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Spaces of Agrarian Struggle:
ALBA, La Via Campesina and the Politics of 'Food Sovereignty'

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2017

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I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and has not been submitted for any other degree.

Signature:

Abstract

This thesis offers an in-depth analysis of the political project of 'food sovereignty' within the Latin American regional institution of ALBA (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*: Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). As a means of navigating ALBA's agrarian transformation, the thesis employs a broadly historical materialist approach to the analysis of class struggle and socio-political change in the context of realizing a new food sovereignty regime. Drawing primarily on a neo-Poulantzian perspective, the analysis opens up the question of the bureaucratic state itself – as a condensation of class relations and hegemonic discourses – through the tripartite lens of *rights, territory and sovereignty*. Such coordinates are key areas of contestation for food sovereignty protagonists, who not only struggle against the power of landed capital but also the concentrated force of state power. To ground these theoretical parameters, the empirical data draws upon fieldwork carried out in Venezuela (the economic and ideological center of the ALBA bloc). Through an examination of social movements, peasant producers and activists, educational/pedagogical institutions promoting the practices of food sovereignty, and workers within ALBA's rice producing factory network, the study offers a multifaceted account of the complex and contradictory transition away from capitalist agriculture and towards a new food regime embedded within structures of popular empowerment. From this analysis, the thesis uncovers a number of critical findings that are not often acknowledged within the ALBA literature; namely, that while the role of the 'post-liberal' state has been a key actor in the improvement of social wellbeing, popular classes find their greatest challenge in the form of the strong, bureaucratic state. Such a contradiction – between state-as-ally and state-as-nemesis – speaks directly to the Poulantzian problematic of 'democratic socialism', and the challenge of engaging with state institutions in order to dissolve their very logic. The study therefore offers important lessons with respect to the limits and prospects of building 'socialism in the 21st century'.

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Acronyms

AD – *Acción Democrática*
ALBA-TCP – *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos*
APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Bs - *bolivares*
BsF – *bolivar fuerte*
CAFTA – Central American Free Trade Agreement
CANEZ – *Coordinadora Agraria Nacional Ezequiel Zamora*
CARICOM – Caribbean Community
CASA – *Corporación de Abastecimiento y Servicios Agrícolas*
CC – *Consejo Comunal*
CICPC – *Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas, Penales y Criminalísticas*
CONAIE – *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*
CLOC – *La Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo*
CRBZ – *Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora*
CSM – Council of Social Movements
CTV – *Confederación de Trabajadores*
CVAL – *Corporación Venezolana de Alimentos*
EMSA – *Empresa Mixta Socialista del ALBA*
EU – European Union
EZLN – *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation
FCREZ – *Frente Campesino Revolucionario Ezequiel Zamora*
FCRSB – *Frente Campesino Revolucionario Simón Bolívar*
FEDECAMARAS – *Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción de Venezuela*
FEDEINDUSTRIA – *Federación de Industriales, Pequeños, Medianos y Artesanos de Venezuela*
FNCEZ – *Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora*
FS – Food Sovereignty
FTAA – Free Trade Area of the Americas
GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
GNE – Grandnational Enterprise
GNP – Grandnational Project
IMF – International Monetary Fund
INTi – *Instituto Nacional de Tierras*,
LACM – Latin American Common Market
LAFTA – Latin American Free Trade Association

LVC – La Vía Campesina
MAT/INDER – *Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Agricultura y Tierras/Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Rural*
MERCAL – *Mercados de Alimentos, C.A.*
MERCOSUR – *Mercado Común del Sur*
MPPAL – *Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Alimentación*
MPPEU – *Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educación Universitaria*
MST – *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*
MUD – *Mesa Unida Democrática*
MVR – *Movimiento V República*
NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement
OAS – Organisation of American States
OPEC – Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PDVAL – *Producción y Distribución Venezolana de Alimentos*
PDVSA – *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.*
PPP – *Plan Puebla-Panama*
PSUV – *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*
PT – *Partido dos Trabalhadores*
PTJ – *Policía Técnica Judicial*
RBV – *República Bolivariana de Venezuela*
SADC – Southern African Development Community
SEBIN – *Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional*
SPU – Socialist Production Unit
SUNACOOP – *Superintendencia Nacional de Cooperativas*
SUNDEE – *Superintendencia de Precios Justos*
UN – United Nations
UNASUR – *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*

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immeasurably stronger. I will never be able to sufficiently express my gratitude for everything she has done, but I will spend the rest of my life trying.

For my Father

1 Introduction

On December 14, 2004, during an international meeting in Havana between the heads of state for Cuba and Venezuela – Fidel Castro Ruz and Hugo Chávez Frías – a new diplomatic declaration was announced that would perhaps come to represent the culmination of Latin America's long road towards sovereign independence. This meeting forged the first official declaration for the new regional institution of ALBA (*Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*: Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America).[1] This regional cooperation agreement, far more so than any other regional formation in the history of the continent, explicitly positioned its rationale as an alternative to the destructive tendencies of global capitalism, and its US-led regional form (Free Trade Area of the Americas), which according to the joint declaration, "is the most accomplished expression of the appetites of domination over the region and that would constitute a deepening of neo-liberalism and would create levels of dependence and subordination without precedence" (ALBA, 2004).

The declaration was far from a pure form of rejectionism; its distinct regional critique of neoliberal capitalism rested on a strategic understanding that the road ahead required a new kind of regional integration:

> "[I]ntegration is, for the countries of the Latin American and the Caribbean, an indispensable condition to aspire to the development amidst the increasing formation of big regional blocs that occupy predominant positions in the world economy, and that only an integration, based on cooperation, solidarity and common will to move all kinds of consumption towards higher levels of development, could satisfy the needs and longings of the Latin-American and Caribbean countries and, at the same time, preserve their independence, sovereignty and identity" (ALBA, 2004).

Thus was born the ALBA regional integration project, which was imagined as constituting the arch of Latin America's long history of independence struggles: from "the glorious victory of Ayacucho and of the Convocation of the 'Anfictiónico' Congress of Panama, which was an attempt to open the way for a real process of integration of our countries", the ALBA process is envisaged as a means by which

[1] The acronym of ALBA means 'dawn' (*alba*) in Castilian. This regional initiative would go on to be renamed the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America. Later, in 2006, the name was expanded to include TCP (*Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos*: Peoples' Trade Treaty).

"the Latin-American and Caribbean peoples are finally on the way to their second and real independence" (ALBA, 2004).

With now a decade past, and growing to eleven member states, ALBA has come to occupy an increasingly noticeable position within the academic literature on contemporary Latin American integration. This thesis therefore aims as a contribution towards this growing body of ALBA scholarship by enquiring into the origins, nature, significance and possible future for what is perhaps the most ambitious and radical regional institution in the world today. And while the extant literature on ALBA has broached a number of in-depth analyses on a range of policy areas – from the development of higher education (Muhr, 2011a), to counter-trade (Pearce, 2013), or as a new model of regional development (Aponte-García, 2014) – the topic of *agricultural development* has received little substantial investigation. The present thesis therefore offers a comprehensive account of ALBA's approach to food policy, encapsulated by its recent turn to *food sovereignty*. The philosophy and practice of food sovereignty first emerged through the autonomous organisation of Latin American peasant groups during the 1980s in response to the onslaught of neoliberal adjustment in the countryside. In time, this cluster of groups would go on to form a global peasant movement – La Vía Campesina ('The peasant way') – struggling against the power of transnational capital's control over the global food regime, by promoting and practicing alternative methods of agriculture (principally agroecology), a re-orientation towards small farmers, ecologically sustainable production methods, and the radical re-empowerment of rural actors as a key vector in the overall transformation in social relations. The ALBA thus appeared to offer an institutional structure in which peasant movements might be able to consolidate their demands: the Council of Social Movements recognises the participation of non-state actors in the crafting of regional policy; in 2008 ALBA implemented a Food Security and Sovereignty accord, the establishment of an ALBA Food Fund (with a capital of $100 million dollars) and the formation of a region-wide Grandnational Enterprise spearheading the agrarian integration of member states (ALBA-TCP, 2008a; ALBA-TCP, 2009a). As such, ALBA's developmental approach similarly seeks to form cooperative geopolitical relations among member states, as well as the promotion of popular power at the grassroots level among a variety of stakeholders.

Such an investigation of ALBA's approach to food sovereignty is made all the more significant given the current conjuncture of the Latin American left, which by

many accounts is entering into a severe socio-economic crisis and facing a significant challenge from a resurgent neoliberal-right, particularly with the recent 'constitutional coup' in Brazil (pushing out the centre-left president Dilma Rousseff) and the 2015 election of Mauricio Marci to the Argentinean presidency.[2] Such events are therefore particularly relevant to the current context of the ALBA, especially in light of the now all-too familiar social, economic and political crisis facing the sovereign epicentre of this regional space, Venezuela.

With the passing of the Land Law in 2001, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had officially proclaimed the goal of achieving food security, defined as guaranteeing sufficient and stable access to food for the national population, yet with a renewed focus on peasant rights. As such, by 2011, 1 million peasants (out of a total rural population of 1.7 million) had benefited from the land reform, with 5.8 million hectares 'rescued' from large private landholdings (deemed un- or under-productive) (Wilpert, 2014: 6, 8). Despite the often-inconsistent usages of 'food security' (*seguridad alimentaria*) and 'food sovereignty' (*soberanía agroalimentaria*), it was clear from early on that Venezuela's agrarian transformation would focus on the core premises of food sovereignty: elevation of peasant rights, access to and security within their agrarian territories, and thus establishing a truly *popular* regime of sovereign independence. These political coordinates were, moreover, finally couched within an *explicit* call for 'food sovereignty' in Venezuela's national legislation passed in 2008.

And yet, Venezuela's agrarian transformation has produced highly ambiguous results: patterns of landholdings have changed little (resembling the original agrarian reform of 1960); total surface area under cultivation is lower than in 1988 (when the notion of agrarian reform was absent); levels of production could not keep up with the general expansion of consumption and population growth; dependence on imports substantially increased, made possible through Venezuela's extraordinary oil wealth, yet which has now come under increasing strain with a recent drop in world oil prices (Purcell, 2017). When finally viewed in the context of Venezuela's unique fiscal and monetary regime (which we will see further in Chapter 4), the overall macro-economic picture is one that is wracked with inflationary pressures and shortages in key consumables, particularly the food sector. As a result, even casual observers have become accustomed to images of ordinary Venezuelans standing in long lines around

[2] See, for example, Watts (2015).

the block for hours on end to obtain even basic food goods and other necessities, leading to the first significant electoral setback experienced by Chávez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, PSUV), with the opposition Roundtable for Democratic Unity (*Mesa Unida Democrática*, MUD) securing a majority of seats in the National Assembly in 2015 (Neuman, 2015). This development re-ignited the previously simmering debate between supporters and detractors of the 'Bolivarian Republic', which at the most immediate level takes place across the Left-Right spectrum, and largely in narrow terms of whether the crisis is the fault of opposition forces or government incompetence. However, more thoughtful observers highlight the relative complexity involved in disentangling the nature of the Venezuelan crisis, "[not] because some of the causes, and potential solutions, to the crisis are quite technical. The difficulty lies, rather, in the challenge, and perhaps impossibility, of disentangling the 'internal' and 'external' aspects of the crisis" (Hetland, 2016). In fact, no account of Venezuela's crisis tendencies would be complete without both external and internal factors: for the former, the continued dependence on oil rents (and in combination with Washington's close collaboration with opposition forces throughout the country) makes Venezuelan politics beholden to a number of geopolitical pressures, while for the latter a complex combination of state corruption and incompetence, along with the now everyday practice of the "*bachaqueo*" (reselling price-controlled goods in the black market at vastly inflated prices), all lead to artificial shortages and consumer price inflation (*Telesur English*, 2016).

Regardless of these political debates and complexities, it is clear that Venezuela's food crisis exerts a significant challenge to the implementation of food sovereignty as a substantial developmental transformation within ALBA. After all, the socio-agricultural indicators listed above all seem to point in the opposite direction of what a *successful* case of food sovereignty reform might look like, which would suggest a more consolidated level of food security for the population, yet refracted through the substantial democratisation in ownership and control over strategic sites of production, marketing and distribution channels. So intense has this divergence between rhetoric and reality become that last year it was decreed the Venezuelan workforce would be subject to 'obligatory' rural labour for up to 60 days, a startling move that quickly led to accusations of 'forced labour' (Figueroa, 2016). Only days later, the minister of work, Francisco Torrealba, sought to clarify the situation by

reference to a "typo", in which the word 'obligatory' should have been 'voluntary', and duly amending said 'mistake' in the final legislation (Peñaloza, 2016).

Remarkably, the legacy of *chavismo* has not yet taken its last, dying breath; earlier this year (February, 2017), 79 percent of the Venezuelan population named Chávez as their most popular president (with Carlos Andrés Peréz coming in at a distant second with 13 percent), while 77 percent of respondents did not agree with the opposition-controlled National Assembly's attempt to ouster Nicolás Maduro from the presidency (Boothroyd Rojas, 2017a). Added to this, 71 percent of the population believe that the opposition parties have no real plan for resolving the country's problems (Mallett-Outtrim, 2017). Thus, the specific mode of politics fostered by Chávez's 'Bolivarian revolution' (which we might call the *politics of inclusion*) has severely blunted traditional means of counter-revolutionary power, from direct protest waves throughout urban centres to indirect ideological and media-based pressures and tactics (Burges et al., 2017). For the radical social forces that have made the Bolivarian turn what it is today, reclaiming Chávez's politics is their "greatest homage" – as one of the leading Venezuelan peasant groups, the *Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora*, recently proclaimed: "it's no secret that macro politics have become distant from the politics of the day to day, from the politics of the people. The official discourse does not register in the language of the commons" (CRBZ, 2017).

This, then, sets the general *problematique* for the present analysis of food sovereignty within the ALBA regional space, in terms of shedding a critical light on the conspicuous gap between the officialdom of sovereign state power and the everyday politics and struggles for the (agrarian) commons. The aim of this research project is to assess the successes, challenges, failures and potential pathways towards a food sovereignty regime in the regional institution of ALBA. In doing so, the analysis proceeds on the following research questions:

1. To what degree is the agricultural base of the ALBA region being transformed from one dominated by capitalist agriculture, to a regime of production and exchange oriented around use-value and ecological sustainability, as per the requirements of 'food sovereignty'? How, and on what basis, is this transformative process taking place, and what are the specific effects produced by the strategies used for this transformation?

2. Who are the main protagonists of this transformation, and what are the sources of their repertoires of action and contention?
3. To what extent do these different groups of actors pursue convergent, divergent or contradictory strategies, and why?

These questions provide an analytical basis for critically engaging with the many actors, processes and policies that forge the political project of food sovereignty in ALBA, taking account of its own stated aims, the particular stakeholders involved in its elaboration, as well as the crucial moments of divergence and contestation that arises from any substantial process of socio-political transformation. As such, the proceeding analysis will demonstrate that, despite many declarations and scattered initiatives, the formation of a region-wide food sovereignty regime has barely progressed, remaining entrapped within a mere cluster of states pursuing largely independent modes of agrarian development. As I contend, and will demonstrate throughout the remainder of the thesis, it is the overbearing presence of state sovereignty – as a socially congealed institutional ensemble of power relations – that continues to frustrate the decentralisation and democratisation of political power and agency.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

As a corollary to the empirical context above, the thesis aims to address a fundamental puzzle at the heart of ALBA's food sovereignty policy, namely: *why has ALBA's food sovereignty project reproduced the power of the bureaucratic, patrimonial state?* In the context of this research problem, the thesis is primarily concerned with unravelling the *politics* of food sovereignty, and the power relations stitching together a wide number of social actors and political stakeholders. Instead of an overarching focus on the technicalities of agro-ecological practice or the more long-standing debates about industrial models vs. small-holder approaches to agriculture, the analysis enquires into the key *political coordinates* of food sovereignty's philosophy and practice: *rights, territory, and sovereignty*. Such a framework provides a useful foundation for constructing a general theoretical framework of food sovereignty, given that these coordinates enjoy a universal presence throughout the literature, despite its wide-ranging empirical referents. Yet precisely because of the nature of these dimensions,

whenever we speak of food sovereignty, we are implicitly invoking deeply political questions concerning a deeper set of determinations that articulate the sinews of social power: law, space and politics. In this way, rights are the formal expression of juridical norms/discourse, territory is the spatial extension of techniques of governance, and sovereignty constitutes a condensed expression of political power. With these analytical vectors in mind, I aim to deconstruct the problem of ALBA's food sovereignty project ultimately revolves around the *problem of the state*, which, as Bernstein (2014) points out, remains "the elephant in the room" for food sovereignty scholarship.

In order to ground the rights/territory/sovereignty triad, I draw upon the work of Marxian theorist Nicos Poulantzas (2014) and his underlying framework that deconstructs law, space and politics through a set of distinctly Marxian categories: relations of production/division of labour, hegemony, and a relational theory of the capitalist state. This underlying framework, which forms the basis of a sociologically grounded explanation of rights/territory/sovereignty, therefore reveals the social sources of agents' power, and the complex fields of force that permeate the entirety of the social formation. I will also make use of the many subsequent innovations in neo-Poulantzian theory in order to enrich our understanding of the multi-scalar and material determinations of social space, which in turn will form a bridge between the two thematic wings of the thesis (the ALBA region and the politics of food sovereignty).

This Marxian approach thus seeks to extend and enrich the two predominant frameworks of ALBA studies (Realism and neo-Gramscianism). As we will see further below, between these two approaches we are left wanting for a systematic explanation capable of analytically linking distinct political geographies with any kind of sociological basis in which power relations obtain their valence. Rather, only by problematising the capitalist state as such can we gain a better handle on the contours of contestation and power relations that permeate the multidimensional terrain of 21st century socialism, and indeed food sovereignty.

Despite the decidedly *regional* problematic of this thesis, the proceeding analysis will largely focus on the case of Venezuela, in order to draw out several analytical and empirical insights with respect to the regional institution as a whole. This is for two reasons: *firstly*, Venezuela remains the undisputed material centre of the entire regional space, in terms of both absolute Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as

well as the primary role played by petroleum as both the source of cheap (subsidised) energy inputs for member states and a significant source of hard currency through the extraction of ground rent. *Secondly*, ALBA's food sovereignty initiatives, particularly in the form of state-run industrial centres of production formed through ALBA's articles of agreement, reside within the Venezuelan territory. Hence, Venezuela constitutes a central case study that permits a critical comparison between the discourse/rhetoric of ALBA and the concrete practices of actors at the heart of its food sovereignty project.

As a result of this theoretical framework, and the empirical justifications for focusing on Venezuela, the thesis will not substantially draw upon the mainstream literature on regional integration. As the next section will show, regionalism theory tends to oscillate between a rationalist or constructivist approach, each of which provides little traction with respect to agent-specific strategies of reproduction and transformation. Nevertheless, it is necessary to delineate the nature of regionalism theory and its relative limits, which tend to be reproduced within the extant literature on ALBA.

1.2 Explaining and Understanding the Rise of Regions

The 'rise of regions' has been a common notion among scholars of International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE) in recent decades. Within the world's geographically situated regions (Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas) we find a daunting number of regional institutions, which between them possess variable degrees of functionality, depth, or 'regionness' (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000). In Latin America alone, the proliferation of regional institutions, cooperation agreements and common markets has led some observers to claim that the process of regionalization has now "peaked" (Malamud and Gardini, 2012). The fuzziness of regionalism(s), their complexity and (quite often) superficiality may lead some to question why the rise of inter-state regions is of interest at all. But despite the enormous variation among the world's regionalization projects, it cannot be disputed that there exists a general trend throughout the spatial terrain of the world system. Indeed, as Postel-Vinay (2007: 558) suggests, "the actual establishment of a general theory of regional integration… was in fact justified by the simultaneous emergence of regional groupings in other parts of the world" throughout the post-WWII order.

Though no such general theory yet exists, Malamud and Gardini (2012: 118) re-state the most general understanding among regionalism scholars as to the origins of these spatialisation schemes, which amount to "attempt[s] to rebuild the eroded national boundaries at a higher level… as a protective manoeuver by states that cannot by themselves secure their own interests." It would seem, then, that the route to uncovering the origins of regionalism lies in (1) deciphering the social forces that form agent-specific responses to the general conditions of insecurity pushing states to band together, and (2) unravelling the structural contours that produce these forces of insecurity and social disjuncture in the first place.

The word "region" itself is a particularly malleable one, such that the sociologist, or perhaps political economist, will naturally use the term in different ways (cf. Massey, 1995; Scott, 2000), or at a multiplicity of spatial scales (Agnew, 2013). For IR theorists, the scale at which a "region" becomes meaningful is that which obtains between sovereign states, and therefore constitutes international regional formations.[3] As with the broader development of the IR/IPE disciplines, which formed out of the concrete struggles that made the 'modern' world order (cf. van der Pijl, 2014), the evolution of 'region studies' as a relatively distinct discipline arose in response to the socio-spatial transitions that marked the post-war European state-system.

1.2.1 Rationalism

The 'first wave' of region theory, or 'functionalist integration theory', emerged from the initial European experiment, containing a specific separation between politics and economics in which technocratic planning would functionally entail specific political forms for its survival (Mitrany, 1944, 1975; Deutsch, 1957). Latterly, Hass (and others) shifted into a type of 'neo-functionalism', which understood purely technocratic and economic decision-making as shot through with politics, thus reintroducing *political* economy back into the picture (Haas, 1958, 1961; Nye, 1965). Nevertheless, functionalism and neo-functionalism failed the test of durable theory, as it could not easily translate its generalisations of the European sphere to other

[3] As such, the term "region" will, unless stated otherwise, refer to sub-global, inter-state politico-economic spaces.

geographical instances of regional cooperation (Haas, 1975; cf. Hurrell, 2007; Postel-Vinay, 2007).

'Second wave' region theory was oriented around questions concerning the potential rise of malevolent protectionism and the mechanisms necessary to achieve inter-state cooperation under anarchy (Keohane and Martin, 1995; Moravcsik, 1998). Within this broader IPE approach, regionalism was understood as a multifaceted policy array that was formed in response to the onset of globalization (Stallings, 1995; Keohane, 2002: 210), exemplified by such integration projects as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, ASEAN, SADC, and EU. New regional spaces, in keeping with the broader neoliberal discourse of the 1990s, were initially referred to as 'open regionalism' schemes that could somehow reconcile the oppositional forces of regional blocs with multilateral trade. While the concept first originated from the APEC declaration of 1989, which sought to implement an 'open regionalism' regime, in fact "neither APEC nor any other official body has defined 'open regionalism'" (Bergsten, 1997: 545). As two World Bank researchers later went on to note, "'open regionalism' is a slogan rather than an analytical term. It is defined in so many different ways that it conveys no information about an RIA [Regional Integration Agreement] other than that its members are embarrassed to be thought of as protectionist" (Schiff and Winters, 2003: 244). Methodologically speaking, this institutionalist turn in IR theory – which was supposedly in opposition to the dominant Realist approach – shares with Realism the central fixation on states as the main actors in world politics (even with the occasional nod towards the role of multi-national firms). Such conceptual blinders therefore produce an impoverished view of how and by whom socio-economic policy is made, and thus obscuring from view the sociological texture of international politics and economics.

1.2.2 Constructivism

Part of the confusion surrounding the 'open regionalism' label was due to its quick subsuming and consequent synonymising with another term that soon became the standard term within academic circles. Under the 'new regionalism' paradigm, scholars viewed regional institutions as not just 'open', but *open-ended* social processes encompassing broader constructions of identity formation and norm diffusion within security communities and other regional initiatives on behalf of a

variety of social actors beyond the state (see Adler and Barnett, 1998; Checkel, 1999; Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000; Sidaway, 2003; Acharya, 2004; Oelsner, 2005). Yet this open-ended, constructivist approach to region building is as indeterminate as rationalist varieties are restrictive. In attempting to move beyond the limited explanatory power of both functionalism and liberal institutionalism, constructivist accounts of region building work well when norms are adhered to, but do not contain an explanatory mechanism that accounts for the social origins of regional regimes, for state behaviour that diverges from these norms under formal conditions of institutional convergence, nor for the unforeseen crises that tend to precipitate social transformation and thus the possibility for the establishment of new normative regimes (cf. Strange, 1982; Gale, 1998; Teschke and Heine, 2002).

Thus, the rapidly expanding discipline of 'region studies' (which straddles the IR/IPE divide) remains relatively dominated by the two traditional approaches of rationalism (Lombaerde, 2006; Lombaerde et al., 2008; Khan, 2009), or constructivism (Langenhove, 2011; Riggirozzi, 2012; Duina, 2013). As Postel-Vinay (2007: 557) points out, "The focus on the regionalist IR literature has tended to be around the region – 'regionalism' and 'regionalisation' – than about it." And yet, even Postel-Vinay's own 'critical geopolitics' approach is, like so many others within this theoretical tradition (e.g., Ó Tuathail, 1996; Agnew, 1998), more focused on the social construction of the regional 'imagination', and is therefore entirely divorced from any kind of historically specific social content accompanying this new political geography of world politics. As a result, the 'critical geopolitics' approach tends to view the international region in much the same way as other constructivist accounts, insofar as they amount to the mere projection of ideas and norms – or, to use a favoured expression from the critical geopolitics tradition, the mere "writing of space" (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Alternatively, and in paraphrasing Dönmez and Sutton (2016: 13), region theory requires thinking *in* and *through* the nature of regional institutions and spaces, rather than thinking merely around or about them. It requires, in short, the concrete analysis of the materialities and socially embedded discourses that contextualises the differential agency exhibited by a variety of actors in the process of region building.

What we find from this review of contemporary region studies is the same theoretical divide in IR that was identified some 15 years ago by Martin Hollis and Steve Smith.

As the authors noted in their *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (1991), there is a tendency for IR scholars to veer towards either an 'outside' or 'inside' story of the international. The former seeks to apply an 'objective', scientific explanation of social dynamics by focusing on the structural determinants of human action, while the latter pays more attention to the thoughts, words and intentions of social agents that attempt to change the world around them. This dilemma between the 'outside' (explaining) and the 'inside' (understanding) represents the ongoing 'agency-structure' debate within IR (see, Wendt, 1987; Friedman and Starr, 1997; Wight 2006). However, I find more convincing Samuel Knafo's approach to social science methodology that places greater emphasis on "social change as a systemic focus" of critical analysis (Knafo, 2013: 513). Thus, various methodological approaches struggle to achieve precisely the solution they purport to offer: by positing 'structure' *a priori*, positivism robs us of the *political* and thus socially contested nature of structures, which forecloses any substantive explanation of them *qua* constructions; agent/structure dualisms (such as Giddens' 'sturcturation' framework) necessarily 'explain' agency according to structure, *or vice versa*, but in turn cannot congeal into an organic whole; and the turn to ontology in critical realism, while framing a more open-ended approach to empirical specificity, makes the assumption that structure and agency can be unproblematically identified in all cases (Knafo, 2013: 496, 498-9, 500). The remaining problem thus seems to support Hollis and Smith's original scepticism concerning the logical possibility of making agency/structures occupy the same space at the same time.

Knafo proposes to jail-break the problem altogether by bringing agency to the forefront of critical analysis. In proposing this move, Knafo does not throw out the *idea* of structures but rather shifts the ways in which we conceive them. While 'structures' create certain pressures, a specific agent strategy cannot be read off from such imperatives (ibid: 504). Hence, "the significance of social dynamics is not given by the structures themselves, but by what people do with them" (ibid). As a corollary, rather than looking at agency/structure in terms of a *dual relation*, the premium is on looking at many agents embedded within *social relations*: "structural constraints do not materialize as imperatives for one agent if there is no other agent who threatens to act upon these constraints" (ibid). If, then, structures are but the 'shadow' cast by differential agency, and in turn do not possess any powers of causality on their own (because they do not exist on their own), then the entire problem of 'structural cause'

disappears. While this may seem like a thinning of social theory, it remains possible to arrive at "abstract and general conclusions", only this time through specifying agent strategies rather than positing static structural models (ibid: 511).

This methodological wager speaks directly to both the theoretical as well as empirical commitments of this thesis. While the adoption of Poulantzian framework involves its share of abstraction – particularly around the classical Marxist parameters of relations of production, social division of labour, capitalist state, etc. – it maintains the process of *class struggle* as the determinate force in the last instance. Through a broader elaboration of Jessop's neo-Poulantzian approach to 'strategic selectivity' in Chapter 2, we arrive at a methodological approach that fits well with a commitment to agential readings of structural pressures. Empirically, the multi-dimensional nature of food sovereignty (within ALBA or elsewhere) necessarily requires a more fluid approach to empirical analysis. How, after all, are we supposed to find common ground between peasant movements, pedagogical spaces, industrial workers, and so on? The trick, rather, is not to force generalisations between these disparate social forces, but rather to emphasis their specificity even when different actors speak with a common discourse (food sovereignty). The methodological foundation of this thesis, then, is situated on the understanding that *explanation* can never be meaningful outside of the agent-specific strategies used within a given context. Thus, to explain social change is to give more credence to those at the helm of change, and in so doing, allowing people to help refine our theories, rather than shoving people into theoretical frameworks.

As we will see below, the current state of the art of ALBA studies tends to replicate the same theoretical tensions seen within the wider literature on international regions in general. In order to approach both the idea and reality of the ALBA region, we will examine the 'first generation' of ALBA studies in order to discern the potentials and limits of this extant literature, and the degree to which it replicates the same theoretical drawbacks as the dominant approaches to regionalism.

1.3 What Kind of 'Post-Hegemonic' Region is ALBA? A Critical Literature Review

Despite the relative theoretical variety across the corpus of ALBA studies, virtually all academics situate the rise of this regional formation within the broader context of

Latin America's contemporary shift into an era of 'post-hegemonic regionalism', which according to Riggirozzi and Tussie is:

> "characterised by hybrid practices as a result of a partial displacement of dominant forms of US-led neoliberal governance in the acknowledgement of other political forms of organization and economic management of regional (common) goods" (Riggirozzi and Tussie, 2012: 12).

The following analysis will thus enquire into exactly what kind of post-hegemonic region ALBA is thought to be (and how it is constituted) according to the extant literature.

1.3.1 ALBA as a State-led Anti-Neoliberal Regime

The most dominant fraction of ALBA studies tends on average to converge around the theoretical priorities as those seen within the more traditional region studies literatures, focused most heavily on state-led initiatives and policies with little in the way of in-depth sociological explanation for the rise of this radical from of post-hegemonic regionalism. Rosalba Linares, for instance, notes that ALBA "suggests options for the management and control of the market by the State oriented to satisfy the necessities and demands of society within the international economic context" (Linares, 2007: 35). Paul Kellog similarly argues that ALBA "represents an attempt to return to that earlier, Keynesian era", forming a new system of inter-state trade based on "equalization payments on a hemispheric basis, transcending national borders, and imbued with a distrust of traditional trade deals – equalization on anti-neoliberal steroids" (Kellog, 2007: 205, 202). For José Briceño Ruiz (2015) on the other hand, this radical region amounts to a form of geopolitical 'soft balancing' against the neoliberal hegemon. Meanwhile, Maribel Aponte-García's volume, *El Nuevo Regionalismo Estratégico* (2014), which constitutes one of the few book-length studies on this regional organisation, approaches the topic (as the title would suggest) through the lens of "strategic regionalism", a policy array that seeks to internalise benefits through "endogenous development". And while her analysis is also unique in offering a distinctly political economy account of ALBA's functioning, the real substance of the analysis (which we will return to again in Chapter 4) does not fully consider the concrete actors that fundamentally breathe life into these politico-

economic projects, nor the potentially conflict-ridden processes that complicate their execution. Rather, the state – as the key strategic actor – remains dominant.

Hence, time and again, we find the overbearing presence of the state sitting front and centre of the analysis of ALBA (e.g. Al Attar and Miller, 2010; Riggirozzi, 2012; Chodor and McCarthy-Jones, 2013; Espinosa, 2013; Aponte-García, 2015; Medina, 2016). There are, however, a small number of works with a more constructivist lean that offer an insightful picture of the discourses and ideologies that go into constructing an alternative, anti-hegemonic and anti-neoliberal 'common sense' (Marchand, 2005; Gürcan, 2010; Cole, 2010; McCarthy-Jones and Greig, 2011; Emerson, 2013; 2014). Yet these discursive parameters are, like regime theory in general, a poor indicator of regime consolidation, while more substantially, these approaches do not address the class differentiations and concrete social fissures that permeate these state/civil society processes of identity formation and regime construction.[4] While others working from the 'bottom up' perspective of civil society's role in the formation of ALBA have begun to open up this avenue of research (e.g., Martínez, 2013; Cutler and Brien, 2013; Berron et al., 2013; Schaposnik and Pardo, 2015), they are more cursory than comprehensive.[5]

1.3.2 ALBA as a Bolivarian State-Society Regional Complex

Mapping the various actors, social forces and class projects that animate the ALBA space has been principally, and persuasively, charted in the work of Thomas Muhr (e.g., 2010a, b; 2011a, b; 2012a, b), whose approach goes significantly beyond those analyses that view ALBA as merely an inter-state institution. Due to the breadth and depth of Muhr's work, as well as the theoretical/normative overlap shared with this thesis, it is necessary to give much greater length to unpacking the conceptual ingredients of his framework.

Muhr offers a variegated neo-Gramscian reading to the formation of ALBA, through a multifaceted analysis of spatial scale, sites of struggle, varieties of actors,

[4] Indeed, as the contested ideological invocation of *Bolívar* demonstrates, this "floating signifier" (Laclau, 1996), has been variably integrated into different hegemonic projects, such as the early state-building process of Juan Vincente Gómez, or in the subaltern populism of *chavismo* (Coronil, 1997: 88-9; Bray, 2014; Kingsbury, 2015).

[5] Ambar García Márquez's (2013) chapter on the genesis of ALBA's Council of Social Movements is, however, highly instructive in light of her insider's perspective.

and areas of social transformation. From this neo-Gramscian/neo-Coxian perspective,[6] the multiple scales across which capital operates in today's global order necessitates the pursuit of a "counter hegemonic pluriscalar war of position", understood as a specific counter hegemonic spatialisation strategy that "recognizes the reconfiguration of socio-political power geometries associated with 'meta-governance', through which regional and global capitalist institutions actively remake state apparatuses, governmental practices and societal institutions" (Muhr, 2013). Thus, the strategy undertaken by those actors forging the ALBA space reflects the diffuse and deep-seated character of capitalist globalism, embodied not merely within the state system and its attendant institutions, but throughout 'commercial society' as it extends across the world. Invoking Gramsci's military analogies 'war of position' and 'war of movement' – the first designating the frontal assault against, and capture of, the state apparatus, while the second refers to the fomenting of alternative ideas and institutions within civil society itself – Muhr highlights the strategic necessity of pursuing both strategies simultaneously, "as a multidimensional struggle over minds and strategic places at and across different interlocking scales simultaneously in the construction of a historic bloc" (ibid).

This multidimensional strategy is conceptualised by Muhr through two inter-related forms of organisation: the 'state-in-revolution' and 'organised society'. These forms counteract the liberal fetishisation of social life under capitalism, in its formal separation of politics and economics (state and civil society) (see Wood, 1981). In contrast, the state-in revolution represents "the emancipatory activation of state power – that is, the state-promoted organization of the popular classes and the reconfiguration of state power by progressive forces within the state as well as from outside" (Muhr, 2012c: 20). This 'Bolivarian' state/civil society complex forms an organic link between those in the state apparatus and those comprising the popular classes. But it is this latter group that perhaps provides the most dynamic element, constituting the organised society that fundamentally realises itself through self-organisation, autonomy and thus sovereignty (at multiple scales).

However, these two elements – state-in-revolution and organised society – as a distinct state/society complex is not simply contained within the national territory,

[6] 'Neo-Coxian' refers to perhaps the first mainstream usage of Gramsci within IR/IPE by Robert W. Cox (1981).

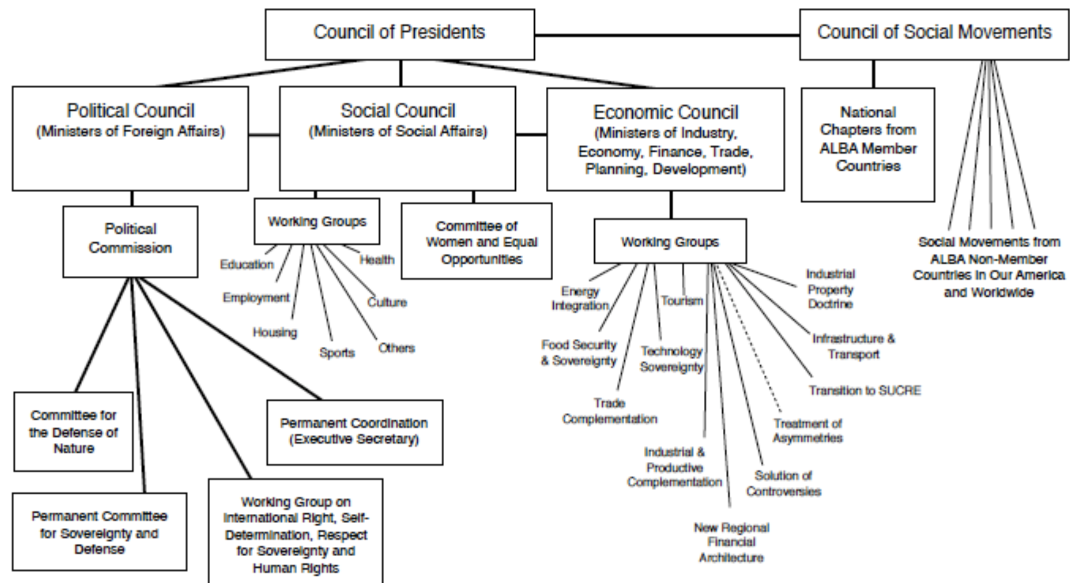

Figure 1: Institutional Architecture of ALBA (as of 2009).
Source: Muhr, 2011a: 280.

but is necessarily scaled-up as per the requirements of a pluriscalar struggle. Thus, Muhr conceives the ALBA bloc as more than a mere collection of states and inter-state agreements; it is an international 'state-in-revolution' (Muhr, 2010b: 29). As with the national-level, the multi- (or trans-) national 'state-in-revolution' acquires its revolutionary character through its organic connection to 'organised society': at the regional (ALBA) level this component forms a "transnational organized society" (ibid: 37). From an institutional perspective, ALBA's state-in-revolution is composed of the Council of Presidents, which "derive their legitimacy from representative democratic mechanisms and procedures" (ibid: 43); the organised society at the regional level is formally represented by the Council of Social Movements, as "the direct democratic embodiment of the transnational organized society" (ibid) (see Figure 1).

Muhr is also careful to consider the contours of power that permeate these social relationships. As he notes, the making of ALBA "is not free from conflict: both state and society actors may be co-opted and/or repressed by ruling individuals and parties, counter-revolutionary forces and constraints (individual power, selfish interests, corruption, consumerism, and so forth)" (Muhr, 2012a: 237). Particularly with respect to the most innovative and radical aspect of the ALBA institution (the Council of Social Movements), the analysis:

> "…should not suggest that there are no power asymmetries, i.e. that both [the Council of Presidents and Council of Social Movements] necessarily have the same decision-making power… [rather] constituted power derived from representative democratic mechanisms (Council of Presidents) is complemented by constituent power grounded in the direct democratic structure of the Council of Social Movements" (Muhr, 2011a: 109).

As the nuance of Muhr's analysis demonstrates, the construction of ALBA is not an uncomplicated affair. The Bolivarian regional project remains marked by power asymmetries and social struggles, which ultimately reveal the contradictory unity of 'push and pull' factors whereby, "the prevailing historical structure may be reproduced in some respects, [but] it is also resisted and transformed as an alternative configuration of forces – a rival structure" that responds to specific social contradictions that must be resolved in one manner or another (Muhr, 2013). Such considerations lead Muhr to the conclusion that:

> "resistance in the form of the construction of a counter-structure within the framework for action, and the multiple forces, dimensions and levels that compose it, can never be at once, full-scale, as if occurring in a 'vacuum'… Rather, certain forces will have to be challenged at certain points in time, which makes structural transformation not only a lengthy and gradual process, but also one that contains inevitable trade-offs and potential contradictions" (Muhr, 2010b: 39).

In the case of Venezuela, as the organic nucleus of the ALBA project, these contradictions are most fully visible in the nature of its productive base and its institutional consequences, as it is "tightly integrated in hegemonic globalisation through its membership in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (which however is also used as a counter-hegemonic tool) and the monopoly rent extraction from oil exports" (Muhr, 2011a: 7). And yet, as Muhr goes on to state, his purpose "is not to explore such contradictions at great length" (ibid). This ultimately signals the inherent limit of Muhr's otherwise valuable analysis. For we cannot truly understand the social origins of these contradictions – e.g., the asymmetrical decision-making power between the Council of Presidents and the Council of Social Movements, or the continuing power of resource extraction and oil rent circulation – and thus the very nature, scope (and potential) of ALBA's achievements without deconstructing the origins and dynamics of the contradictions and social struggles they entail. Such an endeavour is necessary in order to reveal some

of the hidden or understated implications of his approach to the contested project of building 'Socialism in the 21st century'.

1.4 Beyond the State of the Art of ALBA Studies: Problem-Solving From Below

Ultimately, both the state-centric and neo-Gramscian approaches to ALBA fail to uncover the contradictory determinations of socio-political power between actors and groups, and the attendant effects emerging from these inter- and intra-group conflicts. For the more dominant branch of ALBA studies, this is perhaps expected, given that 'the state' remains a black box within which we have no insight into the nature of social agents, nor to their repertoires of political power. It is from this limit point that Muhr's richer critical theory approach extends the insights of state-centred perspectives by highlighting not only the role of the 'state-in-revolution' (as an organic combination of social forces constituting a new, radical form of state and law), but also the various spatial scales across which we find the substantially autonomous organisation of civil society actors within the 'organized society' concept. However, even here we encounter a specific limit point that is encapsulated through two occlusions. Firstly, concrete class dynamics are absent from Muhr's portrayal of the ALBA space. This is not to deny the inherently classed-based discourse of Muhr's neo-Gramscian framework, which devotes some space to discussions of class formation (Muhr, 2011a: 39-41). However, these considerations never make any critical impact upon the concrete empirical referents of Muhr's analysis. As a result, the social forces within the Bolivarian project (both nationally and regionally) are lumped under the rubric of 'revolutionary class' (ibid: 82-3), without enquiring into the internal composition of (and possible fractures within) this class.

The second occlusion, which actually explains the first, is Muhr's resistance to examining the real efficacy of political processes. In a recent publication on the emancipatory potential of South-South cooperation, Muhr in fact turns this tendency into an explicit virtue. In critiquing approaches that interrogate the *concrete consequences of social agency* involved in South-South geopolitics, Muhr simply retorts that such analysis "sweepingly discredits governments (and/or sectors thereof) that actually may seek a transformation of the global power geographies towards a more democratic, multi-polar world order, against the (historical) structural constraints within which they are operating" (Muhr, 2016: 631-2). This therefore

reflects the tendency in Muhr's work to adopt a more interpretivist viewpoint that takes the legal proclamations and discursive components of the Bolivarian project as autonomous determinants that somehow provide a positive valence to our understanding of the politics of ALBA. Though I fully agree with Muhr on the constitutive nature of discourse, the entire point of critical theory, which seems to be absent in his analysis here, is to critically explain why the intellectual content, or intention, of actors often diverges so radically from the social consequences these intentions generate.

In my view, this discursive/interpretivist streak is primarily due to Muhr's overtly normative commitment to the Bolivarian project, as well as a slightly ambiguous interpretation of Cox's core principle. As he writes:

> "my analysis… is less concerned with a problem-solving evaluation of the effectiveness with which policies are operationalised. Rather, as a kind of 'moral evaluation' in solidarity with the revolutionary process and their actors [my work] aims to contribute to the 'battle of ideas' by demonstrating that there is an alternative to the neoliberal dogma" (Muhr, 2011a: 8, emphasis in original).

The above clearly references Cox's famous distinction between "problem-solving" and "critical" approaches to IR theory (Cox, 1981), in which the former refers to the analysis of 'perennial' regularities that require no critical deconstruction or historicisation, whereas the latter seeks to reveal the social forces and transformative processes that go into the making of historical orders. Indeed, it is precisely upon Cox's critique of 'value-neutral' observations in problem-solving theory that Muhr rests so heavily his "moral evaluation". Yet Cox did not simply rule out 'problem-solving' theory *tout court*; rather:

> "Regularities in human activities may indeed be observed within particular eras, and thus the positivist approach can be fruitful within defined historical limits, though not with the universal pretensions it aspires to. The research program of historicism is to reveal the historical structures characteristic of particular eras within which such regularities prevail" (Cox, 1986: 244).

So long as the "universal pretensions" of problem-solving theory are jettisoned, it becomes possible for critical approaches to sufficiently grapple with precisely those aspects earlier highlighted by Muhr, in which "the prevailing historical structure may be reproduced in some respects", and thus come out the other side with a "critical problem-solving theory", which "relates directly to real-world problems but

approaches them from the perspective of the underdog" (Brown, 2013: 483; see also Andrews, 2013; Sinclair, 2016). Hence, *contra* Muhr, without a sufficient focus on real-world problems such as the effectiveness of specific policies and their concrete social consequences we are in danger of slipping from "moral evaluation" to *monotonic evaluation*.

In moving towards a more 'critical problem-solving' approach to the formation and function of ALBA, the thesis does not seek to necessarily reject or overturn the state-led or neo-Coxian approaches – for each in their own bounded framework highlight a concrete dimension to this regional space. Rather, the aim here is to cumulatively build upon, and critically extend, the limits inherent in each perspective. In reference to the limits of Muhr's analysis, the focus here will concentrate more heavily upon the uneven structures of power and decision making between specific agents, institutions and spatialities, and the ways in which these asymmetries emerge from particular class relations. Such theoretical commitments, which in my view constitutes a distinctly *Marxist sociological approach* to ALBA, are quite limited within the range of ALBA studies and therefore constitute a potentially valuable route to critically analysing its developmental patterns. As Regueiro Bello points out, "the pattern of accumulation defines the nature of integration processes" (2008: 293; see also Seabra 2013; Katz, 2006: 70-4). Yet as is often the case, these studies offer scant empirical data, let alone on the ground insights that might help to reveal how these conceptual parameters play out. The thesis therefore shares the theoretical commitments of these Marxian analyses with respect to the transformation of ALBA's political economy and its relations of production and exchange, yet grounds them within a quantitative and qualitative framework. Only through this type of empirically informed class analysis will it be possible to delineate the social and geopolitical tensions contained within ALBA's model of alternative development.

1.5 Methodology: Poulantzas in Venezuela

This thesis is primarily a work of historical materialism, broadly defined. As previously stated, it rests heavily upon the work of Nicos Poulantzas' theory of the capitalist state, but the analysis certainly cannot stop at this limit. As the thesis proceeds, other insights will be introduced as a matter of necessity in order to bring the heterogeneous sets of data into alignment. Yet suturing all of this together will be

the basic methodological commitments of a Marxist research programme. In this way, the fundamental methodological approach is not one based around the principles of pure induction or deduction, but rather informed by Imre Lakatos' notion of a theoretical 'hard core' – a set of theoretical postulates that are protected from anomalous sets of data by progressively incorporating new postulates into the "protective belt" surrounding (and guarding) the hard core of the research program. This "positive heuristic" method, as Lakatos called it, "sets out a programme which lists a chain of ever more complicated models simulating reality" (Lakatos, 1989: 50). But what exactly is the hard core of the Marxist research programme?

1.5.1 Historical Materialism's 'Hard Core' and the Question of 'the Political'

In analysing the work of the Leon Trotsky, Michael Burawoy writes that historical materialism's 'hard core', or as he calls it "the Marxist problem-solving machinery", revolves around the idea that "history is the history of class struggle" (Burawoy, 2009: 177). A few pages earlier, Burawoy notes that, beyond the prism of social classes and their periodic conflicts, Trotsky took fully on board one of Marx's most concise statements on the hard core of the historical materialist approach, which points towards the contradictory interaction between the forces and relations of production, or between the near-continuous development of the tools wielded by social agents in the process of production, and the socio-institutional structures (of which "class" is primary) that undergird the socio-political power of agents. Burawoy also suggests that "[t]his is obviously not the only way of constructing the hard core of a Marxist research program" (Burawoy, 2009: 174). And this is indeed true, for the "long twentieth century" of Marxian theory has seen an enormous expansion in critical approaches to history and society, from the classical theories of imperialism to the theorisation of gendered and racialized forms of oppression (see Bidet and Kouvelakis, 2009).

In contrast, I intend to pursue a more nuanced understanding with respect to the materiality of *the political*, in so far as the matrix of social relations constitutive of a social formation cannot be adequately captured without recourse to uncovering the co-constitutive relations between the political and the economic under capitalism. By invoking this co-constitution, I do not intent to re-posit the structural separation of 'the economy' from the 'political state'. Rather, it is to recognise that capitalist relations

of production, based as they are on exploitation and domination, are inextricably bound up with *struggles for political power*. In this way, to "reveal the political face of the economy", as Wood (1995: 20) puts it, becomes possible only through revealing the economic face of the state. With respect to this latter move, I argue that state power is not simply a pristine realm of political power – the great Leviathan whose monopoly of force permits orderly relations in civil society. Rather, state power is grounded within a specific *political technology* that encapsulates the ways in which certain technical, managerial and bureaucratic state practices constitute the production of knowledge/power in bourgeois society and hence the concrete management of the social formation itself. There is, then, a certain economy of force that guides the micro-foundational aspects of state power, the consequence of which is the reproduction of the capitalist class's *political force within the economy*.

The real upshot of this reading, then, is to complicate our understandings of where 'the state' begins and ends and, in the process, opens up a more fluid and processual understanding of how *sovereignty* comes to be constituted. The central coordinates under consideration throughout the thesis, namely *rights, territory and sovereignty* – as they apply to both the politics of space within the ALBA, as well as the spaces of agrarian struggle constituting the terrain of food sovereignty – are thus inherently sites of political struggle (even if they are articulated by 'economic' struggles). As a result, this type of methodological commitment offers a different take on the 'hard core' of a Marxist research program by focusing on the co-constituted nature of the economic and political 'moments' in order to reveal the immanent contradictions inherent within a social formation like ALBA, which is self-consciously attempting to move beyond the bourgeois notions of 'economy' and 'sovereignty'. By bringing in Poulantzas' critique of the capitalist state, the struggle for food sovereignty within ALBA (and especially with respect to untangling convergent and divergent agential strategies within the Venezuelan example) provides a key theoretical register that helps clarify the surface nomenclature of 'liberal-capitalist' or 'post-liberal/socialist' societies by grounding our critique within the class nature of the state, as well as the condensation of political power within the 'economic' realm.

Yet even this 'hard core' of the research program does not lend itself to a general theory of the state. Instead, Poulantzas carries forth the classical 'hard core' of the Marxist research program with a general theory of modes of production, which

allows for a generalised theoretical exposition on the nature and function of the capitalist state. And yet, Poulantzas further specifies that, like that of the state in general, there can be no general theory of a transition between different types of states – even a transition from a capitalist to a socialist state. The reason for this apparent non-correspondence between the generalisability of the theory of capitalist states and that of its transition towards a socialist one is that the theoretical elements comprising a theory of the capitalist state can only ever be "applied theoretical-strategic notions" (Poulantzas, 2014: 22), and thus enjoying an entirely different status under an enquiry into a state-in-transition. This is ultimately due to the fact that the very motor of this transition is given by the raw creativity animating the process itself: the vital compulsion to create anew the ordering principles of society, which itself can never be captured entirely by a theory that explains its previous form. As Poulantzas argues: "one cannot ask any theory, however scientific it may be, to give more than it possesses – not even Marxism, which remains a genuine theory of action. There is always a structural distance between theory and practice, between theory and the real" (ibid). It is for this reason that the struggle for food sovereignty in ALBA and its study is supplemented through the use of field-work based methods (specifically the use of semi-structured interviews) in order to allow the real-world praxis of actors involved in this struggle to articulate and enrich the 'hard core' of the research program offered here. All such interviews were conducted in Spanish, while those participants whose full name is revealed opted to waver their anonymity.

1.5.2 Interview Methodologies: Battling Gatekeepers, Chasing Leads

Interviewing techniques, as Rathbun (2008) tells us, are often met with scepticism among political scientists. Any analysis informed by the two dominant wings of political science (behaviouralism and rationalism) would, of course, naturally find this type of methodology somewhat disdainful given that the very act of interviewing reveals a certain assumption about the social world: namely, that agents possess the ability to alter the course (and logic) of social processes. Thus, given that both rationalism (resting on deduction of theoretical claims that are then located in the empirical world) and behaviouralism (in which the empirical landscape provides the raw material for the induction of theoretical premises) are fundamentally based on structured repetition and regularity, there can be no real allowance for the place of

subjectively constituted data (interview testimonies) into the explanatory fold (cf. Hay, 2002: 53-4).

And yet, as Rathbun contends, "Interviewing, despite its flaws, is often the best tool for establishing how subjective factors influence decision-making, the motivations of those involved, and the role of agency in events of interest" (Rathbun, 2008: 686). At the same time, interviewing can provide insights not only into the specific agency of participants but also the structural contexts in which they operate. Thus:

> "Strategic circumstances might be found by a model to provide the best account for particular action, but are only empirically useful if the model reflects more or less the actual circumstances that decision-makers found themselves in. Interviewing is one, although certainly not the only, way of identifying that situation" (ibid: 691).

However, it should certainly not be forgotten that there are specific weaknesses (or flaws) pertaining to the interview technique. One can never know, for instance, of the validity or veracity of a participant's testimony, or if it amounts to a true representation of the opinions within the wider group to which the agent belongs. However, if such drawbacks are taken sufficiently into account, it is possible to avoid the negative consequences of these weaknesses through appropriate counter measures.

Firstly, the researcher must vigilantly compare and contrast the content of the participant's testimony against the known facts of a particular issue or case. This can be achieved easily enough, provided that the facts of the case are effectively available (i.e., that the testimony is not referring to something that is completely unverifiable). Secondly, one must understand the specific 'field' into which one is entering in order to ascertain the 'sufficient' number of interview samples (Seidman, 2006: 54-5). In this case, there are two fields of research: the Latin American University Institute of Agroecology 'Paulo Freire' (IALA), and the ALBA-Arroz network of rice producing factories. These two sites were chosen as a means of connecting the two 'ends' of food sovereignty: small-scale agroecology and large-scale industrial processing. Yet each field carries with it its own specific composition of key actors. For the former, it is peasants and small farmers, peasant-teachers, students and university management; while for the latter we have the workforce as such, comprised of various grades of workers, mid-level managers, administrators, factory presidents, as well as those at the highest ministerial level under which these factories are institutionally subsumed.

In each case, interviewees were sampled across each of these positionalities as much as possible.

Nevertheless, there are certain limits to the interview samples presented in this thesis, which must be fully accounted for. With respect to the IALA field site, there is a woeful lack of female participants. Although the original research plan intended to interview female students in order to gain insight into the highly gendered terrain of peasant life, several attempts to arrange interviews with them never materialised. Some of this can be put down to the contingent clash of personal schedules, and partly to the restricted time frame spent among the school (10 days).[7] Indeed, the intention was always to return to IALA for follow up investigations, yet due to research contingencies, this was never made possible. Nevertheless, as other interview data from peasant movement leaders demonstrates, the issue of women's rights in the countryside and the aspect of gendered structures of power represent major fault lines within the struggle for food sovereignty. Thus, the IALA sample is limited by this lacuna.

In terms of the ALBA-Arroz site, the major absence is at the factory-presidential level and the ministerial level. Yet these limits each have their own story, which actually helps to colour the overall quality of the research problem. Gaining access to the spaces of production within Venezuela that were formed under the ALBA agreement (i.e., the *Empresas Mixtas Socialistas del ALBA*) was by far the most challenging aspect of the entire research process. Having encountered great difficulties in accessing personnel at the ALBA factories, it was only by chance that workers at ALBA-Arroz had taken the factories under occupation, and ejecting the high managerial strata. Thus, all interviews at these research sites are within the workforce proper (though some of these workers are charged with coordinator-type roles). Taking stock of the difficulties faced during fieldwork in Venezuela provides much insight into the nature of bureaucratic structures and the problem of 'state secrets' when attempting to access state-run research sites. Additionally, the very fact that the workers were perfectly happy to allow me access to their factories also indicates a very real divide between the worker and managerial segments, which was revealed by

[7] Though upon reflection, other factors come into play. Firstly, the female portion of the student body is only 40% of the male population. Additionally, when I initially met with the administration of the school, it was the faculty that chose which 'key' students to introduce me to, whom they thought would be suitable initial interlocutors, perhaps based on their knowledge or amicability. All of these interlocutors were also male.

the differential access offered by these two groups. This divide will be further analysed and reflected upon throughout the thesis.

1.6 Thesis Outline

Having reviewed the relevant ALBA literature in this Introduction, Chapter 2 will seek to unravel the basic parameters of 'food sovereignty' (FS) in both its academic and activist guises. This alone poses a considerable challenge, given the enormous scope of FS literature and the many projects and practices that constitutes its everyday politics. As such, I frame the approach to FS through three inter-related lenses: rights, territory and sovereignty. In doing so, I aim to reveal how we think about these dimensions intellectually and politically, as well as posing a series of questions that further unpack some of the ambiguities and contradictions found within them. With a few exceptions, FS scholarship does not enquire into the specific class basis of struggles in the countryside. Yet while I do not offer a comprehensive study of class differentiation in the Venezuelan countryside,[8] I aim to demonstrate the sociological foundation of the Bolivarian state as a specific condensation of class forces, which significantly shape the ways in which it attempts to implement its policy goals. From this angle, I will show the relative compositions of the active labour force, which provides a contextual grounding for explaining the strategic selectivity of state policies, and the (sometimes) contradictory outcomes they produce. Thus, by drawing upon Poulantzas' analysis of the capitalist state, as well as a host of more contemporary neo-Poulantzian innovations, I offer an analytical frame that is capable of explicating the nature and operation of the ALBA regional formation, the Venezuelan state, and the relations of power permeating these institutional complexes.

In Chapter 3, I offer a historical reconstruction of Latin America's long road to regionalism during the post-war period. By and large, Latin America's early experimentation with regional organisation was entirely refracted through the US's

[8] There is, in fact, no direct way of measuring class composition in the countryside (short of physically studying specific production units, farms or social production companies [see, eg. Kappeler, 2013]). As Deere (2017) notes, when viewing land reform in Venezuela, only farm size is indicated (and the relative redistribution of holdings among the population), without revealing anything about the type of property rights prevailing within any given farm, nor the distribution of power and ownership among genders. Of course, the larger the landholding the more easily it can be surmised that wage-labour is used as the most necessary labour regime, yet this can only ever be assumed, and thus insufficient to draw any concrete conclusions viz. class composition.

hegemonic project aimed at stabilising the capitalist bloc of the world system, embodied primarily through regional communities. Each development drive, from modernization to neoliberalism, continually produced a series of social ruptures and cycles of struggle that laid the ground work for the emergence of Latin America's new left at the cusp of the 21st century. Yet even this geopolitical re-alignment possessed its own internal divisions, from the relative divergence of development goals between MERCOSUR and ALBA, to the contradictions inside the ALBA bloc itself with respect to its material basis of resource extraction.

Chapter 4 thus seeks to better understand these contradictions within ALBA, by presenting a comprehensive analysis of its articles of agreement with respect to the role of social movements throughout the regional institution, and to the specific political economy embedded within ALBA's 'Grandnational Concept'. As I show through a documentary and empirical reconstruction, the role of the sovereign state – in both its relationship to the 'transnational organised society', as well as its approach to political economic development – maintains an overarching presence, invested in both juridical and material terms. The underlying politics of food sovereignty in the ALBA space therefore appear in a radical discourse and philosophy converging around issues of the 'social economy', yet overdetermined by state power.

Lest we fall into the trap of fetishising 'statism', it is important to reveal the concrete strategies, discourses and modes of knowledge among social forces from below. Chapter 5 builds upon this premise by analysing the emergence and dynamics of peasant movements in Venezuela, which struggle at both the national and regional (transnational) levels. Additionally, we will closely examine the work and praxis of the IALA School for Agroecology, which represents a key site of transnational organisation, counter-hegemonic knowledge production and the extension of popular pedagogical networks throughout the community. For both peasant movement actors and those in the IALA institution, the struggle for rights and territory is as much about radical education as it is about law and land; the struggle over the formation of a new 'common sense' is also a material struggle.

Chapter 6 seeks to situate the struggle for food sovereignty at the other end of the production chain, in the form of industrial processing. Through an analysis made up primarily of participant interview data, I show how the shadow of statism continues to dominate the production of food within the ALBA-Arroz rice-producing factories. The workforce exhibits both a strong level of intra-group solidarity, as well as a number of

divergences of outlook. For the former, the values of *Bolivarianismo*, deep commitments to the ‘social economy’, and a shared hostility to bureaucratic structures all shine through. For the latter, most low-level workers had little faith in the current government to extricate itself out of its current morose. The outcome of the workers’ struggle is also revealing with respect to the specific factory regime prevailing in ALBA-Arroz, as well as the concomitant politics of production that are shaped by it.

The thesis then offers a conclusion for the above findings, incorporating theoretical insights and empirical data that offer new contributions to both the Poulantzian state theory approach as well as the politics of food sovereignty in the ALBA regional space.

2 Rights, Territory, and Sovereignty: Rethinking Peasant Politics Today

This chapter will lay out the theoretical contours that will inform the remainder of the thesis. It specifically looks at the philosophy and practice of Food Sovereignty (FS), in order to understand the motivations, challenges and strategies of the main protagonists involved in this struggle. It will focus on three main coordinates – rights, territory and sovereignty – and attempt to reveal the ways in which FS protagonists understand and mobilise these categories in their strategies and discourse. The second section of the Chapter will then turn to the work of Nicos Poulantzas, particularly his analysis in *State, Power, Socialism*, as well as Jessop's 'strategic-relational approach', as a means of refining the parameters at stake in thinking through socio-spatial transformation. The insights taken from this neo-Poulantzian approach will shed critical light upon the variegated sources of power against which FS actors struggle.

2.1 Unravelling Food Sovereignty: A Critical Approach to 'the Peasant Way'

So why rights, territory and sovereignty? After all, this is a somewhat arbitrary choice, as these elements by no means exhaust the various dimensions and topics relevant to food sovereignty struggles around the world. Yet precisely because of this reason, a choice must be made. As Henry Bernstein notes in his 34-page review of the FS literature:

> "Trying to assess the claims of FS, both analytical and evidential… presents certain difficulties. First is the sheer quantum of the literature generated by FS, magnified by the internet sites of the many organizations committed to it… Second, the FS literature encompasses versions of virtually all processes and patterns of agrarian change in the world today, sweeping up many diverse dynamics and struggles into its overarching framework of the vicious and the virtuous" (Bernstein, 2014: 1032).

In this face of these difficulties, I have chosen the above coordinates in order to bring out what I believe to be three of the most common and crucial parameters of the FS philosophy and activism. More importantly, perhaps, and as I hope to demonstrate throughout the entirety of this Chapter, we need to think about what rights, territory and sovereignty means, not simply in the minds of peasants (though these are also vitally important), but in terms of how certain practices and forms of power have given

these terms specific social content and, ultimately, discursive hegemony throughout history. This approach will then offer up some deeper lines of enquiry into how we can theoretically deconstruct the nature of capitalist power (and capitalist state power) in the contemporary world, and what this tells us about the unique nature of state power and the struggle for 21st century socialism today.

Before this exploration, it is important to specify precisely what is meant by the term 'peasant' or 'peasantry', a term that has taken on myriad interpretations over the years (Edelman, 2013). For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I define 'peasants' as all those who reproduce themselves through *direct relations to land and soil* as a key medium in their productive activities. As a corollary, those actors not *directly* involved in the metabolic process of agrarian production – be it supervisors, technical experts, industrial workers, or strictly owners of land/capital– do not come under the definition of 'peasantry', despite the agrarian roots of their specific work tasks or owned assets. Such a definition is necessarily broad, particularly given the blurred lines between peasant producers who are often (to varying degrees) wage-workers on others' land. Reference to connections with the land and soil must also pertain to landless peasants as those who closely identify with rural life yet have been denied access to land, groups that are often at the forefront of food sovereignty struggles (Borras Jr., 2008: 275). This definition thus allows us to view a wide variety of actors, unit-sizes and production relations through a common, socio-ecological lens. In other words, whether producing for themselves or for others, peasants necessarily *work the land and identify with it as the material basis of life.*

2.1.1 The Problem of Liberal Rights: Negotiating the Positive/Negative Conundrum

In many ways, the contestation over the nature and content of rights has been the key to food sovereignty's philosophy and practice (Patel et al., 2007; Wittman, 2011; Peschard, 2014; Claeys, 2015; Dunford, 2015). The types of rights discourses engaged with by La Vía Campesina (LVC) have steadily shifted throughout its lifetime. Part of this shift is due to the embattled legacy of human rights in the modern world, which can be divided between two conceptual poles: economic liberalism, and political (sovereign) power. For the former, *negative* mode of rights, the liberal doctrine of private property continuously moves through a series of enclosures, whether through monopolisation of private property in land, technological packages, seed varieties and

so on (Claeys, 2014: 33-4; cf. Borowiak, 2004; Kloppenburg, 2010). With the latter, *positive* mode of rights, the sovereign state represents the author and guarantor of particular rights for given groups. The much earlier call for 'food security' during the first food crisis of the 1970s (Mechlem, 2004) was a prime example of the state's positive role in society. Nevertheless, the enjoyment of public goods through state provision does not necessarily enhance autonomy or empowerment – rather, it tends towards dependence on, and subsumption under, sovereign power (Claeys, 2015).

These two dimensions of modern rights discourse (economic liberalism and state-sovereignty) represented a relative barrier to the first phase of LVC's existence. During their initial engagement in negotiations through international forums – particularly the various food-related organs of the United Nations (UN) – LVC framed its rights discourse through the 'right of nations' to protect their food systems and to choose their ways of agricultural life in line with the concept of (sovereign) self-determination (FAO, 1996). However, with little progress made on this front, LVC soon switched its rights frame during the mid-2000s towards a discourse emphasising the 'rights of peoples' to choose and manage their own agrarian practices as it suited their local and cultural specificities (Claeys, 2015: 459; LVC, 1996).

Nevertheless, this move has seen only a partial rejection of the modern notion of rights; while the radical invocation of peasant rights summarily reject the capitalist 'food regime' (based upon unequal terms of trade, intellectual property rights and ecologically destructive practices), it remains relatively focused on working with(in) (and sometimes against) the sovereign state in an effort to complement, strengthen and even protect new forms of agrarian organisation and self-determination. As Trauger (2014: 1139) argues, any appeal or engagement with the liberal state is inherently "paradoxical", given that "capitalism and liberal states have been mutually constituted in the project of modernity". However, this view tends to bracket the possibility that peasant struggles can be both in and against the state (cf. McMichael, 2008: 225; Akram-Lodhi, 2015: 573), and that such struggles are the direct reflection of the fact that state forms are socially and historically constructed. Just as the liberal, capitalist state was the product of class struggles and political projects of historically situated actors, so too will the struggle for food sovereignty entail the radical restructuring of the state and its legal, institutional and political relations.

Rights to What, and by Whom?

Even with the LVC's shift of discourse from the 'rights of nations' to the 'rights of peoples', the emphasis was always clearly within the positive rights domain, at least in terms of extending such rights beyond the narrow realm of the private market. And yet, it is only with the latter conceptualisation – 'rights of peoples' – that the positive rights domain begins to internalise a seemingly irrevocable split. On one hand, the core substance of LVC's rights claims speaks to the inherently democratic nature of socio-economic production, which includes the decisions taken over the method and execution of specific productive practices, as well as the wider systems through which these practices link up into larger networks of intermediate production and distribution (see LVC, 2007). In essence, these strategic powers are invested in those who occupy the land, and are thus invested with geographically specific "bundles of powers" to dispose of the material conditions of social (re)production (Ribot and Peluso, 2003).

At a certain level, therefore, the realisation of self-management on the land, and the networks and systems linking up agrarian spaces, must come from the self-directed struggles among those embedded within such spaces. Social emancipation must, to a certain degree (perhaps a substantial degree), come in the form of self-emancipation (cf. Claeys, 2012). On the other hand, the social substance of these rights does not necessarily dispose these agents with the requisite power to actually bring about their political realisation. This problem may present itself as a question between legal convention and facts on the ground – i.e., between *de jure* agency, and *de facto* agency.[9] In other words, it sometimes appears as if *de facto* agency can only ever become substantial in the presence of its *de jure* recognition. For instance, Fox notes the analytically distinct yet related aspects of 'rights' and 'empowerment' (see Figure 2). Their substantial relationship in terms of social change, according to Fox, is determined by the degree to which 'empowerment' (*de facto* agency) is concretised by 'nominal rights' (*de jure* agency). Thus, "empowerment can make nominal rights meaningful, and nominal rights can make empowerment possible" (Fox, 2007: 335).

Yet there is an inherent ambiguity in this argument, one that is indeed recognised by Fox: "Formal institutions can help to establish rights that challenge

[9] To clarify this distinction, I am speaking of certain forms of agency that are *legitimately prescribed* (*de jure*) – articulated within the normative frame of reference within society, which in the modern context emerges from the juridical state – in contrast to agency that is *materially realised* (*de facto*) – irrespective of whether this agency is recognised by traditional sources of social power or not.

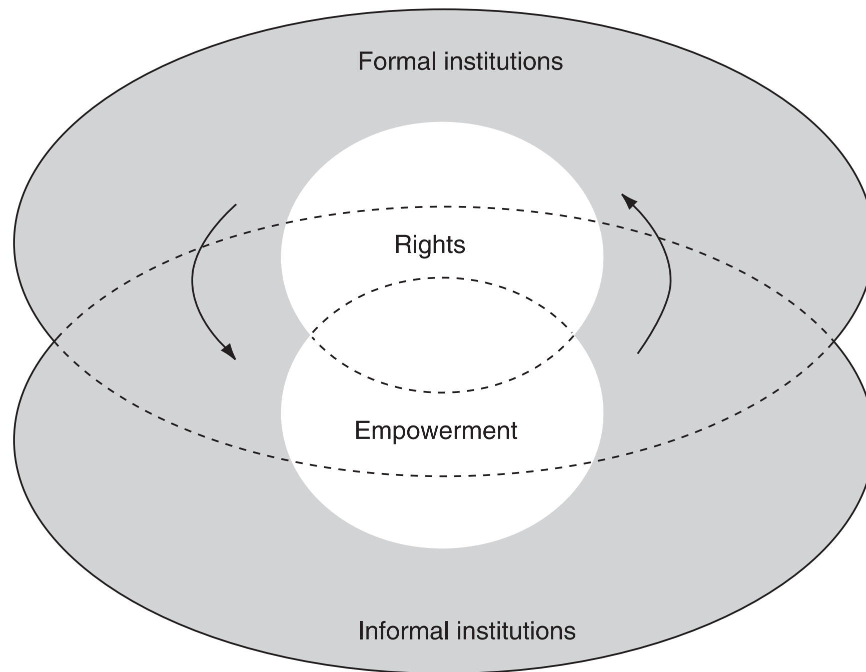

Figure 2: The reciprocal interaction between rights and empowerment.
Source: Fox, 2007: 336.

informal power relations, while those informal structures can also undermine formal institutions" (ibid). What are we to make of these 'informal' power relations? At one remove, it might seem as if these informal power relations sit somewhere outside the formal structure of the state and law; hence their capacity to undermine nominal rights, by virtue of escaping their reach. However, we must understand the relatively superficial image this reading gives us, for approaching the problem in this way is to assume that the state is nothing other than an aggregation of formal, abstract rules.[10] Power relations as such cannot be reduced to a division between formality and informality – for 'informal' powers may well be materially inscribed into the formal institutions that, in many cases, make these informal powers so effective. Thus, every transformative, even revolutionary, moment is structured by the prevailing division of powers between agents, powers that are not exhausted by the legal (and thus rights-allocating) domain.

All of this serves to illustrate the 'what' and the 'who' involved in transforming societies towards the principles of food sovereignty, as well as their complex inter-relations. For if food sovereignty is "one of increasing social and environmental

[10] An illusion to which much of contemporary liberal jurisprudence has become enamoured, amounting to a mere "accountancy of rules" (Douzinas, 2000: 374).

benefits and a more equitable distribution of resources and political power in the food system" (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2010: 87), then we are immediately moving beyond purely *formal* questions about rights, and instead towards a specific set of social relations. This consideration of 'relations' refers to more than simply the relationship between those imbued with the power to dispose of rights, and those who become the bearers of such rights, which in the modern form of law refers to state-society relations (cf. Finer, 1997: 1298-9). Rather, the notion of 'relations', in relative distinction to 'rights', refers to the social context in which agents dispute and struggle over the distributional enjoyment of property, whereas a 'right' to this property denotes merely the formally validated relationship of the agent to the specific object in question. This is not simply an abstract observation; as LVC's Nyéléni Declaration states, the transformative realisation of these rights "implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality" (LVC, 2007).

These considerations therefore require a more concerted emphasis on the material locus of rights, particularly with respect to the specific rights invoked by FS actors, and LVC in particular. For in relation to the contradiction noted immediately above:

> "Vía Campesina's conception of a right… is one that is explicitly without content – the right is a right to self-determination, for communities to redefine for themselves the substance of the food relations appropriate to their geographies. This is a contradictory understanding of rights – where the state remains a guarantor of the rights, but where it plays no role in the authorship of these rights" (Patel and McMichael, 2004: 249, emphasis added).

This contradiction goes to the heart of what Bentham described as a difference between 'real' and 'imaginary' rights, in which the latter refers merely to rights that are invoked without the requisite author and guarantor of such duties. Thus, LVC's philosophy amounts to "a call for a right to a right" (Patel et al., 2007: 91), without specifying the ways in which the material foundations of everyday rights become instantiated (cf. Patel, 2009: 669). And yet, while the above considerations on the relative absence of the social content of rights discourses characteristic of FS struggles remains pertinent, it is not entirely accurate to say that the rights claims made by rural actors are entirely without material foundation. We will therefore explore one of the key socio-spatial categories that crucially inform a significant portion of FS discourse.

2.1.2 Value(s) of Territory: Contested Practices (and Perceptions) on the Land

The preceding problematic opens up a series of related questions concerning the intersections between rights and territory. Such a problematic was noted early on by Raj Patel, who brought attention to some of the unspoken ambiguities in the FS literature/movement:

> "To demand a space of food sovereignty is to demand specific arrangements to govern territory and space. At the end of the day, the power of rights-talk is that rights imply a particular burden on a specified entity – the state. In blowing apart the notion that the state has a paramount authority, by pointing to the multivalent hierarchies of power and control that exist within the world food system, food sovereignty paradoxically displaces one sovereign, but remains silent about the others" (Patel, 2009: 668).

Though this passage is almost universally quoted among FS scholars, particularly with respect to questions concerning 'multiple sovereignties' (which we will see below), Patel's query also helps to underscore the fact that when discussing the nature of 'rights' (as in the case of LVC rights framing), we are immediately conjuring up notions of territoriality and space. In other words, rights invoke not just subjects but places. Nevertheless, ambiguity remains in terms of how FS protagonists attempt to carve out (and how FS scholars attempt to understand) new rights discourses and their territorial manifestations in a world system overdetermined by the commodification of land and territory.

As Alonso-Fradejas et al. (2015: 441) suggest, "democratic control over land and territory responds to capitalism's regressive processes of 'territorial restructuring'", which "seeks control over the places and spaces where surplus is produced by shaping and controlling the institutions and social relations that govern production, extraction and accumulation". Hence, capital's tendency to produce a series of 'metabolic rifts' (Foster, 2000) – through the degradation of the soil, stark divisions between town and country, as well as the (often forceful) separation of peasants from their means of subsistence – becomes the central dynamic against which FS movements position themselves by reclaiming the elements of life that have been wrenched from local control by national/transnational capital (cf. Brent, 2015; Vergara-Camus, 2014). Araghi (1995) brings attention to the wider, global context of capital accumulation that ultimately affects many such instances of qualitatively different types of peasant units (differentiated by size, production methods, crops

grown, and levels of political integration with state institutions) that for the past 50 years has resulted in "depeasantisation". Thus, the marked draining of people from the land, resulting in the "global army of migratory labour" (Araghi 2003: 61) has severed the organic connection between people and their traditional modes of place-based empowerment, in exchange for precarious (or non-existent) work and minimal civic rights within sprawling urban centres.

In addition to the ways in which territory becomes a physical asset over which capital and labour struggle for control, the notion of territory gains a wider significance for the FS movement. In 2006, during the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)-sponsored 'International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development', a parallel paper was drawn up by the various civil society groups that had participated in the Conference. The document set out a clear indication of the new vision of territory as not simply a material object, but also a specific place in which life and communal identity gained its content (see LVC et al., 2006). The struggle, then, becomes one of resisting and even overturning the now predominant Anglo-Saxon worldview, which "treats land as the passive object of human activity and ignores all forms of value that are not easily priced on the market" (Kolers, 2009: 64). In this way, LVC conceives of territory as a particular matrix of being that goes beyond the idea of mere 'land' – as an object of land reform – but rather as a bundle of spatial signifiers that connote a sense not just of ownership (as the traditional metric for land reform) but also the framework through which the notion of peasant rights, and the constellation of territorially specific values that emerge from them, gain traction (Grajales, 2010). Thus, "[t]he growing concern for the Mother Earth inside LVC has in turn resonated with a questioning of why we want land and territory and how we use it; in other words, 'Land for what?', or 'Territory for what?'" (Rosset, 2013: 727).

Territory as Use-Value, Cultural-Value… or Political Technology?

The above distinction – commonly found within FS literature – between perceptions (and indeed material practices) that treat the ecological substratum of agrarian life as either 'land' (productive asset) or 'territory' (cultural space) presents a relative challenge to any comprehensive policy of agrarian transformation. Contending perceptions and practices on the land can pose certain barriers to effective cross-class or cross-cultural organisation within a broad based social movement. Despite the ongoing sensitivities bound up with these differences, the LVC has taken concerted

steps to unify its discourse among its varied social base. Hence, whether from the perspective of peasant production, or indigenous territorial control, the idea of territory as more than simply a commodity but also the place of everyday life (and its reproduction) has become relatively hegemonic within the LVC.

And yet, as with our discussion of FS rights discourse, these struggles over the meaning and practice of territory emerge from within a markedly complex field of action, which has been laid down by the capitalist state and administered through a specific set of territorial practices. Thus, the issue of *political technology* becomes a decisive battleground among various actors who attempt to embed their agency into a transformative set of practices, i.e. as a means of affecting change at the societal level. I borrow this term from Stuart Elden, who conceives of 'territory' as a "political technology" that goes beyond the execution of technical calculations (science, technology, etc.) and towards "legal systems and arguments, political debates, theories, concepts, and practices" (Elden, 2013: 17). Thus, Elden distinguishes between "land" as "a relation of property" (containing a political-economic function) and "terrain" as "a site of work or battle" (containing a strategic function) (ibid: 9). In this way, territory as such is irreducible to either land or terrain but is instead constituent of them. In order to give land and terrain their historically specific form, these elements are put to work through a distinct set of discourses and material practices that congeal into a spatially and temporally particular bundle of political technologies. It is within the constitutional architecture – the formal body of laws and people-rights (corresponding to what Poulantzas calls the "People-Nation") – and the *de facto* power of the state to interpret and "stretch" these constitutional articles that reveals the intimate relationship between sovereignty and territory that are both contained within contemporary political techniques (see Kröger and Lalander, 2016).

Thus, like the issues concerning rights, the centre of gravity in today's hegemonic pattern of political techniques is undoubtedly the sovereign state, and the wider (international) system of 'like' states among which it resides. Yet this observation is only at the most general level, for sovereignty (and its associated techniques) can be deployed through a number of different ways. Sovereign regimes can be established upon 'corporatist', 'neoliberal', or even 'post-liberal' lines, all of which emerge from the specific ensemble of social forces that give rise to a given institutional resolution to the underlying foundation of societal divisions. It is this

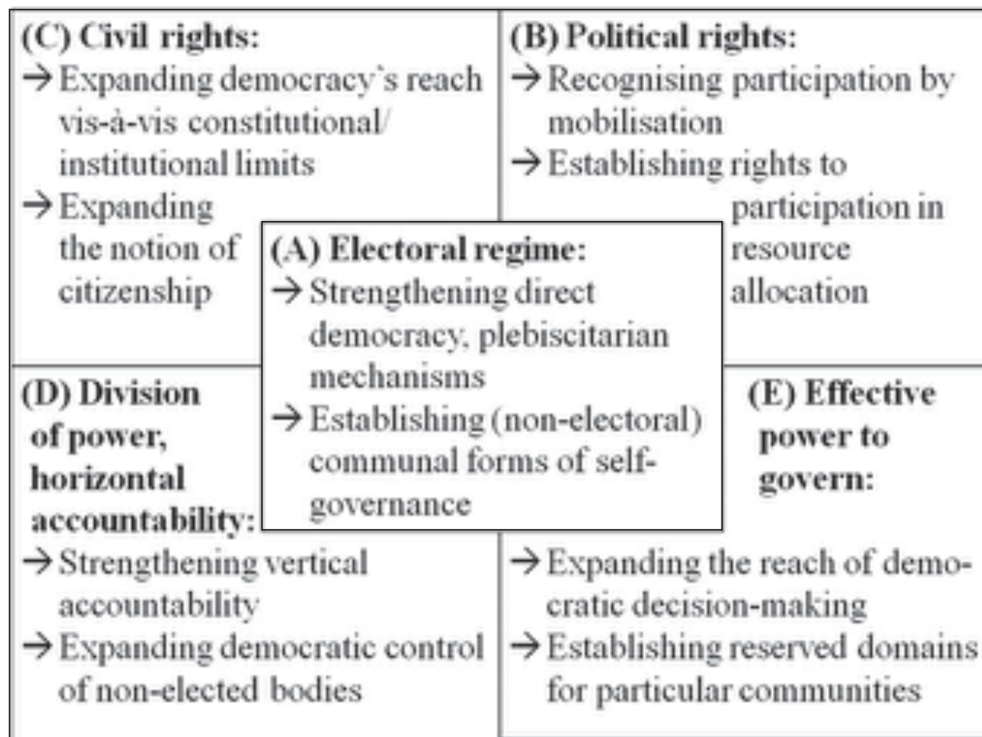

Figure 3: Post-Liberal Challenges to Liberal Democracy.
Source: Wolff, 2013: 36.

latter designation, which has come to occupy an increasingly prominent place among studies of Latin America's 'left turn', that belies not so much a radical rupture with the status quo but rather new political projects that foster hybrid forms of social, political and economic practice (Arditi, 2008). For Yashar, the post-liberal turn represents "a different kind of political mapping – one that would secure individual rights but also accommodate more diverse identities, units of representation, and state structure" (Yashar, 1999: 88). This conceptualisation stands in contrast to the predominant form of 'political mapping' that is consonant with the era of liberal modernity, constituted by "economy, individual, instrumental rationality, private property, and so forth…" (Escobar, 2010: 12).

Thus, in terms of conceptualising the set of political technologies bound up with the post-liberal turn, we can, following Wolff (2013), conceive of this matrix through five inter-related forms: electoral regime, civil rights, political rights, division of power/horizontal accountability, effective power to govern (see Figure 3). Taken together, these axes of governance also speak to a specific political technology in its post-liberal form. 'Territorially' speaking (which, as I contend, is the proper register for enunciating the language of political technique), we can understand the spatial

construct of post-liberalism as the enhancement and consolidation of "vertical territoriality" (Delaney, 2005: 32-3), which refers to the multiplicity of territorial spaces constitutive of a 'national' territory, most commonly seen within federal regimes. However, in contrast to federal systems, in which the constituent federal territories are substantially overdetermined by the effective hegemony of the central/national state, the idea behind the political techniques associated with post-liberalism point towards the real and material decentralisation of powers traditionally confined to society's power centres. This of course speaks directly, and in a 'territorial' register, to the notion of 'peasant rights' in the discourse of food sovereignty, and thus the territorial autonomy embedded with such rights-discourses.

The preceding discussion on the notion of territory seeks to clarify the way in which territory signifies something beyond the related notion of 'land' and 'cultural space', and towards the fluid relations between place and power (Elden, 2013). Political technologies principally refer to the ways in which material objects (be they tools, terrains or human bodies) become legible, and thus to the very production of knowledge through which legibility becomes inscribed. In the modern, liberal era, these repositories of knowledge/power are most visible within image of the sovereign state (see Scott, 1998). And yet, "explicit discussion of the politics of making and using knowledge is frequently absent from [FS] movements and academic work" (Iles and Montenegro, 2014: 10). Unpacking the ways in which 'territory' becomes a bundle of political technologies is therefore central not only to the analysis of sovereign state power but also to the possible pathways towards the material transformation of this power. Thus, in taking inspiration from Gramsci's formula, in which "State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (Gramsci, 1971: 263), we may understand an *historically specific form* of rights and territory as equating to *sovereignty*: a representational form in which the rights of the People-Nation are protected by modern techniques of power.

2.1.3 From Westphalian Sovereignty to Multiple Sovereignties

As Roman-Alcalá recently noted, the question of, "'Who is the sovereign within FS?' has emerged as one of the most crucial of the unanswered questions" in both the FS literature and the movement itself (Roman-Alcalá, 2016: 1, emphasis in original). Despite the complexities of identifying the location of 'sovereignty' within the food

sovereignty discourse, a deeper understanding of LVC's approach to agriculture and social life helps to reveal the stakes involved in the question over sovereignty as such. As argued by one of the leading thinkers on FS, Philip McMichael, "In the discourse of capitalist modernity, food is conceived essentially as a commodity – an input to enhance accumulation and urban provisioning. Peasant mobilization today conceives of food as comprising social, ecological, cultural, and political relationships" (McMichael, 2002: 33). The corollary to this broader and deeper understanding of agriculture is that political power reverts to those social agents that reside within a given location in which agrarian production is ultimately embedded. Through this type of political vision, which McMichael dubs the "second modernity" (in contrast to the "first modernity" based around the exclusive right of the Westphalian state to both dispose of subject-rights and lay claim to national territory), contemporary peasant movements are "asserting the right to alternative forms of democratic organization and the securing of material well-being through multiple sovereignties based in cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability" (ibid: 39). Other authors have alluded to this spatial organisation of power in various ways, as either "agrarian citizenship", or "sites of sovereignty" (Wittman, 2011: 92; Roman-Alcalá, 2016: 3). Yet regardless of how this political geography is termed, all such definitions revolve around the common understanding that the right to occupy space and to administer a given (local) territory is given by those who inhabit each individual space, such that the politics of space itself transforms into a praxis of direct social participation and power that is capable of cascading upwards, throughout "communities, peoples, states and international bodies" (LVC, 2007).

This form of praxis seen within the LVC has a sharp resonance with Kees van der Pijl's own concept of 'multiple sovereignties'. As he describes it:

> "Democracy and self-rule must begin locally, in the spheres of production and daily life. However, the parliamentary form of debate by political representatives of collective interests, accompanied by the transparency created by old and new media, would be revitalised if this [UN] level of global governance were included" (van der Pijl, 2007: 201).

In this way, the 'scaling up' of direct democracy (or vertical territoriality) towards the highest (UN) level, is given within the concept of multiple sovereignties at the global level – i.e., not simply multiple in a horizontal fashion traversing space, but in a vertical fashion in which the barrier of space itself (the energy and resources required

to traverse long distances) is partially overcome through the formation of group representatives that can carry local demands up through the spatial hierarchy of global governance. As such, this political form has become increasingly noticeable within the international praxis of the LVC.

As the 1990s witnessed an ever greater push towards trade liberalisation, primarily expressed through international forums such as the World Trade Organization (Hoogvelt, 2001), LVC had framed the problem of agriculture in nation-state terms and, in doing so, had begun to engage with international forums. Since that time, LVC has participated in a number of FAO sponsored summits, affected a noticeable shift in the language and norms deployed in forums like the FAO and other UN human rights bodies, and created ever larger institutional spaces in which peasant movement representatives participate (Edelman and James, 2011: 95-6). Despite the scaled-up approach to civil society politics seen within LVC strategies, there are major limits to what this institutional participation has (or even can) achieve at the UN level. As one of the central LVC figures recounted: "UN recognition of Food Sovereignty could constitute an umbrella for all these mobilizations… But the way UN [*sic*] works means that representatives have to be present continuously, it is a permanent effort and heavy task" (Paul Nicholson; cited in Claeys, 2015: 459). Thus far no such presence has yet been decided within the movement or within international bodies, and it is unlikely that one may emerge in the near future, given the significant resources that are required to establish an effectively permanent social movement presence within these global institutions.

Even with the notable shift in language that characterises international law on the rights to food found within the UN/FAO commissions and summits, there remain deafening silences on such issues as "rights to conserve and exchange or sell traditional seed varieties, to intervene in markets and set prices, to participate in economic decision-making at the international and national levels" and so on (Edelman and James, 2011: 96-7; see also Brem-Wilson, 2015). At the level of hegemonic discourse, such silences thus amount to what Hopewell (2016) dubs a type of "invisible barricade" to the fuller participation of, and transformation by, civil society actors. A corollary to this problem is the structural inclusion of international capital as another 'non-state actor' with the same rights of inclusion as other (social movement) actors. The presence of capitalist firms became particularly prominent during the mid 1990s; with the publication of the UN's Report on Global Governance

(1995), the increasing presence of NGOs, citizens' movements, MNCs and global capital markets signalled the need for states to "adjust to the appearances of all these forces and take advantage of their capabilities." These adjustments have culminated in an explosion of Public-Private Partnerships brokered through UN agencies (Utting and Zammit, 2009). And while this closer partnership between international capital and global forums might suggest an all-powerful global reach of private firms, this power ultimately stems from the consistent lobbying by national states for the continued inclusion of (and often lax vetting processes over) these firms (McKeon, 2009: 171-2).

What this review of LVC's participation in UN bodies suggests is that while such participation offers an immanent process of building a truly global structure of multiple sovereignties, the very institutional infirmity exhibited by peasant movements indicates the fact that the power of sovereignty resides elsewhere, beyond the meeting rooms that host multi-stakeholder negotiations. Rather, and despite the proliferation of global institutions, national sovereignty remains the fundamental referent in terms of socio-political power, which is spatially expressed through an already 'multiple' sovereign realm composed of many states within an international system (Kazancigil, 2007). This then puts the impetus for food sovereignty back onto the material plain of struggle – namely, the sovereign nation-state – in order to build up the requisite power to withstand (rather than directly compete with) the geopolitical power of capital. Yet to do so would indeed require the formation of multiple sovereignties that significantly penetrate the traditional spaces of political power (sovereign states), as well as higher-level spaces (regional institutions), and potentially beyond. In this way, some suggest that instead of aiming directly at the height of the global institutional architecture (i.e., the UN), peasant movements could alternatively focus on "regional groupings or ideological blocs, such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) or the Venezuelan-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA)" (Edelman and James, 2011: 99). Yet we might ask why UNASUR has not adopted the principles of food sovereignty, while the ALBA has. The answer again stems from the basic (sovereign) constitutive units of global or regional organisations, and the differential nature of their own social and discursive projects, which in turn reflect the ensemble of social forces that animate them (Pritchard et al., 2016). Thus, while the struggle for multiple sovereignties is a key aspect to the political geography of food sovereignty, this struggle must ultimately begin at the

confrontation with the sovereign state, even if the ultimate goal is to break down the centralisation of sovereign power.

Where (and What) is the Common Ground Between Multiple Sovereignties?

If we recall the above formula for understanding sovereignty as the aggregation of an historically specific form of rights and territory, then it becomes clear that in answering the question as to how multiple sovereignties can cohere depends fundamentally upon the degree to which both the power of FS rights discourse and the political technologies necessary for their instantiation become generalised. We can better understand this necessary relation by noting the ways in which specific forms of rights and territory became coterminous (and indeed productive of) capitalist sociality. In this sense, the question of where and what is the common ground between multiple sovereignties can only be approached through a more concerted focus on precisely the structure that has cropped up again and again in the course of the above discussion: the sovereign nation-state. In essence, the FS literature and movement does not truly possess a 'theory' of the capitalist state. Yet I argue that a more robust analysis of the rights and territoriality constitutive of the sovereign nation-state can be aided through a close reading of Nicos Poulantzas, particularly with respect to his final (and in many ways unfinished) volume*, State, Power, Socialism*, which fundamentally seeks to ground the workings of state and society through the common lens of social relations of production and the concomitant strategies and struggles that go into their reproduction (and possible transformation).

2.2 Food Sovereignty as Class Struggle: A Poulantzian Approach

Taking the conceptual coordinates of rights, territory and sovereignty as the basic problematic undergirding the transition to food sovereignty, this section will draw upon those aspects of Nicos Poulantzas' work that heavily touch upon law, technique and democratic socialism. Suturing all of these considerations together will be the basic underlying theme of Poulantzas last work, *State, Power, Socialism*, which sought to bring out these coordinates by critically deconstructing the nature and composition of the capitalist state. Thus, the following sub-sections explicate these lineaments of the capitalist state, which, as I argue, is entirely necessary for revealing the concrete challenges that face social actors seeking transformative revolutionary change. The

remainder of this chapter will therefore seek out the obscure yet terrifyingly real effects of state power, which will offer a more grounded field of analysis through which we might be able to better understand the full import and implications of socio-political agency embedded within the transformative project of food sovereignty in ALBA.

2.2.1 Hegemony, Class Struggle and the Strategic Field of the State

Broadly speaking, the great majority of Poulantzas' theoretical enterprises bore the imprint of Althussarian structuralism. Particularly in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973), as well as *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (1975), we find the various components of capitalist society subdivided into neat, if not complexly related, 'regions' or 'instances' of activity (e.g., politics, economics, ideology). Within this dominant *oeuvre*, as Stuart Hall notes, "there is a double framework to every question – each element appearing *twice*, once as the 'effect of structure', once as the 'effect of a practice'" (Hall, 2014: ix). As such, this double-layering of each problematic speaks to the overtly *formalist* approach found in Poulantzas' comprehensive yet somewhat skeletal taxonomy of capitalist sociality. As Poulantzas later noted in a type of auto-critique, his earlier work "did not succeed in exactly situating the specificity of the state, … [nor] in grasping the relations between state, society, economy, in a sufficiently precise fashion" (Poulantzas; cited in Jessop, 1985: 144). In contrast, *State, Power, Socialism*, (*SPS*) goes beyond the formalist fold by re-inscribing the complex, micro-foundational elements of social struggle into a broader understanding of 'the state' that extends into the very bowels of society itself. Underlying this *relational* (rather than structural) approach to the state is his ontological view of *class* as that of *process*, rather than abstract category, subjective disposition, or structural effect – an approach that was already present in *Classes and Contemporary Capitalism*, but only fully elaborated in *SPS*. Rather, it is the *effect of socially and historically specific class struggles* that congeal into the *institutional materiality* of the state. Hence, reading the key parameters of the modern state – juridical rights, territorial practices, and sovereign power – through the lens of *State, Power, Socialism* reveals the social content of complex political projects and discursive imaginaries.

It is first of all necessary to unpack Poulantzas' basic operative components: the relations of production and the social division of labour. The basic relations of

production under capitalism renders the direct producer (worker) with no other possession other than her body, which she must sell to capital for a wage. These relations thus lead to a situation in which a general separation between manual and intellectual labour takes place, whereby all organizational capacities are accrued to capital, leaving the worker as a mere (manual) appendage of the productive forces (whether in the form of machines or land), and leading to a situation Marx referred to as the "despotism" of capital (Marx, 1981: 477). The social division of labour therefore marks the division between labour and capital in general (as well as intermediate strata). This serves to presage Poulantzas' reading of the capitalist state as inscribed by the social relations of production under capitalism, and the general division between manual and intellectual labour as such.[11] Thus, "In all its apparatuses (that is, not only in its ideological apparatuses but also in the repressive and economic ones) the State incarnates intellectual labour as separated from manual labour" (Poulantzas, 2014: 55-6, emphasis in original). While capitalist power inside the factory amounts to a type of despotism (drawn from the monopolisation of the means of production/intellectual labour) without recourse to direct political domination, "it is within the capitalist State that the organic relationship between intellectual labour and political domination, knowledge and power, is realized in the most consummate manner" (ibid: 56). Yet the power of capital and the power of the state are not externally related, but organically cohere through specific relations of hegemonic force. Thus, "like 'capital', [the state] is rather a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form" (ibid: 128-9).

In this way, the complexity of the state's institutionality emerges from a given relationship it maintains to specific social classes. State action cannot be reduced to 'class' *per se* (and thus to the 'dominant' class), but rather congeals around the various struggles between classes that at any given historical moment form together into a specific hegemonic power bloc (ibid: 129). Yet the varying composition of the power bloc speaks to the variegated rhythms and changing (im)balances that take place throughout the course of capital accumulation at the global scale, processes which are

[11] While Marx typically refers to this division as that between 'mental' and manual labour, Poulantzas employs the term 'intellectual' labour. I will therefore confine myself to using Poulantzas' term from here on.

also bound up with the constant struggle within and between social classes (ibid: 158; cf. Poulantzas, 1975). Poulantzas' approach to understanding the particular actions of the state ultimately revolve around the selectivity of particular policies that articulate a given organic relationship with a specific class fraction and a particular branch of the state apparatus.[12] Hence, like capital in general, composed of relatively autonomous fractions, such as productive, commercial or financial capital which have their own particular perceptions and world-views (cf. van der Pijl, 1998), the state apparatus is itself composed of a number of "relatively autonomous bureaucracies, each of which has its specific field of competence, its own clientele and perceptions of problems" (Poulantzas, 2014: 194). The above components thus specify the *institutional materiality of the state.*

Both state structure and state strategy takes place within and across the specific *strategic terrain* of action and struggle. Such a terrain thus speaks to far more than the mere physical embodiment of state institutions (government buildings, bureaucratic departments, parliament, etc.) but rather to the extended space in which state power gains its traction. Although the dominated classes do not cohere within state apparatuses in the same way as the politically dominant classes (capital, petty-bourgeoisie, etc.) they nevertheless populate the extended (strategic) field of the state, through their presence in the school system, prisons, political parties and, importantly, various spaces of production (what is usually incorrectly conceived of as a separate and hermetically sealed-off realm of the 'economy'). This fact thus opens up the possibility for subaltern struggles to directly impact upon the operation and evolution of the state and its attendant strategies and political technologies. As popular classes are immediately written out of the domain of intellectual labour (as both workers and relatively disempowered citizens), they must struggle at a certain 'distance' from the state, even while struggling within the fringes of its embodiment (ibid: 152). The institutional materiality of the state therefore provides it with specific powers and capacities, which as Jessop (1985: 119) summarises, consist of: "the individualization of the body-politic, the role of law as the mode of organized violence, and the

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[12] The notion of the 'selectivity' of action was not well brought out in Poulantzas' work, maintaining at best an implicit acknowledgement. One of the few references to it makes note of the "*non-decision making*" of dominant actors, which "applies not only to the hard core of the relations of production, but also to spheres that go far beyond it" (Poulantzas, 2014: 194). In essence, Poulantzas is referring to the bounded rationality of agents, of the universal gap between agent knowledge and objective conditions. Nevertheless, the notion of selectivity *qua* agential property was never fully worked out, and will thus be further explored below.

bourgeois forms of nationhood and the nation-state." Thus, as Jessop suggests, Poulantzas' framework remains highly relevant to considerations of law and rights, the atomisation of the body-politic as an inherently territorial practice, and the formation of state- and –nationhood as the condensation of modern sovereignty.

Political Struggles Over the Social Content of Rights

Our discussion of rights in §2.1.1 centred on the question of the relationship between formal rights and the (often informal) social relations of power, a question that must be further addressed in order to unpack the ways in which FS protagonists might be able to use rights discourse beyond the narrow confines of liberalism (or even post-liberalism), and in doing so impute a substantial *social content* into their rights-claims and discourses. To approach this question, it is first necessary to reveal how rights are constituted by a related social content.

As Poulantzas argued: "The concrete content of rights and duties precisely depends upon the materialization of needs and labour in… [specific] historical material circumstances" (Poulantzas, [1965] 2008: 65, emphasis in original). Here, "needs and labour" roughly correspond to the forces and relations of production (ibid: 59), yet between the two, "labour" forms the crucial part, for it is the ways in which (and among whom) the productive forces are owned, possessed and organized that certain bundles of social power begin to emerge (relations of production). To forge unity in the differentiated landscape of class-divided society, the establishment of a particular juridical form corresponding to social content (relations of production and social division of labour) is required. The real efficacy of the juridical form lies in "a relationship of force invested in a relationship of freedom" (ibid: 66). As an embodiment of this contradictory relation between freedom and force (or, "Fraternity-Terror"), a certain third force, a relatively segmented fragment of the larger social whole, comes forth to ensure that relations of exploitation assume the form of reciprocity; i.e., that the act of appropriation is accompanied by the return of a duty. Poulantzas thus noted the historically universal presence of this Fraternity-Terror binary across class societies; yet under capitalism "law first appeared as a limitation upon state arbitrariness, and as a barrier to a certain form of violence. This 'State based on law', conceived as the contrary of unlimited power, gave birth to the illusory opposition Law/Terror" (Poulantzas, 2014: 76). This illusory opposition maintains a

homologous relation to the equally illusory opposition between the *public/private* in capitalism, or between the state and civil society.

It is through the state-produced "isolation effect", interpellating individuals into isolated monads (citizens, rather than classes) that relate to each other through the mechanisms of market competition, that makes individuation "terrifyingly real" (Poulantzas, 1973: 130-1). Poulantzas' use of the term "terrifyingly" was no accident, tracing a common etymological root with *terror and territory* (Neocleous, 2003: 102). In this sense, private property is itself terrifyingly real, with each factory or farm representing its own *quasi*-sovereign power, in which the despotism of capital reigns, even while the *general despotism* (the *real* sovereign power) of the Leviathan weaves itself through them all. It is not for nothing that Ellen Wood once observed that through such relations of production, we find that "the integration of production and appropriation represents the ultimate 'privitisation' of politics" (Wood, 1981: 92; cf. Poulantzas, 2014: 18-9). Hence, by locating the common root of class power in the division of manual and intellectual labour, as reproduced both in the quasi-sovereign factory and the fully-sovereign state, it immediately becomes clear how the materiality of class power bursts the abstract boundaries of formal law. For as Christopher Arthur points out, "The monopolisation of the means of production by the capitalist class is an *extra*-legal fact" (cited in Miéville, 2006: 92). From this rather startling observation, an entire series of *social facts* cascade out of the boundaries of *formal rules*; this is particularly so with respect to the numerous instances of 'para-state terror' throughout the Latin American countryside (Mazzei, 2009; Hristov, 2014). Sovereign techniques of power thus continuously exhibit a certain surplus of action beyond the juridical form. Whether legally legible or not, each is fundamentally constituted by Terror, even if it is the abstract juridical form that is most adequate to the construction of Fraternity as a legitimating function.

By tracing the social content of liberal rights to the dominant relations of production and social division of labour, it becomes possible to see *rightful action* as both legibly inscribed into the juridical framework of recognised rules as well as a whole bundle of powers that seemingly contravene the 'letter' of the law, yet share a common foundation with the legal sphere itself. In other words, it is *class violence* – conceived both as legally prescribed private property rights *and* extra-legal acts reproducing class domination – that constitutes the common foundation between legal and extra-legal power(s), as the primary means (historically and socially speaking)

through which the 'reality' of jurisprudence and power (Law/Terror) become actualised, *and by which such realities are transformed into new ones.* And yet, because the primary determination here is that of 'class' *as such*, the entire distinction between formal/informal powers cannot be confined to merely those powers invested within the *dominant* classes. Rather, the formal/informal divide similarly transects the field of dominated classes and, we may surmise, it is far more likely that their agency will tend towards the domain of informal powers, precisely because (given their class position) the formal, juridical body of law does not *by its own class content* represent them (Wood, 2012: 315-6).

But it is one thing to say that class violence *qua* struggle changes the politico-legal landscape; it is quite another to delineate how and on what basis this might come about. Indeed, as Sassen contends (2006: 416), the key "parameter for authority and rights" is *territory*. After all, the key parameter for the transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist one was undoubtedly territorial, in which the process of primitive accumulation saw an entire class of peasant producers "cut off from the network of personal, statutory and territorial bonds" (Poulantzas, 2014: 64). Henceforth, the idea and practice of territory takes on a decisively distinct meaning, one that is simultaneously underwritten by the juridical legibility of law and the terror of sovereign power.

Mapping the Nation: Political Technologies of the Capitalist State

The utilization of terror – as perhaps the key territorial practice – does not stop at the limit of overt, coercive force. The very act of claiming exclusive rights to administer society is itself an assertion of coercive power over the very bodies of subjects, though exacted in subtler forms of discipline, forms that are consonant with the specific spatialities implied within a given set of social relations. As Henri Lefebvre has amply demonstrated, each mode of production carries with it, and is made possible by, its own particular social space (Lefebvre, 1991). Starting from this premise, Poulantzas argues that it is the sudden elevation of national territory as a master-organizing concept that signals the arrival of the modern 'nation' (cf. Elden, 2013: 323ff). Yet the significance of territory (in the modern sense) does not in turn derive from the 'fact' of national territory, i.e. that this significance is found on the outer limits of the nation (its national border). Rather, the significance of modern territory is borne out by the very material framework of the capitalist social division of labour, which induces a

"serial, fractured, parcelled, cellular and irreversible space" (Poulantzas, 2014: 103, emphasis in original). Every farm, factory, warehouse, retailer, and even residential block – each constituting a separate node within the overall circulation of capital, from production to consumption – fragments the social landscape, as so many quasi-(proprietary) *de facto* sovereignties, while contradictorily united through the 'universal commodity' (money) and the law of value (cf. Lefebvre, 1991: 355; Poulantzas, 2014: 104). The exclusivist character of private property, as is characteristic of Anglo-American common law, essentially elevates the exclusion principal to a form of political power; as one legal scholar puts it, "Property is sovereignty, or rather, thousands of little sovereignties parceled out among the members of society" (Merrill, 2000: 972). Thus, the direct producers previously in possession of common property became separated from their means of production (primarily the land), and 'liberated' from their territorial fixtures, "only to become trapped in a grid – one that includes not only the factory but also the modern family, the school, the army, the prison system, the city and the national territory" (Poulantzas, 2014: 105; see also Scott, 1998: 32).

Corresponding to this rights regime and territorial landscape is a specific political technology based on the abstraction of social space, the accumulation of knowledge over the national realm, and hence a form of "pastoral power" – guiding and 'protecting' individuals through mapping and integrating 'citizens' into the pastoral state (cf. Foucault, 1982). As a corollary, this new material foundation of state power (knowledge) and its accumulation was as crucial to the modern state as was the monopoly of legitimate violence (Foucault, 1988: 151). From the cataloguing of the enclosure movement to the policing of food riots, the early agrarian transitions to capitalism summoned their own forms of both abstract and physical violence (Graham, 2011; Bohstedt, 2010).

Thus, enclosures, contract enforcement, education (both civil and military), policing and prisons all rose together, woven into the fabric of state violence, a type of permanent (if not muted) internal war (cf. Foucault, 2003: 50; Poulantzas, 2014: 105), and yet constantly legitimised by the overarching juridical framework through which these fields of force were enacted. Yet such techniques, and their territorial articulations, could not be legitimated indefinitely; they were, after all, as with the new matrix of abstract, juridically constituted rights, imbued with a distinctive class content, and thereby inviting their own challenge from those classes to which they did

not primarily serve. Thus, the arch of popular struggles across the modern world engendered a long and winding road towards a specifically *sovereign* regime. As Poulantzas notes, the primordial form of sovereignty, in the guise of Absolutism, represented a type of capitalist juridical-institutional ensemble *in utero*, by extinguishing “extra-political” sources of law (religion, etc.), establishing the first workings of a bureaucracy, and the centralisation of the means of coercion (Poulantzas, 1973). Yet such regimes were still premised upon a *directly* political constitution of proprietary rights, via the selling of state functions to private individuals (e.g., tax farming) (Teschke, 2003: 171-2). Only after the absolute separation of peasant producers from their lands and means of production – i.e., the absolute ‘freedom’ of the worker – could the *formal* separation between the economic and the political take place, and in which proprietary rights became only *indirectly* politically constituted via the terrifyingly real effect of abstract bourgeois property law. Hence, the multitude of class struggles constituting the European wave of primitive accumulation gave birth to an uneven temporal sequence of transitions from Absolutist to ‘modern’ sovereignty, and their counterparts of ‘popular sovereignty’ and ‘nationalism’ (Yack, 2001).

The rise and consolidation of parliamentary sovereignty, later referred to as ‘representative democracy’, further deepened from the same sequence of class conflict, primarily led by worker struggles, but also significantly by the early women’s movement (see Przeworski, 1985; Eley, 2002). Yet it is the very nature of this institutional parliamentary form – as one of the primary sites in which subaltern struggles become articulated and (temporarily) resolved – that materializes the underlying presence of political conflict constitutive of class society. It is from this angle that we can begin to see the ways in which the very regime of sovereignty (as the rights-bearing state laying juridical and territorial claim over its subjects) is one that constantly undergoes revision, subject to the changing balance of class forces. Indeed, every such struggle grounds itself in a discourse that seeks to fundamentally challenge some particular corner of the overall rights/territory regime, and thus of the meaning of sovereignty itself.

Multiple Sovereignties and the Problem of Dual Power

Having traced the preceding argument through the conceptual vectors of rights and territory, we are now in a position to better approach the question implied by §§2.1.1-

3: namely, what does it mean to use the sovereign nation-state as a means by which to construct a set of social practices that effectively negates its entire *raison d'être*, otherwise known as *raison d'État*? The revolutionary conjuncture in Russia took this question towards both a theoretical and immediately political significance. V. I. Lenin's writings on the topic sought to grapple with the very nature of the state, and how it impacted upon revolutionary tactics. From these considerations emerged the concept of "dual power", first put forward by Lenin as a means of explaining the contradictory situation of the revolutionary epoch in Russia during 1917. This concept referred to the presence of two mutually antagonistic forms of socio-political power during the immediate aftermath of the February revolution. Thus:

> "Alongside the Provisional Government… another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing – the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies… a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and not on a law enacted by a centralized state power" (Lenin, 1964: 38, emphasis in original).

This historical watermark gave dramatic expression to the ways in which informal power, invested in workers and their spaces of production, bursts onto the scene in direct conflict with formal power, invested in parliamentary procedure and juridical rule. Yet the opposing class content of each side led to an irrevocable rift in the sovereign 'lawscape' (Graham, 2011). As a corollary to this revolutionary situation, the logic of dual power predisposes itself to an inherently unstable situation, given that the very nature of sovereignty (at least in the modern sense of the term) cannot exist in two places at once, with each claimed by antagonistic classes.

This concept has recently made significant inroads into the literature on contemporary Venezuela. Helen Yaffe, for instance, sees dual power in Venezuela as characterized merely by a division between state-owned property (oil company) and the rest of the private capitalist economy (Yaffe, 2015: 29). Enríquez (2013) speaks of dual power as the mere fracturing of the state, in which the apparatus contains both old and new classes. More substantially, George Ciccariello-Maher attempts to fully integrate Lenin's conception with the advent of *Bolivarianismo*. Thus, he sees the Bolivarian state as encapsulating Lenin's model, in which the state is "still an instrument of class power (a state), but one oriented towards its own abolition" (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 243). In this way, he sees the scenario of dual power in Venezuela as a "fulcrum to force… radicalization from below" (ibid, emphasis in

original). Ciccariello-Maher views this process as constituted through the flowering of 'communal councils' (spaces of direct participatory power for local communities) as well as the formation of 'citizen militias' giving shape to a type of power reminiscent of the Paris Commune, and thus of dual power in the Leninist guise (ibid: 243-50). Yet his ambiguous restatement of the simple 'withering away' of the state assumes a somewhat fluid and processual form, in which he frames the problem of dual power as an ambiguous 'revolutionary' process (ibid: 251). And yet, it is precisely because he moves from a perspective of a moment of rupture to one of continuous process that the very problem of dual power magically turns into a non-problem of permanent struggle 'from below' (cf. Webber, 2015).

Dario Azzellini's account, on the other hand, is on somewhat firmer ground. For although Azzellini sees the Bolivarian process as entailing the active participation, rather than the necessary destruction, of the state in the formation of popular power, this contains a structural antinomy that cannot be avoided in theory, let alone in (revolutionary) practice. Thus, he notes the concrete asymmetry of power between state structures and spaces of popular power, which can lead to a situation whereby the latter is merely absorbed into the former, with all of the potential dangers this entails: from the re-emergence of hierarchal structures, division of leaders and led, and bureaucratisation – all occurring within participatory spaces (Azzellini, 2016: 276). This danger therefore represents the logical "culmination of dual power" (ibid), in which the very act of absorbing one side into the other reveals the inherently contradictory nature of their mutual articulation – a political situation that cannot endure, but must be resolved one way or another. Indeed, he surmises that the only way in which the Bolivarian revolution could actually continue its forward movement would be for the "constituent power" (from below) to triumph over the "constituted power" (from above) (ibid: 277).

It was precisely this problem that Poulantzas sought to understand in *State, Power, Socialism*, with respect to the process of socialist transition under the conditions of the modern (late 20th century) capitalist state. For Poulantzas "the traditional social-democratic experience" in the West, and the onset of so-called "real socialism" in the East, continually reproduced the problem of statism and the suffocation of genuine self-directed political agency from below (Poulantzas, 2014: 251). Thus, in both Western and Eastern variants we find diametrically opposed views of parliamentary democracy (one fetishizes its democratic utility, while the other

condemns it as the antithesis of genuine democracy) ending up in the same structural straightjacket: “Stalinist state-worship, [and] social-democratic state-worship” (ibid: 255). The basic sociological insight to this double bind is the fact that in both instances the fundamental antagonism of the capitalist mode of production – the division between manual and intellectual labour as one of the primary expressions of economic exploitation – remains intact, and thus modern state power as such (cf. Sandbrook, 2011). Poulantzas knew perfectly well that there was “no easy recipe for a solution” (Poulantzas, 2014: 265), precisely because of this immanent moment of dual power inscribed within the balance between representative and direct democracy. But there were various markers situating the evolution of his thought on this problem.

As Jessop (1985: 300) underscores, Poulantzas’ thinking on this issue went through a series of changes, beginning with a more pronounced favouritism for the dominance of popular power. He then changes his mind, conceding that, should the moment of dual power arise, parliamentary sovereignty should take precedence in order to preserve political liberties broadly speaking, even though such electoral institutions should undergo deepening democratization. Popular struggles should therefore make an impact on the representative institutions within the state, but without undermining these institutions’ role in elaborating national-popular hegemony within the social formation itself, which is also crucial for state support of local initiatives. On this latter point, writes Jessop, “given the difficulties of coordinating dispersed and fragmented democratic organs at the base without relating them organically to representative democracy, they may become strong enough to short-circuit the initiatives of a left government without ever acquiring the strength and cohesion to rule alone” (ibid). An alternative arrangement might then emerge in which popular spaces remain open enough to integrate other political currents (rather than a singular one, prone to subsumption under the ‘single-party’), while nevertheless firmly grounded within local participation and control (Jessop, 1985: 301).

This basic outline of what could be considered a type of functional space of multiple sovereignties can therefore be understood as conforming to a given configuration of issues, their spatial extent of impact, and the competence of management among situated actors. Indeed, the connection between specific scales and the material/subjective nature of human existence is a vitally important one, lest we slip into a completely arbitrary promotion of local participation and popular power. Rather, the very nature of social existence – in both its cognitive and material

dimensions – predisposes the idea of multiple sovereignties, or "nested hierarchal arrangements" as Harvey (2012: 69) puts it, as an inherently pragmatic one in terms of a post-capitalist alternative. Such nested arrangements may well organise themselves according to the specific material and organisational qualities given to a particular space, and the level of experience/competency congealing within such domains (see Duncan, 1996: 41-2). In other words, "[w]hat looks like a good way to resolve problems at one scale does not hold at another scale" (Harvey, 2012: 69). We must therefore move up and down the scalar chain depending on the issue area and the degree to which it is amenable to participatory democracy structures at the local end of the chain. In the context of Food Sovereignty, the vitality of community decision making is directly linked to the centrality of agriculture, in that agro-ecological production cannot take place solely at a high level of abstract problem-solving (unlike, say, macro-level fiscal organisation), given that people must be present on the land (or factory) itself, in the process of "being there alive" (Marx). And in this way, the immediacy of problems to be solved, and activities to be carried out, may be less prone to the usurpation of specialised, abstract knowledge typically concentrated within the sovereign state. Rather, the proliferation of "specialized assemblages", understood as "the multiplication of partial systems, each with a small set of sharply distinctive constitutive rules" (Sassen, 2006: 422), would help to both balance against, and socially consolidate, higher-order functions or powers that contain their own constitutive rules or competencies, approximating a "vertically integrated policy monitoring" form of multi-spatial governance (Fox, 2001). Thus, the flowering of multiple sovereignties will itself pivot upon both the democratisation of knowledge itself and a radical transformation in the class content of that knowledge.

All the same, the realisation of Food Sovereignty – in essence a political program that encompasses more than mere agriculture, but the social relations of power that undergird its organisation – necessarily calls into action the relational structure of different scales beyond the local, in which specific decision making powers adhere to certain problems or technical requirements that (at least in the short-term) may not be suitable to purely local capacities. At a minimum, this conceptualisation offers a window into the ways in which the promotion and consolidation of popular power can not only co-exist with but also actively support (and be supported by) higher parliamentary/technical organisational institutions.

From these three coordinates, I argue that sovereignty is nothing other than the historically specific and politically contested combination of rights + territory; hence, the specific qualities of the latter make up the particularities of the former. The inherent fragility of this terrain of struggle was prefaced above through Poulantzas' broader conceptual pallet, in which the state takes on a relational character between classes, constitutes a strategic terrain of struggle, and in doing so periodically crystallises into a particular hegemonic bloc capable of organising economic production and political normalisation. However, introducing further theoretical extensions to Poulantzas' core concepts opens up both the specific strategic pathways pursued by agents, as well as the socio-spatial coordinates that drive, and is informed by, such strategies.

2.2.2 Spatialising Poulantzas: Strategic Selectivity, the Geograph(ies) of Capital and Counter-Space

Given the unfinished status of Poulantzas last book, and in light of its tantalizing insights into the micro-foundations of power and agency, Jessop put forward the "notion of strategy" as a specific methodological extension of the relational theory of the state (Jessop, 1985: 341). Jessop's "strategic-relational" approach thus forms a conceptual bridge between the iron law of capital accumulation on the one hand, and a purely empiricist examination of class struggles on the other (Jessop, 1985: 343-4). This view differentiates between *accumulation strategies* and *hegemonic projects* (ibid: 344); the former referring to specific growth strategies under the hegemony of a particular fraction of capital (productive, commercial, financial), while the latter denotes a complex articulation of discourses and practices that unite various classes – both dominant and dominated – and which seeks to reproduce the basic foundation of capitalist class rule and thus the relations of production as a whole (Jessop, 1991; Jessop, 2002). As a result of this chaotic social process, state institutions do not simply produce a 'globally' coherent line of policy, but a contested and micro-foundational iteration of "strategic selectivity" in policy making, which ultimately "involves examining how a given structure may privilege some actors, some identities, some strategies, some spatial and temporal horizons, [and] some actions over others" (Jessop, 1999: 51). In this way, the internally related vectors of accumulation crises and class struggles involve not merely "social fixes" but also *spatio-temporal fixes*

that establish “spatial and temporal boundaries” that become adequate to a given conjuncture (Ngai-Ling and Jessop, 2006: 317). Institutions therefore exhibit *spatial selectivity* in conjunction with the prevailing geography of accumulation embedded within a specific accumulation regime (Jones, 1997). Certain sub-national regions, urban centres, or even higher scalar levels of governance will therefore assume greater centrality to a given pattern of accumulation and its corresponding bloc of hierarchically organised capitalist fractions. Selectivity of action is therefore strategic and spatial in equal measure.

Spatial fixes are primarily expressive of “a potential contradiction between the formal market economy considered as a pure space of flows and the substantively instituted economy considered as a territorially and/or socially embedded system” (Jessop, 2002: 110). With the constant revolutionizing of the productive forces (brought about through both class struggles with labour and other capitals), and in combination with the continually expanded scale of production, we find enormous concentrations of physical infrastructure, in the shape of both large-scale factories and the various social spaces agglomerated around them in the shape of “company towns”. Yet as the force of capitalist competition moves throughout this new terrain production, the manifestation of crisis in one location prompts the geographical re-organisation of capital into new ones, forming a seemingly endless chain of ‘spatial fixes’ that seeks to combat the devaluation of existing capital by establishing new bases of accumulation elsewhere (Harvey 2006: 246). As Arrighi (2006) has shown, each major crisis afflicting the capitalist world economy tends towards not merely the geographical shift in the organisation of production but also towards a cumulatively larger hegemonic political space in which new rounds of accumulation take place: from the Italian city states, to the “quasi nation-state” of the Dutch Republic, to the island nation-state of Great Britain and to the “continent-sized island” of the US. The rise of the continent-sized US regime at the turn of the century added an extra degree of pressure on other parts of the world to adapt to new regional-scales of accumulation (cf. Harvey, 2006: 444). As various authors make clear (Ruigrok and Tulder, 1995; Pelagidis and Papasotiriou, 2002; Rugman and Verbeke, 2004), ‘global’ economic activities carried out by transnational firms tend to cluster around their home regions. We therefore find that “intra-regional expansion offers firm-specific advantages of lower costs and more tractable managerial networks” (Carroll, 2010: 229). And while

we may find variations in how certain firm-specific advantages unfold spatially,[13] the capitalist world economy on average clusters around the major geographical regions of the world, thus leading towards "selectively transnational" spaces of production (Hay, 2000: 523). From this framework of strategic and spatial selectivity, we can begin to better understand regional formations as new layers constituting the "arts of international government" (Larner and Walters, 2002: 392). This layer, as Niemann (2000: 90) notes, "does not have the kinds of ambiguous continuities of the state layer", but rather "reflects the constitutive desires and needs of those social forces which can no longer operate properly in the contexts of existing layers." Each regional formation will exhibit its own mix of strategic and spatial selectivity – the EU as a multi-level region, NAFTA and Japan's "flying geese" as a hub and spoke model, and today's Asia-Pacific as a market led system of regional cooperation (Larner and Walters, 2002: 393). As such, regional formations are understood here as *second-order condensations* of social relations of power (Brand et al., 2011), representing both a de-nationalisation of state power (Jessop, 2002), yet understood as the *reproduction* (not 'dilution') of state power via differentially constituted scales, spaces and classes (Demirović, 2011).

Bringing this framework to the central case of the ALBA, the strategic and spatial selectivity of this regional institution primarily emerges from the legacy of past social and geopolitical struggles characterising Latin America's resistance to the discipline of neoliberalism. As a consequence, the counter-hegemonic project pursued by ALBA emphasises discursive and material practices that are adequate to resisting such discipline, particularly with regard to strengthening the *sovereignty* of member states in conjunction with the process of *endogenous development* (Chapter 4). Such a project thus becomes overdetermined by the return to statism as the foundation to regional development, yet one that is qualified by a 're-embedding' of the economy into a deeper politicisation in conjunction with a re-invigorated connection with the

[13] For instance, it is much more likely for globally positioned firms to concentrate their downstream activities (sales and marketing) within the regional space, whereas for upstream processes (production and sourcing of component parts) the spatial distribution is more varied. On this latter aspect, large commercial retailers (Nike, Walmart) overwhelmingly tend towards low-wage areas in which large pools of low-skilled labour can be readily accessed. However, in other, more high-skilled and capital-intensive industries, such as the automobile sector, the geography of both production and sales become much more tightly integrated within the same (home) region (Rugman, 2004; Amighini and Gorgoni, 2014). This simply shows that spatialisation strategies for capitalist firms will depend on a number of factors, including the very material basis of the activity involved (i.e., clustering of high-skills, technical expertise, production techniques).

popular classes. There is, of course, an inherent tension between a genuine socialisation of politico-economic management and a crude statism. As Sandbrook notes, socialist systems may also 'disembedd' economies by affecting redistributive policies through the reproduction of commodity relations in land or labour (2011: 417). And yet, the issue here is not really one of embedding or disembedding economic relations, for even free-market practices are always subsumed within a definite field of social relations, marked by their corresponding social-property forms. The real crux of the issue comes down to dissolving the division between manual and intellectual labour, primarily in the work place through 'labour centred development' practices (worker management) in both the field and factory. Encapsulating this shift is the steady dissolution of the manual/intellectual labour divide, that does not in itself dissolve commodity relations all at once, but provides important aspects of self-conscious understanding, strategic thinking, and collective empowerment in both spaces of production and reproduction, all of which pre-supposes the final transformation away from commodification.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, we must enquire into the specific material basis, *qua* accumulation strategy, through which ALBA is able to affect its policy of food sovereignty. From its inception, the mobilisation of Venezuela's oil wealth became the decisive driver in the first two ALBA initiatives (created even before ALBA's inauguration but forged in its spirit of intent) as the Caribbean Energy Cooperation Agreement providing low cost, low interest oil to Caribbean states, and latterly the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement between Venezuela and Cuba. As such, the socio-ecological foundation of food sovereignty in ALBA comes not primarily from the soil, but what lies beneath. This explains why the actual materialisation of ALBA's food sovereignty initiatives are contained within the Venezuelan territory, particularly in the form of the Mixed Socialist Enterprises of ALBA (*Empresas Mixtas Socialistas del ALBA*). As we will see in Chapter 6, the social and institutional nature of these production units put into question the deeper commitments towards popular participation in socio-economic life under the ALBA banner. More significantly still, the contradiction of building this productive foundation from the basis of oil rentierism shapes a specific institutional materiality of the Venezuelan state, as well as creating huge fissures within the overall accumulation strategy of the ALBA region as a whole. Such features therefore help to

explain the specific strategic and spatial selectivity of ALBA's food policies, which we will successively unpack throughout the remainder of the thesis.

2.2.3 How Bourgeois is Poulantzian Sociology? A Note on Resource Rents and State Forms in 21st Century Latin America

The above indicated importance of resource rents in analysing the political economy of ALBA necessitates a brief engagement with a new yet quite prolific wing of Marxian scholarship concerned with explaining the development of Latin American left wing states (e.g. Grinberg and Starosta, 2009; Grinberg, 2013; Purcell, 2013; Kornblihtt, 2015). This engagement would not be so necessary, however, were it not for the fact that this branch of Marxism specifically takes aim at Poulantizan-like approaches, which (they argue) amounts to a bourgeois sociology in the form of 'structural-functionalism' (cf. Clark, 1977; Purcell, 2017; Grinberg, 2016). These scholars follow the Marxian approach pioneered by independent Argentinean scholar Juan Iñigo Carrera (2007) at the *Centro para la Investigación como Crítica Práctica* (CICP). Given that I find much value in what I will call the CICP school, it is necessary to delineate precisely how a Poulantzian framework can incorporate a Marxian understanding of 'ground rent' and 'landlord state forms' – two categories that are central in the CICP.

In focusing much of their attention on the contemporary development of Latin America, CICP scholars point towards the central role of "ground rent" in the region's accumulation process. The basic premise is that landlords, who by virtue of their private ownership over a portion of the earth and its natural wealth, may command a price (albeit negotiated with productive capital) for their territory in the form of a portion (or all) of the surplus profit capitalized as differential rent in the form of a royalty charged to them (Purcell, 2013: 150-1). As a means of overcoming seemingly simplistic accounts that posit state/landlord agency as "autonomous" determinants (e.g. Grinberg and Starosta, 2009), CICP approaches note that the fortunes of landlords are conditioned by the overall production of surplus value at the world scale – i.e., the amount of purchasing power available to oil-importing countries. Hence, "national specificities" in developmental patterns are "the immanent result of the global unfolding of the 'law of value'" (Fitzsimmons and Starosta, 2017: 3).

The virtue of this approach is its critique of more romanticist readings that treat state policies as *entirely* autonomous from the global forces of capital accumulation. Yet the organising discourse within this approach also presents certain challenges with respect to exactly how we are supposed to view social agency in a given context, and why certain states assume the forms they do. In terms of the former, CICP generally admits no determinate force to agency or class struggle in the transformation(s) of capitalism, but only the "autonomised movement of self-valorising value" (Kicillof and Starosta, 2007: 28). Yet such a restricted reading runs into certain problems when confronted with empirical examples. For instance, in terms of Kornblihtt's study of oil rent appropriation in Venezuela and its connection to macro-economic variables, he notes that "[f]urther research is required to correctly determine the reason for which oil rent is currently not invested… [at the rate] it was in the 1970s" (2015: 67). His provisional hypothesis is that the new international division of labour favours those states that contain a cheap labour force (such as East Asia), and that in light of these competing export power-houses, the Venezuelan state and bourgeoisie cannot (or will not?) invest adequate amounts of capital in order to match this competition (ibid: 68). Yet this begs two questions: why could the Venezuelan state and bourgeoisie *not* implement a new labour regime based on the cutting of workers' wages? And why must we assume that the logic of *Bolivarianismo* would even attempt to compete with traditional capitalist economies in terms of export market capture?

The most basic answer to these questions revolves around the concept of *mediation*, in which state policies and other agential dynamics are understood. For instance, labour regimes in East Asia and Latin America become articulated through an Export-oriented developmental state form, and a landlord state form, respectively (Grinberg and Starosta, 2009). While these differing forms are partly determined by the material foundation of a given national territory (e.g., highly disciplined workforce in one and extraordinarily resource rich deposits in the other), the specific policies exacted by a given state amount to a *mediation* of the global movement of total social capital. Nevertheless, important differences remain between particular landlord states, such as Venezuela and Ecuador. As Purcell argues, the key mechanism of ground rent transfer in Venezuela is the "deliberate state policy" of currency over-valuation (Purcell, 2016: 113), while Ecuador has chosen to remain locked into a dollarization regime. Thus, if a specific "economic content" is realised within a given state form,

we still require a more nuanced analysis of how and why such an economic content comes about in the first place.

Can this approach to Marxian political economy be in any way reconciled with the above Poulantzian approach? While CICP scholars would surely deny such a possibility, I argue that such a reconciliation is entirely possible so long as one does not over-simplify the type of theory offered by Poulantzas and Jessop. For the real sticking point comes down to characterising 'bourgeois' Marxism as positing national policies and class struggles as *autonomous* determinants in the evolution of capitalism. Yet nowhere in Poulantzas or Jessop's account do these dimensions assume a fully autonomous force. At various stages of *SPS*, Poulantzas' discussion of changing European state policies and forms during the 1970s are clearly related with the increasing "internationalization of capital". And as with Jessop's approach to strategic and spatial selectivity, the ways in which such selectivities of state action emerge cannot be adequately captured through either a fully autonomous force of state hegemony, nor through the seemingly autonomous force of accumulation. Rather, they are *mediated* through the complex combination of an accumulation regime (based on material conditions of production nationally and globally) and hegemonic project (constructed in order to *temporarily* normalise the inherent class antagonisms and contradictions of accumulation) – a view that comes remarkably close to the CICP's conceptualisation of the state as the most adequate form for "regulation of… antagonistic social relations" (Fitzsimons and Starosta, 2017: 12; cf. Grinberg, 2016: 253)

To my mind, the real difference between a Poulantzian and CICP approach is largely semantic, despite the distinctive philosophy underlying the latter. However, a Poulantzian reading of the capitalist state, as an open field of class struggle that constantly makes and remakes the nature of the state apparatus, allows for a more nuanced approach to social agency, which simultaneously takes seriously the discourse and ideologies that co-constitute the material realities of social change. For all these reasons, a critical Poulantzian analysis of ALBA also sharply converges with the conclusions offered by Purcell (2016) as to the inherent contradictions of ALBA's agrarian development policies (as we shall see in §6.8).

2.2.4 The Production of Counter-Space(s): Technology and Knowledge as Social Commons

Despite the differences between the CICIP school and Jessop's strategic-relational approach, neither approach offers any substantial insight into how and on what basis subaltern classes seek to forge their own strategies, counter-spaces and institutional alternatives. Rather, for Jessop strategy is always concerned with *elite* strategy, while for CICIP the only actor is the "working class" as an undifferentiated mass. However, the diverse geographies of capital and counter-hegemonic space represent two central vectors that enrich the above Poulantzian approach to rights, territory and sovereignty, as well as speaking directly to the conceptual levels intrinsic to the making of a counter-hegemonic region.

In the above discussion of the production of space, it was noted how the geographies of capital are primarily governed through the (crisis-ridden) development of the productive forces, giving rise to specific means of production and infrastructures in the built environment. Seizing control not only of the existing array of productive forces, but in further developing them in accordance with a specific class project is therefore just as important for subaltern struggles as they are for strategies of class domination. Technologies and technical artefacts thus possess a relative ambiguity in terms of their directional use: a family-sized car may strictly shape the manner of its use, but the components of cars (the wheels, metal, engine, seats, etc.) are less constricted in their variable use (McCarthy, 2015: 54).[14] In this way, "knowledge [as well as technology] has a social content, a class-content… including the natural sciences and techniques" (Carchedi, 2011: 38). Despite the differentiated class content of specific technologies, at a more general level, technological frontiers are in fact the material embodiment of what Marx (1993) called the "general intellect" of society, expressed not simply synchronically (as the aggregation of all individual labours that create the conditions of possibility for a given technological 'moment') but also the diachronic accumulation of past innovations and insights that fundamentally inform any given technological advancement. This state of affairs therefore makes technology a form of *social commons*, though contradictorily privatised by capital (Dugger, 2016).

[14] It is notable that a commonly held practice in agroecology is the use of old car tyres for the making of soil-beds, an example I saw constantly across Venezuela, and used widely throughout the world.

Speaking of the Paris Commune, Marx noted how "not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed on it" (cited in Bossa, 2015: 180). For Lefebvre, this amounts to a "revolt of the 'lived' against abstractions, of the everyday against economism, of the social and civil society against the 'high rate of growth,' whose demands are upheld by the state" (Lefebvre, 2009 [1975]: 114). Forms of working class education were thus central even in Marx's economic writings. In commenting on the necessity to transform the capitalist division of labour in the factory from one of monotonous, atomised work, to one in which workers become consistently more aware and educated of all tasks involved in complex production processes, he refers to the contradictory manner in which the needs of large scale industry have already forged the seeds of popular educational institutions. "One aspect of this process", he observes, "is the establishment of technical and agricultural schools… in which the children of the workers receive a certain amount of instruction in technology and in the practical handling of the various implements of labour." Going further, "There can be no doubt that, with the inevitable conquest of political power by the working class, technological education, both theoretical and practical, will take its proper place in the schools of the workers" (Marx, 1981: 618-9). At the same time, however, it is equally clear that the conquest of political power by the working classes will be significantly shaped by the degree to which alternative forms of knowledge and technical control may take sufficiently deep root in society more broadly.

From a food sovereignty perspective, then, the role of radical pedagogy remains a crucial arrow in the quiver of agrarian transformation (Chapter 5). Nevertheless, as with all hegemonic projects (whether they are *counter*-hegemonic or not), their discursive coordinates must find themselves grounded in a material basis (an accumulation strategy) that is adequate to their class content (Jessop, 1991: 155). In the spatio-territorial context of the nation-state (and laterally, the regional formation), conquering this terrain is obviously linked to wider networks of productive cooperation beyond the small farm. Though not often acknowledged in the food sovereignty literature, there is "the need to increase rural incomes through interventions… such as complementary marketing and processing activities" (Altieri and Nicholls, 2008: 478). Though LVC mentions the necessity for "local markets and local processing" (LVC, 2012), it is not always clear whether this refers to on-farm or off- (and near-) farm processing centres. This choice will be conditioned by the

availability of on-farm processing technologies, or pre-existing processing centres representing past patterns of capital accumulation. More emphatically, Edelman et al. (2015: 925), note that any substantial socio-spatial transformation of the food sovereignty landscape is necessarily embedded within "the struggle to increase value and distribute according to need, which is embodied in the vision of food sovereignty to build agroindustry in rural communities, to increase economies of scale, create forward and backward linkages and generate added value, all under the control of those who labour." The case of the ALBA rice producing factories (Chapter 6) forms a clear example of the above vision, in the context of 'endogenous development', with the inter-linking of direct producers into wider publically owned infrastructures of value-added industrial processing that might benefit from economies of scale. As such, balancing between adequate farm-gate prices and proper technical and organisational considerations in the factory itself constitute important strategic considerations in the construction of a supra-local space of production/distribution that, in the end, hopes to maximise social consumption and popular power. Broadening food sovereignty beyond the peasantry towards other classes of workers similarly introduces considerations on the ownership/control of the productive forces, including the organisation of work itself. At the very least, such socio-productive networks bring both peasants and workers into a common struggle in the push for food sovereignty.

As a final consideration, theorising the production of counter-spaces as integral socialist counter-hegemony cannot be isolated from the broader social context of which they are a part. After all, social space "exist[s] as so many variants in the differential class practices", with both dominant and dominated class practices as "variants of a single matrix" (Poulantzas, 2014: 116). Given the manner in which capitalist power becomes constituted by, and flows through, state power, the notion of counter-spaces, which Lefebvre conceived as *modalities of autogestion* (self-management), "may be proposed and imposed at all levels of social practice, including the agencies of coordination" (Lefebvre, [1966] 2009: 148). If the "revolt of the lived" essentially targets (by its very nature) the knowledge and ideology of the capitalist state ("economism"), then by virtue of broader patterns of direct control/management of productive forces and spaces (and hence dissolving the manual/intellectual labour divide), "The State of *autogestion*, which is to say the State at whose core *autogestion* is raised to power, can only be a State that is withering away (ibid: 150).

2.3 Conclusion

This Chapter has sought to delineate, map out, and interrogate the basic theoretical coordinates that will inform the rest of this thesis. Each section thus contains the same overall rationale: to critically analyse the social, political and territorial implications of Food Sovereignty (FS). Thus, the aim here has been to identify three key markers that continually emerge in both FS scholarship and activist discourse: rights, territory, and sovereignty.

§2.1.1 addresses the challenging relationship between La Vía Campesina (LVC) and the hegemonic rights discourse of the liberal socio-economic order. This then introduces the first question, as to the 'what' and 'whom' of rights formation. For the complexity of FS rights discourse is not that they demand positive rights, but that (in many instances, and as a consequence of politically autonomous rural spaces) these actors often blur the line between presenting themselves as both the subject and author of rights. On one hand, if the traditional author of political rights, the sovereign state, indeed follows through on such a radical course of socio-political change, the very extent of this transformation almost certainly implies a correspondingly large expansion of state power. On the other hand, a genuinely autonomous form of rights authorship could emerge from practices and competencies embedded within specific local or community settings. What, then, is the constitutive basis for the relations between state and social forces, and between the formality of rights and the materialization of social power? It is not that these two binary poles have no relationship to each other, but the relationship is a decidedly complex one, precisely because they appear as relatively separated. To discern this relationship requires excavating a wider set of parameters that speak to the very techniques of exercising complex forms of power.

This then opens up the second parameter of FS discourse, that of territory, and the contrasted meanings various actors assign to this notion. While peasant struggles for land and territory are often waged against the immediate threat from agro-industrial capital, it is also clear that the meaning of territory varies considerably between strands of the LVC movement, e.g., between 'land' or 'cultural territory'. However, there is a different way of approaching this problem, by treating 'territory' as neither simply 'land' or even 'terrain', but as political technology, and thus a medium of socio-political power. The very act of naming and measuring not just land, but populations

and resources, has traditionally been the privilege of state practice. And the variable coordinates that colour specific territorial practices typically spell out the type of political, sovereign regime under question. Latin America's left turn, and the discourse of ALBA in particular, opens up new spaces of recognition and political participation for traditionally marginalized groups. Thus, to speak of a new kind of 'vertical territoriality', in which participatory practice may slowly come into being, already amounts to a new type of political technology. From this vantage point, we can begin to substantiate the earlier claim that food sovereignty is more than simply agricultural practice, but a definite set of techniques that help to galvanise the socio-political dimensions of agro-ecological trusteeship.

Finally, I suggested a simple starting point from which we might be able to disentangle the substance of sovereignty, through looking at the ways in which rights and territorial practices become entrenched. As a suggestive metaphor, I adapt Gramsci's formula for classifying the modern capitalist state – the "integral state", or "state = political society + civil society" – into a complementary formula of "sovereignty = rights + territory". Clearly, the marked presence of decentralised powers and agencies on the land (positive rights + autonomous/cooperative territorial practices) engender the *formal* concept of *multiple sovereignties*, understood by FS protagonists as a set of nested spaces moving from the local all the way up to the international (forum) level.

In order to bring substance to these considerations, I first turn to the work of Nicos Poulantzas, to help flesh out some of the implications of rights and territory under modern conditions, which are precisely those that FS actors are struggle under (and against). I therefore sought to elucidate Poulantzas' work as it pertains to rights (Law) and territory (political technique). Beginning from the same methodological premises of historical materialism's 'hard core' (the forces and relations of production), Poulantzas' early work on law sought to show how every 'state' (so conceived) carries within it the Fraternity-Terror binary – the generalized will for collective freedom ensured through the presence of force, and made necessary by the relations of exploitation. While the capitalist state is unique in its stark separation between the two binary poles, as if the relative 'legality' of the state is somehow attended by the relative absence of coercion, violence is in fact central to this form of state-hood.

Sinews of violence and state power thus emerge through variegated political technologies, abstraction and legalism, upholding private property rights and hence primitive accumulation and factory despotism, and the policing of national territory in the face of food riots or surplus populations. Rather than passive recipients of elite commands, subaltern struggles constantly fissure the coherence of hegemonic blocs, creating ever novel forms of state and institutionality, as well as legal and social norms. As we saw further, once the intensity of class struggle reaches a certain limit point, the presence of an irreconcilable 'dual power' fracturing the sovereign regime becomes ever likelier. Paradoxically, Poulantzas' justified critique of state-worship in both the communist and social democratic variants leads to the seemingly impossible regime of 'multiple sovereignties'. Yet through the general democratisation of property rights, popular control and management of productive (and political) activities, as well as the territorial practices that become adequate to it, the formation of multiple sovereignties appears more as the relative decentralisation of competencies and operations consonant with a given social scale. Thus, rather than splitting the social formation in two, multiple sovereignties holds out the possibility of differential territories linked together through a number of popular initiatives and collectivities form below acting in conjunction and cooperation with higher level administration from above.

All of these coordinates are thus articulated by Poulantzas' broader theoretical framework, as a relational theory of the state, in which its institutional materiality is conditioned by the balance of class forces and the resultant condensation of this balance within its overall form. As a strategic terrain of struggle that permeates every corner of society, the state is thus an open plain of conflict, though differentially open to particular social forces and strategies at different moments.

In order to open up these lines of thought, the chapter turned to latter neo-Poulantzian conceptualisations of agency and strategy. Jessop's strategic-relational approach thus makes more explicit what is only implicit in Poulantzas' formulations. The concept of strategic selectivity thus connects the materially grounded accumulation strategies of dominant classes with the general production of consent and compromise forged through hegemonic projects. A given set of parameters for accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects thus shapes the selectivities of policy making, which is itself subject to micro-foundational contradictions and incoherences, themselves reflective of the contradictions inherent within accumulation and political

domination. Unpacking the dynamism of these strategically selective practices simultaneously calls for a more concerted focus on the nature of social space itself. Following Lefebvre (1991: 349), the nature of space, as outlined above, moves through several steps: as an array of *productive forces*, "a role originally played by nature, which it has displaced and supplanted", and hence constituting a set of *means of production* (as well as being "politically instrumental"); underpinning the reproduction of property relations and their spatial implications (ownership of land, of space; hierarchal ordering of locations; organising of networks as a function of capitalism, etc.); comprising a set of institutional and ideological effects, complete with symbolisms and systems of meaning; finally containing potentialities, inaugurating the project of a different space. Through this multi-layered operation of social space, practices of power are as much spatially-selective as they are strategically-selective. Understanding the process of regionalisation is therefore tantamount to unpacking its underlying socio-spatial processes of becoming, primarily from the expanded scale and scope of accumulation, yet refracted through differential strategic and spatial selectivities marking the distinctiveness of regional regimes throughout the world.

The ALBA regional space is thus similarly marked by such selectivities that speak to the balance of class forces and congealed class projects constitutive of it. Premised upon a counter-hegemonic project against the discipline of Western-led globalism, the strategic and spatial selectivities of the ALBA combines the presence of the strong state with the proliferation of decentered powers. Such a reaction assumes a return to sovereignty, through international solidarities marked by regional articles of agreement yet enacted through ad-hoc negotiations. Though such agreements make note of both food sovereignty and the expansion of popular power, it is necessary to more closely examine the manner in which such policies are put into action, and the practices and strategies of various political actors that form a complex picture of socio-spatial power.

3 Latin America's Long Road to Regionalism: Capitalism, Ecology and Geopolitics

The chapter will chart the emergence of Latin American regionalism through the rise and fall of US hegemony. Though initially ensnared by the dictates of Cold War geopolitics, Latin American leaders had always sought to carve out a new, modern version of Simón Bolívar's 19th century dream of uniting the Latin continent. The uneven development found across the region, as well as the over-riding dominance of US power, continually thwarted the many attempts at a comprehensive region-wide arrangement, resulting instead in a proliferation of regionalisation schemes. The relative transformations in the international division of labour across the world system, in conjunction with the Cold War politics of imperialism, significantly affected the transformation in state forms and sovereign regimes – from post-war developmentalism to neoliberalism, engendering unique sets of rights, territorial politics and sovereign power. Yet the neoliberal onslaught would foster a new sense of rebellion through the Southern Cone, which in turn would lay the groundwork for 'Our America' *(Nuestra América*). The new Latin American left therefore marks the newest phase of region building in the 21st century. However, this new push for a post-hegemonic regionalism is not without its own tensions and contradictions.

3.1 Geopolitics of Capitalist Agriculture: US Hegemony and the Problem of Regional Order

The global power shift from British to US hegemony was, as with all such historical transitions, the manifestation of deeper underlying socio-ecological contradictions of the capitalist state-system. Britain's 'extensive' regime of accumulation engendered a huge expansion in the productive forces across the globe, primarily in the form of transport infrastructures, as a response to the imperial centre's voracious appetite for food and raw materials, which dramatically shrank the time-space configuration of the world economy (Moore, 2010a: 394). As a consequence, Britain's spatial integration of peripheral spaces inadvertently elevated these new areas of production within the overall hierarchy of production and supply of grain at the world level. With the consolidation of settler colonial state-spaces, European agriculture was soon displaced

by a six-fold increase in imports from these areas (Friedmann, 1990: 14; Mazoyer and Roudart, 2006: 368-9). The ever more 'energetic' exploitation of the ecological base by these emergent centres of world agriculture – seen throughout the great plains of the United States, Canada and Argentina (to name but a few) – contributed not only to the systemic crisis of the capitalist world economy (the 'Great Depression' of the 1870s and its system-wide depression of prices), but various ecological crises, the largest culminating in the great dustbowl throughout the American plains (S. Phillips, 1999).

With the emergence of the US hegemonic regime, there was an inherent contradiction between, on the one hand, the strategic necessity of supporting US agriculture in the competitive environment of capitalist geopolitics on the one hand, and a deeper (hegemonic) necessity to maintain minimal agricultural security and stability within other states on the other, lest these states become vulnerable to revolutionary social forces. This lesson came early to US foreign policy planners in the case of Mexico (one of only five states that were formally democratic during the inter-war period). With Roosevelt's pressing desire to avoid both fascism and socialism in his southern neighbour, a partnership was brokered via the Rockefeller Foundations' Mexican Agricultural Programme, which became "a crucial event in the transformation of agricultural science from a tool merely for industrial modernization into a device for power relationships between nations" (Perkins, 1997: 103). From the Mexican perspective, the national-popular regime headed by Lázaro Cárdenas similarly sought to carve out a middle ground for the state apparatus, which as Trotsky wrote, "seeks to defend itself on the one hand against foreign imperialism and on the other against its own proletariat" (cited in Morton, 2010: 24). A major part of Cárdenas' balancing act between inherently contradictory class forces was the strategic partnership with the US and the Rockefeller Foundation, cemented for the purpose of importing up to date technologies and techniques, as well as agro-ecological expertise. Indeed, this strategy was a major concern for virtually all Latin American states, desperately seeking to re-import the botanical and agro-ecological knowledge that had been taken by imperial-metropolitan elites during the colonial era, and which, once recaptured, could be harnessed in further consolidating their commercial-agricultural foundations (McCook, 2002).

These developmental dynamics, at both national and geopolitical scales, strongly shaped the subsequent pattern of Latin America's foreign relations with the

emergent world hegemon. In the context of delicate, and potentially revolutionary, situations brewing in the South American continent, Adolf Berle, a member of Roosevelt's 'brain trust', noted that, "We shall have to be either generous or imperialistic… and present history is showing that the generous policy is infinitely the more successful" (cited in Grandin, 2007: 33). Thus began the famed 'Good Neighbour' policy – a type of indirect imperialism that maintained "ideological as well as military and economic hegemony and conformity, without having to pay the price of permanent conquest" (Drake, 1991: 34), and which would form the major component of post-war US policy in the Western hemisphere.[15] In essence, all of these developments rose up together, forming a cascading series of determinations that radically altered the political geography of world politics – the expansion of the productive forces via British-led industrialisation "increasingly forced the 'closing of frontiers'" across the world system (Colás, 2008: 622), leading ineluctably towards a new form of strategic and spatial selectivity of an emergent US hegemony, more concerned with prising trade and investment doors open while still maintaining the *formal* integrity of sovereign frontiers.

And yet, the Western hemispheric system of domination was also reflective of a much deeper shift that was taking place throughout the political geography of the 20th century world system. The fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production – between the geographical expansion and socialisation of the productive forces, and their organisation by private and national interests (Mandel, 1986: 20) – culminated in a new spatial form seemingly adequate, yet unevenly distributed, to the immanent development of large-scale industrial capitalism, culminating in 'continent'-sized polities and regional spheres of influence. In many ways, the entire World War II conflagration could be seen as a global instance of geopolitical strategy attempting to adapt to the extensity and intensity levels of late industrial capitalism, expressed principally through the US continental space of accumulation (Moore, 2002). Hence, German and Japanese expansionism, and the regional spheres they attempted to carve out (in the shape of *Großraum* and the Great East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere) were fundamentally premised upon solving the first great 'agrarian question', in terms of adequate ecological space for the feeding of both voracious

[15] Though the same cannot be said of the less fortunate (smaller and more spatially proximate) Central American and Caribbean states (see LeFeber, 1993).

national-imperial machines, and the concomitant expansion of urban populations (Tooze, 2008: 166ff; Matsumura, 2016). Thus, the first glimmers of regional formations were spatial expressions of capitalism's socio-ecological fixes (cf. Mandel, 1986: 12); in turn, "industrialisation was giving place to a new phase of 'continental history'" (Puntigliano, 2011: 849; see also Smith, 2003: 48f.).

Even after the defeat of these regional challengers to the West's 'Wilsonian universalism', the emerging institutional architecture of global governance eventually ended up consolidating the regionalisation of world politics, rather than undermine it. Roosevelt's notion of the regional 'Four Policeman' (US, USSR, Britain, China) eventually lost out to the State Department's preference for universal multilateralism in the shape of the UN General Assembly (the Security Council, wielding the monopoly of legitimate force, was the basic compromise between these two extremes). Yet the rapidly escalating antagonism between the US and USSR, including the victory of communist forces in China that required the entrance of Japan as the regional ally of Asia (Katzenstein, 2005: 48), simply increased the necessity of regional forms of governance, even if under a somewhat narrower logic. This logic, at first conceived intellectually as 'integration theory' during the immediate post-war period, was not only a process of seeking adequate spatial complexes for the scale of capital accumulation during the 20th century (Cocks, 1980: 27), but also a fundamental tool in the Atlantic heartland's quest for hegemony throughout the world system; as Murphy observes, for the early post-war theorists, "functional integration could be… an alternative solution to the problems that generated late nineteenth-century imperialism" (Murphy, 2005: 92). This latter strategy was in no small part aimed at checking the expanding influence of the Soviet Union and particularly against the highly significant and combative communist parties that peppered the European continent, particularly in France, Italy and Greece (Krige, 2008). Thus, the post-war project of regional integration was, like the inter-war period, premised on the exigencies of specific accumulation regimes and their spatial-agglomeration effects, yet this time refracted through the making of an Atlanticist hegemonic project underwritten by US 'imperium' (van der Pijl, 2014: 123ff.; Katzenstein, 2005). If policy planners wavered in their commitment to such a project, the very foundation of 'Western' society would be prone to collapse, or at least succumb to the alternative communist development model (Cocks, 1980: 29; van der Pijl, 2006: 39-40). As Hurrell argues:

> “during the Cold War both superpowers favoured those regionalist arrangements that reinforced the strength of their respective alliance systems or provided support for important clients. But where regionalism went against their geopolitical interests it was firmly opposed, as, for example, with US opposition to sub-regional cooperation in Latin America in the early 1950s” (Hurrell, 1995: 341).

The containment of Soviet power that came to dominate US foreign relations during the post-war period formed the underlying logic for the various regional security communities throughout Asia and Latin America (Katzenstein, 2005: 45). US-Latin American relations became the principal laboratory from which emerged many of the ideas and practices undergirding this (regionalised) mode of global governance (cf. van der Pijl, 2014: 126-7). The signing of Latin America’s regional security ‘Rio Pact’ in 1947 would set the trend for other regional security regimes, from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (Grandin, 2007: 39).[16] From this geopolitical arrangement, “the US delightfully had the best of both worlds: the global organization it had sought since Wilson’s era, but also the freedom of action under the Monroe Doctrine” (LaFeber, 1993: 93). Yet the very fact that US policy makers favoured regional security regimes so early on (headed by the preeminent US position within them) revealed the underlying role that the Global South was supposed to play within the post-war order: as pliant spaces of raw material supplies or open markets to the three regional nodes of global capitalism (US, Western Europe and Japan). Economic integration among weaker states, by definition, dilutes this subordinate position in the international division of labour through the establishment of collective tariffs and common markets.

Soon enough, it was realised that this limited role assigned to the Global South would be the undoing of US influence throughout the non-Western world. As the prominent policy advisor Walt Rostow remarked at the time, “Even if Marx and Lenin did not exist, we would still have a problem” (cited in Peck, 2010: 36). For all the intensity of Washington’s bid to portray the communist ‘menace’ as some international conspiracy, the fact remained that the continuation of US imperialism throughout the Global South would simply do the USSR’s bidding, by fostering continual subaltern rebellions that typically took the form of radical socialist or

[16] The Rio Pact of 1947 and the subsequent Bogotá summit of 1948 would culminate in the Organization of American States (OAS), which effectively embodied the institutional expression of US imperial domination within the region (van der Pijl, 2006: 180).

communist social forces. And it is against this wider geopolitical backdrop that must be kept in mind when we consider the post-war trajectory of Latin American states and regional initiatives, as they attempted to exploit, through ever more intensive means, the ecological bases of their own territories in the struggle to survive the tempest of the capitalist world market.

3.2 Creating (and Containing) Class Struggle: Between Imperium and Regional Autonomy

The post-World War II order, spearheaded by the US's 'Fordist' hegemonic project (Rupert, 1995), witnessed the establishment of a world-wide productivist paradigm of Import-Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) that applied directly to those states in the Global South which for so long depended on foreign markets for their primary commodity exports and imported consumables. Yet it seemed clear to Latin American leaders that the ISI strategy could not solve foreign exchange constraints if left within the frontiers of the nation-state (Nogués and Quintanilla, 1993: 281). Thus, the first rumblings of a new post-war regional integration scheme emerged from Brazil's proposal for Operation Pan-America – a diplomatic overture to US policymakers as a means of re-directing their gaze from the global 'threat' of communism and back towards the South American continent.

However, these piecemeal moves towards a renewed pan-American space of development could not be extricated from the rumblings of revolution. With the adverse hemispheric impact stemming from the American recession of 1957-8, protests and urban riots greeting Vice President Nixon's tour of the region, and the openly communist revolution in Cuba, had all brought home Walt Rostow's earlier message to US foreign policy makers: that even without the existence of Moscow, Latin American states would be prone to genuinely popular revolutions. In many ways, they further vindicated Brazil's intense desire to further Latin American developmentalism for the sake of achieving regional order. Nevertheless, and precisely because of the Cuban debacle, the Brazilian dream of a new Pan-Americanism soon gave way to John F. Kennedy's 'Alliance for Progress', launched in 1961, which sought to implement more fully the 'generous' side of US foreign

relations in the Latin American countryside, albeit coupled with an imperialistic "fist of steel" (Smith, 1991: 76; cf. Weis, 2001: 327).[17]

"[T]he first and necessary stage of [the Alliance's push for] modernization", notes McCormick (1989: 143), "was the commercialization of agriculture on a more large-scale, mechanised basis. Land reform was to be geared more to that goal than to any break-up of the haciendas and redistribution of land to the peasantry." Thus, the switch to more modern forms of energy- and chemical-intensive production methods crucially marked this phase of agrarian transition (Petras and LaPorte, 1970). The 'green revolution', which underwrote the fundamental productivist transition within the Alliance's wider geopolitical project, was more than simply applying mechanised means of production to the landscape; it was significantly a revolution in agro-chemical engineering. As a continuation of capitalism's general extension and intensification of the earth's 'nitrogen cycle' (Perkins, 1997: 211-18), and largely pioneered in the US, the 'green revolution' of the 1960s and beyond comprised a gargantuan increase in yields per hectare by combining more capital- and energy-intensive technologies with synthetic chemical compounds and genetically enhanced seed varieties (see Tables 1 and 2). Reflecting a more 'capitalised' form of agriculture, successful chemical input-use was not simply premised on acquisition of the product, but of the knowledge and technical expertise needed to execute them in the right proportions. Again, the sheer weight of capital-intensive production, and the productivity differentials they opened up, meant that despite the hesitance of small farmers, "The question for growers became not whether to use the materials but when, how much, how applied, and for how much money" (Perkins, 1997: 216). Scale and scope meant that larger units of production could capture both larger capital inputs per unit of land and labour as well as the needed technical upgrading in knowledge and management; rarely did foreign advisers trek to the remote villages to help small

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[17] Kennedy was merely carrying forth an earlier instantiation of US discourse regarding 'development' as a major component in its foreign relations. The immediate impact of the Cuban revolution led Eisenhower's ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, to argue that "We should focus on the Declaration of Independence rather than on the Communist Manifesto where [the focus] has been… and in doing so we should not endeavour to sell the specific word 'Capitalism' which is beyond rehabilitation in the minds of the non-white world" (cited in LeFeber, 1993: 14). In turn, Kennedy proclaimed to be building "a hemisphere where all men can hope for a suitable standard of living and all can live out their lives in dignity and in freedom… Let us once again transform the American Continent into a vast crucible of revolutionary ideas and efforts" (cited in Grandin, 2007: 47). The discursive appropriation of the trope 'revolution' helped to infuse a popular idiom with the hidden metaphorical undertone of the *capitalist revolution*.

Table 1: *Fertiliser (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) consumption in selected countries (annual averages in thousands of tons of plant nutrients)*

	1957-9	1964	1971
Argentina	15.9	48.5	86.9
Brazil	227.8	255.5	957.9
Colombia	61.0	94.8	177.0
Chile	55.4	120.1	158.5
Mexico	131.4	300.5	594.4
Peru	62.6	91.9	119.0
Venezuela	11.6	32.0	69.4

Source: Furtado, 1976: 146.

Table 2: *Tractors used in farming in selected countries (thousands of units)*

	1957	1961-5	1971
Argentina	70.0	139.0	180.0
Brazil	57.9	70.1	99.4
Colombia	-	23.4	27.9
Chile	15.0	-	30.5
Peru	-	-	12.3
Mexico	-	64.8	92.0
Venezuela	-	13.1	19.2

Source: Furtado, 1976: 146.

farmers become more accustomed to what they had just purchased in the new chemical input markets. As a consequence, both the land and people working on it were often at extreme risk from chemical exposure and toxification.

Despite these efforts at revolutionising Latin American agriculture, serious imbalances emerged: productivity per agricultural worker was only one-fourth of industrial workers, while agriculture grew at around 3.5 percent (1950-1967), compared to industry's 6.3 percent growth rate. In comparison to average growth in the overall regional economy (5.2 percent), agriculture was under-performing while industry was moving in the opposite direction (Stevenhagen, 1974: 126, 129). This pattern can be largely explained via the territorial and geographical specificity of Latin America, marked primarily through enormous resource frontiers (extensive land tracts and rich mineral deposits), which offered statesman and industrial capitalists ample opportunity to avoid confrontation with their own working classes by simply seizing

a portion of ground-rent generated by large-scale agriculture or mining in order to support the relatively uncompetitive nature of industry (Philips 2004: 45; Grinberg and Starosta 2009: 767-8). The main upshot of these developments – of industrial ISI, agricultural revolutions, and the geopolitical offshoots of these socio-economic changes, such as the Alliance for Progress – was that they were all stop-gap measures for a fundamental contradiction that could not be solved unless approached at the most fundamental level (cf. Taylor, 2010: 44). In other words, the containment of class struggle, which comprised one of the central politico-discursive functions of Latin American populism and developmentalism, would only ever be a temporary possibility within the confines of traditional class structures.

In light of these difficulties, it was recognised by the end of the 1960s that the time to move away from simple security communities was at hand. It was Latin American leaders themselves who were most attuned to the need for a re-boot of Operation Pan-America (Puntigliano, 2011). In his *Foreign Affairs* article of 1959, then ex-president of Ecuador, Galo Plaza, argued for the establishment of a "regional market" in order to further stimulate Latin America's meagre push into producer goods and consumer durables sectors. In his view, the territories of the US, USSR, China and India were already "regional markets of enormous magnitude. Only Latin America remains divided into 20 separate economic units" (Plaza, 1959: 609-10). Some years later, at a conference held in 1966 at Georgetown University, Gustavo Lagos, a Chilean intellectual and later Minister of Justice under the Frei administration, noted the structural necessity of moving towards a larger politico-economic space for the South American nations. Like Plaza, he noted that the sheer scale of capital accumulation during the second half of the 20th century (marked primarily by the "continental federations" of the US and USSR) necessitated a concerted push towards tighter political and economic cooperation between the smaller South American states (Milenky, 1973: 10-11).

Subsequent to Richard Nixon's inauguration in 1969, Plaza (then Secretary of the OAS) was contacted by Nixon to gain some insight into how US-Latin American relations could be placed on a stronger footing. Plaza's response was to organise a fact-finding mission across the continent, of which he recommended Nelson A. Rockefeller to be the mission's head. Yet Rockefeller's grand tour of the region was, like Nixon's a decade earlier, met with intense bouts of protests and civic unrest from the continent's subaltern classes. It became immediately apparent where the region

would have to go in order to quell the growing social unrest. Like Plaza, Lagos, and other Latin American leaders, Rockefeller understood that regional integration would be the surest path to prosperity and stability. And yet, despite Rockefeller's recommendation, the US had little interest in seeing a South American regional formation potentially dilute US economic dominance. Nevertheless (and perhaps because of this) the *Tratado de Montevideo* (Treaty of Montevideo) was signed in 1960 by Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile, and later joined by Paraguay, Peru and Mexico, thus creating the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA). In 1968, the number of member states reached 11. The idea was to institute a negotiated and gradual elimination of trade barriers (buffeted with countless clauses and concessions for particular countries on particular commodities), and the subsequent formation of the Latin American Common Market (LACM) within 12 years (Phillips, 2004: 48). By and large, the Association did produce results, but perhaps not those envisaged by Latin American developmentalist thinkers; agriculture and primary products accounted for 70 percent of intra-LAFTA trade, rather than manufactures, and by 1967 the push for the LACM was all but abandoned. The principal reasons for LAFTA's disappointing career was due to the sheer diversity in size, structure and socio-ecological basis of the member states, the weak level of physical and communicative integration between them, and the concomitant concentration of trade between the biggest players, Argentina, Brazil and Chile (Phillips, 2004: 49-50; cf. Haas and Schmitter, 1964: 721).

Yet these developmental bottlenecks merely stumped the LAFTA space, not integration itself. The spatial divisions that expressed differential development patterns re-emerged in subsequent integration initiatives that brought together groups of states that were closer in both geography and levels of development, such as the Central American Common Market, the Andean Pact and CARICOM (Fawcett, 2005: 39). The overall strategic and spatial selectivity of early Latin American integration was therefore overdetermined by the relative dominance of agriculture, the only significant trade good within LAFTA, at the expense of industrial goods, thus leading to a further geographical fragmentation of the Latin American continent.

Meanwhile, deeper transformations taking place within the world economy would go on to take a particularly heavy toll, which subsequently impacted on its structures of agrarian production and forms of regional integration. Indeed, the world-wide turn to neoliberal 'discipline' engendered a new mode of social regulation and

economic organization that, at least within Latin America's agrarian spaces, led to entirely new discursive conceptions, and patterns of mobilization, among political elites and peasant movements.

3.3 The 'Lost Decades': Economic Liberalisation and Neoliberal Discipline

The severe re-adjustments experienced by Latin American states during the 1980s were due to the conjunctural shift in the organisation of international capitalism. The general crisis of the capitalist world system, experienced as general falling rates of profit within the core states (US, Germany and Japan), forced the most sluggish of these three competitors, the US, to drastically change the rules of the global game in order to stave off unbearable competition and ensure its continued dominance (Kiely, 2005: 56-64). Having severed the US dollar's link to gold, the floating exchange rate mechanism freed the US from traditional balance of payment constraints, in which devaluation and expansion into foreign markets were buttressed by the international system's continued reliance on the dollar as measure of value and medium of exchange. More significantly, the oil crisis of 1973 saw OAPEC states (the Arab states within OPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, instigate an oil embargo, precipitating a major earthquake throughout the world economy in the form of skyrocketing oil prices. The cash-flushed oil states would, according to the negotiations between Kissinger and King Faisal in 1974, recycle these dollar holdings back into the US banking system, which in turn was used as a lending mechanism to the Global South as a replacement of the dwindling aid programs (Spiro, 1999).

For Latin American states, such sources of funding were essential for covering their balance of payments problems, which had been traditionally financed through increasing volumes of ground rent appropriated from the countryside. The eventual 'Volcker shock', which hiked US interest rates in the battle against domestic inflation and domestic class conflict, put enormous pressure on states in the Global South with respect to their debt repayment values, which correspondingly increased.

Yet the neoliberal turn in Latin America did not simply originate through debt crises and balance of payment constraints, even if this became the general trend by the 1980s. Rather, the imposition of neoliberal discipline was from the start, and even into its 'mature' phase, as a class project seeking to break the power of organised labour in its traditional spaces of power in the cities and countryside. In other words, wherever

labour was a significant political force, it had to be put back into a position of social discipline. Hence the early arrival of neoliberal experimentation in Chile, which boasted a highly combative and well organised working class and peasantry, which finally achieved political hegemony through the election of Salvador Allende. Yet the Chilean case is a particularly notorious example of US imperial power in the region, exemplified by the 'Operation Condor' network of 'anti-Marxist' terror campaigns actively coordinated and funded by the US military establishment (McSherry, 2005), and in which the American 'monetarists' used this Latin American nation as a laboratory for untested economic ideas. Equally, if not more bloody than the Chilean case, Argentina's 'dirty war' scarred the social landscape for almost a decade throughout the 1970s. As with Chile, Argentina's new military junta conceived of its role in murdering, torturing and 'disappearing' political opponents (radical social forces) as a necessary component to rebuilding its economy, seeking "to solve the problems that the economy posed for political stability, at the cost of economic growth if necessary" (Romero, 2002: 221). This dynamic truly speaks to the underlying social logic of neoliberal transformation: while so often couched in the discourse of market 'efficiency' and 'growth strategies', the class basis of neoliberal logic fell upon a notion of 'the market' that "appeared to be the instrument capable of equally disciplining all the social actors" (ibid; cf. Kiely, 2005: 63ff).

In terms of ecology, this new accumulation regime, based less and less on the introduction of new sources of wealth (land and labour productivity) entailed highly contradictory effects on the composition of Latin America's agrarian spaces: "[t]he frontiers that could yield a cornucopia of nature's free gifts were fewer than ever before, and the scientific-technological revolution in labor [*sic*] productivity, greatly anticipated in the 1970s, never materialised" (Moore, 2010b: 229).[18] In the face of falling prices and productivity, it was ultimately the rural poor that suffered lower levels of consumption, which took a massive toll on the state of the agrarian population: the rural population went from more than half to a quarter between 1960-1990, during which time the value of agricultural exports by one-half to one-fifth, and as a share of GDP from 17% in 1960 to less than 10% (Kay, 1995: 21; see also Table 3).

[18] The 'closing' of the frontier represents a significant structural barrier to Latin America's traditional mode of agricultural growth, in which for the years 1948-1964, "two-thirds of the increase in [agricultural] output stemmed from bringing new land under cultivation" (Street, 1987: 203).

Table 3: *Evolution of the Agricultural Labor Force in Latin America, 1970-2000 Selected Countries (000s).*

Country	1970		1980		1990		2000	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Venezuela	829	26.0	751	14.6	874	12.0	805	8.1
Argentina	1,495	16.0	1,384	12.9	1,482	12.1	1,464	9.8
Uruguay	207	18.6	192	16.6	193	14.2	190	12.6
Chile	715	24.1	800	20.9	938	18.8	980	15.8
Brazil	16,066	47.2	17,480	36.7	15,232	23.3	13,211	16.7
Nicaragua	350	51.1	393	39.6	392	28.6	396	20.0
Costa Rica	243	42.9	290	35.2	307	26.1	324	20.2
Panama	211	41.6	197	28.9	245	26.2	251	20.3
Colombia	3,080	45.1	3,776	40.5	3,696	26.6	3,719	20.4
Mexico	6,541	43.8	7,995	36.3	8,531	27.8	8,551	21.4
Ecuador	997	51.5	1,013	39.8	1,201	33.3	1,249	25.9
El Salvador	673	56.8	697	43.6	709	36.4	775	29.1
Peru	1,915	48.3	2,183	40.3	2,654	35.7	2,965	30.4
Honduras	580	67.4	684	57.2	693	41.4	769	31.7
Paraguay	409	49.8	514	44.8	595	38.9	706	34.3
Bolivia	872	55.1	1,064	52.8	1,249	46.9	1,497	44.2
Guatemala	1,106	61.1	1,257	53.8	1,569	52.4	1,916	46.1
Total[a]	36,289	42.1	40,670	34.3	40,560	25.2	39,768	19.5
% Rural	10,6399.2	42.3	11,3679.7	35.2	11,2316.8	28.7	11,2835.4	24.4

Source: Long and Roberts, 2005: 63

[a]The percentages are the percentage of the total labour force that works in agriculture.

Contrary to economic orthodoxy, neoliberal economic reforms led to lacklustre growth in the agricultural sector, around 2 percent in the 1980s and 2.6 in the 1990s, compared to 3.5 per cent between 1950-1980 (Kay, 2004: 234). This highly uneven form of agricultural production has merely accentuated the earlier pattern of rising food imports during the 1970s, in which rural production became skewed in favour of remunerative products favouring urban tastes and foreign consumers (e.g., fruits, livestock, and sorghum) (Ortiz, 2014). Subsequently, the ratio of agricultural imports to exports was around 40 percent in the 1980s, and 60 percent in the 1990s (Kay, 2004: 235). In the context of these changes, the composition of the peasantry has resulted in a type of 'semi-proletarianization' in which peasants devote more of their time to off-farm activities, either in urban centres or from seasonal wage-labour on larger farms (ibid: 241).

As a corollary to this novel accumulation regime based less on new sources of wealth and more on higher rates of exploitation, the neoliberal hegemonic project

tended to relegate the role of the state in the process of economic development, even if the state as such did not necessarily see a 'decline' in its overall power (Lahiff et al., 2007). Rather, "neoliberal enclosures required, in the first instance, fundamental alterations by the state in the structure of rights to property in the juridical and legal sphere that it monopolised" (Akram-Lodhi, 2007: 1446). Yet the distinctiveness of this new sovereign regime consequently led to the relative fragmentation of the state apparatus itself, in which various competencies become externalised towards private groups:

> "governments in the region enlisted the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to encourage peasant organizations and communities to make greater use of the 'market mechanism'… and, in their politics, to eschew direct action and utilize instead 'the electoral mechanism' – in other words, to adopt peaceful/legalistic forms of struggle in pursuit of their interests" (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2002: 52-3).

This marked a substantial transformation in the strategic selectivity of state apparatuses, in which various competencies traditionally integrated into the state itself were 'outsourced' to more agile, formally independent organisations. Yet these groups were not simply boosters of the neoliberal project. For many NGOs, there was a dilemma as to whether or not participation in agrarian reform and social fund implementation under conditions of neoliberal adjustment conveyed a passive acceptance of these social dislocations, "which nearly all NGOs have criticized as socially regressive and unacceptable" (Beggington and Thiele, 1993: 51). On the other hand, it was the very nature of NGOs – as institutions that were more efficient and effective with limited funds – that condemned such groups to rules of reproduction that continuously pushed them into the arms of neoliberal hegemony; unlike the seemingly unlimited funds of a state budget, "[w]hen an NGO programme comes to an end, it is the NGO which must look for [external] funds to maintain its personnel" (ibid: 55). The effects of structural adjustment facilitated the propensity for NGOs to carry forward the new neoliberal discourse premised on a renewed neo-classical vision of markets, with state personnel leaving an atrophied public sector for the NGO sector, and carrying with them their university educated knowledge of classical sociology and biological science (ibid: 54; see also Silva, 2009: 25).

In essence, the emergence of a near-universal turn to 'neoliberal sovereignty' in Latin America carried with it corresponding shifts in rights and territory. By

transforming state functions to a night-watchman mode and away from the post-war *gran patron*, ceding key industries and social service provision to domestic and foreign capitals that correspondingly shifted the terrain of rights away from the popular classes back towards property owners, Latin American states took on a new set of political technologies – principally enshrined in the discourse of liberal democracy, and thus from a positive rights guarantor to a negative rights guardian (Silva, 2009: 24-5). Changes in the productive forces and organisational strategies of accumulation led to variable degrees of "flexible accumulation", creating an ever more flexible labour market and thus increased precarity within the ranks of the working class in both the factory and field (Spronk, 2013: 81; Kay, 2008: 924-5). The hegemonic project of neoliberal discipline was equally supported through the 'de-radicalisation' of educational institutions (catered more towards business/industry oriented curricula), the establishment of enormous media *latifundios* (Dello Buono, 2010), and the transformation of a once-radical cadre of intellectuals into a loyal choir singing the praises of neoliberal discipline. Strategic and spatial selectivities thus unfolded along a type of "de-nationalisation" (Jessop, 2002), transposing socio-economic power above and below, typically through sub-national decentralisation, forging "economies of agglomeration" within urban centres (though wracked with informal work and *barrio* peripheries) (de la Cruz, 2011), as well as through foreignization of space through increased Foreign Direct Investment and profit expatriation (Robinson, 2008).

As with the challenges faced by Latin American states during the closure of the ISI boom, the systemic pressures of neoliberalism were met with a wider push towards regionalisation. Gustavo Lagos' prophetic remarks concerning the continent sized confederations of the US and USSR were now borne out by the increasing regionalisation of the global trade regime, seeking to economise on geographical distance and transaction costs (Coleman and Underhill, 1998). Unlike the previous era, however, the US was attempting to consolidate a wider regional role through the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in which the concerns for increased regional competitiveness over the rival regional poles led by Germany in the European Community and Japan's 'flying geese' model always trumped other concerns over the potentially negative effects on labour or ecology (Fairbrother, 2009: 148; Ciccantell, 2011). From the emergence of this trilateral economic space arose a re-articulation of the long-standing contradiction between the

fragmentation of sovereign equality, and capitalism as a global mode of production; in terms of the particularly unequal partnership between the US and Mexico, "The NAFTA discourse allowed the simultaneous existence of both the possibility of economic integration with Mexico as an equal partner and the established image of Mexico as a dependent other" (Skonieczy, 2001: 451, emphasis added). Discursive constructions of this kind were (as with social discourse in general) internally related to the politico-economic reality of the NAFTA space, which quickly yielded a 'peso crisis' in Mexico, and lacklustre macro-performance in both Mexico and Canada (measured in high rates of unemployment and declining real hourly wages, not to mention ecological degeneration), leading ultimately to "a discredited NAFTA" (Pastor, 2001: 120).

Yet US designs for the western hemispheric region went far beyond the mere trilateralisation of cross-border flows – it fundamentally harked back to the Monroe doctrine vision of an entire hemisphere premised on US hegemony. The Miami Summit in 1994 thus presented the diplomatic platform for the US's proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which would stretch from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego (with projected completion by 2004). Yet for Latin America's biggest economy, Brazil, "this could only signal that there was a premium on diversification of its economic and political links. For Brazil, MERCOSUR is therefore a political vehicle for larger ambitions rather than a goal in itself" (van der Pijl, 2006: 197).

The origins of Latin America's most developed regional project, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), goes back to the earlier round of regional integration agreements in 1986 between the two largest players, Argentina and Brazil (Gardini, 2010). It finally came to fruition as 'Southern Cone Common Market' in 1991, signed by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. The economic content of the MERCOSUR space was not so different from the neoliberal pattern, yet its socio-political effects certainly deviated from the norm of subservience to Atlantic capital, an institutional ensemble "located somewhere between NAFTA and a common market" (Katzenstein, 2005: 231). MERCOSUR could offer a more stable platform for trade and production given the much lower levels of unevenness across its members states than what would be the case if they had joined the proposed FTAA (or even bilateral agreements with the US). Trade levels among member states grew moderately, from 4.1 to 20.3 billion USD (1990-1997), with the percentage of intra-

MERCOSUR trade relative to members' global trade at 14 to 25 percent (1992-1997) (Muñoz, 2001: 83).

Nevertheless, MERCOSUR is hobbled by a number of intervening factors. Firstly, it is entirely premised on inter-governmentalism, which leaves inter-state relations at the level of diplomacy, rather than region-wide legislation (Phillips, 2003: 220; Katzenstein, 2005: 231). Secondly, this pattern of relations between members leads inevitably to a democratic deficit with respect to the citizenry of the bloc, who may have formal channels of consultation (Consultative Social and Economic Forum), yet in practice have little influence on policy. Thirdly, and despite the more level playing field within MERCOSUR as opposed to integration with the US, the levels of development, and the specificities of each member's economy, creates asymmetries of opportunity and cost, leading either to unequal benefits or to treaty agreements that remain too vague and indeterminate to have any region-wide effect (Malamud, 2005: 427-9). As a result, regional integration within the MERCOSUR space has been limited to either "resource seeking" or "market seeking" behaviour by the largest continental firms, which precludes any region-wide integration of value-added production chains whose final products may compete within the wider world market (Burges, 2005). The material substratum of the region's economies, focused largely on a renewed impetus towards agro-industrial expansion, therefore produces an accumulation regime premised on the national capture of value-added processing activities coupled with uneven demand for energy resources (particularly the enormous demands pursued by Petrobras, the Brazilian energy giant). What appears as a rational hegemonic project for each *national* space in fact adds up to an *irrational* result of depressed regional integration.

Given the turbulence MERCOSUR has had to endure with Brazil's devaluation of the real in 1999, and the Argentine economic collapse of 2001, it became increasingly clear that member states' cooperation had to ensure the stability of its social fabric. With the ascension of Lula da Silva to the Brazilian presidency in 2002 from a "developmentalist front" coalition within the Workers' Party (PT), a new social compact between the "grand bourgeoisie" and the subaltern classes would enable Brazil to endure the strains of region building and insertion into the world market on a potentially more solid (and popular) footing via an altered alignment of the state towards the promotion of social production and real accumulation, rather than allowing the relatively autonomous forces of finance capital free reign (van der Pijl,

2006: 198; Boito and Berringer, 2014). As such, Brazil's approach to regional integration was far more substantial during this time in comparison with the high watermark of the neoliberal 1990s, reflective of Lula's strategic aim to forge its regional leadership in opposition to the Northern colossus (Phillips, 2003). The Lula 'enigma' was thus reflective of a much deeper fissure that began to emerge between the Latin American continent and the Atlantic core.

3.4 Reclaiming '*Nuestra América*': Contradictions of the New Latin American Left

Our analysis of neoliberalism in the previous section was relatively muted on the nature and impact of popular movements and anti-systemic mobilisations during the 'lost decades'. However, the social turbulence produced by this new form of market discipline gave a glimpse of things to come. Latin America's subaltern classes were experiencing the systemic crises of the world system under particularly harsh political conditions. The disintegration of the traditional Left, as a consequence of authoritarian repression, therefore produced a social vacuum throughout the region. Added to this, the specific changes in class structures tended to shape new modes of social organisation, which obtained in almost all social formations in the region. In contrast to the turn of the 20th century, in which peasants often preferred the more manageable and less risky exploitative relations with their *patrones* to the precarious form of wage-labour in urban centres, the late 20th century saw an entirely opposite dynamic – with capitalism in fully blown (yet inherently uneven) form, the evisceration of the campesino pattern of everyday life changed the calculus of survival: "People moved to the cities because urban conditions, for all their horrors, were better than those in the rural areas" (Gilbert, 2004: 99). Coupled with the already numerically small working classes,[19] the incidence of the rural-urban migration, and the consequent squeeze on those already employed created a burgeoning underclass characterised by informal work, 'micro-entrepreneurialism', violent crime, underemployment, or outright unemployment (see Portes, 1985; Portes and Hoffman, 2003). Across the entire region, these stress fractures unleashed wave upon wave of anti-systemic resistance in the form of "austerity protests" and "food riots" (Walton and Seddon, 1994: ch. 4).

[19] The peak of trade union density, as one proxy for working class size, was around 22 percent during the height of the ISI period, compared to about 13 percent in the 1990s (Spronk, 2013: 80).

These socio-structural tendencies help explain the rise of 'new social movements' throughout the region, who no longer had recourse, or even good reason, to pursue class struggle of the classical sort. Disenchanted with political parties and the capture of state power, these movements tended to be defensive in their forms of resistance while bringing issues of 'justice', 'dignity', 'identity', 'solidarity' and traditional cultures into the centre frame of their struggles, even if they found common cause in resisting neoliberal reform (Silva, 2009).

Perhaps the most prominent example to capture the attention of academics and activists was the Zapatista uprising in 1994. What started out as an armed revolt by the EZLN (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*) in rejection of the NAFTA accords, and after taking heavy casualties from the Mexican army's counter-offensive, the Zapatista resistance repertoire quickly transformed into a more symbolic struggle for the world's attention towards the plight of agrarian communities in Chiapas. The Zapatistas' demands strongly resonated with the aspirations of other 'advocacy networks', in and beyond Mexico, by constructing a "master frame" of democratic participation, emphasising diversity and horizontalism in decision making, linking injustice to neoliberalism, and utilising the internet to disseminate its message (Olesen, 2006). Such transnational linkages helped put external pressure against the Mexican government on issues of human rights and the militarisation of the Chiapas region. The nature and evolution of the EZLN struggles carried various commonalities with other agrarian movements during this time. Probably due to the increasing rural-urban migrations, and the relatively stronger presence of indigenous communities remaining in the countryside, it was during this time that "the struggle for land has been accompanied by a distrust of the state in rural areas", a pattern that can be seen with CONAIE in Ecuador, the *Consejo Regional Indigena del Cauca* in Colombia, and the many indigenous movements that make up the social base of Bolivia's Evo Morales (Teubal, 2009: 15-6).

If these rebellious currents were no longer enamoured with the traditional methods of class struggle and compromise, they were, at least nominally, also much less beholden to the nation-state as the exclusive space of struggle. In addition to the 'new social movement' discourse, Latin America's social movements tended to intersect with another academic fashion known as 'transnational activism' (Tarrow, 2005). Noting the transnationalisation of Latin American social movements became increasingly common as the neoliberal years rolled on: prominent examples include

the Foro Mesoamericano network, which formed in 2001 in response to the neoliberal integration projects Plan Puebla-Panama (PPP) and later expanded its target of resistance to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) (Spalding, 2008). At a region-wide scale, the Hemispheric Social Alliance emerged in 1997 in order to challenge the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which would extend the institutional logic of neoliberal restructuring over the entire hemisphere (Saguier, 2010). Thus, whether it is struggles for labour rights in *maquiladoras* (sweatshops) (Carty, 2006), indigenous rights struggles (Mato, 2000), or the resurgence of rural social movements (Deere and Royce, 2009), contentious politics in Latin America appeared to have an ever-greater transnational articulation (Silva, 2013). Highlighting this new spatialisation strategy undertaken by the region's social movements is particularly important when tracking the trajectory and changing character of agrarian struggle. For what emerged during the 1990s was not simply a new found militancy among those in the countryside, but an entirely new field of discourse and practice that would be relevant to the changing contours of world (dis)order.

No doubt the most prominent of these transnational movements has been La Vía Campesina (LVC). Its official birth came out of the Mons conference in 1993, wherein numerous peasant organisations from around the world banned together under a new name 'the Peasant Way' (*la vía campesina*). A few months after this inauguration, dozens of peasant movements marched under the LVC banner against the GATT meetings in Geneva. Later in 1996, LVC was a prominent participant in the World Food Summit held in Rome and sponsored by the FAO. Since then, LVC-affiliated groups have participated in a score of anti-neoliberal protests, in Geneva (1998), Seattle (1999), Cancun (2003), and Hong Kong (2005) (Desmarais, 2007: 8).

And yet, the central contradiction of LVC's discourse – crystallised in the slogan, "our resistance will be as transnational as capital" – was that its greatest ally would come in the form of a new state-apparatus. At the most immediate level, therefore, this renewed cycle of resistance among subaltern forces pointed towards a bottom up form of strategic and spatial selectivity, though an inherently complex one. On the one hand, resistance to neoliberal sovereignty – which in essence had displaced the classical locus of sovereignty away from the nation-state and hence the citizenry as such – brought with it a renewed emphasis on sovereign independence (Silva, 2009). On the other hand, radical social forces were keenly aware of the fact that neoliberal sovereignty expanded its territorial and spatial extent, insofar as the

transnationalisation of capital required the territorial expansion of popular struggle. Popular struggles from below thus congealed simultaneously around the nation-state *and* regional society, by engendering the first traces of a renewed imaginary of 'Our America' (*Nuestra América*). For peasant movements in particular, the types of transnationally organised counter-spaces emerged from the much longer lineage of the *Campesino-a-Campesino* movement begun in the 1970s and 80s, culminating in the formation of the Latin American Agroecology School in the Brazilian state of Paraná in 2005, and the latter establishment of the Latin American University Institute for Agroecology 'Paulo Freire' (IALA) in Venezuela (Chapter 5). Hence, the novel pincer movement constituted by a new wave of electoral victories for anti-neoliberal parties and a new resurgence of popular struggle came together to lay the groundwork for a new Latin American left-wing hegemony.

Under the politico-discursive project of Venezuela's *Bolivarianismo*, the fusion between the state apparatus and the people itself, leading to what Ciccariello-Maher (2014) calls the "insurgent government" and "communal state", created ideal conditions for the cultivation of a new peasant radicalism. Although we will look more closely at the potentials and limits of Venezuela's agrarian reforms in Chapter 4, it is important to note that, from the long history of class struggle in Venezuela's urban and rural spaces (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013), Chávez set about to transform (in partnership with his radical social base) the socio-ecological space of the nation, through land redistribution, free transport infrastructure, and the formation of entirely new 'socialist cities' that would encourage the redistribution of the population through the vast space of the country as a means of combating hyper-urbanisation and social exclusion (see Massey, 2009). With respect to agroecology, the Bolivarian regime has been noted by some authors as seeking to transform its agrarian base into a foundation for 'food sovereignty' and sustainable ecological practice which is organised in partnership with peasant groups (Schiavoni and Camacaro, 2009).

In different ways, Chávez's geopolitical allies in Bolivia and Ecuador are formally attempting to minimise and eventually dissolve the antagonism between social production and the ecological base through the pursuit of food sovereignty (cf. McKay et al., 2014). Ecuador's long-standing legal battle with the US-based energy multi-national Chevron over the ecological and human destruction wrought by oil drilling has constituted a major battle against foreign imperialism, and a central plank in President Correa's political platform (Rushe and Carroll, 2011). As well as seeking

compensation from transnational capital, the state is seeking to reverse its predatory relationship with the ecological base; as Correa stated in 2007: "Ecuador seeks to transform old notions of economics and the concept of [exchange] value… The Yasuní-ITT Project is based on the recognition of use and service of non-chrematistic values of environmental security and maintenance of world biodiversity" (cited in Rival, 2010: 358). The central discursive reference point that informs the inter-related practices of government and social movements in Ecuador revolves around this radical promotion of use-value over exchange-value: *buen vivir* (living well), or *sumak kawsay* (in the indigenous Kichwa language) (Villalba, 2013). Thanks to the legacy of anti-neoliberal class struggles waged by Ecuador's indigenous and peasant groups, which took on marked intensity after 2001 in response to the FTAA and proposed bilateral trade treaty with the US, Correa's re-drafted constitution in 2008 made the achievement of food sovereignty a major goal of the new government (Giunta, 2014).

In Bolivia, the major discursive framework of action emerges from the largely peasant-indigenous base of Morales' constituency, which maintains a strong cultural and social connection with 'Mother Earth' (*Pachamama*). The Morales government has passed several laws (The Law of Mother Earth) that seeks to heal the 'metabolic rift' among Bolivia's plurinational constituencies and the ecological base, in which the right to nature will "not be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities" (cited in Vidal, 2011). These policies intersect with broader reforms to the country's agricultural production system, which forms Bolivia's own version of 'living well' (*Suma Qamaña*, in the indigenous Aymaran language). When large landowners in the eastern regions of the country attempted to block Morales' proposed reforms, indigenous and peasant-led protests marched on the capital, La Paz, and formed a large demonstration outside the parliament building for several days and nights, until the 'Law of Communitarian Renewal of the Agrarian Reform' was finally passed in 2006. A central aspect of the law revolves around the multiple socio-economic and cultural functions land performs for given communities, and the priority given to communal forms of property rights (Bottazzi and Rist, 2012: 540). Finally, Bolivia's new constitution, adopted in 2009, contained a specific priority to the building of food sovereignty within the country.

Returning to the regional perspective, it is from these conditions linking the uneven development of agricultural spaces, resistance by radical social forces

pursuing intense cycles of struggle across the strategic terrain of the state, and the rise of new regimes born from these new cycles of resistance, that forms the fundamental source of the ALBA region, as well as the foundational potential for the regionalisation of food sovereignty. The rise of ALBA constituted merely the most radical fraction of Latin America's new left, who were unsatisfied not just with the imperialist powers of the world system, but also the potential regional hegemons (particularly Brazil, but also Argentina and Chile) who were constructing their own independent forms of capitalist 'developmentalism' (Ebenau, 2014), largely inimical to the building of 'socialism in the 21st century'.

However, when focusing on the ALBA space, and particularly its largest members (Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador), we must move past mere discourse analysis (e.g., constitutional amendments, legal proclamations, etc.) and examine the ways in which ecological, social and political conditions and struggles shape the degree to which social realities converge or diverge from the stated goal of a given discourse (e.g., *buen vivir*, 'food sovereignty'). At the most fundamental level, the radical discourse characterising the 'Bolivarian' states (at least those formally included within ALBA) rely to a predominant degree on the continued exploitation of their natural resources, whether agricultural or mineral. Too often development projects, whether in the form of new commercial or transport infrastructures, or through extending (both vertical and horizontal) resource frontiers, confront indigenous and other subaltern communities as major threats to the ecological sustainability of their ways of life and claims to sovereignty over their ancestral lands (Bebbington, 2009). The class character of these frictions boils down to the continued struggle over the capture of ground rent between rentier classes comprising state managers and national/foreign owned capitals. However, it is important to note that within this politico-economic terrain, it is the social content of a particular state's hegemonic project, rather than the material character of accumulation as such, that determines the relative developmental direction. As Higginbottom (2013: 200) observes, this struggle over *the domestic capture* of ground rent has been far more successful within the ALBA space as compared to non-ALBA states. Yet 'success' in these terms cannot simply be read off from the domestic acquisition of foreign exchange, for the development of society's productive forces – whether in technology, knowledge or the soil itself, as well as the accumulation of hard currency – cannot be taken as autonomous agents in their own right, but rather as a specific limit whose

extension and direction of change will be determined by the outcome of social struggle. This is no less true for agriculture as it is for mineral deposits and, indeed, for this group of radical states attempting to revolutionise their agricultural base via the redistribution of ground rent (surpluses generated by mineral exploitation), these two vectors of resource frontiers are intimately related. Thus, the central political tension for those states that actively pursue (or at least proclaim to be pursuing) food sovereignty hinges on the embedded structures of resource mobilisation whose proceeds become the very stuff of political struggle between, on the one hand, a potentially unitary and cooperative discourse of regional (transnational) production under the banner of 21st century socialism, and on the other, the reality of geopolitical fragmentation between states whose options are overdetermined by the wider world market.

3.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has charted a historical reconstruction of Latin America's long arch of regionalism from the inception of US hegemony. As with much else during the early Cold War years, US geopolitical strategy was refracted through containing the communist 'menace', which more often than not appeared in the active formation of regional 'security communities'. Yet neglect of development diplomacy would simply stoke the fires of subaltern resistance against the new global order. It was precisely this danger of subaltern insurgency that informed the economic and geopolitical strategies of the US 'Fordist' compact. In response to the Cuban rupture in the US *corpus imperium*, the 'green revolution' – as the ecological arrow in Kennedy's geopolitical quiver – unleashed the enormous power of capitalist agriculture upon the Latin American region, with devastating effects on both human and ecological landscapes; the uneven balance of forces between nature on one side, and the state and capital on the other, had entered a particularly intense and destructive phase.

Born from the systemic crisis of the capitalist world economy beginning in the late 1960s, there occurred a transition away from discourses of national development and political inclusiveness (however fleeting these may have been in practice) and towards a new form of rights, territory and sovereignty that spoke to the invisible hand of (global) market discipline. The inter- and trans-national class offensive against subaltern groups in Latin America launched by the US and fractions of Latin American

ruling classes led to a reorganisation of the region's class structures, which reflected deeper transformations in the increasingly 'globalised' world economy. The push towards regionalisation, with MERCOSUR leading the way, sought a way out of this state of affairs, yet could not extricate itself from the same social contradictions of capitalist development.

Yet the severity of neoliberal discipline had merely ensured its own downfall. The myriad social struggles that wracked the Latin American continent laid the foundations for a renewed left wing insurgency in both the streets and at the ballot box; thus, neoliberal discourse emphasising the efficacy of electoral politics over direct action ultimately backfired. The outcomes of these struggles resulted in a notable rebalancing within many Latin American states towards a rights/territory/sovereignty regime of 'post-liberalism', in which capital would, *in theory*, become far more subordinate to the state apparatus itself, and the popular social forces constituting its radical constituency. However, Latin America's new left are caught within a contradictory bind of furthering the accumulation of rent-bearing capital for the sake of social development and technical upgrading. This accumulation strategy has, unfortunately, been overwhelmingly reliant on further exploiting mineral resources, often in confrontation with the state's social base. Understanding the nature of these contradictions and struggles, and their bearing on the path to food sovereignty in ALBA, and Venezuela in particular, will therefore constitute the central focus for the remaining chapters of the thesis.

4 From Magical State to Magical Region: The Social Origins of ALBA

The previous chapter sought to build a 'long' historical context to the emergence of Latin America's new left at the turn of the 21st century, and thereby trace the genealogy of the structural preconditions of ALBA's counter-hegemonic regionalism. The following chapter will therefore comprehensively analyse the nature and evolution of the ALBA region. As both the geopolitical centre and the concentred site of ALBA's agricultural productive initiatives (in the form of "Mixed Socialist Enterprises of ALBA"), deconstructing Venezuela's development model offers the cipher for ALBA's political economy. In terms of the regional institution itself, two lines of analysis will be pursued. Firstly, we will examine the state-social movement relationship as it is articulated via strategic state-society alliance building, as well as the contradictory integration of social movements into the ALBA institution itself. Secondly, we will examine the various contours of ALBA's political economy, specifically through four vantage points that emerge from ALBA's 'Grandnational Concept': cooperative advantage, map of goods, endogenous development, repairing the metabolic rift. In analysing each dimension in turn, we will better understand the potentials and limits of ALBA's political economy of food sovereignty and the social forces that animate its development.

4.1 Dictatorship, Democracy and Class Struggle in the 'Magical State'

As the post-colonial theorist, Fernando Coronil, argued in his influential text on Venezuelan state formation, it was the presence of vast oil reserves, representing seemingly unlimited wealth, that culminated in a contradictory fusion of material and mental constructs. Through the exploitation of natural wealth beneath its subsoil, the Venezuelan state apparatus created the material basis for its remarkable capacity to absorb "within itself the multiple powers dispersed throughout the nation's two bodies" – the political and ecological 'bodies'. (Coronil, 1997: 4). Thus, "As a 'magnanimous sorcerer,' the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions – a magical state" (ibid: 5). Put more concretely:

> "The Venezuelan case shows the historical development not of classic market 'spontaneity' but of a different second nature – the 'spontaneous' recognition of the need to control state intervention as a result of the formation of capitalist society whose major source of

monetary wealth rests not on the local production of surplus value but on the international capture of ground-rent" (Coronil, 1997: 227).

As Coronil and others note, the discovery of oil was also the death knell of Venezuelan agriculture, as new mining opportunities continually absorbed capital and labour away from an uncompetitive agricultural sector, which simply undermined the already flagging agro-export economy further (Carlson, 2016; Brown, 1985: 375). As a percentage of Gross National Product, petroleum jumped from 9.5 to 34.7% (1925-1936), with agriculture falling from 34.6 to 18.8% (McBeth, 2002: 112, 114).[20] From Venezuela's early *caudillo* led modernization emerged an accumulation regime and hegemonic project that *singularly fused* around the turning of the oil-spigot: "Although the land and its products were celebrated in poetry as well as in the visual arts, music, and popular songs, agriculture did not provide a common source of national identification in Venezuela" (Coronil, 1997: 88). Despite the emergence of democracy in 1945, with the ascension of Romulo Betancourt and the *Acción Democrática* party (AD) on the back of a previous cycle of class struggles throughout the cities and countryside, the AD's more 'pluralistic' political regime could not entirely solve the contradiction of administering a landlord state (and in turn mobilise its hegemonic force through the circulation of oil rents) within what remained a militant identity among the peasantry. Even with the dwindling agrarian population due to petroleum-induced urbanisation, the agrarian sectors were a political force that could not be ignored.[21] Agrarian reform was thus high on the list of priorities for AD leaders, yet refracted through a specific strategic and spatial selectivity that oriented rural development away from a general array of social support policies for peasants, and towards the strategic integration of agricultural production as a mere support for the expansion of urban populations and spaces (Powell, 1971: 292; Huizer, 1973: 70-

[20] Though during this time, the weight of the oil industry did not produce inflationary effects because profits were mostly repatriated (McBeth, 2002: 115). Indeed, by Löwy's estimation, during the first seven years of AD government rule, some $504 million had been expatriated, "an amount that was equal to almost half of the total income of US investment in Latin America" (Löwy, 1981: 182-3).

[21] A substantial fraction of the social base of *Acción Democrática* (AD) was based in the countryside, and represented a newly enfranchised segment of the population with the proportion of citizens voting in national elections jumping from 5 to 36%. And despite the interruption of Venezuelan democracy between 1948 and 1958 (the reign of Pérez Jiménez), rural support for AD remained strong, leading to a string of electoral successes (Powell, 1971: 287-8). Indeed, as Powell suggests, the agrarian classes' "cohesion as a support group for the reformers was decisive, since the urban electorate proved to be highly fragmented, diffusing its majority power through a large number of splinter groups, personalist parties, and vague coalitions of various ideological hues" (ibid: 291).

2; cf. Angotti, 1998). Yet with a new push towards economic diversification in consumer durable exports, Carlos Andrés Pérez had entirely neglected the agricultural sector, or at least the most numerous and vulnerable parts of it, with virtually all state directed development and credit lines extended towards large agribusiness firms. During this time, agriculture's share of GDP dropped from 7.0 to 6.1% (1961–1980), with food imports increasing by a factor of 10 throughout the decade in parallel with increased smuggling of goods across the border to Colombia and elsewhere for the sake of price speculation, and finally a bout of food shortages in 1977 across a range of basic goods (rice, sugar, milk and coffee) (Petras and Morley, 1983).

With the onset of the debt crisis of the 1980s (afflicting states in the Global South), a new regime of social discipline in the form of neoliberalism came to dominate the region as a whole through the institutional power of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Coming to power a second time in 1989 on an anti-IMF platform, Carlos Andrés Pérez subsequently embarked on the *Gran Viraje* (the Great U-Turn) by implementing a harsh series of IMF-backed neoliberal reforms, decimating most economic sectors (particularly agriculture) and ushered in the characteristic forms of social dislocation and destruction typical of neoliberal discipline (Lander and Fierro, 1996; Di John, 2005a). With the utter evisceration of society's social and ecological fabric, in the form of both land and labour that could find no productive outlet, except in the petroleum or construction sectors (Lander and Fierro, 1996: 58) the common pattern of sporadic fighting between subaltern actors and the state apparatus had transformed into something radically more intense in the form of the *caracazo* riots (López Maya, 2003).

This signalled the deep "organic crisis" fracturing Venezuelan society by the late 1990s. As Gramsci understood it, an organic crisis constitutes a fundamental material contradiction in the prevailing accumulation regime, one that cannot be moved out of stasis without an entirely new set of political forces ready to temporarily overcome the socio-economic impasse through new hegemonic projects and class alliances. Under such conditions, "social classes become detached from their traditional parties" (Gramsci, 1971: 210). Consequently, "the immediate situation becomes delicate and dangerous, because the field is open for violent solutions, for the activities of unknown forces, represented by charismatic 'men of destiny'" (ibid). As it happens, the decade of Venezuela's organic crisis witnessed both potentialities, and carried out by the same charismatic man of destiny – while Chávez's attempted

military coup in 1994 was ultimately unsuccessful, his subsequent turn to the electoral option in 1998 would help to finish what he had started years earlier: the ouster of Venezuela's crisis-ridden *punto fijo* bloc.

'Elite-outliers' from the realm of Venezuelan capital were from the start keen participants in the project of *Bolivarianismo*. Because the strategic terrain of the Venezuelan state penetrated entirely throughout the 'realm' of the economy, there is no conceivable way for Venezuelan capitals (of any kind) to prosper without establishing organic links to state apparatus. Thus, the number of business elites who voted for Chávez did so precisely because of the position they occupied within the organised bloc of the dominant classes; in other words, a government dominated by Chávez's *Movimiento V* [Quinta] *República* (MVR) party would provide better prospects for state access (Gates, 2010). Yet while the new constitution introduced in 1999 formally reflected the contours of this somewhat delicate balance within the hegemonic bloc that had brought Chávez to power – particularly Articles 112 and 115 guaranteeing economic freedom and private property, as well as central bank independence – it also stipulated a more expansive role of the state in the national economy (Orhangazi, 2014: 223). The introduction of new constitutional reforms during the first two years of Chávez's administration further pushed to breaking point the integrity of the power bloc. And while areas of reform were relatively moderate – including participatory democracy and strengthening the state's control over its sovereign wealth, culminating in the passing of 49 new laws in 2001, including the Organic Hydrocarbons Law, the Land Law, and the Fisheries Law (Webber, 2010: 24) – the fact that they were passed by Presidential Decree, without consultation or deliberation in the National Assembly, and nor with the Chávez's own party, created a certain sense of trepidation on part of the dominant classes (Brading, 2014).

4.1.1 Popular Power, Land Reform, and Resource Sovereignty

The new constitution proposed by Chávez in 1999 tipped the scales decisively towards "democratic, protagonistic democracy". As Alvarez (2004: 152) observes: "The 'Bolivarian' constitution even failed to make mention of political parties anywhere in the text. Instead the document used the vague expression of 'associations with political ends'." This nascent structure of vertical territoriality thus formed a compromised mix between "absolutely direct" democracy (which Chávez believed to be an impractical

approach) and its "representative counterpart", settling instead upon the mixed regime of "protagonistic" democracy (ibid: 154). Yet in transforming the political basis of politics as such towards that of a protagonistic democracy, the "constituent power" based upon the will and agency of the people was, paradoxically, internalised within specific branches of the state apparatus itself, which "opened channels for direct participation at the same time that it enhanced the power of the national executive" (ibid: 155).

These constitutional changes thus laid the politico-juridical basis for the rise of popular power in the Bolivarian republic. Previous initiatives, such as the *Consejos Locales de Planificación Pública* (Local Councils for Public Planning) had envisaged a new form of decentralized politics in which protagonistic democracy could take root, but encountered a litany of problems (particularly with the reproduction of traditional representative politics embedded within these new spaces). Consequently, the place of *Consejos Comunales* (Community Councils, CCs) became more prominent (Azzellini, 2016: 87). Thus, while the CCs were far more grounded in (and often initiated from) the grassroots level, they ultimately consolidated their institutional status and rapid expansion from the state (ibid: 94). Such a form of popular power was inscribed within Chávez's 'five motors' of revolutionary change, one of which referred to the "new geometry of power" in which the territorial re-arrangement of political rights and territorial decentralisation of powers would help to facilitate new spaces of public life (see Massey, 2009; Menéndez, 2013). It is therefore important to note that while CCs have become one of the more radical hallmarks of Venezuela's transformed legal structures, they emerged quite spontaneously – outside of juridical codes – and were pushed towards the National Assembly for their institutionalisation, a clear case of *de facto* agency transformed in *de jure* agency. And in line with the general flavour of the 1999 constitution, the CCs maintained a direct line of support and financing from the state and its immediate apparatuses, rather than from the less trustworthy local authorities at the municipal level (Azzellini, 2016: 96).

The introduction of the 2001 Land Law (*Ley de Tierras y Desarrollo Agrario*) saw a new push against the large landowning class (*latifundios*). Its political orientation brought to the foreground the underlying premise, established in the 1999 Constitution, that "the regime of large landholdings [*latifundista*] is contrary to the social interest" (Article 307, RBV, 1999). Thus, not only did Chávez embark on a

substantial process of land confiscations against the landlord class,[22] he had also effectively internalised peasant struggles on the land into law. Article 471 of the Venezuelan Penal Code de-criminalized small farmers occupying private lands (Isaacas et al., 2009), and in turn closed the gap between the informal powers of peasant struggle into the formal realm of juridical discourse. And yet, the use of the law as a means of not simply reforming Venezuelan agriculture, but also of strengthening the political power of the peasant class, was mobilised in a highly diffuse and sometimes indeterminate manner. Thus, the modified land law, promulgated in 2005, deemed expropriation necessary for the purposes of maintaining "food security" (Article 68), in accordance with "public utility and social interest" (Article 69) or simply "exceptional circumstances" (Article 84) (RBV, 2005; cf. Lavelle, 2013: 142). Legal discourse concerning land rights therefore shifted somewhat beyond the abstractly verifiable codes of conventional jurisprudence, and towards a grey area of (arbitrary) executive right, which was nonetheless couched in legal discourse. In this instance, the Law/Terror binary was decisively blurred, albeit embedded within a social content favourable towards popular rural classes.

With respect to the oil industry, the new law stipulated that foreign capital could capture no more than 50 percent of joint ventures (which stipulates the ratio of returns to partners), and doubled royalty rates to 30 percent (Lander and Navarrete, 2007: 26). Increases in royalty payments (based on unit price) where thus facilitated through the new metric used by the Ministry of Energy and Mines, which was based upon the international price of oil, rather than the much lower 'transfer price' PDVSA set for its foreign affiliates (Mommer, 2004: 141). This move significantly augmented state power over the surveillance of PDVSA, which had traditionally managed to manipulate its true share of taxes based upon reported profits and net income (i.e. 'transfer mispricing'), which was markedly opaque given the ability to manipulate the appearance of cost structures (Wilpert, 2007: 96). Yet with the subsumption of PDVSA under the state, particularly the executive branch of the state apparatus, the practice of misreporting figures, or at least inventing new accounting methods to augment certain flows of funds, was re-established. The official state budget thus

[22] The land law stipulated that any farms of over 100 hectares (ha/s) on high quality soils, and those over 5,000 ha/s on lower quality soils were eligible for expropriation. Later, in 2005, the criteria shifted towards that of 'productivity', wherein any *latifundio* not producing above 80% capacity could be subject to expropriation (Lavelle, 2013: 142). By 2011, these reform policies had seen 2.5 million hectares 'rescued' from *latifundios* and turned over to landless peasants (Wilpert, 2014: 6).

pegged expected oil prices at a considerably lower level than the international market price, which allowed the executive branch to capture significant surplus funds without institutional oversight (Rosales, 2016).

4.1.2 Class Conflict and the Struggle for *Bolivarianismo*

From the above considerations on the transformation of the state apparatus, particularly the balance of power between its various branches, it is clear that the rapid and profound changes taking place throughout the legal and policy domains was facilitated through the equally rapid accumulation of power within the Executive branch, expressed principally through Chávez's rule by decree for the first year. Yet within the wider strategic field of political struggle, this re-organisation of institutional power within the state was not enough to offset the leverage of the leading fraction of Venezuelan capital (still concentrated within PDVSA) and the remaining power bloc under their leadership.

Thus, Venezuela's traditional ruling classes, outraged by this meagre assault on their privilege, organised a business strike in December 2001, with the principal players including then privately owned oil company, PDVSA, FEDECAMARAS (the national business association), and the CTV (Venezuela's largest union organisation). Having re-instated the PDVSA managers responsible for the strike that Chávez previously dismissed (a calculated gamble that sought to minimise the possibility of repeating the short-lived coup in April 2002 coup) the oil company once again possessed a managerial cadre dedicated to bringing Chávez's political programme to a halt. Now grouped under the name *Coordinadora Democrática*, their strategy of sabotage was significantly assisted by US capital, itself working in close partnership with the US state (Golinger, 2007: 102-3). As a result of the 2002-2003 'bosses strike', around 24 percent of GDP and $6bn in revenues had been lost (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2007; Webber, 2010: 26). The severity of the crisis was of course due to the sheer weight of the oil sector within the national economy, which shed an unusually high volume of wealth in such a short period of time.

Yet soon enough, cracks within the opposition bloc were steadily widening due to a coordinated effort between the Bolivarian state and various sections of skilled and un-skilled workers to regain control over the national economy. Various workers inside PDVSA actively began to seize control of operations and collectively choose

their own supervisors. Indeed, this conjuncture helped to push Chávez into a more radical stance, and to usher in the Bolivarian Revolution as we know it today: a political project that seeks to build socialism in the 21st century (Brading, 2014). However, despite early examples of spontaneous worker control and self-management, the state decided that such moves towards socialism were premature in an industry that was so strategically central for the economy as a whole (Webber, 2010). Thus, with Chávez firing over 19,000 personnel from PDVSA's ranks of managers and engineers in response to the strike, and thus sacrificing a huge amount of technical knowledge, it was believed that the oil sector was too vulnerable at this stage to allow the full flowering of worker self-management.

This moment of confrontation between capital and the state presents a crucial conjuncture in the political economy of *chavismo*, which must be fully addressed at this point of analysis (insofar as its qualitative and quantitative features will have a continuous presence throughout the next two chapters). Preventing a chronic wave of capital flight, and thus diluting a potential weapon wielded by Venezuelan capital, was seen as a major priority after the bosses' strike.[23] From 2003, the state imposed strict exchange rate controls, through the introduction of a new state-led institution, *Comisión de Administración de Divisas*. With the vast over-valuation of the national currency, the *bolivar fuerte* (BsF), which came to USD1.90/BsF,[24] domestic capital may apply to the government for dollars at preferential (official) rates for the sake of maintaining imports and satisfying domestic consumption (Purcell, 2016: 113). Between 2003 and 2012, some USD317 billion has been sold to the private sector at preferential rates, yet with the historically structured disincentives to engage in domestic investment (particularly through the purchase of up-to-date means of production in the world market, which would be made considerably easier with an over-valued domestic currency), many of these companies engage merely in a type of fraudulent exchange, in which goods are either imported yet never brought to retailers (instead often ending up in Brazilian or Colombian markets at a higher price), or simply through the falsification of import papers, in which shipping containers arrive to Venezuelan ports empty (Yaffe, 2015; Lampa, 2016).

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[23] The phenomenon of capital flight was in fact a relatively 'normal' feature of the Venezuelan economy, which reached USD14 billion during 1994-2000 (di John, 2005b).

[24] This again is a normal feature of Venezuela's oil-dominated economy, whereby the influx of dollars due to oil exports creates pressures to revalue the national currency, which would benefit national commercial capitals in their quest for cheaper imports (Purcell, 2013: 150).

Even with the presence of price controls on a number of key consumables, mostly in the food sector, companies often skirt such regulations through minute adjustments to production specifications, thus pushing a given product outside of set categories for controlled goods. Finally, with access to preferential dollars, a rapid expansion in a parallel currency market offers other avenues of currency speculation, in which cheap dollars buy up large amounts of *bolívares*, in turn used to access dollars, and so on. As a consequence of this artificial squeeze on the domestic supply of consumables, a vicious 'inflation-depreciation' spiral has wracked the Venezuelan economy in recent years, with the annual inflation rate hitting 63.4% in 2014 (Lampa, 2016: 13). Since 2014, the Venezuelan Central bank has been reluctant to release its usual annual statements on the national inflation rate (undoubtedly based on political considerations); only in January 2016 was the next statement released, indicating that for 2014-15 the accumulated rate of inflation had reached 141%, with the cost of food showing the greatest inflationary pressures at 254.3% (Dutka, 2016).

These macro-economic indicators, and their underlying class dynamics, form the basic contextual background for the proceeding analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. But they also present a systemic contradiction that severely affects the overall political economy of the ALBA region. For while these tendencies amount to a series of unintended consequences of Chávez's anti-neoliberal drive, the struggle against neoliberal capitalism has undoubtedly emerged through a concerted geopolitical strategy to unite the Latin American region around the wider principles of *Bolivarianismo*. For Chávez, the immediate priorities for his multi-scalar strategy – between nation and region – focused on shoring up the state's capture of oil wealth, and to consolidate Venezuela's position internationally as a buffer against further imperial aggression. It was in constructing the ALBA regional space that Chávez sought a solution to this latter problem.

4.2 Oil Diplomacy and the Emergence of a 'Bolivarian' Foreign Policy

The dramatic change in Venezuela's foreign policy outlook under Chávez can best be understood as constituting a significant challenge to US regional primacy and domination, which became particularly marked under the Bush administration's unilateralism. The Bolivarian vision for international affairs emphasised one of Latin America's long-standing norms in the form of sovereign equality. One of the primary

means through which Venezuela sought to forge a new system of international relations was through the deployment of its extraordinary wealth. In a speech delivered to the OAS by the Venezuelan representative, Jorge Valero: "Oil can be, as our Government realizes, a powerful lever to drive development, integration, cooperation, solidarity, and the economic complementarity of our countries" (cited in Burges, 2007: 1345). What truly consolidated this stance, however, was the confrontation with the US-sponsored regional project, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Indeed, as Nelson (2015) points out, foreign policy was not at the top of Chávez's agenda upon assuming office in 1999, but rather the re-organisation of the country's socio-economic structures and institutions. It was only after attending the various international summits convened for the negotiations over the FTAA that the strategic selectivity of the Venezuela state began to crystalise around foreign policy and regionalisation concerns, which significantly informed its early opposition to the FTAA negotiations during the 3rd Summit of the Americas in April 2001. Yet such a perspective was not confined to the lofty heights of sovereign statecraft. As we saw in Chapter 3, the numerous social movements that had sprung up during the 1990s had finally consolidated into a series of transnational advocacy networks whose discourse and activism had significantly boosted the rationale for Chávez's anti-neoliberal regionalism.

4.2.1 ALBA's Council of Social Movements

In contrast to the other great regional block of Latin America, MERCOSUR, which contains a far smaller place for social movement actors (Jelin, 2001), the ALBA space was from the start infused with the deeper understanding of popular participation as a key driver of the region building process. According to Ruben Pereira, Coordinator of the Council of Social Movements in the Executive Secretariat of the ALBA headquarters in Caracas, "there is no international organisation that has called out to the social movements and collectives to be incorporated into the organisational structure relating to the mechanisms of regional integration" (Interview, RP, 05.04.2016). While the role and function of social movement participation would only come into signed effect sometime later, it was during 2002 that Chávez outlined the ways in which the Bolivarian movement could move forward beyond the strictures of

neoliberalism. During the 2006 World Social Forum in Caracas, Chávez extolled the strategic virtues of forging a more robust regional Bolivarian state-society complex:

> "We have to link up all our causes, unity, unity, unity, movements united respecting diversity, respecting the autonomy, no one is planning to impose anything on anyone, only coordination, unity, because if we don't work together we will never triumph not even if we fight for 500 years, only united can we do it, united our moral and intellectual forces, our ideas, our diversity, our physical strength, our social movements, our political movements, our local governments" (Chávez; cited in Martinez, 2013: 63).

In the subsequent year, during a parallel session at the 5th ALBA Summit with the respective heads of state, a wide grouping of social movements from across the continent affirmed their official alliance with the ALBA institution. In addition to proposing a raft of social measures designed to bolster the struggle for women's rights, environmental protection and food sovereignty (to name just a few), the convened group of social movements called for official institutional spaces for their concrete participation within ALBA, which would "permit the achievement of participatory and protagonistic democracy in accordance with socially organised popular interests" (*Movimientos Sociales del ALBA*, 2007). The proposed body was therefore initially styled as the 'Consultative Planning Council of Social Movements'.

However, the relatively slow pace of progress with respect to fully consolidating the Council of Social movements (CSM) lead to a twin strategy on behalf of civil society actors. A year after the initial meeting in 2007, at the VI Summit of the ALBA-TCP, social movements were given only a brief acknowledgement, without any sustained proposals for their further establishment (ALBA-TCP, 2008b). It was precisely because of this slow pace of institutional change that the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST), La Vía Campesina and other assorted social movements proposed and agreed a parallel initiative in July 2008, embodied in "a hemispheric articulation of social movements and organizations around the principles of ALBA" (*Movimientos Sociales del ALBA*, 2009). From this meeting came the final crafting of the Charter of Social Movements of the Americas, announced during the 3rd Social Forum of the Americas (October, 2008), which was conceived as the struggle for "building the integration of peoples form below" (*Movimientos Sociales del ALBA*, 2008), and marking the inauguration of the 'Continental Articulation of Social Movements Towards ALBA'. At the 1st Summit

meeting of the Intercultural Plurinational Council of Social Movements of the Countries of the ALBA-TCP in October 2009, it was acknowledged that due to "realities and challenges that some member countries have experienced", as well as the influence of "other priorities and efforts within the ALBA-TCP", there had been a relative brake on the process of forging the CSM within the architecture of ALBA since 2008 (*Movimientos Sociales del ALBA*, 2009), which made the creation of alternative structures all the more necessary.

In this way, social movements attempt to straddle an often-precarious "inside/outside" divide of contentious politics, which Martinez (2013) dubs the "double-turn" of social movement counter-hegemony, articulated through their institutional inclusion within the CSM, and a wider socio-spatial rendering that seeks autonomy from both neoliberal globalism and the official institutionalism of ALBA's inter-state architecture. Each strategy embodied in this 'inside/outside' positionality fulfils a specific function that animates and strengthens movements' internal cohesion and external capabilities (cf. Gürcan, 2010; Emerson, 2013). The 'outside' position helps to strengthen the movement's identity with respect to its self-conscious formation as a proto-typical form of 'post-liberal' politics embodying principles of self-organisation, participatory democracy and decentralised modes of sovereignty. The 'inside' position, on the other hand, seeks to harness the existing institutional structures of regional inter-governmentalism in order to maintain proximity to the main channels of power and decision-making. As Martinez suggests, "[o]nce the Council is fully consolidated it will, in theory, act as a mechanism to mutually coordinate the work of social movements and the ALBA-TCP project, exchanging information up and down the hierarchy of the ALBA-TCP structure, as well as horizontally across countries" (Martinez, 2013: 65).

However, by the time of the 10th Summit in 2010, the CSM was still framed as more of a proposal rather than an institutional reality. As noted in the Bicentenary Manifesto of Caracas:

> "…the time has come to install the Council of Social Movements. This entails establishing national Chapters in each country and that social movements assume, as proposed, not only sector struggles of the working class, peasants, women, youth, etc., but that they also move forward and join the development of economic and social projects for the specific construction of alternatives to the predatory capitalism existing in our continent" (ALBA-TCP, 2010).

It is notable that, three years later, during the most recent ALBA Social Movement Summit, the collective statement noted that, "Integration of peoples and for the peoples… requires the redesigning of the decision-making bodies… We urge, therefore, to move forward with a full and organic incorporation of People's Power in the decision making process of ALBA" (ALBA-TCP, 2013).

This somewhat contradictory picture underscores the ways in which social movement participation in ALBA is a highly uneven affair. While the importance of, and proposal for, the CSM was understood early on, it would take many years, and as many Summits, for this idea to take any kind of shape; indeed, as one member of a prominent Venezuelan peasant movement noted, the independent organisation of social movements themselves have done far more than the many ministerial meetings in terms of consolidating the social space and organising principles of the CSM (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). Much of the impetus for independent movement organisation – in terms of forging a transitional identity, organisational capacity and the formal outline of institutionalisation (primarily in the shape of national 'Chapters' across the ALBA and non-ALBA states) – emerged directly out of the "rhythms" of movement mobilisation in order to fully capture their "organic forces" (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.201). Yet despite the institutional outline of the CSM's role during the 9th Summit in 2009, the direct relations between ALBA's core institutional elements (mainly at the political/ministerial level) remain quite ambiguous. For although the CSM enjoys an institutional position at the same level is the Council of Presidents, the idea that the CSM should wield the same types of decision making powers was not firmly entrenched at the elite level (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.201).

There is, therefore, a critical tension between the enthusiasm among social movement actors concerning the institutional inclusion of the CSM within the top layer of the ALBA architecture on the one hand, and the relative exclusion of social movement demands on the other, a trend that has been duly explored elsewhere (see Aguirre and Cooper, 2010; Cutler and Brien, 2013; Martinez, 2013; Stevenson, 2014). As I was informed by one interview participant from the ALBA TV network, a Caracas-based communication hub by activists that create content for, by and about various social movements across the continent, the existence of the CSM is unparalleled in the history of regional organisations, beyond anything present in MERCOSUR or the European Union: "never before has such participation been given to social movements as 'actors', as well as what this implies semantically and

conceptually" (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.2016). But it is possible that the substance of the CSM merely stops short at the semantic and conceptual limit. For on the one hand, social movement actors are in no doubt as to the necessary, and quite particular, relationship with the sovereign state. There is a clear recognition that unequal powers exist between the states and social movements, yet one that is almost dictated by the institutional materiality laid down by representative democracy. Hence movements do not have "factual power"; through the course of popular elections, the state is imbued within a "constitutionalised series of powers" making it the legitimate actor of representation (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.201; Interview, RP, 05.04.2016). In this way, movement actors often look to defend the constitution, and thus the state itself as a means of enshrining popular power (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.201). On the other hand, member states of ALBA can turn this form of political legitimacy to their advantage, by excluding from the CSM social movements they deemed too hostile to national policy, as in Ecuador (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015), or to the point of outright criminalization, as in the case of CSM-member social movements in Peru (though the Peruvian state is not a member of ALBA) (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.2016).

As I was informed, such tensions continue to mark the relationship between Venezuelan social movements and the Bolivarian state, particularly over issues pertaining to mining projects (beyond the petroleum sector). Problems associated with the contradiction of "ecological mining" – as a supposedly sustainable form of mining that respects ecological integrity and the participation of local communities (RBV, 1999: 24; RBV, 2001: 82-3) – can only be dealt with effectively if there is openly accessible information and data on the impact and consequences of such projects: "even in having so many resources, we have not developed our own methods… we need concrete data, concrete standards, and concrete categories in order to be able to know what the underlying fundamentals are with respect to the exploitation of the Arco Minero" (Interview, ALBA TV, 20.06.201).[25]

These aspects of information control, and the various ways in which these forms of control manifest in the obscured litany of "state secrets", are some of the central characteristics of the modern bureaucratic capitalist state. This is not to suggest that all such information is forever hidden from view, for some portions of information

[25] A problem clearly acknowledged in the last CSM statement, imploring the organisation to "ensure transparency in their dynamics" (ALBA-TCP, 2013).

and statistics will become part of the strategic selectivity of the state (Poulantzas, 2014: 32); thus, the Venezuelan state will frequently speak of its various successes in the realm of poverty reduction, improved levels of equality, health care and so on (see Frajman, 2014). Yet as soon as these fragments of information touch upon areas sensitive to the reproduction of the state's accumulation regime, then the underlying divide between intellectual and manual labour (i.e., in maintaining a critical distance between the dominated classes and various modes of knowledge which may empower them beyond a desired point) becomes further entrenched. Thus: "that structural mode of functioning of the state administration, bureaucratic secrecy… perfectly embodies the distance between leaders and led, as well as the hermetic insulation of power from democratic control" (Poulantzas, 2014: 226). In turn, such an accumulation regime comes into direct conflict and contradiction with the wider hegemonic project of *Bolivarianismo*, in terms of fostering broader popular participation in the overall reproduction of the social formation itself.

The above considerations on the place and function of social movements within ALBA therefore touches heavily upon the wider socio-economic strategies pursued by those states formally committed to socialism in the 21st century. We will therefore examine in more detail the specifically economic-developmentalist side of the ALBA space in order to delineate the precise contours of power and organisation that significantly shape the wider project of food sovereignty.

4.2.2 ALBA's 'Grandnational Concept' and 'Grandnational Enterprises'

While the first official invocation of Grandnational Projects (GNPs) and Grandnational Enterprises (GNEs) was outlined during the 5th ALBA-TCP Summit in 2007, it was in the subsequent year during the 6th Summit of the ALBA-TCP, held in Caracas, Venezuela, that a new productivist paradigm was declared, under the label of 'Conceptualization of Grandnational Projects and Enterprises in the Framework of ALBA' (ALBA-TCP, 2008c). In many ways, the significance of this summit, in particular the section declaring the creation of the Grandnational Enterprises (GNEs), emerges from the concerted effort to move towards a concrete form of cooperation that mobilises the material wealth of the region (in ecological, technological and human terms) towards the real satisfaction of human need, and thus finally bringing to life the early philosophical content of the first ALBA summit of 2004, in which:

"Trade and investment cannot be conceived as ends in themselves, but instruments to reach a just and sustainable development" (ALBA, 2004). As the statement noted:

> "[t]he Grandnational concept can be assimilated to that of a Mega-State, under the joint declaration of broad and common political lines of action between the States that share the same vision of exercising the National and Regional Sovereignty, through developing and showing each of them their own social and political identity, without this involving – at the moment – the construction of supranational structures" (ALBA-TCP, 2008c).

The strategic rationale for constructing the ALBA space, which in fact largely echoes the common theme found throughout the history of modern regionalism, comes down to the goal of "overcoming national barriers to strengthening local capacities by merging them into a whole and to be able to face the challenges of the world reality… dominated by the big industrialized powers and the hegemonic, economic [regional] blocs" (ALBA-TCP, 2008c).

Thus, the rationale of GNEs resides in their specifically productivist function, and as the materialisation of ALBA's inter- and trans-national framework for the production of goods directly towards the satisfaction of the popular masses. In a sense (and as we shall see further below), the structural formation of trans-territorial production, distribution and consumption takes its cue from the prevailing standard of transnational production among multi- or trans-national corporations, but from the angle of Keynesian state management. Put simply, it is a call for the centrality of the state in the process of transnational production ensembles, even if these ensembles contain various private enterprises operating at any place in the Grandnational chain. From within this organisational rationale, four operational values are listed as part of the Grandnational Enterprise concept:

1. Cooperative Advantage: Productive integration viz. complementarity, with a view to "making the most of the capacities of each country."
2. Map of Goods: Production oriented towards internal (intra-ALBA) consumption – that of material autonomy proper, with any remaining surpluses re-directed towards the world market.
3. Endogenous Development: GNEs "base their existence upon productive efficiency", not only as a logical consequence of the ALBA principles, but also "to be self-sustainable."

4. Repairing the Metabolic Rift: Production must entail not only the re-commensuration of nature and the community, but also redress the robbing of wealth and value from (respectively) the earth and labour. (ALBA-TCP, 2008c)

The above category titles are couched in terms not found within the 'Conceptualisation' statement; rather, they reflect the specific historical materialist approach pursued in this thesis. Nevertheless, these dimensions substantially express the fundamental vision underpinning the four values of GNEs within ALBA. To recap, then, we can see that these values touch upon four analytically distinct yet internally related aspects associated with the political economy of ALBA: (1) Cooperative Advantage, (2) Map of Goods, (3) Endogenous Development, and (4) Repairing the Metabolic Rift. The first two points, relating primarily to the moment of *circulation*, will be addressed together, while the latter two pertaining to *production* will be dealt with separately thereafter.

Cooperative Advantage and the New Map of Goods

As has been widely understood among ALBA studies, the dynamic of cooperative advantage structures the commercial relations between member states (Muhr, 2010a; Costoya, 2011; Broadhead and Morrison, 2012; Pearce, 2013; Gürcan and Bakiner, 2015). This concept stands in contrast to the prevailing ideas of classical political economy (comparative advantage), in which free trade among nations will lead to an idealised equilibrium in the balance of trade between all participants. Yet the reality of international trade, as clearly recognised by the ALBA institution, reveals the operation of *competitive* advantage in which the uneven development of capitalism tends to form geographically concentrated clusters of capital and technical leads, which tend towards the re-production of trade imbalances (Shaikh, 2007). Thus, ALBA's philosophy in terms of international trade focuses less on the accumulation of capital for its own sake, and towards the enhancement of the socio-economic wellbeing of the ALBA states (and peoples).

It was during the 2009 Cuba-Venezuela Mixed Commission meeting that Chávez laid out his metaphorical vision for the material transformation of ALBA, by proposing "the creation of the map of goods [*el mapa de las mercanías*] to advance toward new forms of production, complementarities and trade among nations" (cited

in Aponte-García, 2011: 182). As indicated above, it is through the materialization of the GNEs that this map takes on a concrete manifestation beyond the cartographic imagination. According to Maribel Aponte-García, ALBA's 'map of goods' is navigated via "sustainable value chains", which can be broadly understood through politically established regulatory structures, civil society involvement, local institutional factors, and societal values (Aponte-García, 2011: 186; see also FAO, 2014). This form of productive network is further explicated by Aponte-García in terms of "strategic regionalism", which can be conceived analogously to the central parameters of the 'new regionalism' paradigm – including the advancement of extra-economic goals (political harmony, cultural exchange, regional social policy) and the participation of a variety of social actors (Aponte-García, 2011: 186). Through such characteristics (sustainable value chains / strategic regionalism) Aponte-García claims that the ALBA space is "inserted between capitalism and twenty-first century socialism", in terms of its "diversity and plurality of property forms" (ibid: 187, 188; see also ALBA-TCP, 2008c). Yet despite the range of property forms within any given Grandnational chain, it is the state itself that sits front and centre across both upstream and downstream components of economic organisation (see Figure 4).

With such qualitative features in place, we must enquire into the concrete data generated from the operation of GNEs within the ALBA space. Yet it is the quantitative side of the analytic coin that is most difficult to ascertain. Aponte-García has, however, by far gone the furthest among ALBA scholars in offering a first-cut approximation to the magnitudes of trade among ALBA states. By coding various figures from UN Comtrade data sets, Aponte-García has managed to construct a series of trade tables based around each GNE (e.g., energy, food, etc.), the contents of which refer to exports per country within the ALBA space (Aponte-García, 2011: 190).

Form a broad perspective her data show that intra-ALBA trade almost doubled from $5bn (2000-2004) to $9bn (2005-2009). Interestingly, the highest growth category from this trade was within the ALBA-Food Grandnational, rising from 12 to 32 percent of the total (ibid: 193). This Grandnational Enterprise formed the culmination of the prior agreement within the ALBA bloc to internalise the values of food sovereignty and security into their forms of agricultural cooperation and mutual development. In response to the world food crisis beginning in 2007 (see McMichael, 2009), ALBA's first official call for the development of food sovereignty and security policies encompassed the creation of the ALBA Food Security Fund, with an initial

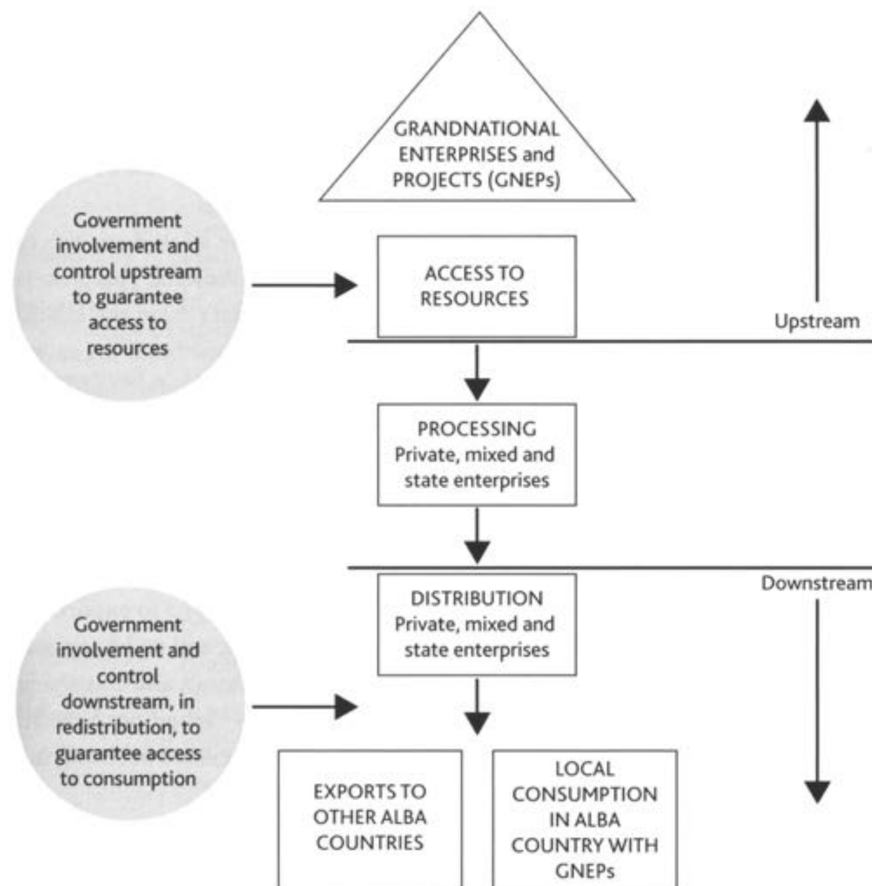

Figure 4: Model of grandnational enterprises and projects.
Source: Aponte-Garcia, 2011: 189.

capital injection of $100 million (ALBA-TCP, 2008a). The following year, the ALBA-Food Grandnational Enterprise was signed into agreement, endowed with $49 billion from the existing ALBA Food Security Fund, which laid out a series of objectives – including the sharing and exchange of technical/scientific innovation in agricultural production, identifying specific productive units for collaboration, and stipulation of key areas of production (rice, corn, beans, oil seeds, vegetables, fruits, meat, milk) – all of which were to take place through inter-governmental agreement and diplomatic negotiations in accord with each member state's national legislation (ALBA-TCP, 2009a, 2009b).

In seeking to gain a handle on the specific trade patterns of this Grandnational Enterprise, Aponte-García has disaggregated her data as seen in Table 4. However, this is merely an approximation of ALBA's map of goods, which of course contain various deficiencies: firstly, it is not clear from the UN Comtrade data whether or not it is in fact public or private entities that produce/export goods to ALBA members;

Table 4: *Intra-ALBA trade in food, by economic category to analyse regional production chain potentials. Sub-period 2005-2011, in US dollars at constant prices (2005=100)*

Member country of ALBA	**Consumption**	**Intermediate Processing**	**Primary**	**Total**
Antigua and Barbuda	16,786	494,647	57,266	568,698
Bolivia	37,240	1,192,735,298	13,507,433	1,206,279,971
Cuba	3,069,251	2,876,060	849,518	6,794,828
Dominica	272,784	1,245,315	15,865,299	17,383,398
Ecuador	3,396,363	1,048,117,340	127,189,030	1,178,702,733
Nicaragua	33,559	419,039,968	182,235,867	601,309,394
Saint Vincent/Grenadines	8,373	22,339,251	1,236,076	23,583,700
Venezuela	552,954	18,334,602	1,327,305	20,214,861
Total	*7,387,308*	*2,705,182,481*	*342,267,793*	*3,054,837,583*

Source: Aponte-García, 2014: 243-4.

secondly, as the author herself notes, "I am assuming [each numeric value] reflects what is locally produced, although this doesn't necessarily imply that consumption goods are being produced by local or public entities; for that matter, it could be MNCs [Multi-National Corporations] producing… export[s]",[26] and thus whether or not profits are retained within the host country. Despite these deficiencies, the table produced by Aponte-García for the Food-Grandnational is revealing. As we can see from the table above, the author has broken down the component parts of each state's export category: primary production, intermediate processing, and consumption. From these figures, we can see that the intermediate processing component of ALBA's production spaces are by far the most significant, comprising around 89% of the total value. In the process of capturing more value within the overall production sequence, the intermediate phase tends to contribute towards constructing regional productive capacity and employment growth (Aponte-García, 2014: 243). At least from the perspective of Venezuela, the epicentre of the ALBA space, it is clear that the country sits just below the median line in the ranking of ALBA's total export value column. More important, however, is the changing dynamics of Venezuelan agriculture and the impacts they have on the evolution of ALBA's space of flows.

As Table 4 shows, the three weightiest countries in the table are Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, all of which are among Venezuela's top ten import partners. Taken together, the value of all Venezuelan imports of agricultural products from Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua comes to roughly $665 million, which dwarfs the total

[26] Aponte-García, Personal communication with author, 18 August 2015.

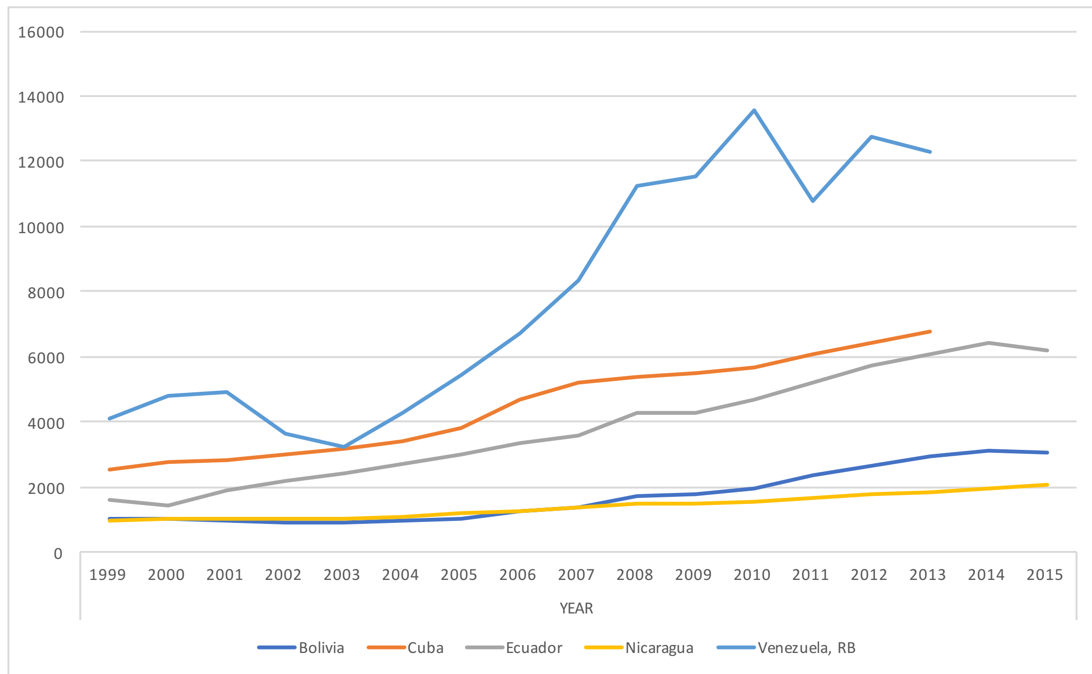

Figure 5: GDP at market prices (current US$).

Source: World Bank

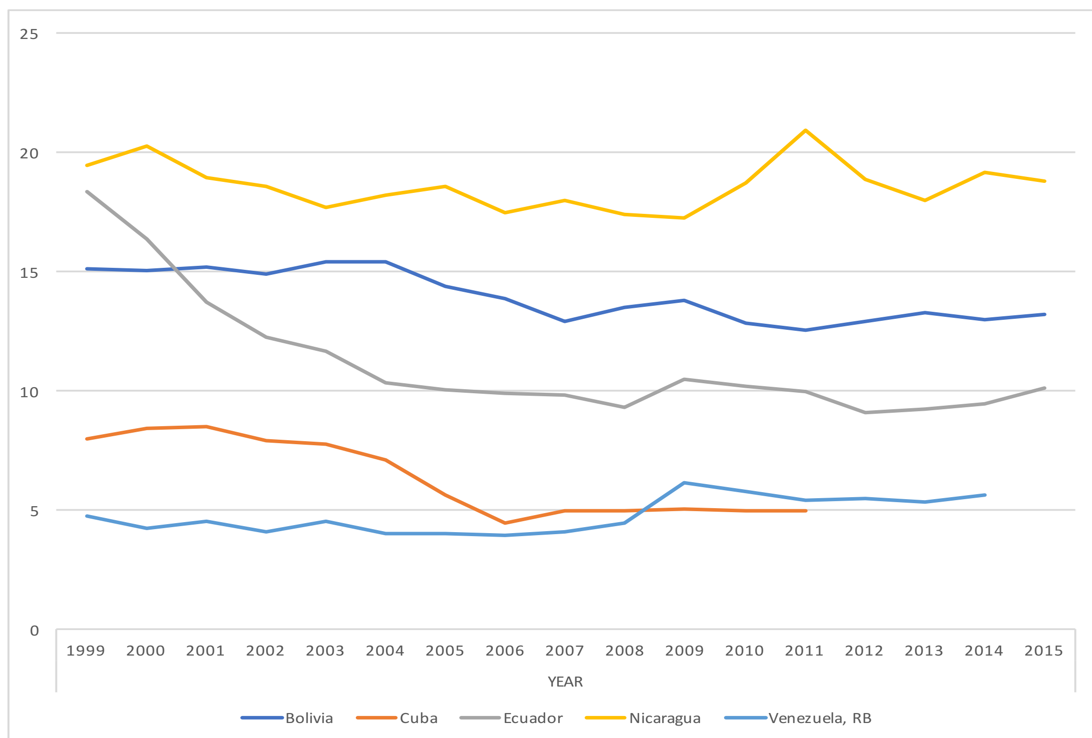

Figure 6: Agriculture, value added (% of GDP).

Source: World Bank

value of Venezuelan agricultural exports to ALBA ($20.2 million).[27] Again, it is assumed, by virtue of the ALBA principles, that intra-ALBA exports between members are complementary, roughly corresponding to goods that are relatively scarce and therefore sought from outside partners. Nevertheless, despite the positive growth in intra-ALBA trade, there remains a huge level of uneven development between ALBA states, with Venezuela continuing to hold a marked imbalance between agricultural imports and exports. We can appreciate the nature of ALBA's uneven landscape by comparing Figures 5 and 6, showing comparative figures of GDP among several ALBA states, and the ratio of agricultural value added to total GDP. As we can see, Venezuelan GDP clearly outstrips the other four ALBA states, yet its share of agriculture as a percentage of GDP is at the bottom end, comparable to Cuba. Furthermore, Venezuela's annual growth rate of food imports remains at a constant 11 percent from 2001-2011, while food exports contracted by 6.68 percent (2001-2006) and 36.53 percent (2006-2011). Added to this, it should be noted that, despite doubling its rate of imports from ALBA states, these ALBA-imports represent a mere 4.9 percent of Venezuela's total imports (2006-2009), while the US represents 28%, China 11%, Brazil 10%, Colombia 6% and Mexico 4.7% (Yaffe, 2011: 137).

While ALBA remains committed to enhancing the region's independence from mineral extraction and constructing a more balanced socio-economic structure, the short- to medium-term remains locked within the older patterns of oil-rent circulation (either through direct trade in petroleum, or through the channelling of ground-rent in the form of hard currency transactions). As Chávez stated in 2012, "[w]e should increase oil production from 3 to 3.5 million barrels a day, and by 2014 we should be at 4 million barrels. This is going to allow us greater flexibility in all of these [ALBA related] projects" (Chávez, cited in Boothroyd, 2012; cf. Dabène, 2009: 210).[28] When oil was at $70 a barrel, Chávez offered his Caribbean allies a principal payment of 50% of the total price, with the rest to be paid off over 20 years at 1 percent interest; when the oil price reached over $100, he offered 40%, and promised to further lower the principal to 30% should the price of oil go over $200 (Dabène, 2009: 184, 240 fn. 29). What will happen now with the current price of oil at around $50? From one

[27] The following data for Venezuela is derived from the FAO Country Profile (2015), available at http://faostat3.fao.org/home/E

[28] It seems that Venezuelan production levels have fallen well short of Chávez's goal. As of 2014, current production levels stand at around 2.7 million b/pd (OPEC, 2015: 27).

angle, it is clear that the allure of Petrocaribe will be less pronounced for the smaller Caribbean states, whose previous price advantage via cheap Venezuelan oil is now almost matched by the current world market price. From another angle, the chief source of Venezuela's extraordinary wealth will produce an adverse impact on the capacity for ALBA operations, given Chávez's explicit link between oil revenue and "greater flexibility" for ALBA projects.

Of course, this need not mean that the ALBA project itself is unviable, but merely that "[t]his is not an easy task" (ALBA-TCP, 2008c). The priority will be to maintain strong links within the ALBA trade bloc, which will help to enhance complementarity and self-sufficiency for the region as a whole, in terms of establishing a region-wide space of endogenous development that progressively phases out the necessity of purchasing capital or consumer goods from extra-regional sources. And yet, it is equally clear that the very nature of ALBA's current map of goods (in terms of geographical distribution between imports/exports and commodity frontiers) must be radically transformed. Significant social transformation cannot come about purely through quantitative changes; i.e., through the 'balancing of trade'. Indeed, as we will see further below, trade as such is a somewhat peripheral aspect to the very political economy of the ALBA bloc, whether in the case of food or otherwise. For the ultimate goal is not so much self-sufficiency for the region *as an undifferentiated space*, but to foster various spaces and scales of agrarian production that are in essence self-sufficient and hence independent, even while inter-linked through a cascading structure of regional cooperation and solidarity. As such, tracking particular movements in trade can only give us the faintest glimmer as to the potentialities of strengthening the spaces of agrarian production throughout the ALBA region. And as we have already noted, precise data on the nature of intra-ALBA trade is extremely scarce, leaving open any number of questions regarding the precise entities involved in ALBA members' production, and whether productive entities are in fact linked in any way to Grandnational production chains. We must therefore confront the central premise and goal of the Grandnational Concept as one that is fundamentally bound up with the transformation of the Latin American regional society. And yet, this vision is not substantially explicated within the 2008 Declaration. Rather, it is within the development of the 'Economic Space of ALBA-TCP' (2012) that we begin to find the outlines of a specific socio-economic transformation that is capable (in theory) of moving beyond the quantitative aspects

of international trade, and towards the *qualitative* aspects of a new mode of social production.

Endogenous Development

The notion of 'endogenous development" (*desarrollo endógeno*) has become one of the cornerstones of Venezuela's Bolivarian development policy. It can be situated in a broader lineage of developmentalist thinking that emerged during the 20th century, under the conditions of US productivist hegemony. From the Cocoyoc Declaration (1974) issued by experts within the United Nations development units, to the various strands of thought concerning "alternative" development models, the post-war era was principally one of re-thinking the social, political and ecological impacts of Western development theory (Gudynas, 2013: 19-20; Rist, 2008: chs. 7-10). However, the more specific notion of "endogenous development", which later emerged from the same intellectual network within the UN, became oriented around:

> "the identification of potential human resources, divides responsibilities between self-reliance and international collaboration, seeks to grade regional projects and national objectives, and establishes permanent communication between a downward and an upward flow of information, representing not merely the transmission of orders and reactions to those orders but also a circuit of trust between governors and governed" (Perroux, 1983: 202).

While Venezuela's development model became oriented around these values from early on, principally embodied within the first 6-year plan (RBV, 2001), these ideas have subsequently come to encapsulate the underlying rationale for the overall development objectives of the ALBA bloc. It was noted during the 11th ALBA Summit in Caracas, Venezuela, in 2012, under the implementation of the 'Economic Space of the ALBA-TCP (ECOALBA-TCP)', that the realisation of the GNEs must be premised on the enhancement of productivity as a function of self-sustainability. This priority contains three strategic elements. Firstly, ALBA must insulate itself from the competitive pressures of the capitalist world market, via a "shared-development process under the perspective of a bloc and not as a mere aggregation of individual countries, which will also allow its international positioning" (Article 1.1, ECOALBA-TCP, 2012, emphasis added). Secondly, the development of productivity and economic diversification also pertains to the internal satisfaction of each state's development goals:

> "All countries can become industrial countries and diversify their production in order to achieve the integral growth of all sectors of their economies. Rejection of the 'export or die' premise and questioning of the development model based on export strongholds. The privilege of production and a national market that fosters satisfaction of the needs of the population through internal production factors, importing what is necessary and exporting surpluses in a complementary fashion" (Article 2.4, ECOALBA-TCP, 2012).

Finally, ALBA states will seek to augment this trend through consolidation of their technological frontiers, through the cooperative exchange of research, innovation and development:

> "The constant scientific-technical exchange, cooperation and collaboration as a form of development, taking into consideration the strengths of member countries in specific areas with a view to constitute a critical mass in the field of innovation, science and technology" (Article 2.3, ECOALBA-TCP, 2012).

Taken together, these two priorities represent (1) the external defence of the ALBA bloc, and (2+3) its internal consolidation – strategically speaking, the former will be strengthened and reinforced through the realisation of the latter. However, ascertaining the precise dynamics and data for point 3 poses particular difficulties. If we recall Aponte-García's data on intra-ALBA trade in the Food Grandnational (Table 4 above), it should be noted that the UN Comtrade category for 'capital' (i.e., exchange of technology/capital goods) is null for all countries listed in the table.[29] This lack of data for such a category therefore presents certain difficulties in assessing the impact of "productive complementarity and technological advancement" within the ALBA bloc (Aponte-García, 2014: 243). To better understand the material embodiment of endogenous development within the ALBA Grandnational Concept, it is first of all necessary to delineate the precise form in which this materialisation takes place.

As we have seen, the primary task of cooperative advantage and the strategic map of goods that emerges from it is to forge a type of "productive integration" between member countries (ALBA-TCP, 2008c). And while the political rationale of constructing region-wide GNEs centres on combatting the negative effects of (Western dominated) transnational capitalism, the very notion of productive integration takes its cue from the specific technological and organisational frontiers

[29] This explains why, in the reproduction of Aponte-García's table above, this category has been left out.

carved out by contemporary transnational firms. As Chávez himself noted with respect to the formation of the ALBA-Food GNE, "We are going to create a supranational company, like a transnational company, but in this case with the concept of a great nation, to produce food with the goal of guaranteeing food sovereignty to our people" (Chávez; cited in Suggett, 2009a). However, at this point we reach a relatively large ambiguity in exactly how the GNEs function and thus what organisational form they actually assume. As Califano (2013-14: 86) points out:

> "[p]art of the misunderstandings is directly caused by the ALBA-TCP official documents, or by constitutive treaties of enterprises which are not GNEs… such as the Venezuelan based socialist mixed enterprises – which even in official documents are sometimes considered Grand-National Enterprises."

Thus, when we turn our attention to those productive enterprises that fall officially under the ALBA mandate, there is a potential split within the overall GNE building processes as two relatively distinct entities emerge from a supposedly 'organic' process: on the one hand, the "*Empresa Mixta Socialista del ALBA*" (Mixed Socialist Enterprise of ALBA, EMSA), and on the other hand, a transnational GNE proper. Thus, EMSAs are characterised by the establishment of a single production centre (factory system), which may well forge its own links with surrounding upstream suppliers and downstream entities yet nevertheless inscribed within the national territory. As a bilateral investment, the ownership structure is legally prescribed by the majority ownership (51%) assumed by the host country, with the participating country holding the remainder (49%) (Solórzano Cavalieri, 2012: 146).

A GNE, on the other hand, is quite literally "a compound entity composed by more than one mixed enterprise. Thus, it is structurally bound to act regionally" (Califano, 2013-14: 88, emphasis in original). Given the relatively less complex nature of the EMSAs, it is little wonder that they are "much more developed… in terms of number of operating firms, of their longevity, financial resources, etc." (ibid: 87). To date, there is no such transnational GNE, which would imply the differentiation of productive tasks across borders under the aegis of a 'parent company'.[30] One of the few GNEs of the EMSA variety located outside Venezuela is in Bolivia. The bilateral

[30] To the best of my knowledge, the only GNE that is in *multilateral* (rather than bilateral) ownership is the Soy Processing Plant 'Eulalia Ramos' in Venezuela, established through an agreement between Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia (*El Universal*, 2007). The plant was intended to supply Venezuelan schools with flavoured soy milk.

agreement to establish a food Grandnational, signed into each state's respective national legislation in 2011, aims to invest in a number of agricultural goods, including soy, corn and rice, with the intention to forge industrial processing centres for their production (*América Economica*, 2011; *Gaceta Oficial 39.719*, 2011). By May 2013, the status of the productive entities was still in the diplomatic stage, with official pronouncements for the company's creation but little evidence of its materialisation; though the following October, it was announced that all necessary steps had been taken for the final realisation of the firm (*El Mundo*, 2013; *La Razón*, 2013). Nevertheless, it is unclear as to the current status of this EMSA.

Through a bilateral accord with Venezuela and Nicaragua, the ALBA Alimentos de Nicaragua GNE was formed in 2007 between the Venezuelan Food Corporation (CVAL) and the Nicaraguan-based ALBA Alimentos company. The accord stipulates a basic bilateral trade deal, whereby the ALBA company will supply Venezuela with a variety of food products, including beef, 'long-life' packaged milk, coffee and beans. In turn, Venezuela would supply its trade partner with plantain jam, dairy products, tuna and powdered cocoa (*El Universal*, 2011). Here again, precise data mapping the trade patterns and volumes within this agreement are hard to come by, particularly given the institutional and financial opacity surrounding the ALBANISA holding company (COHA, 2010).[31]

All other EMSAs charged with the production of foodstuffs are located in Venezuela, under the auspices of the Venezuelan Food Corporation (*La Corporación Venezolana de Alimentos*, CVAL), with a focus on the following products: rice, legumes, pork, chicken, fish, and dairy (*Gaceta Oficial 39.494*, 2010).[32] It is therefore apparent that, contrary to Chávez's aim to forge a truly "transnational" food company within ALBA, we find that the entire thrust of *Bolivarian* endogenous development is to *nationalise* developmental dynamics by satisfying the internal consumption needs

[31] However, according to a diplomatic cable from the US Embassy in Managua, trade between Venezuela and Nicaragua had grown considerably under the ALBA accord, from $2 million for all of 2006 to $102million for just the first ten months of 2009 (https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MANAGUA1164_a.html)

[32] These enterprises are (respectively): Empresa Mixta Socialista Arroz del ALBA; Empresa Mixta Socialista Leguminosas del ALBA; Empresa Mixta Socialista Porcinos del ALBA; Empresa Mixta Socialista Avícola del ALBA; Empresa Mixta Socialista Pesquera del ALBA; Empresa Mixta Socialista Lacteos del ALBA. There is also one other EMSA stipulated in the same *Gaceta Oficial*, oriented around the production of timber - Empresa Mixta Socialista Maderas del ALBA. The only other Venezuelan-based food EMSA not contained in this decree is the ALBA-Cacao company, which was signed into law a few months earlier (*Gaceta Oficial 39.410*, 2010).

of the country in question, rather than the systematic expansion of markets and territorial differentiation in production. There is, then, a certain tension with respect to the first element in of the 'Grandnational Concept' – *cooperative advantage* – in terms of how its content (referring to "productive integration") should be understood. From the above considerations, this term takes the form of 'fair trade' (*comercio justo*), rather than the progressive integration of productive activities across borders. In this way, the second element – *map of goods* – assumes its shape largely around the map of state territoriality, and thus amounts to a mere "aggregation of states", rather than an integrated "bloc". It is therefore the general logic of the third term – *endogenous development* – that shapes the first two, by subordinating capital to the needs of the community, and thus fixing capital more thoroughly to the territorial specificity of the community itself. And it is precisely this subordination of capital to society that opens up the last element of the 4-part conceptualisation of ALBA's Grandnational Concept.

Repairing the Metabolic Rift

The notion of 'metabolic rift' was a central aspect of Marx's thinking with respect to capital's revolutionary effects exacted on both the natural and human landscapes (Foster, 2000). Writing during the time of the second agricultural revolution, which witnessed the introduction of fertilizer industries and the application of soil science, Marx began to see how large scale industry and ecological cycles entered into a contradictory relationship. The transition to capitalist agriculture, which more and more becomes an appendage to the needs of industrial production (primarily in the production of cheap food for an urban labour force), steadily seeks to increase agricultural productivity by squeezing more and more fertility out of the land with scant regard to the relative limits set by the nitrogen cycle and other ecological barriers; thus, "all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility" (Marx, 1981: 638). Contemporary peasant movements seek to mend this rift in an effort to not only heal the relationship between society and nature, but also for the sake of consolidating a new concept of 'agrarian citizenship', which goes beyond the notion of mere political rights in the countryside, but of the general responsibility and obligations of citizens to mend society-nature relations and in doing so, forge new types of social relations (Wittman, 2009). Yet the notion of the metabolic rift was more than a mere critique of capital's destruction of the ecological basis of life, but also of the degenerative effects

on the human body. In addition to separating the labourers from their means of production (primarily the land), exacting a stark divide between town and country, and progressively robbing the soil of its natural foundation, the development of capitalist relations of production aggravates another rift between the worker and the products of her labour, and in turn degrading the integrity of the human body and mind (Marx, 1981: 638).

While the entire thrust of Western development has favoured the power of capital to 'develop' the capacities of labour, in reality it is labour's subservience to capital that continuously robs humanity of its creative, developmental powers. In this way, the *type* of endogenous development promoted by the ALBA space comes far closer to what Ben Selwyn calls a 'labour-centred development' (Selwyn, 2016a; 2016b). Consolidating this form of development can run through several stages (though by no means 'inevitable' in sequence): workers can extract concessions from capital even while remaining subordinate to it; they can similarly confront capital directly (as well as the political institutions from which it derives power) either by expelling the despotic power of capital from the shop floor (worker cooperatives) or by mounting a frontal assault on the capitalist state itself through extensive political mobilisations; finally, under propitious conditions, labour can take hold of the productive process, become more empowered within the strategic field of the state, and in doing so re-direct the idea of 'productive efficiency' towards a radically different notion – from the accumulation of capital to the development of individual capacities and general social satisfaction (see Selwyn, 2014: 192-205).

These two components of the metabolic rift (ecology and labour) speaks directly to this fourth aspect of the Grandnational Concept, with the aim of "executing environmentally sustainable projects, [and] promoting conditions for decent employment and equitable distribution of wealth" (ALBA-TCP, 2008c), a political goal that should be read alongside the further elaboration of the ECOALBA space, stating that, "the equitable distribution of wealth and the socialization of the means of production constitute two powerful tools to ensure social justice and the progress of our societies and economic systems" (ECOALBA-TCP, 2012). By focusing on this revolutionary goal in the context of Venezuela, we can begin to see some of the potentials and challenges with regard to this aspect of social transformation in ALBA. We will therefore deal with each of these axes (ecology and labour) in turn, despite the fact that they intimately connected.

On the ecology front, Venezuela's adoption of food sovereignty, as a specific plank in the national development plan, seeks to go beyond traditional forms of capitalist agriculture. In June 2008, two separate Extraordinary Laws were passed (Organic Law of Food Security and Sovereignty [RBV, 2008a]; Law of Integral Agricultural Health [RBV, 2008b]), each of which carries a different register in terms of society-nature relations. For the former, the role of 'food sovereignty' is explicitly conceived as:

> "the inalienable right of a nation to define and develop agrarian policies appropriate to its specific circumstances, starting from local and national production, respecting the conservation of productive and cultural biodiversity, as well as the capacity of prioritised self-sufficiency, guaranteeing the timely and sufficient access of food for the entire population" (Article 4, RBV, 2008a: 46).

This broad policy is to be enacted through "the transformation of the relations of exchange and distribution, from the co-management in planning with the participation of all actors involved in agrarian activity", as well as with "the identification and recognition of the social relations of production and consumption, within the concrete necessities and possibilities of every one of those actors of distinct agrarian chains" (ibid: 47). As a corollary, it is stated that in the effort to ensure "sustainable production", practices of "intensive monoculture", as well as excessive market dependence, were contrary to the present law (Article 10, ibid: 52-3). With the Law of Integral Agricultural Health, the legal text is equally emphatic, though this time with reference to the application of "agroecology" as a "scientific base of tropical and sustainable agriculture" (Article 49, RBV, 2008b: 42). And while the OLFSS makes various references to the presence and use of agro-chemicals in the process of agrarian production (Articles 79, 80, 81, RBV, 2008a: 91-2), the LIAH explicitly states the intention to "progressively prevent" (phase out) the use of such chemical and toxic agents, as well as prohibiting their furthered use, production or importation (Article 56.3, 57.12, RBV, 2008b: 45). Despite this stated goal, Venezuelan agrarian development has tended to favour traditional methods of production (particularly the use of agro-chemical inputs) at the expense of agro-ecological approaches (Schiavoni, 2015; Lavelle, 2016; Enríquez and Newman, 2015) (see Figure 7).

In terms of labour relations and enhanced decision making power for the direct producers, Venezuela has come to be known, perhaps more than any other ALBA state, as one of the region's principal examples of worker control and self-management

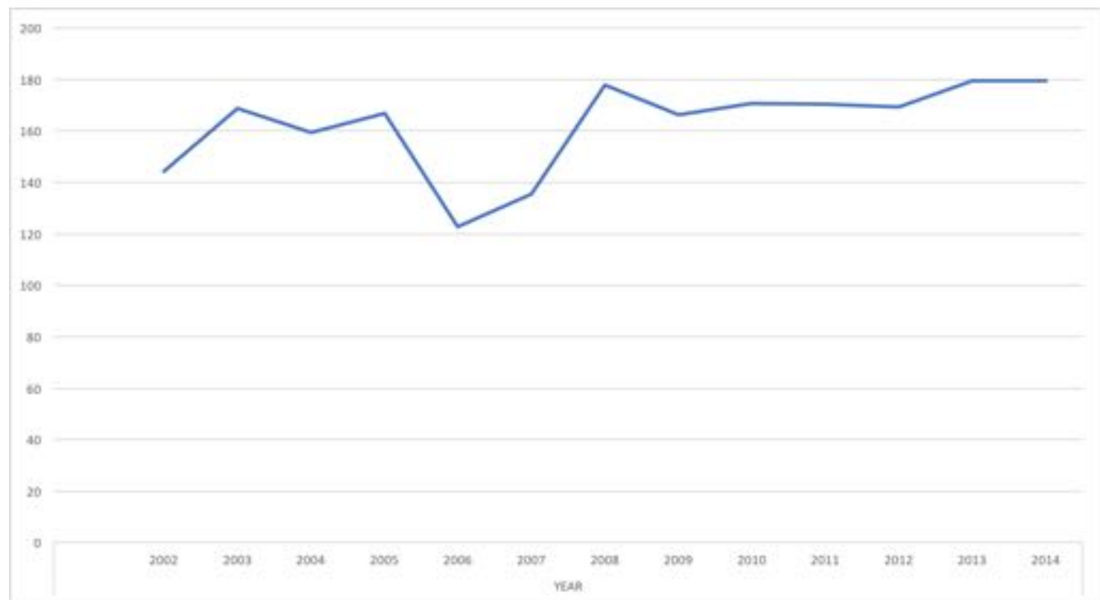

Figure 7: Kg/s of fertiliser consumed per hectare
Source: World Bank.

(*autogestión*). The call for the democratisation and socialisation of the means of production had already made their mark in two of Venezuela's 6-year plans, as well as the ECOALBA-TCP statement above (RBV, 2007; RBV, 2013). By the time of Chávez's inauguration, there were some 813 cooperatives in existence. With the creation of a special law for cooperative associations in 2001, in which the process of starting a cooperative was significantly streamlined (and the benefits derived from cooperative status were greatly enhanced), the number of registered cooperatives expanded rapidly. The national cooperative supervisory department (Sunacoop) registered around 262,904 cooperatives by the end of 2008 (Azzellini, 2009: 172). Thus, the flowering of a cooperative movement throughout Venezuela was thought to represent the underlying social values of the National Constitution (1999), stipulating the importance of human centred development, comprising self-management, co-management, and cooperatives forming the institutional expression of *Bolivarianismo* (Article 70, RBV, 1999). These institutional forms were envisioned as a means through which the "rights of workers, as well as the communities" can "develop associations of a social and participatory character", and where "these associations will be able to develop any type of economic activity, in conformity with the law" (Article 118, ibid).

However, the zeal with which the Bolivarian state sought to encourage the growth of cooperatives produced unintended consequences that severely undermined

the early success of their existence. As the governmental supervisory body, Sunacoop, later divulged after a closer examination of its data, it was found that only around 70,000 cooperatives were legally certified, of which 49.38% were engaged in services (tourism, cleaning, industrial maintenance, hairdressing, etc.); 25.3 productive cooperatives (agriculture, livestock farming, fishing, manufacturing, industry); 11.48 transport; 7.64 banks of *consejos comunales* (Azzellini, 2009: 173). The remainder were found to be "ghost cooperatives" – established in order to obtain favourable terms of credit and other lines of state support, or even in some cases existing only on paper in order to defraud the state (Rojas, 2006). In the agrarian sector, many cooperatives failed due to a lack of prior training, insufficient levels of knowledge exchange with more experienced peasant groups, while cooperative participants were often unaccustomed to arduous work, instead merely re-selling various means of production on the market in an attempt to move back to urban centres with cash in hand (Page, 2010; Lavelle, 2016; Purcell, 2016). Yet even when cooperatives were well organised internally, the relationship between them and the central state itself has been a strained one, with frequent complaints on behalf of individuals within their community councils concerning "length of proceedings, delays because of incomplete information, bad accessibility, unfulfilled promises, lack of coordination and competition between different institutions, insufficient support, and attempts at co-optation" (Azzellini, 2015: 145; cf. Enríquez and Newman, 2015).

The larger, mostly industrial scale 'Social Production Companies' have seen a number of successful cases of worker control, but elsewhere tend to reproduce the traditional hierarchal structure of power and decision making inside the capitalist firm, thus maintaining the divide between manual and intellectual labour, and hence the power of capital (even if state-owned) over labour (Kappeler, 2013; Larrabure, 2013). The still ongoing class divisions within the Bolivarian process thus highlights the divergent visions that often accompany a given Social Production Company, in which the working class tend towards more concerted strategies to maintain the integrity of the firms' operations for the sake of fulfilling the goals of a socialist mode of production (Azzellini, 2015: 150).

Arguably, the notion of the 'social economy', and the concrete class praxis involved with the formation of cooperative workplaces, has gone further in Venezuela than elsewhere. This again points towards the rationale for using Venezuela as a central case study and proxy for the development of the ALBA space, and the degree

to which spaces of production in Venezuela that have been established under the ALBA banner are in fact moving towards novel modes of social production.

4.3 Conclusion

The chapter has offered a historical and documentary analysis of the ALBA regionalisation project in order to preface our contextual understanding of the way in which food sovereignty is refracted through this regional space. However, the specificity of food sovereignty *as such* was not the central focus of the Chapter. Rather, as a study in the *politics* of food sovereignty, and how such a politicization expresses itself in a range of material/institutional settings, it was necessary to sketch the precise delineation of ALBA's relationship to various social forces (primarily through the Council of Social Movements), as well as the institutional embodiment of its politico-economic vision and policy (Grandnational Enterprises). In short, clarifying the parameters of ALBA's agrarian politics help to situate the nature and content of the subsequent chapters.

From the historical point of view, it is near impossible to sufficiently understand the antecedents of this regional space without further understanding the lineaments of state formation in Venezuela. There are three reasons for this: firstly, the material power of oil had left its mark on the process of Venezuelan state formation from the beginning, leading to the rise of a 'magical state' administered by the national landlord (though always in a contested relationship with foreign capital); second, the very birth of ALBA was indisputably a Venezuelan vision, though no doubt in conjunction with ideological convergences among political allies in the region (initially the Cuban state and the various Latin American social movements); thirdly, and as a consequence of these first two points, the materialisation of the ALBA space, particularly in the form of productive enterprises, are largely concentrated within the Venezuelan territory.

Casting a long shadow over the processes of Venezuelan state formation, the presence and production of oil has significantly shaped both the class structures and political discourses constitutive of this 'magical state'. The various social contradictions that have accompanied this process simultaneously formed the strategic rationale for Chávez's campaign for the presidency, and his subsequent vision for a new type of *Bolivarianismo*, rooted in the elevation of national independence and

popular sovereignty. Undoubtedly rooted in a confrontation against neoliberalism, and a re-emphasis on a fair and just form of economic development, Chávez's plan for national rejuvenation was hardly a radical break from previous ISI discourse and policy, as seen in the first major document produced during the run up to his candidacy, the Alternative Bolivarian Agenda (Chávez, 1996). This measured plan would therefore skilfully unite an electoral bloc composed of both the popular sectors yearning for change, and sections of Venezuelan capital eager to maintain, or gain, strategic access to the state apparatus. Yet the ways in which this apparatus was transformed during the first years of Chávez's presidency ultimately fractured this power bloc beyond breaking point. From the plebiscitary re-drafting of the new constitution in 1999 to the emergence of 'enabling laws' permitting the passage of various economic changes by presidential decree, an irreparable rift had emerged between Venezuela's traditional dominant classes and the mass of popular sectors that maintained strong support for *chavismo* (López-Maya and Lander, 2000; Brading, 2014).

The expansion of state power, particularly concentrated in the executive branch and the newly created institutions linked organically to it, thus reflects a peculiar type of what Poulantzas called 'authoritarian statism', though with a raft of new political spaces conducive to protagonistic democracy. These expanded functions of state practice characteristic of authoritarian statism tend towards the relative side-lining of other fractions of the state apparatus: "legitimacy embodied by parliament which had as its frame of reference a universal rationality is gradually passing over into a legitimacy characterized by the institutional rationality of efficiency and embodied by the Executive-administration" (Poulantzas, 2014: 218-9). This trend could be read early on when Chávez addressed the constituent assembly in 1999 with the words of Símon Bolívar: "Fortunate the citizen… who, under the protection of arms, calls on national sovereignty to exercise its unrestricted will" (Simón Bolívar; cited in Gott, 2005: 125). At the same time, however, the Bolivarian state appears to be directing its unrestricted will towards the deepening of radical democracy, and empowering the previously disenfranchised popular classes with novel forms of state-society relations in the making. Combining the strong state with the flowering of popular democracy therefore sets the scene for the slow but steady emergence of ALBA's underlying strategic and spatial selectivities.

Our examination of ALBA therefore focused on two specific dimensions: state-social movement relations, and the specific political economy of the ALBA bloc. On the first count, the creation of the Council of Social Movements (CSM) was a genuinely novel feature of regional building, in which social movement actors enjoyed a formal presence in the highest echelons of the institutional architecture. The slow pace of consolidation for the CSM was equally matched by the (strategically necessary) self-organisation of transnational social movements across Latin America, all of which recognised the staggered progress of their incorporation, yet never relinquishing their desire to forge a truly anti-neoliberal (and anti-capitalist) regional space. However, various examples in which ALBA states and their respective social forces were meant to work together tend to reveal a marked imbalance of power between the two. From bargaining leverage in international forums to the more localised examples of mining production in Venezuela, social movements find themselves in a contradictory position of deriving their agency and power from nationally constituted 'sovereign powers' – the simultaneous source and limit of social movements' transformative capacity.

Thus, as we have noted only in theoretical form (§2.2.2), the general conditions of ALBA's strategic and spatial selectivity find common root in the specific mode of region-building, of which the *raison d'être* is the reassertion of *raison d'État*. This reassertion of sovereign power contains an uneasy fusion of specific political rights and territorial practices – the expanded inclusivity and territorial decentralization of agency. Yet the balance between centralized and decentralized powers typical of post-liberal regimes remains compromised precisely because of the material foundation of its own accumulation regime, principally in the form of mining extraction. In a contradictory fashion, the democratization of social wealth thus requires a centralization of powers within the national executive, in order to cut-across other sub-national fractions of the state that may obstruct such distributional channels. From the regional perspective, this strategic and spatial terrain of post-liberal sovereignty therefore amounts to a mere aggregation of states, rather than a region wide "bloc", somewhat contrary to the stated aims of ALBA. Consequently, it is also for this reason that many of the social forces involved in the regional project of food sovereignty expend most of their energy in political organization and struggle within their own national territories, rather than at the level of a region-wide 'organised society' (Chapter 5).

The political economy of ALBA thus finds its institutional materiality confined in a similar manner. ALBA sought to consolidate this political economy through the instantiation of several conceptual markers, which, drawn from the 'Grandnational Concept' (2008c) through to the 'Economic Space of the ALBA-TCP' (2012), amounted to a region-wide 'social economy'. The four component parts of this concept were categorised as the following: cooperative trade, map of goods, endogenous development, repairing the metabolic rift. Broadly defined, the first two centred on aspects of circulation, with the latter two on production. Thus, cooperative trade and the new map of goods sought to identify not only the modality of exchange between ALAB states, but also a select number of products to which the new trade regime would be oriented. In the agricultural sector, these trade dynamics have recently come to light through Aponte-García's careful analysis, yet the qualitative nature of such data come with certain drawbacks. Thus, no real data set for intra-ALBA trade currently exists, making it difficult to distinguish between the types of industry involved in the flow of goods (whether from state, mixed, or private industry). The true measure of ALBA's political economy must therefore come from the materially grounded instantiations of its productive base, specifically in the form of the Mixed Socialist Enterprises that dominate the economic side of the 'Grandnational Concept'.

Despite the stated aim of forging a truly transnational form of cooperatively integrated production chains across the ALBA space, the absence of this form is the result of more than the mere difficulty of constructing such institutions. For the very logic of endogenous development effectively prioritises not only the satisfaction of the national market, but also the progressive accumulation of the means of production subordinated to national popular ends. This helps explain the conspicuous absence of "productive integration" and the "transnational production" that this would entail. Such an absence should not imply that there exists no cross-national cooperation in the field of economic development; the establishment of EMSAs are legally predicated on at least two national states cooperating in the formation of these firms, albeit the 'foreign' partner owning a minority stake. As a result of this legal architecture, the direct control (if not legal ownership) resides with the home state, subject to national legislation, and therefore subject to change only through diplomatic negotiation. In light of these two dimensions of exploration, these subsequent chapters will further analyse the concrete actors involved in Venezuela's consolidation of food sovereignty under the auspices of ALBA.

5 Territorial Struggles and Modes of Knowledge: New Political Technologies of Food Sovereignty in Venezuela

This chapter will examine the specific strategies, struggles and challenges facing Food Sovereignty (FS) protagonists in Venezuela in the context of ALBA principles and institutional arrangements. The analysis will develop through two main sections. Firstly, we will explore the more specifically Venezuelan dimensions of the struggle for food sovereignty via an engagement with various grassroots protagonists attempting to transform the political technology of agrarian life in Venezuela. As we saw in Chapter 2, political technologies encompass bundles of powers and practices that congeal into a specific regime of sovereignty. Peasant struggles within and across the strategic terrain of the Bolivarian state thus seek to re-organise the legal, territorial and political balance of forces and the institutional materiality of the Venezuelan state itself. Through the use of semi-structured interview data, we will be better able to fully capture the potentials and challenges faced by agrarian movements under the Fifth Republic.

Secondly, the chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the Latin American University Institute for Agroecology 'Paulo Freire' (IALA), located in the Venezuelan state of Barinas. IALA's formation represents a unique example of states and transnational social movements acting in collaboration, and under the principles of ALBA, to further the ideas, values and practices of a regional character, namely the "agroecological revolution" in Latin America (Altieri and Toledo, 2011). Through a critical analysis of interviews conducted with participants located within the IALA institution, as well as participant observation in the field, it will show how even formal alliances and points of ideological convergence between states and social movements may run into various obstacles and tensions. Such contradictions are, as we will see, merely the inescapable conditions for the deeper struggle to transform modes of knowledge and practices that are weaved into both territorial and social relations.

5.1 The Making of Popular Power in the Countryside: Class Violence and Political Organisation

Nerson Guerrero, one of the main national coordinators for the *Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora* (FNCEZ), describes this group as "a social movement, distinctly popular, [and] very autonomous" (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015), and has been maintaining its struggle for peasant rights for roughly 18 years. The origins of FNCEZ have their roots at the end of the 1980s, in the frontier region between Venezuela (Apure) and Colombia (Arauca). The key turning point came with the Massacre of Amparo in which 14 Venezuelan fishermen were killed by Venezuelan security forces on the maritime border with Colombia (Romero, 2016). From that time onwards, and with the collaboration of university student organisations, a new peasant movement began to slowly emerge from self-organised strategies and interventions against large landowners (particularly through land occupations) as well as marches and road blocks (Settembrino, 2012: 87). Later in 2004, two of the main groups that emerged from this cycle of popular resistance – *Frente Campesino Revolucionario Simón Bolívar* (FCRSB) and the *Frente Campesino Revolucionario Ezequiel Zamora* (FCREZ) – came together to form the FNCEZ (Longa and Wahren, 2009: 110).

Chávez' land reform law thus provided much needed validation to the previous wave of peasant struggle; with the law passed in 2001, the FCRSB and FCREZ had organised over 3,000 peasants to claim 60 rural settlements that were deemed 'unproductive' or 'idle' (McKay, 2011: 109). In broader terms, between 2003-2005 some 2.3 million hectares of state-owned land had been redistributed to 116,000 families, while the 2005 reform to the Organic Law of Lands and Agricultural Development pushed even further with the identification of privately owned lands to be expropriated that exceeded the average-size land-holding in the (sub-national) region, as long as its yield was 80% or less than its maximum potential (Wilpert, 2014). Originally the FNCEZ was in fact sceptical of Chávez, but when they better understood his background and political project, they eventually threw in their full support (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016).

Nerson was unsure of the exact number of members in the FNCEZ – "but we are a movement of masses, politically speaking". He estimated that the FNCEZ represents around 2,500 peasant families just in the neighbouring vicinity of Barinas

city (around 4-5 people per family),[33] with some 1000-1,200 dedicated militants engaged in permanent agitation and organisation. In terms of political organisation, the FNCEZ is but one part of a larger cluster of movements that come together under the umbrella group of the *Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora* (CRBZ), a revolutionary current comprising the Simón Bolívar National Communal Front, Simón Rodríguez Centre for Training and Social Study, the FNCEZ, and various popular worker movements (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). As Nerson explained to me, this diverse corpus of social forces is brought together into a participatory hierarchy of delegation:

> "Each of these currents puts forward delegates, each of which works together in conjunction with a specific state functionary (at the ministerial level), which is then composed as an Executive Commission whose purpose is collectively defined. The Executive Commission is always made up of 5 or 7 people, but always an odd number in order to avoid the problem of split voting deadlocks (I was told that at one point the Commission had 11 delegates, but that the process tended to work better with 7). At the base of this democratic hierarchy are the *Núcleos Zamoranos* – grassroots working groups that take up specific tasks within the overall process of popular politics (e.g., land reclamation projects, politico-ideological training workshops, educational spaces), each of which was headed by a *coordinador del núcleo* [group coordinator]." (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015)

Such group coordinators represent delegates from the first rung of this cascading political geography of popular power. At the lowest level is the parish, within which working groups are formed among residents. Among this group, a delegate team is then sent to the municipal level (composed of representatives from all parishes in the municipality), which then in turn moves up towards the regional level. Typically, these working groups will function through the (lower-level) communal councils and upwards towards the (higher-level) communes. According to one national coordinator of the CRBZ, their cadres are active in 260 communes out of the country's 1,500 total, and perhaps even up to 300 (including those that are not officially registered as communes) (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). The final level of this vertical territoriality consists in the recently formed Socialist Presidential Council of Peasants and Fishermen (*Consejo Presidencial Socialista de Campesinos y Pescadores*), creating a direct line between locally based delegates (*voceros*) and the executive

[33] However, it is generally understood that FNCEZ comprises about 15,000 peasant families nation-wide (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 202).

branch of the state in order to cooperatively plan the transition to food sovereignty. According to a representative of the *Coordinadora Agraria Nacional Ezequiel Zamora* (CANEZ), one of the two primary peasant organisations in the country along with the FNCEZ, these councils are integrated by municipality with 5 delegates from each – the state of Portuguesa alone contains 70 such delegates (Interview, CANEZ Apure, 27.06.2016).[34]

For Marelis Ramirez, one of the national coordinators for the CRBZ, there is a qualitative difference between community-level politics before and after Chávez's arrival: "Before the Law of the Communes, we simply had neighbourhood associations" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016), local corpuscular groups that were largely fragmented and unable to achieve significant political weight (Ellner, 1999). From Marelis' perspective, however, popular power is not formed through some mystical force emanating from Miraflores palace, but is crucially made through autonomous social forces, which often creates facts on the ground that subsequently become enshrined in law,[35] such as with the prior construction of the Socialist Communal City of Simón Bolívar, autonomously formed through the self-organisation of 38 communal councils and 5 communes. The formation of this communal city (*Ciudad Comunal Socialista Campesina Simón Bolívar*, CCSCSB) marks a significant example of what has come to be termed "insurgent planning", a set of grass-roots practices that subverts the traditional power structures constitutive of modernist planning techniques (Beard, 2003). This set of insurgent practices thus seeks to "disrupt the attempts of neoliberal governance to stabilize oppressive relationships through inclusion" (Miraftab, 2009: 41). As such, these bundles of agency tend towards an immanent critique and praxis from within the confines of the old society: "they are not about fighting for utopian future, but are precisely about bringing into being or spatialising what is already promised by the very principle upon which the political is constituted, i.e. equalitarian emancipation" (Swyngedouw, 2014: 129).

Through a series of 'encounters' between 39 communal councils (CCs) in the state of Apure, facilitated through the organisation of the FNCEZ and the *Frente*

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[34] It is reported that, nation-wide, there are 736 peasant delegates for this council, working across 5 Work Commissions (*El Universal*, 2014a)

[35] This in fact sharply dovetails with the sentiment carried in the original 2007 constitutional reform referendum, which refers to popular power as "not born of suffrage nor any election, but out of the condition of the human groups that are organized as the base of the population" (cited in Spanakos and Pantoulas, 2016: 8)

Nacional Campesino Símon Bolívar (FNCSB), the communal city was legally established in 2008, with the added formation of 7 communes comprising a middle layer between the CCs and the city level. As a self-organised collective of peasant families, workers, and peasant movements, the communal city helps to form cooperation and collaboration between its members in the areas of agricultural planning, knowledge exchange and the acquisition of means of production as well as legal advice (O'Brien, 2014). This collective had subsequently made a significant impact in shaping the legal content of the Law of the Communes: "this is what popular initiative looks like" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).

However, the FNCEZ remains a somewhat limited movement in terms of its overall size: "there are not enough people to permanently take care of or manage what we suggest as projects that would be sufficient for the construction of popular power, of the organization of the communities, and in strengthening the communes" (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015). As another FNCEZ coordinator intimated, while the size of its membership may be growing, it is doing so under conditions of class violence on behalf of the old *hacendados* and their allies in the security services (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016). As I was told, over 300 peasants have been killed over the past decade, 100 from the FNCEZ alone (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016). Yet it is difficult to ascertain the precise number of murdered peasants in the country; as others suggest, this is possibly due to the reluctance of the state to open up substantial lines of legal inquiry into extra-judicial killings, given that a portion of current personnel within the government have been tied to such crimes against peasant leaders over the past two decades (Lopéz-Sánchez and Rodríguez, 2014). Thus, it has perhaps within the judiciary where the most intense forms of struggle between the old dominant classes and the emergent Bolivarian power bloc have taken place, signalled by the fact that not one landowner has been charged with respect to these killings, not to mention the near continuous counter-rulings issued by the supreme court against the legal possession of land held by peasant communities and movements, as well as the violent eviction of peasant families from the land carried out by local fractions of the state apparatus (Ellis, 2011; *Correo del Orinoco*, 2014; PROVEA, 2016; Boothroyd Rojas, 2017b).

An added challenge to the making of popular power is the specific geography and topography structuring Venezuela's rural spaces: "[the Ministry of Communes] began creating many communal councils but in the urban neighbourhoods. But for us,

we had to begin in those communities that were the most remote, those who didn't have cars, and where there was no transport or even roads – effectively places that were very difficult to access" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). It was conceded that this was a serious ongoing challenge, and that in spite of all of the advances represented by such participatory spaces as the Simón Bolívar city, there was a great deal left to do in terms of sufficiently organising those rural spaces in which the only point of access was through horseback.[36]

Beyond these sporadic setbacks, the major structural weakness was clearly identified: "We are an organisation, a popular movement, that effectively has no resources. Neither the state nor NGOs provide us with resources" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). One anecdote related to me in this context was of the local initiative spearheaded by the CRBZ in a local town. Movement cadres came into contact with a small community that had access to a recovered *latifundio* ("a bundle of territories that were abandoned"), of which the community were willing to cede (at least part of it), in order to permit the CRBZ to continue their organisational work. Having completed the legalization process with the National Institute for Lands (*Instituto Nacional de Tierras*, INTi), the CRBZ moved one of their local schools into the infrastructural spaces of the old *latifundio*, in order to solve the long-standing problem of heavy rains that periodically halted teaching hours. As a consequence of this move, the CRBZ school now had the agricultural resources to better support its educational work, through the self-supply, and partial commercialisation, of produce grown on the productive land of the old *latifundio*: "This is how we generate resources for the costs of our organisation. So our weakness is that we have no hard resources, beyond what our own families produce. But in terms of organisation we are doing quite well" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).

As well as the barriers of geographical space, it was emphasised that peasant organisation is subject to problems of organisational momentum once certain major victories have been secured. Particularly with respect to the push for land reform and redistribution among the peasantry, movement activists encountered some resistance on the part of their social base in terms of pushing forward the broader struggle for agrarian citizenship and political power (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015). A type

[36] Even the problem of weather, such as torrential downpours during the rainy season, seriously hinders organisation drives, as when their initiative to register 5,000 new cadres was halted due to inaccessibility caused by flooding (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).

of cooling off might be expected after the arrival of such a far-reaching reform, yet once this stage of struggle had attained substantial results, various fissures began to appear across the Venezuelan peasantry. As O'Brien notes, subsequent to one of the first big FNCSB occupations in 2002 of a cattle ranch owned by the widow of former president Carlos Andrés Pérez, the INTi had issued a *carta agraria* (land titles recognised by the executive branch yet not necessarily cleared through the judicial system) to those who had taken the lands under occupation. However, once the land had been divided amongst peasant families, some had simply disengaged from the movement, partly due to their insistence on maintaining private property for family smallholdings, whereas a large number of active movement cadres sought to implement systems of collective ownership (O'Brien, 2014: 63).[37] At a broader level, other social movement actors noted the relative dominance of this type of small-holding private property, which "has barely scratched the surface" in the struggle for a socialist mode of agrarian life (Interview, CANEZ Apure, 27.06.2016). Representatives from CANEZ thus maintained that their "fundamental objective" had always been the formation of "new relations of production, which should be based on social property in production". In their view, however, this lack of progress was largely the fault of institutional inertia, and particular policies that were never intended to forge this type of agrarian order (Interview, CANEZ Apure, 27.06.2016). These types of class differentiation within seemingly united peasant movements are therefore of great consequence for their political organisation, a fact not sufficiently acknowledged by FS scholars (however, see Bernstein, 2014; Henderson, 2016).

For the FNCEZ, however, the occupation of rural space, in the guise of land reform, was only the first step:

> After the struggle for land came the roads, health, education, schools and so on… So we had to incorporate the communities, that the communities know how to mobilize, how to put themselves into action, and that generated a dynamic mobilization… So the peasant movement had to be a voice, and a vote, it had to have rights. We were maintaining that it had to occupy spaces, spaces inside the institutions that permitted us to have representation… Before the revolution arrived, there was no participation, because everyone was hand-picked, it was an apolitical

[37] According to O'Brien's account, which is derived from participant interviews among members of the Símon Bolívar communal city, it is apparently this split that led to the formation of the FNCEZ (those advocating collective property), though this is something that I am unable to verify independently, either form my own interviews or from the few academic sources on the formation of this peasant movement.

> movement, it understood nothing about anything…. Yet, day after day, it became more participatory, though always very critical, and from there began a convening of popular movement power." (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015)

Even within this challenging context, Nerson was adamant that Venezuela "is one of the countries that is most organized amongst the peasants." This may, on reflection, represent a somewhat exaggerated claim, at least in terms of other, far weightier peasant movements in the region, for instance, those found in Brazil or Mexico (cf. Vergara-Camus, 2014). Yet Nerson's pride stemmed from a more qualitative perspective in terms of how various movements interact and, in turn, create wider networks of support and mutual solidarity. Such movement-building strategies crucially turn on the painstaking negotiation with political allies, who may well be differentiated on the basis of culture or class (property ownership), yet may also find common cause over certain basic principles – "in the struggle against the large tracts of privately owned land, in agricultural production, in the struggle against toxic inputs" (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015) – while also offering bases of solidarity and assistance to communities that seek further deepening of their political strategisation.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight some of the continuing divisions within the movement itself, often over questions of property relations. As Marelis pointed out, the question of property is loaded with broader cleavages along lines of gender:

> "Before the promulgation of the land law the landowners were looking for workers to put in charge of running the *haciendas*, so they would bring you and your wife and children to work on the land. Your wife cooked all the food for the workers of the *hacienda*, as well as cleaning and taking care of the children of the owners, the animals and the orchard, but this was all unpaid work. The only salary was with the husband. So we as an organisation are attending to this theme of gender inequality, to promote gender equality in all areas… We say that women can have the same responsibilities as men in the community. Inside the communes the majority of those we help are women, some of which don't even leave their houses. But these days women are often leading the campaigns and have participated in communal parliaments, they go to Caracas and participate in different conferences and meetings." (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016)

This expanding role of women in the countryside therefore finds articulation within the wider discourses on gender equality of the LVC that have emerged in recent years

(Desmarais, 2007: 161-80; Park et al., 2015). Yet when I sought to broach this topic with a male participant from the FNCEZ, I received a quite different response. For him, there was something not only secondary about women's struggles, but something that seemed relatively unproblematic from the perspective of the movement as a whole:

> "We have to understand something, and I would say this something is cultural. It is that all of a sudden you have feminist movements that have to have equality. Speaking directly for myself, I am a child of peasants; our culture is chauvinist but it is the woman that primarily promotes it. It is more in the home of my grandfather, that to enter the kitchen is synonymous with homosexuality… It is a cultural thing and it is the woman that should be here. Even in the case of my father, if he arrives late back home my mother will still serve him, making sure she eats her meal with him, but she does not do it by coercion. She does it because she feels good taking care of him or simply doing her role. A feminist says this is humiliating, that she should not be like this, that she should eat anyway, and if he is not home on time, well… It is something with which we have to deal with, but I don't think that this should be a foundational problem for a peasant family to function well. The peasant family is a loving family, but there are some cultural aspects that are not going to change overnight. If you go and say to a black woman in Guanarito that she has to talk firmly with her husband, it is you that will be running, not her! Of course, from the point of view of a socialist at some level and at some moment it is important, but for now I don't think that this is something that hinders the plan for the participation of the family." (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016)

Two points of discussion immediately emerge from the above considerations on gendered divisions of power within rural social forces. Firstly, the variegated role and importance of gender as a coordinate for political transformation will obviously depend a great deal upon how gendered divisions of power become refracted and substantiated in and through wider structures of social power, expressed through the inter-related dimensions of class (property) and state (law) (Bernstein, 2010: 117). Indeed, the very struggle alluded to above with respect to transforming the old pattern of hacienda workers and their patterns of familial reproduction speaks to the concerted focus that some female activists pin on the transformation of state policy and legislation as a means of redistributing the structure of social property relations. Secondly, and as we saw in Chapter 2, 'the state' does not simply begin and end with the official cluster of government institutions (ministries), nor with the simple promulgation of formal legal proclamations. Rather, the molecular structures that go into the making of everyday life, including those pertaining to gender relations, also

represents the material substratum of the idea of the state (cf. Fernandes, 2007). In other words, to the extent that radical social forces, as part of the "constituent state" (Azzellini, 2010), represent the more decentralised forms of socio-political power – now more embedded within and articulated with the Bolivarian state apparatus – the struggle to concretely materialise politico-legal forms into real social contexts will necessarily take place at the local, community or social movement level. In this way, both *de jure* and *de facto* agency become enmeshed through complex combinations of state institutions (formally committed to the empowerment of women),[38] and rural class structures organised around the male property owner (particularly during moments of state credit transfer, property titling, etc.). And as these co-constituted forms of agency become entrenched, there is the danger in which patriarchal attitudes within the peasant movement – concerning the 'proper' place of women within rural life – become inadvertently reproduced and consolidated. Thus, despite the fact that the preferred unit of production within peasant movements and agrarian reform programs is towards the 'family unit', without further radicalisation of this process in the form of equality of ownership and control of assets *within* the family, such units remain subject to specific strategic selectivities in which the male property owner becomes the family capitalist – monopolising possession and control of productive assets, including female labour (cf. Jacobs, 2015: 179). Transforming these established practices will be further conditional upon the production of more concrete data concerning land reform and patterns of property ownership pertaining to it; currently, there do not exist comprehensive data sets that disaggregate land reform beneficiaries according to patterns of land rights, nor to the ways in which such holdings are divided between genders (see Deere, 2017: 271). Peasant struggles throughout the strategic terrain of the state are therefore as much about gender as they are about class.

5.1.1 The Making of Food Sovereignty in Venezuela: Territory, Culture and Class

"Here very little is known about food sovereignty", said Marelis. "Yet Chávez left us this principle, enshrined within our constitution, that food sovereignty was to reside within the people, and that we understand this as the livelihood of those same people

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[38] The Bolivarian state has made a number of institutional innovations in this area, including the Ministry for Women and Gender Equality (*Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Mujer y la Igualidad de Género*) and the Women's Development Bank (*Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer*).

to guarantee food to the community" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). As she further told me, a great deal of her work within the CRBZ and peasant movement more widely is based upon convincing the population to rely more heavily on what they produce: "we have to produce what we eat, and eat what we produce."

Echoing the above, for Nerson, food sovereignty carries all the hallmarks associated with the philosophy of LVC, particularly its steadfast resistance to being dependent on external powers for the necessary inputs of agriculture – "transnationals and their technological packets" – and the concomitant capacity to choose what is sown, grown, consumed, all within the cultural specificity of the people occupying the territory (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). In this way, the common cry among FS protagonists against the power of transnationals was not seen as an end in itself: "I am an enemy of the transnationals, but we have to have an alternative as well" (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016). There are several examples of how new alternatives are becoming improvised and articulated into everyday practice. One of the projects carried out by the CRBZ is the establishment of countrywide exchanges between different spaces of production – principally articulated through encounters in the local commune – comprising a network of local produce markets, with each locality bringing to market those products in which it specialises (and from which other participating communities, which do not grow said products, will benefit). At its most basic, these exchanges work along a type of barter-exchange system. Money still changes hands – indeed, these markets provide valuable financing that make up a significant proportion of the operating funds for community councils, communes and other independent producers – yet does so in a manner set by personal interaction, rather than impersonal market forces (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016); thus resembling what van der Ploeg et al. (2012) dub "nested markets" – nested both in specific normative frameworks and inter-personal connections and exchange.

One prominent market of this type is organised every weekend in Caracas; yet all exchanged products are raw produce, without any type of processing. This, Marelis tells me, is a major gap in the scope of their work, while the expansion in general education and training in the processing of agricultural goods (albeit at the "artisanal" level) is greatly needed (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). In this respect, there was a certain recognition that operating at this scale of production was somewhat of a challenge in the face of environmental constraints, as with the El Niño phenomenon and the lack of rainfall (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). As she went on to

explain, a major gap in Venezuela's agricultural infrastructure is the lack of irrigation systems, which apparently cover only around 10% of the country's productive land (located across Portuguesa, Barinas, Guanare); the remaining 90% must rely on a combination of hoses, pipes, lakes and rivers, presenting an additional set of pressures on agro-ecological farming (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016). This debility represents an historic neglect of one of agriculture's key infrastructural inputs (irrigation), where in Venezuela such systems are around 40 years old with very little maintenance on behalf of the state, and hampering the potential level of output: "We were reduced from 7,000 kilos of rice per hectare to 3,000 because there was no water, at least in the case of my family" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).[39]

Related to these aspects of 'scaling up' agroecological practice was the more specific role that technology might play in the building of a food sovereignty regime. Though the use of 'technology' remains a contentious aspect of FS debates (Altieri, 2010) – not least because of the nebulous meaning associated with this term – FS protagonists expressed a qualified support for the ways in which technology should be both used and thought about:

> "We don't want to live in backwardness [*atraso*] where you cannot use a tractor, or any machine. Yet we cannot become human just through the production of capital, or mere money. The theme of sovereignty and technology has to proceed according to guaranteeing food for humanity, to be human, to live well, more than producing food through the use of combustibles. I think that the key is to produce together with technology and artisanal culture according to guaranteeing food in order to be human." (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015)

There is therefore a fine balance to be struck between the use of high technology – even in the form of conventional means of production (tractors) – and the maintenance of ecological balance. Again, the reference to "artisanal culture" represents a continual theme that cropped up among interviewees with respect to the processing part of agrarian production. However, this does not mean that the rural landscape should be populated with a thousand disconnected, relatively independent centres of artisanal production. As Marelis explained, one of the prime reasons for the establishment of the ALBA factories was for the direct purpose of linking various small-scale operations into a centred space of industrial level production (Interview, CRBZ

[39] This area of investment is one that has been clearly recognised by rural development agencies in Venezuela, which has led to the implementation of a four-year plan (marked 'Phase 1') for the radical rehabilitation of the nation's irrigation system (MAT/INDER, 2015).

Caracas, 26.04.2016). As she recalled, her family farm (oriented mainly around the production of rice) yields around 6 tons per hectare (ha) on a 10ha piece of land. Yet the processing of this crop is a laborious affair in the absence of machinery (6 family members threshing 6,000kgs of rice). Thus, unlike fruit and vegetables, specific 'strategic' crops, such as rice and sugar, require significant infrastructures for their production (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).

However, the wider struggle towards this type of endogenous development is as much political as it is technical. As she recalled, the state's acquisition of the Central Sugar Refinery 'Ezequiel Zamora' (Barinas) had failed to achieve its goal of substantially strengthening the productive chain – between direct producers in the field and factory processing – due to political corruption in the factory. As a consequence, failing enterprises such as this hold out the risk of turning such infrastructures back to the private sector as a last-ditch effort to raise production volumes (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016; cf. *El Universal*, 2014b; *El Mundo*, 2016).[40] Representatives from CANEZ specifically singled out the ALBA rice producing factories, which did not come through on their responsibilities to process the raw material that had been produced and ready to deliver from the surrounding fields. One of the surrounding fields directly owned by the ALBA-Arroz firm, Caño Seco, has been idle for some time, with abandoned tractors and other machinery. Such means of production, either in the form of land or machines, "do not belong to the peasants, nor to the 'point and circle'[41] that surrounds the ALBA factories, it's their property. They have personnel that are there only to cover their own weekly salaries" (Interview, CANEZ Apure, 27.06.2016).

The overriding perception is one of a raft of 'functionaries' (*funcionarios*) populated throughout the productive system and the state apparatus more broadly that tend to exhibit narrow self-calculation: "*De 15 y último*" (Interview, CANEZ Apure, 27.06.2016).[42] The strategic logic therefore rests upon the creation of a truly social

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[40] Yet very often, handing productive infrastructure to the 'more efficient' private sector does more harm to national production that perhaps assumed, given that some companies will *hoard* state-credits (at a *negative* real interest rate given the high rate of inflation) rather than invest them productively, as a means of waiting out for a better political climate with which they can finally invest their capital (Purcell, 2017: 309).

[41] This phrase refers to a specific political geography of the social economy, which we will see further in Chapter 6.

[42] Most salaried jobs in Venezuela are paid bi-monthly, on the 15th and last day of the month (15 y último). This common Venezuelan expression thus describes a worker that is motivated by the acquisition of a wage, and little else.

economy in which productive power (and hence the possibility to augment the collective intellect of the workforce) is vested in the hands of the direct producers beyond the strictures of wage-labour:

> "If one allows a company to transform from employing peasant wageworkers to protagonistic subjects, then the logic changes. If an animal dies here or there, I still get a wage, but if I am the one profiting directly from the company, then this profit depends on the welfare of the animal, and so I will put enthusiasm into my work – and this principle goes into the practice of popular government." (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015)

Hence, the process of popular participation is seen as a practical activity transecting each 'sector' and level of everyday life, from socio-economic production to political decision-making. Overcoming the economic alienation associated with the manual/intellectual labour divide typical of wage-work thus assumes a critical first step. Popular movements therefore see the direct benefit stemming for more substantive participation and power within the workplace, as well as the concomitant necessity to weave such spaces of popular power into a concrete institutionality that is not relegated to a subordinate position within the state apparatus.

Within other topics covered in the conversations on food sovereignty, a sharp distinction was made between discourses of 'endogenous development' and the idea of FS. As we saw in the previous chapter, the notion of endogenous development was a key driver in not only rebalancing the economy away from oil-dependence, but in establishing a host of economic linkages in which "skills and materials… [would] come from within the country or community being developed" (Wilpert, 2007: 80). In this way, the Bolivarian state outlined five key dimensions to the formation of an endogenous development model:

1. Based in existing capacities and necessities
2. Motivates community participation in the planning of the economy, via new forms of organization, such as cooperatives and social networks
3. Is organized from below towards above
4. Is based on the values of cooperation and solidarity

5. Uses appropriate technologies of the region without compromising the ecological equilibrium.[43]

Strikingly, this list shares a large number of similarities with the wider FS philosophy, particularly with regards to the role of popular, grass-roots participation as the driver of socio-economic development. Yet for one participant, there is a crucial dimension that is missing from this list:

> "[Endogenous development] involves merely the social but without taking into consideration true sovereignty. Rather, you are producing in order to give satisfaction to society, to improve quality of life, but without necessarily impinging on the struggle for sovereignty, which is already a territorial, cultural struggle – to safeguard nature, conservation of the planet and its environment, of human life itself, which implicates what sovereignty is as a concept, beyond that of endogenous development." (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015)

It was clear that a particular conceptualisation of sovereignty did not adequately emerge from the more common project of endogenous development or indeed 'food security'. Rather, while endogenous development is clearly one crucial component of the food sovereignty model, it requires supplementation with labour-centered development, with all of the social and spatial parameters that go with it (territorial autonomy and the multiplication of sovereignties). Part of this conceptual specificity can be parsed from the ways in which FS is framed as a "re-culturalisation of the countryside", which links with the reclaiming of rights to territory beyond the mere promulgation of abstract laws:

> "I cannot decree by law a product, and I cannot say that tomorrow you are a graduated producer, a producer that functions beyond what you already know… You need a culture of production. And that has been taken away from us, leaving very little behind, which have been taken up by the large producers and transnational companies." (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016)

The above considerations resonate sharply with many other studies showing the relative failure of productive units ('endogenous nuclei') that have been created from above, and without the necessary expanse of popular participation that would be required to help retrain other members of the community which lack the requisite skills and cultural acclamation (Page, 2010; Purcell, 2011). More broadly, these politico-

[43] This criteria set was derived from a presentation given by the Ministry for the Popular Economy in 2004 (Wilpert, 2007: 80).

economic dimensions are but one part of the much wider struggle for creating a new regime of rights, territory and sovereignty in Venezuela – one that is not universally premised on state-led endogenous development, but on a more diffuse proliferation of multiple sovereignties that are territorially embedded within ecological systems, modes of knowledge and production, and autonomous forms of political organisation based on both horizontal-outreach and vertical-territoriality. Because of these contours of power and agency, it is necessary to further examine the strategic relationship between the peasantry and the state.

5.1.2 In and Against the State: Continuing the Struggle for Food Sovereignty

Though the FNCEZ had become a fully active social force before the Fifth Republic, it was only with the arrival of Chávez that the group had been actively welcomed into the corridors of power, and to participate in the crafting of national legislation. As Nerson went on to explain, just 3 days before our interview, FNCEZ delegates had been in negotiations with high-level officials (Elías Jaua, Carlos Osorio and Iván Gil) in order to plan the way forward in the implementation of peasant-led food sovereignty through new sources of financing and government support. However, this relationship with the state was at the same time a precarious one, subject to all sorts of ambiguities stemming from the ways in which the state apparatus becomes prone to a type of "wax and wane" (*suba y baja*). The movement's relationship with Elías Jaua, for instance, fostered a continual flow of contact, meetings and communication, while the subsequent minister, Juan Carlos Loyo, maintained only sporadic contact with the group: "If they miss a meeting, or do not call one, then we must put pressure on them to step up" (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). Again, strategic lines of contact with state personnel are subject to the same pressures of inertia as those within peasant movements themselves: "we have not had contact at the level that there was before, because before it was motivated by the struggle for land. Now that land reclamation has fallen to an ebb [*reflujo*]… the dynamic is not the same" (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). The struggle now focuses more closely on the need to establish peasant holdings as sustainable units of production, with access to necessary inputs and price stability.

However, a more significant problem arose in terms of diversification: "you can go to the state looking for credits to grow rice and corn, but not for papaya,

xanthosoma [ocumo], yucca, roots and tubers, or passion fruit" (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016). Thus, the tendency for many Venezuelan state-led commercialisation networks was towards the concentration of "flagship products", such as corn (Enríquez and Newman, 2015: 614), which tends to tip the scales towards the 'food security' end of the food security/sovereignty balance. As one participant bemoaned, many of these practices end up replicating previously failed models of agrarian development, which heavily depend on state largesse and a consequent dominance of bureaucratic structures, often leading to time lags and inefficiencies in project execution: "the government comes with a wallet, but no plan… it's as if the bureaucracy is trampling on the institutions, it becomes a kind of personification that creates all these obstacles on our way towards achieving food sovereignty" (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). Reference to state bureaucracy and the associated confusion around state competencies speaks to the marked proliferation of new agencies tasked with the implementation of Venezuela's agrarian reform, most notably for credit and technical assistance and infrastructure (FONDAS, INDER, BAV, INTi, CIARA, *Misión Che Guevara*), agroecology (INIA, INSAI), and marketing (CVAL, MERCAL) (see McKay et al., 2014: 1182).[44] As both Enríquez and Newman (2015), and Page (2011) point out, this plethora of state institutions amounts to a potential redundancy permeating the state apparatus, with increased propensity for intra-agency conflict and confusion over the distribution of state competence (cf. Poulantzas, 2014: 155). More specifically, these types of institutional bottle-necks take a particularly heavy toll on agrarian production in the context of Venezuela's current economic crisis; very often, credit packages allocated by FONDAS incur a severe time-lag between approval and actual transfer, where the time in between has incurred a marked rise in factor prices due to inflation, which thus renders the original credit amount drastically short of current financial needs (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016).

At a more micro-foundational level, it was also noted that a further contradiction of the state apparatus emerged through a relatively fractured ensemble of political allies within it. In some respects, not only does the state display some of

[44] These institutions are, respectively: Development Fund for Socialist Agriculture, Rural Development Institute, Agricultural Bank of Venezuela, National Land Institute, Foundation for Training and Innovation for Rural Development, National Institute of Agricultural Research, National Institute of Integral Agricultural Health, Venezuelan Food Corporation, Food Markets (*Mercado de Alimentos*).

the trappings of old agrarian reform practices, but also in terms of the clientelistic relations that inhere between peasants and state personnel:

> "We also had problems under Chávez, well not necessarily with him, but with the people below him, because in this country people are accustomed to a certain way of being; for instance, being the minister of Agriculture and Lands somehow makes you the 'owner' of the peasants. So if you are irreverent, they categorize you as 'undisciplined', or 'counter-revolutionary'." (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016)

As Poulantzas noted, as a social category state personnel "is not a social group existing alongside or above classes: it has a class place and is therefore internally divided" (2014: 154). And while such personnel may be embedded within the formal appearance of a state-in-revolution, they nevertheless maintain a certain internalisation of latent hegemonic subjectivities and practices, subject to the always-present class struggle within the state apparatus itself, that predispose them towards the maintenance of old class alliances (ibid: 156):

> "There are people inside these institutions that have 30 or 40 years there, and continue to respond to the policies of the Fourth Republic, because they were never convinced of what Chávez said and were never in agreement with the socialist project or perhaps changed because they had other interests. So they thought: 'I'm better off with the large landowner who will continue giving to me, rather than a peasant who is going to produce only their 10 hectares and is going to be in a collective, and I'm not going to get my share, or I won't benefit because this socialist project is going to fail.'" (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016)

Practices of bureaucratic corruption, in the form of clientelistic class alliances, thus cropped up with some frequency during my conversations: "There's a very common saying here among the people: that if you are employed in the public sector and you leave without money, you're an idiot – that is to say, you have to rob in order to make your foundation [*para hacer pilas*]" (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016).

Despite these old bureaucratic ramparts, the executive branch continues to innovate new mechanisms of popular participation in the struggle for food sovereignty, most recently through the creation of Presidential Councils of Popular Power (*Consejos Presidenciales del Poder Popular*), comprising 12 different councils across a range of issues, including councils for women, youth, workers, indigenous, peasants and artists (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015; see also Ladera, 2014). First

announced in 2014, these councils were only passed into law a year later, though the lack of previous legal standing did not stop the congregation of movement spokespersons with officials at the presidential and vice-presidential level (*Gaceta Oficial Extraordinario 6.209*, 2015). However, such encounters between the popular sectors and the more concentrated centres of power within the state apparatus carry their own tensions: "Though we might have the structure of a council there may not be substantial participation, perhaps because there is some fear on behalf of the 'boss' [*jefe*] that power may be lost" (Interview, NG, 18.07.2015). There is, then, a continued struggle within the institutional spaces of the state apparatus – to "occupy spaces… inside the institutions that permitted us to have representation" (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015) – as well as within the more marginal spaces of the state's strategic terrain, a struggle that crucially informs the general approach to peasant mobilisation and tactical thought:

> "The relation with the state has, for a while, been a critical one. I have been very critical of the state, even though I defend it. I am one of those who says that if the fight is internal, we fight, we fight amongst ourselves; and when the fight is 'outside', we fight together, struggling against the other" (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016).

5.1.3 Transnationalising Agrarian Struggle: Venezuelan Peasants and the LVC

All participants spoke of the importance of international organisation, particularly with reference to the Latin American bloc (*La Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* – CLOC) within the wider LVC movement. However, one line of contention that arose was the issue of gender equality and the struggle of rural women to make their voice heard and rights respected within the wider transnational movement. As Marelis explained to me:

> "You know that we are women of the countryside, but the topic of feminism is very sensitive in the countryside… In the CLOC congress we had the Fifth Assembly of Women and when we came to the topic of feminism the Bolivians, or a section of the Bolivians, stopped everything and said, 'we're not going to participate in this topic tomorrow because it's about feminism, and we're not in agreement with this.' We spoke with our female comrades and said, 'look, we are forming our own feminism, it's not European feminism, it's ours, of women from the countryside.' I consider myself a feminist because I have the capacity to decide on my own, as a woman, to participate in

> politics, in economics, as well as the family." (Interview, CRBZ Caracas, 26.04.2016)

It is clear that the differentiation of power relations among genders – whether expressed in material, subjective or discursive forms – takes place at every moment within the scalar space of peasant struggle: from the global/transnational, right down to the local/household unit. While the push for consolidating women's participation and visibility within the transnational movement remains, lines of contentious perspectives continues to divide the movement throughout a multitude of scales, spaces, and sites of encounter. For the FNCEZ, there exists a broader ideological dissonance between themselves and the wider transnational movement:

> "Where other regions are talking of agrarian reform we are talking of agrarian revolution, that is to say transforming everything, not just modifying one article of one law but to make laws that permit the guaranteeing of what peasants actually suggest, promote and do… We continue and are going to continue contributing to the LVC and among our comrades in the CLOC on the themes of socialism, for at least within the CLOC its core principles already imply socialism. But for some that was a taboo, as it happened to us in Jakarta where the commission said that it went to the CLOC demanding that it cease talking about socialism. One of them said to us that, well, if they [the CLOC] try to veto this it is going to be difficult for them to stay inside the LVC. However, one must have a certain amount of common sense [*cordura*], as well as patience, in order to move forward. We do not intend that everyone says we are going to be socialist, but with facts and proposals we are going to grow, and this is assumed now in the ongoing project of the CLOC." (Interview, NG Barinas, 18.07.2015)

These comments display a sharply Gramscian tone, whereby the struggle for a socialist counter-hegemony is one that must be continually pursued in the interest of consolidating a united, corporate body of popular sectors into the principles of socialist transformation. The reference to 'common sense', therefore, is one that does not simply refer to an already formed constellation of ideas, but rather to the iterative process of movement building and of patiently negotiating with one's comrades in order to establish an organic process of persuasion (Gramsci 1971: 181-2). Other interviewees from FNCEZ were even more adamant about the potential tensions of transnational peasant struggle:

> "There are small disagreements, but we have also achieved small agreements as well… But I think that we have been lacking a certain aggressiveness. There is a component at the level of the CLOC and of LVC that is very detrimental even to the point where I would say it has

> been timid, such as the MST. Without wanting to underestimate them, there is a sense in which they are carrying the baton, but at the same time have subordinated the framework of internal reconstruction to their own internal growth and accommodating their internal logistics which is detrimental to the type of struggle that we have in the community. At the very least when they killed Berta [Cáceres][45] we could have been more forceful… But I think that we lack a regional leader; those leaders, like João Pedro Stedile has been dedicated more to other things. I don't want to be too critical of João… but one must do things more in common because the imperial powers are not going to be afraid of you if you are disunited – they are going to be afraid if you are more united… So our struggles in Latin America from the point of view of the organic peasantry is still very incipient" (Interview, FNCEZ Guanare, 10.06.2016).

Yet this assessment carries a somewhat contradictory content. The lamentation on the 'lack of a regional leader' sits somewhat uncomfortably with the broader understandings of a counter-hegemonic apparatus, which seeks to narrow the gap between a cadre of elite intellectuals and the popular masses by "construct[ing] an intellectual-moral bloc that renders politically possible a mass intellectual progress and not only a progress of small intellectual groups" (Gramsci 1971: 332-3; cf. Issa 2007). Of course, as a processual movement towards the formation of such a bloc, there will necessarily exist a temporary divide as trained intellectual cadres continually interact with the popular sectors in order to mould a new form of counter-hegemonic 'common sense'. Yet the politico-territorial implications of this (in the context of food sovereignty) suggest a more molecular and multiple form of leadership, starting from the local and national levels, rather than through the formation of a singular 'regional leader'. Through direct, local contact, the peasant revolutionary must form a "historic-humanistic conception, without which he [*sic*] remains a 'specialist' and does not become a 'leader' (specialist-politician)" (Gramsci; in Davidson 2005: 9). Only through the consolidation of these many instances of direct popular-pedagogical struggles can the formation of an 'organic peasantry' occur at the regional scale. The next section will therefore examine one of Venezuela's key sites of peasant internationalism, forged through the framework of the ALBA-TCP, and offering a nationally constituted hub for the Latin American region's agrarian population.

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[45] The murder of the Honduran environmental activist and indigenous political organiser, Berta Cáceres, has been a rallying cry for peasant movements within LVC and ALBA, in pointing towards the continued class violence in the Latin American countryside and the impunity afforded to those responsible by the state (*Correo del Orinico*, 2016a).

5.2 *Instituto Universitario Latinoamericano de Agroecología-Paulo Freire* (IALA): 'Encounters of Knowing' and the Pedagogy of Food Sovereignty

The Brazilian educational thinker and practitioner, Paulo Freire, has become one of the primary referents in the discussion of the connections between education and political liberation (Roberts, 2000; Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010). As he argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 2005), the foundational character of social struggle is the recuperation of humanism, and thus against the oppressive structures of dehumanization. A people's "vocation" of humanization is dialectically confirmed and justified by the operation of oppressive, exploitative and violent socio-political relations (Freire, 2005: 43-4). One of the key challenges for a pedagogy of the oppressed, therefore, is to formulate modes of thinking and knowledge that will be able to "critically recognise" the causes of oppression, which in turn recognise the mutual dehumanization experienced by both the oppressed and the oppressors (ibid: 47-8). Thus, the struggle of the oppressed carries within it not simply the liberation of this subaltern class, but of society as a whole.

These values, ideas and philosophy are clearly present within the educational policies and practices of *Bolivarianismo*, in both the Venezuelan and the wider ALBA context. The formation of the University Institute for Agroecology-Paulo Freire (*Instituto Universitario Latinoamericano de Agroecología-Paulo Freire*, IALA) represents a clear example of this philosophy in relation to the transformative struggle for food sovereignty. Though first conceived through encounters between social movements and the Venezuelan state, the creation of IALA was established through the radicalisation of Venezuela's higher education policies, primarily through the promulgation of a 5-year plan for the reformation of higher education, with the explicit aim of guaranteeing "the participation of society in the creation, transformation and socialization of knowledge, [and] to contribute to overcoming the division between manual and intellectual labour…" (MPPEU, 2008). IALA now boasts a network of institutes from across the Latin American region (and within both member and non-member states of ALBA), in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua and Colombia (Snipstal, 2015; McCune et al., 2016; Chohan, 2017). In line with Freire's liberation philosophy, this process of social transformation therefore seeks to overcome one of the primary axes of oppression within capitalist society – the division

between manual and intellectual labour – and in the process helping to form educated, confident and empowered individuals that are capable of forging new, multiple sovereignties beyond the confines of the centralised sovereign state.

5.2.1 The Origins of IALA and the Contested Process of Institutional Formation

The inception of IALA can be traced to a meeting among social movements and Hugo Chávez, convened in the Miraflores palace in 2004, in which social movement leaders pressed Chávez to break with transgenic seeds. As the dean of IALA, Miguel Angel Nuñez, explained to me: "At this point Chávez said to the movements, 'ok, I'm going to break with transgenics, but I want the creation of a school for the peasantry, for all peasants of Latin America'" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016). Later, at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005, João Pedro Stedile of the Brazilian MST spoke with Chávez in order to finalise the founding document of the IALA school. "It spoke of the need to create a school in Venezuela, in order to train producers in the area of agroecology, as well as to produce seeds… So he signed the document, which was really a document of stages, the first being the arrival of the brigade from the MST, which came in the same year [2006]" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016).

Thus, from the outset IALA was conceived through the framework of ALBA, despite the fact that the formation of the school has not been officially marked within any ALBA declarations. Rather, the fundamental diplomatic and geopolitical lines of cooperation underscoring the establishment of IALA run directly through the "transnational organised society" component of ALBA's multi-scalar structure (Muhr, 2012b). Thus, the principal guideline for IALA's existence refers to:

> "The Latin American and Caribbean integration for advancing towards the creation of the Great Fatherland [*Patria Grande*] signalled by our Liberator Simón Bolívar, upheld in the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) under the principles of solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, independence and equality among States, constitutes the new base upon which the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses and will endorse accords of cooperation with other countries, taking into account, the social movements as promoters of agroecology, defenders of the right to land, anti-imperialists and opponents of neoliberal globalization, of those Latin American and Caribbean nations with the aim of coordinating efforts for the formation of integral professionals in this area and to contribute to the integration of the Region" (Castellano et al, 2007: 105).

On the other hand, the institutional hierarchy in which IALA is embedded begins from the Venezuelan Ministry of Education (rather than the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands), and thus does not share a direct institutional connection within the ALBA-Food Grandnational (which is principally composed of the Council of Ministers of Agriculture) (ALBA-TCP, 2009b). In this way, the formation of IALA should be understood in the wider context of Chávez's push to expand university education (see Ivancheva, 2016). As I was informed, IALA's official inauguration in 2008 was facilitated by a Directive Committee, which managed operations for the first 4 years. From Miguel's recollection, the problems associated with the original Directive was its basic incompatibility with the wider politico-legal terrain:

> "They took on relational methods that, up to a certain point, collided with administrative norms, with the laws of budgeting, more precisely the Organic Law of Management of Public Budgeting. So when the financing came, the projects were not executed. We have payments to be made to employees, and for all of the projects that we do, but this has to be done in legal terms, and under legal norms. It has to be put under responsible administration, or through allocation of a technical coordinator for a given project… There was then a demand from the Political-Pedagogical Committee, who had been going back to the black board on a weekly basis to map out all the things they wanted and needed, which had to be fulfilled, and this was a big part of the problem." (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

What emerged from this initial period of IALA's existence was a number of administrative problems that ultimately clashed with the values and orientation of the student body and workforce. Pressures finally came to a head in 2011, when the school was taken under occupation by the student body and some of the workers – all of whom were organised within the Political-Pedagogical Coordination committee (students) and the General Coordination committee (representing all members of the IALA space). According to their collective statement:

> "The failure to recognize and the disrespect towards collective efforts at constructing IALA, the disqualification of popular/collective decision-making bodies… the unjust and excluding treatment of workers at the institute, and the bureaucratization of efforts are just a few of the factors that have been creating contradictions within our university" (cited in IALA, 2011).

As Miguel further explained, the final nail in the coffin of the old administration came with their summons to Caracas, to present to the ministry their budgets as a means to gauge the level of administrative spending and costs. With the arrival of Miguel and

his team came the implementation of a much tighter budgetary oversight process, which restored confidence to the Ministry of Education, and in turn granted an expanded budget for IALA over the years. The fundamental change in administrative direction enacted by Miguel and his team was through a more concerted focus on the socio-economic realities of the country, and in shaping the educational activities of the school around these realities: "Before, we had a slogan, 'Educate in order to produce.' But now we have, 'Produce in order to educate'" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016).

However, this change in governance structures, while adding a certain level of institutional efficiency, represents a relative tension between a state-led view of higher education and the more endogenous view produced from within IALA itself. And while Miguel did not view these tensions as a conflict between two models of administration, he noted that this was embedded within an ongoing process of negotiation with the ministerial level (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016). This underlying tension was expanded upon by one of the students in the following way:

> "Within the creation of its functioning organisational structure there has been a slight deterioration, in the sense that before there was a collective direction, or rather there was no sectarianism… This has made it very difficult to struggle against the same system of state education, and here they govern through a lot of norms and rules that are very different than before. When the institute was created the decisions were taken collectively by general assembly. Inside this space was a student council, organised by committees, which in turn had a core project [*proyecto núcleo*] of debate, a project of production. But this has changed towards integrated socio-productive projects. So IALA doesn't have a people that truly know the struggle, or what was the originality that was created… There was much more political clarity from the people of the first cut [*corte*], they were much more committed, there was more education, more willingness to work and they felt much more committed to IALA… So inside the policies of the state in terms of the transformation of universities has come a deforming of the reality of IALA… Because IALA is a space where we prepare for this battle, here the idea is to be able to materialise true emancipatory education, where true equality of democratic participation exists. But this has been slightly broken through a lack of political clarity and willingness on behalf of those inside the Direction of IALA." (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016)

This slow transformation of the institute has had a debilitating effect on subsequent generations of students, which according to the participant are less prepared politically and educationally to understand the true novelty of a radical pedagogical space and its

potential transformative impact. Thus, many current students have fallen into a passive acceptance of certain governance norms that ultimately undermine processes of social and organisational autonomy and independence (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). As a result, a significant number of current students are more narrowly focused, for example, private/social lives rather than with the practices and politics of agroecology: "here there is only a consciousness of words", rather than a commitment to action (Interview, JL IALA, 24.02.2016). Whether in the more calculated testimony of Miguel, or of the student's more decisive (and critical) comments above, clearly there is a yearning for more participatory (or at least, autonomously-driven) forms of educational practice.

5.2.2 Contours of Critical/Plural Pedagog(ies) and the Values of IALA

As some scholars have pointed out, the role and efficacy of 'values' has taken a central place in thinking through the prospects for building socialism in the 21st century (Harnecker Piñero, 2009; Lancaster and Sanyal, 2012; Sandbrook, 2014; Harnecker, 2015: 180-1). In the context of IALA's founding document, the emergence of key values similarly comes to the fore, which speaks of the need to "weave together" a form of "horizontal communication" into:

> "formative processes, where the relation of Other-I [*alteridad-yo*] should be recognised through the setting in practice of values, among which underline: responsible solidarity, co-participation, honesty, respect for one and the other; together with all of those, the principle of social justice, that is incorporated to an ethical reasoning and the exercise of criticism, subverting rationalisations and slanders [*imposturas*] of the manipulation in inter-personal relations" (Castellano et al., 2007: 23).

As Miguel further explained to me:

> "When we talk about these formative processes, we are talking about 'learning how to be', that has to do with eco-ethics. It has to establish values inside the realm of human relations, inside the relations of the collective, and relations with the universe; that is eco-ethics, that is what it is 'to be.'" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

This reference to 'eco-ethics' reflects wider concerns within notions of environmental and ecological justice, which stands in direct contrast to "[t]raditional ethical traits [that] focus on inter-human relationships and relations between humans and

supernatural phenomenon (spirits, gods)", which have consequently "led to anthropocentric and geocentric models of our world – models that do not sufficiently acknowledge the realities around us" (Kinne, 2002: 88). Such an 'ethical' approach to agriculture and nature is itself already an immanent step towards building an alternative set of knowledge and techniques that potentially breaks the contradictory relationship between technology *qua* commons and the privitisation of society's general intellect.

As Miguel further explained, this form of being is conceptualised around two forms of 'knowing': *conocer* and *saber*. In English, the first of these terms refers more to a type of encountering ('to get to know something'), while the second refers to the acquisition of knowledge ('to know about something'). Hence, in combination, this process of educational becoming facilitates encounters of knowing: "In this way, you can learn to know [*conocer*] as well as learn to know [*saber*], and here lies the truth of agroecology" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016). As another student informed me, this form of knowledge acquisition, embodied in the student curriculum, assumes its double-meaning in the following way:

> "One is the popular/liberatory organisation that is under the principles of Freire, Rodriguez and Martí, and so focusing on liberatory organisation, and the other half is on agroecology as a project of life, a mode of production with a distinct vision, that searches for roots and adapting to specific advances, rather than being in the service of technologies already given to you." (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016)

An early yet crucial example in this process of encounters of knowing was seen during the 1st Continental Encounter of Agroecology Trainers of LVC in the Americas, organised on the IALA campus in 2009 and established through a cooperative partnership between the LVC and the Venezuelan state. This 'dialogue of knowledge' (*diálogo de saberes*) – as it is more commonly known among LVC activists – facilitated a debate among the participants over issues of identity within the broader struggle for food sovereignty across the continent. As Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2014) note, this debate principally revolved around three relatively general categorisations of peasant life and the differences between them: 'peasants', 'indigenous' and 'rural proletarians'.

As we can see from Table 5, each identity (as demonstrated by the diverse identities among participants of the Continental Encounter) roughly corresponds to a specific differentiation in how individuals relate to units of organisation (community,

Table 5: *Peasant, indigenous and proletarian organizations, and agroecology*

Identity frame	Unit of organization	Transmission of knowledge	Emblematic struggles	Sources of affinity with agroecology
Indigenous	Community	Coded in cultural traditions	Defense of territory and construction of autonomy	Indigenous cosmovision and care for the Mother Earth
Peasant	Family	Experiential, farmer-to-farmer	Access to land, prices, subsidies, credit	Lower production costs, self-provisioning combined with marketing
Proletarian	Collective	Classrooms and technical assistance	Land occupations, strikes, transformation of the economic model	Socialist ideology, dispute with Capital

Source: Martinez-Torrez and Rosset (2014: 11).

family-unit, collective), forms of knowledge transmission, types of struggles and relationships with agroecological practice. In most of my encounters with students and professors at IALA, the most common themes encountered tended to revolve around the peasant and indigenous identities. Particularly with respect to the latter, it was explained to me that the key cluster of ideas that animated the IALA project was the formation of a counter-hegemonic knowledge that resists many of the characteristic aspects of 'modern' Western thought, away from Euro-centric and anthropocentric models and towards a "planetary" mode of thought and a "holistic struggle" concerning diverse cultures, territories and ecologies (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016). As another student explained, IALA's mode of identity formation does not necessarily draw a fine line between different epochs of thought within the history of Latin America, but rather combines the variegated insights between the 'cosmovisions' of early indigenous communities as well as the more 'modern' Latin American thinkers, such as José Martí, Paulo Freire, Che Guevara and Chávez himself:

> "This is the ideal one searches for when navigating the colonial register that has been prevailing for the past 500 years, since the 'discovery' of the Americas, yet we were not discovered here in our own territory. So the principal teachings one receives here in IALA is that there already were civilizations and they were made and constructed by their inhabitants. This is the basis upon which IALA promotes a kind of dialogue of knowledge… It is not a question of becoming a professor and going to society with an attitude of imposition, like a technical engineer that knows what to do, but it is a question of being together

> with the people of the community, in dialogue, and in communication without end so that they are the ones who end up being the protagonists that guide the resolution to the problem, and to the construction of their own programs and projects." (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016)

This sentiment clearly reflects the core outcome of the Continental Encounter held at IALA in 2009, in which various participants across the range of social identities had, after a vigorous and often contentious debate, agreed to a further Continental Encounter in Guatemala held in 2011 in order to further debate the differing visions over what "socialism" is suppoed to represent. In this way, the process of reciprocal communication between experts in agroecology and local communities fosters "consensus around emergences, and not merely a midpoint between binomials" (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2014: 14).

Despite these more nebular understandings of the institution's basic philosophical precepts, it was clear that the central mission of IALA is to embed itself firmly within the project of *Bolivarianismo* as such. According to Miguel, the central values of IALA are entirely synonymous, and should be understood in light of, the preambular section of the Bolivarian Constitution (1999),[46] as well as those pertaining to Articles 3[47] and 305[48]:

> "The project of IALA cannot be over and above, not somewhere below what is effectively conceived in the constitution… These dimensions have a substrate in those public documents outlining the revolutionary

[46] The relevant preambular section establishes the overall effort towards the making of:
"…a democratic, participatory and self-reliant, multi-ethnic and multicultural society in a just, federal and decentralized State that embodies the values of freedom, independence, peace, solidarity, the common good, the nation's territorial integrity, comity and the rule of law for this and future generations; guarantees the right to life, work, learning, education, social justice and equality, without discrimination or subordination of any kind; promotes peaceful cooperation among nations and furthers and strengthens Latin American integration in accordance with the principle of non-intervention and national self-determination of the people, the universal and indivisible guarantee of human rights, the democratization of international society, nuclear disarmament, ecological balance and environmental resources as the common and inalienable heritage of humanity" (RBV, 1999: 1).
[47] Article 3 states that: "Education and work are the fundamental processes for guaranteeing" the basic values of justice, peace and individual dignity (RBV, 1999: 1-2).
[48] Article 305 states that:
"The State shall promote sustainable agriculture as the strategic basis for overall rural development, and consequently shall guarantee the population a secure food supply, defined as the sufficient and stable availability of food within the national sphere and timely and uninterrupted access to the same for consumers. A secure food supply must be achieved by developing and prioritizing internal agricultural and livestock production, understood as production deriving from the activities of agriculture, livestock, fishing and aquiculture. Food production is in the national interest and is fundamental to the economic and social development of the Nation. To this end, the State shall promulgate such financial, commercial, technological transfer, land tenancy, infrastructure, manpower training and other measures as may be necessary to achieve strategic levels of self-sufficiency…" (RBV, 1999: 70).

> process that basically points towards the accelerated path in a new conception of public politics that has to do with food sovereignty...” (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

Here a potential tension arises in terms of how the institute perceives its role in fostering a ‘dialogue of knowledge’ between diverse visions of society and agriculture, and the more specific constitutional articles of the Bolivarian state. That said, it could be argued that the transposition between these to ‘binomials’ are more formal than real, insofar as the articles in question embody a sufficiently high level of generality that they could be easily interpreted within a vast array of different social identities and practices. Indeed, the constitutional laws to which IALA’s guidelines conform are not only of a general nature, but extend beyond the confines of the national constitution, including the associated understandings laid out in the General Guidelines of the Plan of Economic and Social Development (2007-2013), the Law of Science Technology and Innovation (specifically Articles 12 and 13), the Law of Lands and Agricultural Development (2001), *Misión Alma Mater* (2006), as well as those contained in the numerous declarations of the ALBA-TCP (see Castellano, 2007: 15). Nevertheless, for Miguel, at least one crucial distinction stood out in the differentiation of what IALA potentially represents:

> “…none of these laws touches upon the development of work, the wealth of work as such, which is what we have seen in IALA, and is why we are defining IALA as an agroecosystem… Here there is a convergence between two strands: popular liberatory education, and the formation of a liberatory agroecology. And from here emerges the PFN; as we call them, ‘projects of learning.’” (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

5.2.3 Learning as Territoriality: Pedagogy in the Community

One of the central pedagogical components of IALA’s curriculum is its practical activities, teaching and rural collaborations beyond the university campus. Around 30-40% of the students’ curriculum is taken up by productive activity inside the IALA encampment, while another 30% is conducted outside the campus with members of the surrounding community (the remainder is taken up by academic work). Community work is thus divided into two types of activity. Firstly, there is one day a week in which small group-teams go into the communities to visit local families in order to help them with their small lots (*patios productivos*), and orient them towards

new techniques and more efficient use of inputs. In contradistinction to other experiences these communities have had with other technical advisors, IALA's pedagogical relations with these spaces do not stop at the level of a pure supply function (where communities simply ask advisors for tools, seeds and other means of production) but facilitates the exchange of knowledge, practice and critical debate over the socio-political dimensions of agroecology, which ultimately leads (in theory) to the formation of more independent and confident peasant farmers that are capable of taking hold of their own problem-solving processes (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). In turn, these encounters help students to better understand their learning and knowledge about local ecological conditions and general peasant production. Secondly, students take a month out of their vacation time to live and work with a specific community (in any part of the country), as a means of putting this practice of knowledge exchange into a deeper and longer time-frame, with the possibility of further promoting and teaching the philosophy of agroecology among local users (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016).

Vignette I: Taking Pedagogical Practice into the Community

Photograph 1: Negotiating difficult terrain is part and parcel of agroecological pedagogy, and a principal indicator of the dedication exhibited by radical educators (Photos: Author, 18.02.2016).

The IALA bus dropped us off in the middle of the highway. A small team of five, we watched the bus drive away from what seemed like the middle of nowhere. In every direction, the horizon stretched into a seemingly endless expanse of green savannah. The only object of any note was an old oil pipeline, beginning at the edge of the highway and extending well into the sweltering plains. Before long, two members of the team had begun to mount the pipeline in an effort to use it as a makeshift footpath spanning some 400 meters… It soon dawned on me that this was our only access point into the community.

Having successfully negotiated our precarious entrance into the small family farm in which the class was to take place, we were greeted warmly by the entire family, spanning four generations. Already set up within the small patio space behind the house was a blackboard, work table and a circle of chairs. The participants that day were a mix of local residents, one from the Network of Free Associated Producers (Red de Productores Libres Asociados)*, a pair from the local communal council, and two small farmers from neighbouring plots. Our two teachers, a male and female IALA student, led the class, which revolved around the core components of agroecology as an inherently holistic praxis that encompasses 6 major dimensions (see Figure 8). The*

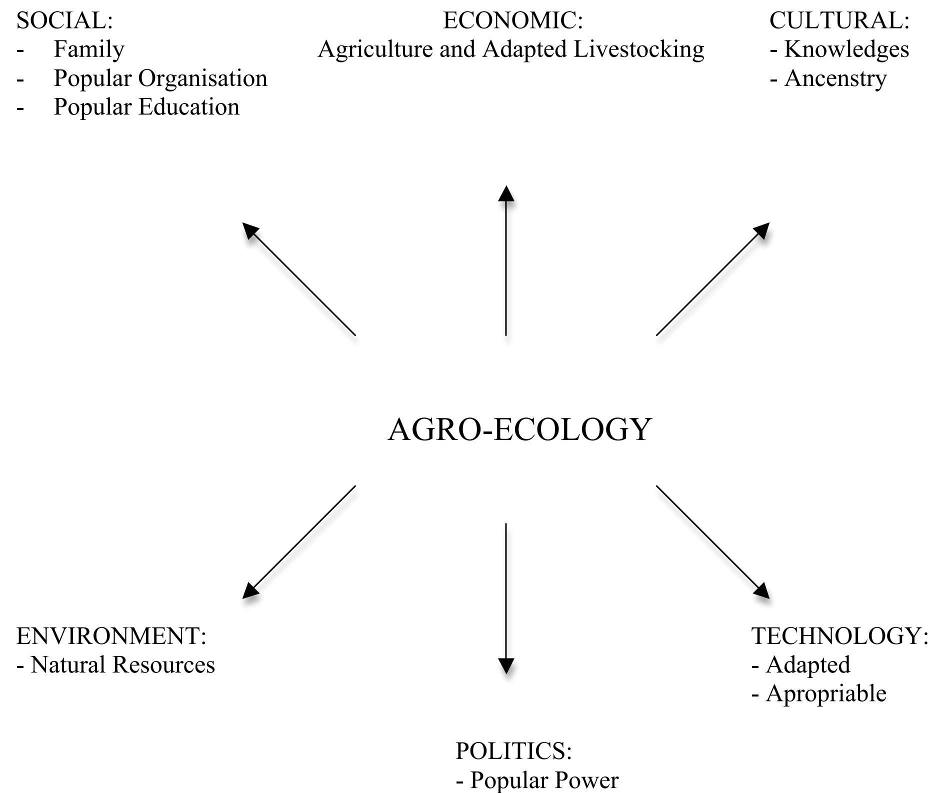

Figure 8: Agroecology as a Holistic Practice.

teachers emphasised the two-way process between 'formación y formador' *(training and trainer), in which the production of knowledge circulates from both sides of the teacher-pupil relation. For instance, when talking of how to decide between 'good' and 'bad' pesticides, we were told that one cannot answer the question in advance, but must emerge from the specific ecological circumstances and local knowledges that inform a particular strategic decision.*

At a broader level, our teachers underscored the importance of political practice as a crucial substrate of agro-ecological practice. From this perspective, it was said, 'politics' is more than just 'the state', but rather flows through a wider understanding of 'convivencia' *(living together), and the everyday social relations that form the basic structure of small scale agriculture within a given social setting. Participants also spoke with the teachers of their own concerns, understandings and desires – all of which was recorded on a mobile phone carried by one of the teachers. The participants spoke of a variety of issues and topics: from the relative dearth of technical advisers, access to seeds, difficulties in securing property rights, as well as*

the everyday challenges of forging and maintaining cooperative forms of socio-economic organisation – from collective production to distribution and marketing.

As part of the IALA philosophy of diálogo de saberes*, the IALA teachers did not offer themselves or their institution as the panacea to such problems, but merely reflected upon their implications with participants, exploring strategic possibilities with them, and finally offering IALA's space and teachings as potential sources of help to which the participants could always turn.*

* * *

My glimpse into the praxis of community outreach and critical pedagogy that embeds itself within the everyday settings of those who are most affected by 'academic' topics offered crucial insights into these "projects of learning." Disregarding the difficulty of the terrain and problems of geographic access, the IALA students approach their tasks with not only professionalism, but also love and dedication. Though this may seem a somewhat trivial observation, it can also offer key insights into how certain practices are able to penetrate 'non-representational' aspects of social relations, in expressing what speech cannot (Thrift, 2008). These emotional lines of force were reflected upon by the namesake of IALA, Paulo Freire, in the context of Che Guevara's relationship with the popular classes:

> "It was, then, in dialogue with the peasants that Guevara's revolutionary praxis became definitive. What Guevara did not say, perhaps due to humility, is that it was his own humility and capacity to love that made possible his communion with the people. And this indisputably dialogical communion became cooperation. Note that Guevara (who did not climb the Sierra Maestra with Fidel and his comrades as a frustrated youth in search of adventure) recognizes that his 'communion with the people ceased to be a mere theory, to become an integral part of [himself]'" (Freire, 2005: 170-1, quoting Guevara).

In this way, the contemporary practice of *diálogo de saberes* forms a key part of the revolutionary lineage from Guevara to Freire, and towards contemporary notions of *mística* (Issa, 2007), in which solidarity, commitment and, indeed, love form vital components to the formation of popular "communion" with the people, and through which the organic connection to popular sectors goes on to consolidate the revolutionary's thought and praxis (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). With respect to Table 5 above, this communally 'embedded' classroom setting seems to conform to

the "proletarian" identity relative to the mode of knowledge transmission. In this context, and in distinction to 'indigenous' and 'peasant' identities, IALA's pedagogical outreach contains the potential to infuse more collectivist settings among diverse participants in the service of building forms of self-sustainable peasant practices in conjunction with politico-ideological formation.

However, in somewhat more concrete terms (though certainly connected to the above considerations on practical commitment) other students noted the strategic necessity to radically expand such practices: "We need to start moving towards a form of production in the community that goes beyond one or two hectares, and we have not advanced very much in this respect with our community work, apart from our maestro professors" (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). It was thought that the scaling up of current practices could be better facilitated through the expansion of community work (beyond one day a week) as well as with the flow of people moving in the other direction – with local farmers visiting the IALA campus to get a first-hand glimpse of agroecology in action. This more expansive form of outreach would also be greatly aided through a closer collaboration with other government-led agricultural institutions that might help to cover more 'ground' (both literally and figuratively) (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). These processes thus highlight the formation of a rural political technology in which *learning* becomes its own form of *territoriality*. In other words, as Meek (2015) suggests, such pedagogical practices on the land amount to a place-based pedagogy tailored to the socio-ecological specificities of the actors involved, and in turn provides new directions in how individuals and groups interact with their lands and territories (cf. McCune, et al. 2016). Nevertheless, it is only through the successive multiplication of these spaces of radical agrarian praxis towards a national- (and regional-) popular scale that we can begin see the emergence of multiple sovereignties on a sufficiently consolidated basis. These considerations on the necessary scale of agroecology also crucially touch upon a key dimension of Venezuela's agrarian transformation and the potential contradictions it must overcome.

5.2.4 Can Agroecology Feed Venezuela? The Challenge of 'Scaling-Up'

The above considerations touch heavily upon the continued debate within scholarly circles as to whether small-scale agriculture can attain sufficient scale in order to feed

the world's population. While many within the FS literature champion the capacity of agroecology to meet this goal (e.g., Altieri and Nichols, 2008; Rosset, 2009 Altieri and Toledo, 2011; Martínez-Alier, 2011; McMichael, 2015; van der Ploeg, 2014), the debate is equally weighted among sceptics (of various degrees of rejectionism) that question whether low-input farming is capable of matching conventional yields (e.g., Dyer, 2004; Woodhouse, 2010; Purcell, 2013; Bernstein, 2014; Jansen, 2015). One of the main challenges in consolidating strong claims for the universalisation of agro-ecological practices comes in the form of eco-geographical differentiation – the inherent variety that obtains within different productive territories – as well as the variable quantities of labour power that is exacted upon a given space of production (cf. Jansen, 2015). Hence, ecological conditions and labour supply represent radically uneven factors of production when viewed across a large number of geographical cases. More importantly, however, the political technologies inherent within food sovereignty – which at its core revolves around the method of *agroecology* – seek to shift our understanding of *what productivity actually means*. As Weis notes, such an understanding would begin to calculate measurable costs with respect to "GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions, soil erosion, toxicity, unhealthy food, violence and humanity's overall footprint in the landscape and atmosphere" (2010: 334). Nevertheless, part of the challenge to fomenting this transformation in knowledge and ecological management hinges on the strength of agrarian social forces and their relative weight within the overall national economy (ibid: 335). Both of these points thus resonate strongly with the following insights gained from participants at the IALA institute.

On the question of whether or not agroecology could feed a country like Venezuela, with few producers in the countryside and a highly urbanised population,[49] Miguel offered a cautious response:

> "Look, to say to you that the small producer could feed this country would be very difficult… it would be rash to say this. But I can say that there are figures in other Latin American countries that have ecological diversity, for instance Ecuador and Brazil, where 70% of the foods in the basic consumption basket are produced by familial peasant agriculture" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

[49] Some 93% of the Venezuelan population live in urban centres (Lavelle, 2013: 140).

However, as I pointed out, the difference between Venezuela and other examples is the concerted lack of labour within the countryside, as well as the crippling disincentives towards agricultural production due to high inflation and a booming informal sector in urban areas. It was relayed to me that the obvious solution to this would be a return of the people to countryside in order to re-populate the productive spaces of the country. And yet, I mentioned that there has already been a government policy of exactly this name – '*Vuelta al Campo'* (Return to the Countryside) – which has produced sub-standard results and contradictory outcomes:

> "Ok, but what other option do you have? Of course the people have become very distant from the countryside, quite brutally so. But what is the other option? Depend on the transnationals and the corporations? To continue dragging out the same problems, or look for a way out of these problems with very concrete progressive policies? Remember there are a lot of figures showing that agroecology can feed the world… Yes it is difficult to bring people back to the countryside… But you have two realities. Which reality could be easier to live with? We stay in the urbanized zones, with the associated problem of water, illnesses, insecurity and delinquency – or do we return to the countryside? I think that ultimately there has been a carelessness of the revolutionary process, of not finding a process of integral formation for the Venezuelan countryside, and to give a political response that requires an understanding of what the reality is right now… But in the end, there is no other option." (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016)

Despite the hard line taken in this response, there is good reason to be sympathetic to the absolute need to re-populate the countryside, if not for the sake of relieving the demographic pressures that build up in Venezuela's largest urban areas, particularly Caracas. Yet, in line with Miguel's critique of "carelessness", other authors have noted, the relative failure of the *Vuelta al Campo* initiative due to the "catch-22" of implementing both necessary infrastructural transformation for the sake of agricultural productivity, as well as the social and cultural shifts required for this type of activity to take off on a large scale (Page, 2010; Kappeler, 2013). As one participant explained, this contradiction similarly reinforces the tendency towards promotion of conventional farming inputs (Interview, JL IALA, 24.02.2016; cf. Enríquez and Newman, 2015: 20). Hence, the strategic and spatial selectivity of the state remains trapped within circulation of oil rents that sustains urbanised life, as well as conventional technological packets oriented towards fragmented and scattered small-farmer groups.

It was equally apparent that some of the concerns among participants were the relative paucity in state-led transformation of small-scale farming practices.

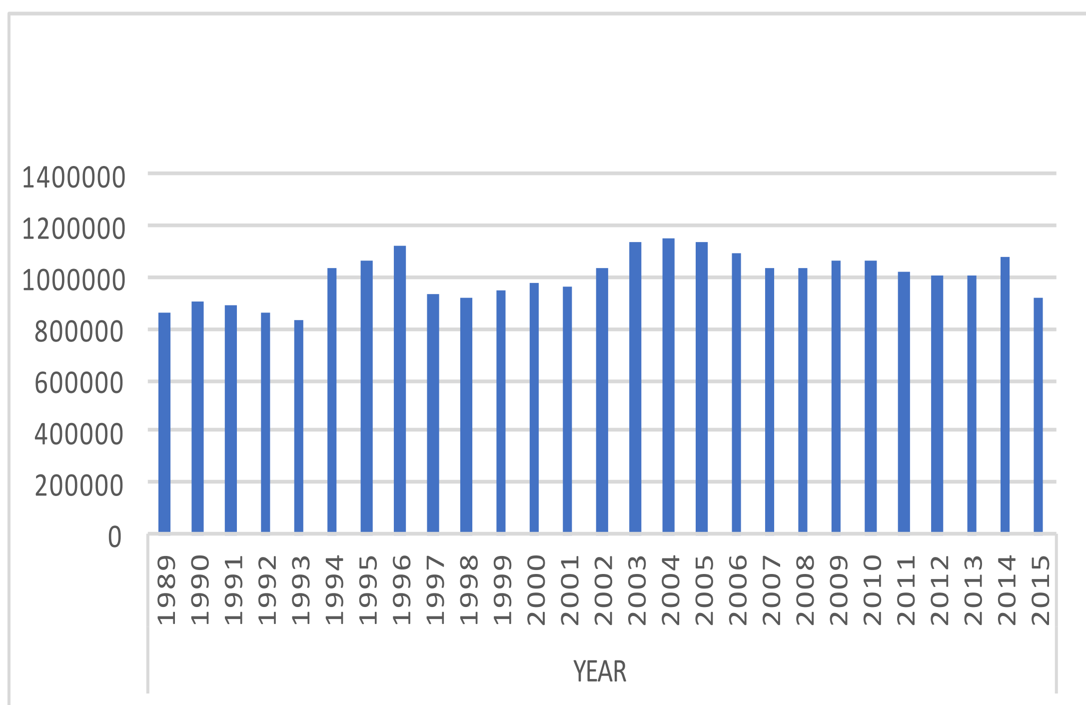

Figure 9: Economically Active Population (Rural)

Source: Author's calculation of annual averages, from Instituto Nacional Estedística.

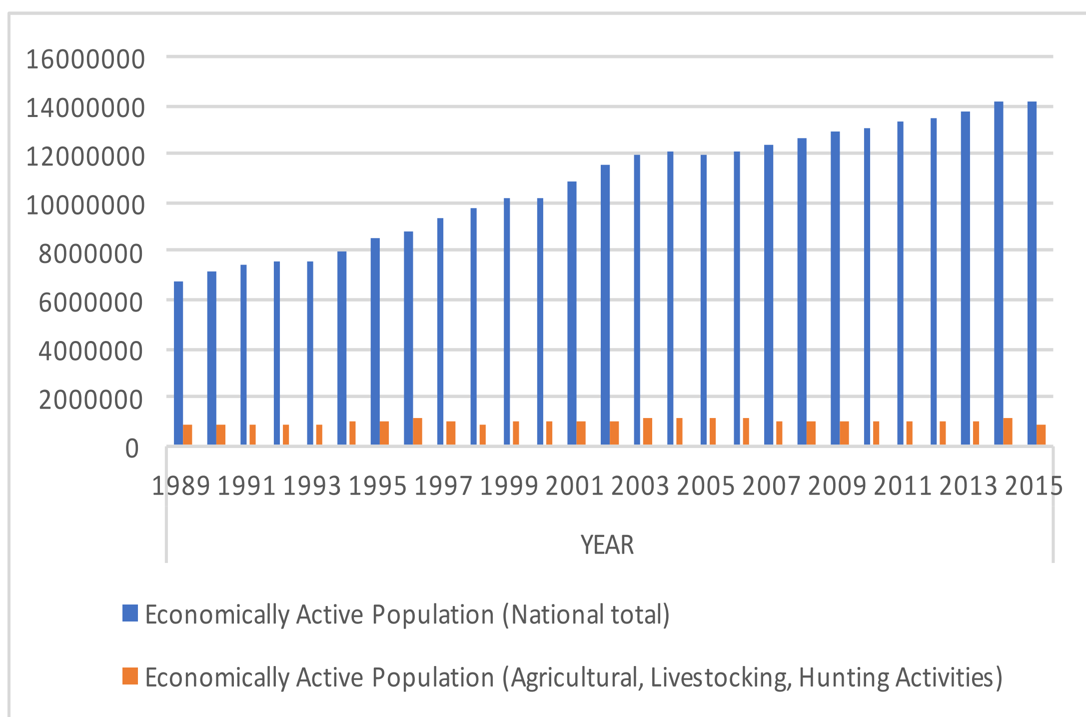

Figure 10: Economically Active Population (Total/Rural)

Source: Author's calculation of annual averages, from Instituto Nacional Estedística.

More specifically, it was intimated that a particular form of fragmentation among farmers results from their continued integration in the wider circuits of commodification in terms of not only securing adequate capital (i.e., farming inputs) but also in terms of valorising their labour in the market. Strictures of agricultural life have thus adversely impacted on the size of the economically active population in agriculture (see Figure 9), which has shown a near-continuous decline since the onset of Venezuela's economic crisis (2008), while the current figure sits at the same level as when Chávez first came to power (1998), all of which stands in contrast to a near-continuous rise in the total proportion of economically active population nationally (Figure 10). Even at a more micro-foundational level, various complexities exist within the overall goal of extending the practice of agroecology.

Vignette II: Differentiation of Agro-ecological Practices

Photograph 2: An IALA student converses with one of the school's 'maestro' professors – peasant producers that teach part-time in the IALA curriculum. Use of government-provided tablets help students keep track of crop cycles and any contingent problems encountered with each yield (Photo: Author, 20.02.2016).

On my second day out in the community I was accompanied by one of IALA's Salvadorian students, who was taking me to visit a few residents in order to check on the progress of their crops. Our first stop was at the house of a 'maestro' who also happened to teach a course at IALA. We entered a four-hectare space containing a small house for the family of eight. Eager to show me the fruits of the family's labour, the maestro led me and my companion towards the back of the house, which hosted two large beds of red and black beans. With a growth cycle of 34 and 39 days (respectively) these crops provided an important part of the family's staple diet; in all, around 200kg of the beans were consumed by the family each year, while the remaining 300kg were either conserved for the next round of sowing, or marketed outside of the farm.

Beyond this, underneath the extended canopies of mahogany surrounding the house, was a wide variety of crops and vegetation: Leucaena (whose seeds provide

protein-based animal fodder), Cedar trees, Neem trees (which produce neem-oil used for organic pesticides), Topocho (Venezuelan banana), plantains, avocados, and much more. The last two of these crops yield around 13 tons a year, with roughly half the produce consumed on site, while the other half is taken to market. As I was informed, the production process is virtually self-sustainable, with no external inputs needed. For this reason, the farm's produce is always capable of maintaining the same nominal price (e.g., 5 tons of plantain is sold for 50,000Bs), without suffering the effects of cost-push inflation. This therefore provides consumers, which suffer continual falls in real purchasing power, with relatively cheaper food on a continued basis.

*　　　*　　　*

It was time to check on one of the neighbours who lived directly next to the maestro's farm. The lady who greeted us was clearly glad to see her Salvadorian acquaintance, and welcomed the European newcomer into her 5-acre expanse. As she relayed to us, she had been suffering problems with pest control, resulting in some damage of her lettuce and bean crops. It was advised that she visit the maestro next door, in order to obtain either advice or inputs for organic pesticide. However, I was later told that the 5 acres were in reality split into two halves: one half comprised the woman's crops, grown organically in the methods of agroecology, and the other half by her husband who used traditional farming techniques, including the use of agro-chemical (toxic) pest repellents. While she informed me that her choice of agro-ecological practices was based on health and conservation issues, I also asked why her husband chose to produce conventionally: does he find it better for his yield? Is he not able to obtain the necessary inputs for agro-ecological production? To this I was merely told that there was no particular reason for it at all, "he's just used to doing it that way."

As my Salvadorian guide and I walked down the highway to our next destination (to visit another maestro-professor of IALA for lunch), I was curious to know his views on what the lady would be able to do in order to solve her pest problems. I asked whether she was well acquainted with the maestro-professor, and whether they spent much time talking to each other about farming techniques and methods. The response I received was instructive: "They don't really communicate that much, at least not about agroecology. Very often, there is a certain fear about

losing control, or about inviting stronger competition, if one's knowledge or techniques are disseminated. If they do talk, it won't be about agriculture, but other things, mostly religion."
(Fieldnotes, Barinas, 25.02.2016)

*   *   *

The above vignette serves as just a small example of how agro-ecological practices become highly differentiated for a number of reasons. Though the above example can only rise to the level of an emblematic case, it nevertheless provides insight into some of the contradictory aspects of production that is encapsulated by the food sovereignty idea. Firstly, in contradistinction to some concerns that low-input farming cannot generate the necessary productivity in order to fetch an adequate return for farmers, the case of the maestro demonstrates that the virtual elimination of capital overheads militates against the compulsion to accumulate debt, or raise prices on consumers. Especially in the case of Venezuela, this form of price control (which does not represent any form of external price-subsidisation) is especially useful in which the system-wide phenomenon of price inflation continually eats away at the strength of the domestic market.

At the same time, the above example shows some of the (often obscure) reasons for the turn towards conventional agriculture. Despite my somewhat persistent enquiries, my interlocutor could not come up with any specific reason for the differentiation of agricultural practices within the same (family) farm; from her perspective, people were simply in the habit of producing in one way or another. The fact that cross-contamination from toxic inputs was not a problem for the differing yet adjacent plots probably contributed to the survival of this somewhat precarious mixture of production techniques. Yet the very fact that such divergent techniques exist within the same 'household' – which for many in the FS literature, as well as peasant activists themselves, represent an indivisible socio-economic unit – shows not only the existence of concrete divisions of labour within such units, but also concrete divisions of practices taking place within a single space of production.

Lastly, it should be noted that the relatively casual relationship between neighbours, each of which engage in farming and of an organic, agro-ecological form, represents very real pressures exerted by (even limited) integration into capitalist

markets. Again, while the minimal use of external inputs provides many benefits to both producers and consumers, the very fact that this production takes place under a relatively more favourable technique (which brings in efficiency through the reduction of capital costs) militates against its free dissemination to those whose structural position represents a potential competitive pressure on a limited market. In this respect, family farmers may "establish their commodity enterprises at the expense of their neighbours who are poorer farmers, unable to meet those costs or bear those risks and losing out to those who can" (Bernstein, 2010: 105). Hence, despite the overall goal to expand and intensify the philosophy and practice of agroecology, even partial integration into commodity relations places contradictory pressures upon such networks of solidarity and knowledge exchange, in which knowledge as such becomes a crucial factor of production and competitive advantage. This therefore comes to be a very serious (or at least potential) obstacle to the substantial 'scaling up' of agro-ecological practice.

5.2.5 From Transnationalism to Statism: On Food Sovereignty, the State and ALBA

As can be expected from an educational-pedagogical institution that was born directly out of the LVC, the core notions and complex understandings embedded within the (multiple) ideas of food sovereignty emerged clearly from the various conversations I carried out across participants. As one student explained, FS is more than simply a body of declarations from social movements, but practices concretely internalised into territorial space that attempt to break down dependence on established technological packets and commodity relations (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016). Such a perspective draws a sharp line between food sovereignty and food security, for within the former "is it more about the quality of the sovereign, which is the exercise from below to promote this practice by those still in the countryside…" (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016). Yet in terms of moving beyond the helping hand of the state, in which citizens remain stationary in anticipation of state support, it was noted that the organisational prerequisite for the strengthening of the popular sectors has undergone a series of strains:

> "What we need is a unification of the diversity we have here in Venezuela. There are a lot of weaknesses in that a lot of social movements are created but they are not able to transcend this

> fragmentation. One of the things that one must advance with is in making a true process of production from the base, based on self-consumption, autonomy and self-government… To continue depending on the government will achieve nothing." (Interview, LG IALA, 24.02.2016)

One of the central lines of tension emerging from this fragmentation was, according to another participant, the problem of the state itself, as an over-powering institution that more often than not isolates, rather than congeals, the field of social forces throughout the country:

> "One of the principal obstacles is corruption and another aspect in Venezuela which is very common is bureaucracy. The bureaucracy has unfortunately empowered the political institutions in Venezuela, which remember is a country that specialises in electoral politics and its discourses… I believe that the principal task should be to produce and resolve these problems with the food supply, but I also think that one of the battles should really be to retake and recuperate those principles that were engendered by the president [Chávez] because they have been totally lost, and they [bureaucrats] confuse us as a nation. That is why we see a lot of despair among the citizenry" (Interview, JL IALA, 24.02.2016).

There is clearly a palpable concern with the very material condensation of the state apparatus, spanning the entire gamut of institutional ensembles and discourses – from the complex bureaucracy to the discourses of representative democracy to which these institutions cohere. These comments maintain a sharp resonance with Poulantzas' observations concerning the institutional specificity of the capitalist state in late modernity, in the context of authoritarian statism. Empirically, Poulantzas' comments refer to those states within the European region (and primarily Western Europe), in which the role of plural parties and legislative branches of the state had lost power relative to the strengthened executive. Such conditions amounted to an effective "crisis of legitimation", expressed through the expanded responsibilities and tasks taken on by the administration-bureaucracy, which "now bears the brunt of demands for legitimation, although it is less and less able to meet them" (Poulantzas, 2014: 245). As noted at the end of Chapter 4, however, the Bolivarian state is unique in displaying both authoritarian-statist characteristics (expanded power of the executive at the expense of other branches of the state and increased state participation in direct economic activities) and concrete innovations in a post-liberal political technology (primarily through the formation of vertical territoriality via the proliferation of popular democratic spaces). However, whether from the internalisation of curricular

design into the dominant ideological predilections of state administrations, to the broader array of state practices that tends towards the promotion of 'food security' rather than food sovereignty, we find a relative disorganisation of the popular classes, in contradiction with the stated aims and discursive orientations of the Bolivarian process. And yet, as with so many of the testimonies encountered, the above comment contains an unmistakable ideological centre-point based on an idealised notion (real or not) of Chávez as a transcendent individual; a pedagogical figure in which core principles become distilled, and through which future struggles become instantiated (cf. Michelutti, 2016).

Coming finally to the question of ALBA itself, the idea and role of the regional institution carried a somewhat contradictory position within the conversations at IALA – between both a potential space of emancipation, as well as a distant object lacking a true presence within the school. At a more general level of understanding, a sharp distinction was drawn between the geopolitical relations among capitalist IFIs, which attach stringent conditionality with their lending, in contrast to ALBA agreements that respect and uphold the sovereignty of the participating states: "It's important to understand that within this framework we can reduce the transfer of resources, because every country needs resources to develop, it needs capital, and it needs to be able to dispose of this capital" (Interview, MA IALA, 26.02.2016). In addition to these general comments, Miguel conceived of IALA as being an integral part of the Grandnational Project (GNP) for Education, one of several Grandnational Projects that were outlined in the first declaration for the formation of GNPs at the Fifth Summit in Tintorero (ALBA-TCP, 2007).

However, for most of the students it was intimately understood that despite the resolutely socialist principles animating the ALBA project, "it does not have the capacity to resolve a problem as big as we have right now in terms of the oil price", precisely because the very fate and function of the ALBA space is so heavily integrated into the world oil market (Interview, JL IALA, 24.02.2016). Beyond this wider concern with the structural limits of ALBA, it was also said that the 'transnational organised society' aspects of ALBA – in terms of social movement organisation that had been at the heart of IALA's founding – had receded into the background. Rather, IALA's subsumption under the Ministry of Education has shifted the strategic rationale towards expanding *Venezuelan* students into its ranks, with a tighter focus on internal curricular formation, rather than transnational political

solidarity (Interview, EG IALA, 23.02.2016) – a necessary rationale in one respect, yet one that has adversely impacted on the inter- and trans-national quality of the school (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016). Additionally, the very workload associated with the established curriculum (in terms of the amount of subjects and credits required to complete a degree) means that more practical connections to other institutional (productive ensembles) get lost: "students depend on this academic workload; during the day, night and weekend, they forget about ALBA, about Petrocaribe, about UNASUR and MERCOSUR" (Interview, AC IALA, 24.02.2016). As another professor told me, it is essential that IALA move past its overwhelming focus on curricular formation (as vitally important as this may be) in order to make stronger political connections with surrounding productive units like the ALBA factories, which could be target placements for outgoing graduates (Interview, EG IALA, 23.02.2016).

Nevertheless, the very idea of ALBA was not lost on this generation of students, who all saw this regional institution as promoting a "new class of encounters" around "common themes, such as seeds, land, territory, so that one serves an approach that unifies us and allows us to meet as people, in order to push through legislation, and to exercise public policies as such. Public policies don't have to come from above, but should emerge in light of the proposal that are born from the struggle of people in their communities, who know what is happening there" (Interview, DM IALA, 24.02.2016). Thus, despite the relative slowdown in the transnational momentum that originally inspired and formed the IALA space, students and teachers were clear as to the fundamental axes of struggle around which their work revolved – and the presence of these interconnected terrains of struggle would forever ensure that, no matter how occluded, the function, philosophy and praxis of the IALA School would be dedicated to a regional agroecological revolution from below.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to reveal the various actors, strategies and struggles that go into the making of food sovereignty in Venezuela and within the wider ALBA context. As noted in Chapter 4, much of what takes place in Venezuela carries a significant impact on the fate of this post-hegemonic region, whether due to the fiscal capacity of Venezuela's oil diplomacy, or on the (inter-related) question of the degree to which

Venezuelan agriculture can become more self-sufficient (thereby easing its fiscal burden through a reduced import budget). Thus, it is through the latter two components of the ALBA Grandnational Concept – endogenous development and the metabolic rift – that this (and the subsequent) chapter is framed. Additionally, the primary focus has been on the *politics* of food sovereignty, rather than an in-depth analysis of class differentiation in the Venezuela countryside or more technical arguments over agrarian techniques. Re-telling the insights, hopes, desires and frustrations among various social movements actors, as well as radical pedagogical practitioners, has sought to reveal "the development of practices of citizenship that enable people to demand and secure rights *for themselves*" (Dunford, 2015: 2, emphasis in original). These stories, vignettes and case studies thus provide a rich portrait of how the parameters of rights, territory and sovereignty undergo transformative change in the struggle for the agrarian commons.

Thus, it was first of all necessary to trace the ways in which Venezuela's drive for food sovereignty has been experienced, and in many ways led, by grassroots actors. From the testimonies of these actors, it is clear that agrarian social movements are slowly crystallising a truly post-liberal political technology, through the concerted struggle for new positive rights that do not merely request the intervention of state power but fundamentally traverse the entire strategic field of the state. Land occupations, self-organised networks of knowledge-exchange and solidarity-building, and finally to the partial occupation of institutional space (whether in the form of communal councils to the Presidential Councils of Popular Power), all constitute distinct 'moments' in the overall terrain of peasant struggle for a new food regime. Yet, as with all revolutionary processes, such practices are not free from contradictory forces.

Relative lack of resources frustrates the necessary infrastructural/organisational investments (either in the form of various structures within the built environment to day-to-day expenses involved in everyday activism), while the challenge of scaling up small-holder, artisanal methods of production, whose material basis embodies the principles of food sovereignty and ecological resilience simultaneously lack the requisite power of economies of scale necessary for the general satisfaction of the nation's food needs. And in relation to this latter aspect, larger spaces of production under the aegis of the state become concentrated sites of class struggle between committed revolutionary actors and those in high positions of

factory management, who are seemingly content with bad management practices, hierarchal structures of workplace relations and possible examples of corruption and fraud from within the 'social economy' itself. Here again, the struggle over the productive forces (and hence the material basis of counter-hegemonic space) is one that traverses simultaneously across already-existent resources – particularly land or production infrastructures – as well as those not-yet existent but clearly required for the adequate concretisation of food sovereignty and popular politics (particularly with respect to better transport facilities, irrigation systems, etc.) This latter array of social infrastructures is thus entirely dependent on state policy (through the investment of oil rents) and thus complicates the degree to which counter-hegemonic strategies from below may be able to affect the construction of new counter-spaces.

Traversing the terrain of the state in the course of making new political technologies conducive to food sovereignty therefore implies more than simply a head-on confrontation with government bureaucracies, but within the broader space of struggle even within peasant movements. As is characteristic of the entire LVC movement, issues pertaining particularly to gendered relations of power loom large in the FS movement. More broadly, the LVC exhibits some differentiation between views on leadership, tactical issues and the nature and meaning of socialist transformation, each of which may carry greater or lesser significance for various nationally or locally constituted actors. The open-ended process of dialogue and knowledge exchange nevertheless offers a conducive atmosphere to the constant (re)negotiation of these strategic dimensions.

As a means of further exploring this latter consideration, the chapter offered a critical engagement with the University Institute for Agroecology, a concentrated example of collaboration between ALBA states and transnational agrarian movements. Here too, the aim has been to both articulate the deep values and discourses of this space of radical pedagogy with the particular challenges faced by the institute. The first years of IALA was very much reflective of its most basic principles – that of learning by doing – as the operational dynamics of school management and curricular formation became key areas of revision and re-design. Yet with this re-organisation came the further involvement of state agencies within the Ministry of Education, which consequently opens up possible tensions between the drive for political autonomy and state-led management.

By and large, however, the basic values of IALA shine through in its everyday work, in both the campus and the wider communities. The general practice of encounters of knowledge (or, *diálogo de saberes*, as it is more commonly known), form the foundational constellation of principles with which IALA's students engage with the surrounding agrarian communities in their radical pedagogical praxis. Yet as is so often the case with issues of food sovereignty, it was recognised that these forms of praxis must be significantly scaled-up in order to both extend the transformative potential of liberatory education as well as the raw productive power of combining and enlarging cooperative forms of production within and between various local farms (cf. McCune et al. 2014: 32; Agarwal, 2014: 1261).

These challenges were thus fully acknowledged by interview participants in IALA, in so far as the Bolivarian state has remained somewhat limited in its substantial promotion of agroecological practice. Both the prevalence of an urbanised population and the extensive presence of the state throughout the social fabric come together to paradoxically limit the full potential of grassroots autonomy and self-directed planning in the realm of food sovereignty, thus resulting in the mere reproduction of food security. Yet for these actors, the struggle continues, both within Venezuela and the larger ALBA space. And despite the relative recession of IALA's transnational flavour, the values of ALBA continue to inspire and inform the praxis of agroecological pedagogy and political organisation.

What remains somewhat of a lacuna in all of these discussions within IALA is the relative silence on wider connections between agroecology and the larger spaces of agricultural production, particularly in the processing sectors. There was no real hostility to the use of high technology in the production of food, albeit used with due consideration to both ecological and labour concerns, yet it would seem that IALA is relatively confined to networking at the small farmer level. This does not, however, necessarily undermine the rationale for its existence; indeed, this is the primary function of the institute. But it does leave a gap in our understanding of the broader networks of agrarian production that take place under the auspices of ALBA.

6 The Political Economy of ALBA: Class Struggle Behind the Factory Gates

This chapter will offer an in-depth qualitative analysis of the *Empresas Mixtas Socialistas del ALBA-Arroz* network of factories within the federated state of Portuguesa, Venezuela. Through first-hand interviews with workers at both the coordinator and factory-floor level, the proceeding case study aims to shed light on the political economy of ALBA's Grandnational Enterprises, and the ways in which structural-macroeconomic forces and class strategies impact on the function and status of these spaces of production. As we will come to see, the specific factory regimes present within the ALBA-Arroz network are somewhat *sui generis*, albeit embodying a complex mix of politico-institutional features present in factory regimes typical of both capitalist and bureaucratic-statist political systems. The following interview analysis is therefore conducted across 5 of the 7 sites of the ALBA-Arroz network (Píritu I, Píritu II, Píritu III, Agua Blanca, Payara).[50] The analysis will proceed through thematic sections, rather than a site-by-site review, given that many of the same questions (albeit within a semi-structured interview process) effectively yielded many of the same answers. Each site conducted at least two sets of interviews, one with the worker coordinators (i.e., those considered as a 'worker', though in a coordinating role for the entire workforce of the plant mediating between workers and upper management), and the other with a group interview conducted among lower level workers (from a range of different roles).[51] Thus, references designating only location (e.g., Píritu I, Payara) refer to interviews with the coordinators, while those designating 'workers' are among the lower levels of the workforce.

6.1 Venezuela's *Empresas Mixtas Socialistas del ALBA* factories: Origins and Challenges

As we saw in Chapter 4, ALBA's *Empresas Mixtas Socialistas del ALBA* (EMSAs) first took form on 24 January 2007 through the signing of a Cuban-Venezuelan letter of intent. In terms of the EMSAs dedicated to the production of rice (*Empresas Mixtas*

[50] Two of the 7 sites are located in Guárico state, which were not incorporated into this study due to logistical difficulties and time constraints.

[51] For Píritu I and II, follow up interviews were conducted with the worker coordinators.

Socialistas del ALBA-Arroz), the first steps were taken through a bi-national survey and investigation, carried out by a Cuban team of 7, and two Venezuelan participants, into the possible locations for the establishment of these plants. It was later signed into Venezuelan law on 16 July 2007, and finalized on 22 November 2007 (*Gaceta Oficial 38.726*, 2007a; *Gaceta Oficial, 38.828*, 2007b). The first installations of these firms came in 2008, with the *Unidad Primaria de Producción Socialista* (UPPS) 'Río Guárico', as well as the Píritu I and Payara plants, located in the states of Guárico and Portugesa. The latter two installations together comprise a potential production capacity of around 80 tons of processed rice per day with a workforce of 85 employees, and with technology acquired through a joint agreement with Brazil (Depablos, 2009).

In 2009, the Bolivarian state expropriated the "Santa Ana Parabolizado" plant, also in the state of Portuguesa, owned by the US agro-industrial firm Cargill. According to the results of government inspections, Cargill had been found in "violation" of price control regulations, through the modification of its rice products (i.e., switching from Type-1 white rice, to pre-cooked rice), as well as for failing to mark its packaging with regulated prices, and the discovery of 18,000 tons of regulated white rice sitting in its warehouses (Suggett, 2009c). From this strategic move came ALBA-Arroz's central productive unit, Píritu II.

In 2010, these entities were transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands to the authority of the Venezuelan Food Corporation (CVAL), under the rationale that:

> "it is essential for the policies of agro-industry and agriculture to establish a system of functional centralisation for the organisation of State led guarantees of food security and sovereignty, as well as the just satisfaction of the needs of the people in order to improve production of those products of primary necessity and of a strategic character" (*Gaceta Oficial 39.494*, 2010b).

It was envisaged that under the auspices of CVAL the entire "food chain" – from primary production to processing to distribution and consumption – would fall under the "model of socialist management" (ibid: 14). Institutionally speaking, the flow of goods thus emerges entirely under the auspices of CVAL, which may spontaneously order certain factories to redirect supplies of consumer goods to particular strategic outlets within the PDVAL or MERCAL networks (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016). As of 2015, ALBA-Arroz maintained an operating budget of Bs 86,478,742, the highest of all the EMSAs (MPPAL, 2015: 42).

The emergence of the EMSA's follow the footsteps of Venezuela's wider push towards the formation of Socialist Production Units (SPUs), which numbered between 1,000-3,000 by 2009. SPU's are thus oriented around three central goals: provision of above-average wages, locally sourced inputs from surrounding territory, and sale of goods at below-market prices (Larrabure, 2013: 183-4). All EMSAs follow these general protocols, as the following analysis will show. And yet, there exist numerous tensions and struggles in the development of Venezuela's 'social economy'.

6.2 Losing in Order to Win? Class Struggles and Systemic Contradictions of the Social Economy

On 8th of April, an article published in Portuguesa's local newspaper, *Ultima Hora*, reported that the central ALBA-Arroz site, Píritu II, had been taken under occupation by the workforce the day before, ejecting then acting President of ALBA-Arroz, Arturo Aponte, and demanding the re-activation of production at the plant, which had reportedly sunk below 80% capacity. Among other complaints from the ALBA workers' union representative, Tirso García, were the lack of raw material inputs from the local countryside, neglect of factory machinery and the lack of transport facilities for the workforce (Palencia, 2016). The ALBA union had called upon the minister of Agriculture and Lands, Wilmar Castro Soteldo, to enter negotiations with the workers to rectify the situation. As indicated by the secretary of the ALBA union, Héctor López, these deficiencies had also caused a complete paralysis in the supply of rice to the local communal councils (Hurtado, 2016). This manifestation of worker militancy offered two central opportunities to the pursuit of this research, for it had (firstly) presented a remarkably rare instance of class struggle taking place specifically within the ALBA-initiated production sites,[52] and (secondly) seemingly excised the singular obstacle to gaining access to ALBA's production sites (senior management). Eager to learn more about the circumstances of the workers' dispute, and the current strategies they have for solving these problems, I headed to the factories before it was too late (and before a new president of ALBA-Arroz had been designated).

As I sat down with the coordinator at the Píritu II plant, it was immediately clear that the problems affecting the ALBA factories stem from the same systemic

[52] The only other major centre of worker struggle I am aware of is in ALBA's fish processing plant, La Gaviota (see, Azzellini, 2015).

mechanisms afflicting the entire country, albeit in myriad forms: “Last year the country accumulated almost $200,000,000 through petroleum rent, and in this year, it gained not even $35,000,000” (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016).[53] However, the true source of the problem emerged through the course of the conversation, which fell mostly to aspects of the price structure:

> “A kilo of paddy, which is shelled rice, was bought at 17Bs from the direct producer… But for us to produce a kilo of finished rice, we need two kilos of paddy. So that comes to 34Bs. And yet, we were selling at 25Bs, which is the regulated price… So we are simply working under a loss. We have to pay for man-hours, packing material, electricity and gasoline, not to mention maintaining the machinery… It’s as if something costs 10 Euros to produce, and you sell it at 5.” (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

Compounding this difficulty is the rate of inflation, which adds considerable costs to the price of inputs. For instance, at the Píritu I plant, the cost of maintaining the industrial rubber roller used during the hulling process had been 30,000Bs five months previously, whereas today it would be 170,000Bs. However, these sums are (for the time being) relatively small; as I was told, the main concern is the restoration of the milling equipment, which had been badly worn out, yet could be solved for a relatively small sum (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). What remained the central concern was the rate of inflation that created major problems in terms of crafting production plans; the time it takes to analyse the necessary values for a given purchase often undermines the very same process, as by the time a solution is obtained, the values no longer hold (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016).

Interwoven with these problems were wider issues with national infrastructure, particularly in the area of electricity. Since 2002, the state has taken on more and more of the nation’s electricity generation operations, now standing at 90 percent (Massabié, 2008: 193). As a consequence of government regulatory rules, virtually all state-run energy entities operate without profits, due mainly to increased energy consumption along with subsidized prices to consumers, leading to the transfer of billions of dollars in ground rent to maintain the system. Yet chronic under-investment has incurred a

[53] The figures cited in this participant’s testimony are, in fact, quite off the mark. In 2015, the value of Venezuela’s petroleum exports amounted to $35 billion, while for 2016, the figure dropped to $25 billion (OPEC, 2017: 20). I would argue that the wild discrepancy between the numbers cited in the testimony – positing a difference between 200 and 35 – merely reflects, in discursive form, the social strain experience by Venezuelans due to the objective drop in oil revenues.

marked increase in power failures, from 8 in 1994 to 84 in 2005 (ibid: 196). The Guri hydroelectric dam, which generates around 70 percent of the country's electricity is also highly vulnerable to drought conditions, with the last major drought-induced reduction in 2002-3. However, with another severe drought during the summer of 2016, the Guri facility experienced a major drop off in supply, which led to emergency measures of nation-wide rationing (Koerner, 2016a). As a result, virtually every business sector – from manufacturing to retail – became subject to closures and planned downtime. The Píritu I plant reported an average of 4 hours per day in downtime due to electricity shortages (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2015). Thus, the operational capacity of the factories has taken a severe hit, reducing production capacity from 1.3m kilos to 300-400 kilos per month (Interview Píritu II, 11.05.2016).

The workers' occupation therefore approximates one of the primary steps in the longer struggle towards a type of labour-centered development, at least in terms of (temporarily) seizing productive infrastructures, which in itself resembles a nascent form of counter-space. Nevertheless, the specific labour relations prevailing within the factory are a far cry from those officially promoted by the ALBA region, in terms of socialisation in the means of production. Thus, organisational practices and bureaucratic structures continue to frustrate the smooth operation of this strategic set of production units.

6.3 Despotic Power in the Social Economy

The presence of a large, multi-layered bureaucracy seemed to represent a major bottleneck in terms of how information is exchanged, and the efficiency with which decisions could be taken:

> "What remains one of the biggest problems in the first place is communication, because we are managing information here that varies a great deal from the information that they have above. For example, they will be thinking that we are producing at 80 or 90% capacity, whereas we are more like 10%... Until recently the 'situation room' in the Republic of Venezuela didn't know anything. I even spoke to a friend of mine who works in these circles, and they haven't been to these sites since 2012… As far as the situation room is concerned, we don't exist." (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016)

For some, the problem became rooted in a certain pattern of governmental organisation and policy management, in which functional administration became subject to

pressures of personal clientelism: "The question is whether the process completes as it should, and that there is no favouritism or nepotism, or because you know a minister which means that the plants are always reported as 'perfect'" (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016). Yet issues of communication were also found wanting inside the factories themselves, whereby management structures typical of capitalist firms tended to dominate the day to day operations of the plants. For some, this amounted to a sub-optimal form of workplace organisation:

> "Let's say a person assigned to sweeping picks up a screw from the floor, a screw that should have been attached to a fixture above, this person knows the problem, and so the screw could be replaced so that it doesn't cause more damage. But if you don't talk to people, not even the person that sweeps the floor, how are you going to know about the fallen screw? Structurally speaking, in terms of this company, this is where we are administratively." (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28.06.2016)

This points towards the strategic necessity of including all workers into a more fluid space of communication and strategic planning. Even for the supervisory strata of workers, this rigidity at the top of the firm is quite debilitating: "When you are a president you have to talk with the workers, with the commune [*comuna*], with the people, because you work in a socialist company, and you have to have this conviction because you're a socialist." As I was later told, the previous president was "egocentric": "he was a despot, and we are not accustomed to working in this way" (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). Instead of approaching problems through the utilization of the living labour force that attains its knowledge through the everyday experiences of daily production, the perceived problems experienced by the ALBA-Arroz network are 'solved' through the simple rotation of personnel at the top level of management, particularly the presidency. To the workforce, this appears as nothing less than the operation of bureaucracy, inefficient planning, and often outright corruption and fraud: "there is a very famous saying here: '*No me des, ponme donde hay*' [Don't give it to me, put me where it is]" (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June 2016).[54]

This aspect of bureaucracy and its potentially adverse impact on socio-economic planning also pertained to the specific transformation of the firms under the

[54] The above translation represents a more precise reflection of the Spanish phrase quoted. However, in the context of the conversation the fuller meaning would translate to something like: "Don't just give me stolen funds, put me at the source and I can steal it for myself."

ALBA accord (transforming them into Socialist Mixed Enterprises). As I was told by other workers this led to a diminishment of overall capacity to satisfy needs under already tight macro-economic conditions. In terms of the Píritu III plant (used for storing and the preliminary conditioning of raw product):

> "We used to receive anything: cereals, corn, rice, whatever comes, we were ready and we could process all of it, but they passed us on to ALBA Arroz, and they limited us, that you have to be pure rice, where right now Venezuela is passing through a huge crisis that we cannot put a limit on what we do. Already we have shortages of flour, of pasta, sugar, of everything. We cannot be married to just one product; we have to be open to everything. There are peasants that are producing corn, there's corn in the fields, and there is a paralyzed plant that is capable of receiving corn. Why don't we receive corn? Bureaucracy!" (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016)

The eventual narrowing from a multi-product capacity to merely the processing of rice paddy represented a marked contradiction of overall plant utilization, which as I was informed could be returned to its previous status merely through the simple process of switching sieves and filters for sifting particular grains (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016). There was therefore a perceptible level of uncertainty as to the next stage of ALBA-Arroz, and to whether these bottlenecks would be sufficiently dealt with:

> "I don't know how this president [of the factory] is going to do. We have proposed to lend services to other clients, that they will transfer us to another ministry, or even transfer the company to the workers because we know how to work and to generate our own investments necessary to pay our workforce without being dependent on any ministry. So far they have told us nothing, and we continue to wait, and even looking for clients in the meantime so that we get enough product to carry on… without having to wait for the government to pay for everything. That would be one way, that they give us the opportunity to generate our own investments by means of simply working the plant as such…The knowledge that we have, the practical skills that we have, knowing how to manage practically everything. This is the key." (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016)

This last aspect was particularly central to how the philosophy of ALBA – with its focus on a social economy organised by the popular sectors, i.e. self-management – is capable of emerging from the current struggles taking places within its centres of production. Yet it is strikingly clear that, despite the purported aims of ALBA's political economic model, the further entrenchment of factory despotism, and the separation between manual and intellectual labour, considerably thwarts any attempt

towards a substantial move towards worker power and a new model of production based around self-management.

6.4 Self-Management Deflected: The Struggle Against Statism

The issue of self-management (*autogestión*) was a topic I was particularly keen to broach, and eager to understand more about the status of this potential form of socio-economic organisation and ownership, a form that is at least rhetorically promoted by the ALBA accords of 2012. In my conversation with the coordinator at the Píritu I plant, I asked whether ALBA-Arroz had ever been organised under such a worker-led regime; the answer was quite straightforward: "No, never. We are completely centralised" (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). Nevertheless, it was firmly believed that the workforce possessed the functional capacity to undertake the transition towards self-management:

> "The point is that everyone already knows what to do. There is no need for someone to come from the outside and tell me what to do, and I certainly don't have to go with a whip to supervisors telling them what to do with their work teams. Here, everyone works within their area, with conviction and in order to get the job done… So I think that if they were to put us in a position of self-management, I think we would have the capacity to do it." (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016)

Other workers were quick to highlight the potential benefits that might come from moving beyond an over-centralised form of economic management:

> "I think that if there is help from the top, from the ministry or even the presidency in order to elevate this company monetarily, at least to guarantee inputs, I think it could work; if there is direct help from above, without all of these bureaucratic levels that paralyzes you, but a direct line where you might say, 'Look we need the raw material', and it is simply guaranteed to you." (Interview, Píritu I workers, ".06.2016)

The general understanding of the degree of self-management capacity was also shared among other workers, below the level of the coordinator segment of the workforce:

> "Chávez used to say, 'you don't have to wait for me to tell you what to do, if you already know what to do'… I mean you don't have to be someone from NASA to fix a machine." (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016)

> "We know that this company does not move without the workers. The workers are those that operate this plant, without the workers the

machinery doesn't move, the equipment doesn't move, but we still need a management structure inside this plant, to maintain an order." (Interview, Píritu I workers, 29.06.2016)

Throughout out these discussions, however, it became clear that the immediate change in the relations of production, and in the structure of ownership and control over the plant, was not the top priority for those working at the ALBA-Arroz factories: "In this moment we are not looking to be self-managing, but in the long term it certainly could be" (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). Instead, the severity of the crisis and the intense desire to bring the factory back into production seemed to top all other considerations. If anything, the main priority seemed to revolve around the acquisition of competent management personnel, those with specific training and knowledge in the area of rice production, rather than the imposition of "military men" (Interview, Píritu I workers, 29.06.2016). Coordinators at the Píritu I plant had similar conclusions about the strategic necessity of acquiring high-level personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge:

> "The presidents that come here, none of them come with the same preparation, nor do they know much about processing rice… So, the presidents are not so clear about how the system really works, as they are administrative types, like management is, as is the industrialisation department. They don't have knowledge of this, and a lot of them come because the know someone, because they have influence with some ministry, or the president of CVAL." (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016)

However, the more pressing issue of how any transition towards a substantial form of self-management might come about proved to be the most worrisome for the majority of participants.

> "There was a time when Chávez said, 'you are going to be the owners of these companies, so that your work becomes self-sustainable', but what we have now is another protocol, from above, ministers, vice-presidents; this is the fear that exists. Perhaps they believe that things are going to change from Chavista to opposition, this is the internal political conflict…" (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016)

Thus, "internal conflict" appeared as a form of political uncertainty within a period of severe social crisis, in which high-level state managers supposedly retreated into trench-like positions of defence, rather than pressing forward in the movement towards a genuinely 'social economy'. For others, however, the question boiled down to issues of pure power struggle:

> "They won't allow it [transition towards self-management] because those that control will not relinquish it. Even though they are asphyxiating you and strangling you, and they know that what they are doing to you is bad, they are not going to let go of you, because it's about power. When one has power, it's very difficult to let it go. We imagine that what you suggest is an alternative, because we have suggested the same ourselves. But do you believe that those above are going to say: 'I'm going to give 300 million Bs to the workers at ALBA Arroz and that they shall administer, buy the raw material, pay wages, that they will have this company there, and I will do nothing here'? You know that this is not going to happen, because you are talking about losing control, and losing power." (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June 2016)

Curious as to this potentially fatal end to the future of self-management, I asked whether there is anything they (as workers) can do to remedy the situation, or even struggle against recalcitrant forces that may stand in the way of this development:

> "We have tried, but what do they send us? National Guard, SEBIN, PTJ, CICPC, police"[55]
>
> *Against you?*
>
> "Of course."
>
> *So what can you do?*
>
> "Cry."
>
> *Do you think there is any way Chávez's dream can be saved from below?*
>
> "We can achieve this change inside a new structure of socialism; it is possible. But they will have to change the oxygen; they will have to admit that they were wrong and rectify their mistakes; or we are going to do what you are talking about, we are going to create a type of self-management, something that should be autonomous, to begin to capture ideas, but something that is true" (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June 2016).

[55] It should be noted that this worker's reference to the deployment of state violence against workers, although unverifiable in the context of the ALBA factories, is a continuing problem within Fifth Republic (see Janicke, 2008).

The above conversations pointed to a number of positions assumed by the consciousness and orientation of the workforce towards issues of self-management, as the necessary material ingredient in the substantial transition towards the social economy. Firstly, the immediacy of their crisis – the paralysis of production in the context of general mal-distribution of food – promoted an immediate desire to get the company back to capacity, whether under older management structures or not. Secondly, in the medium (or long) term, aspects of self-management were viewed as not only desirable from the consideration of operational efficiency but also as a centrally organic component of *Bolivarianismo*, to which all participants expressed a firm attachment. Indeed, this affective expression towards the political terrain of social transformation was more often shown to be positive when talking about the ideas and philosophy, indeed, the "teachings" of a pedagogical figure in the form of Chávez, rather than with the contemporary political class as such. The latter, in contrast, were often the target of the most severe criticism, which led to the third major component of the discussions about self-management – that its future potential was seriously hindered by the struggles for power going on inside the state apparatus itself, and throughout the political terrain of *chavismo*.

6.5 Food Sovereignty Scales Up: Opportunities and Challenges of Industrialism

Given the nature of these factories, formed under the auspices of ALBA and therefore theoretically in line with its mandate to secure food sovereignty for the peoples of the host country (in this case Venezuela), I was curious to understand more about how the workforce understood this concept and how it impacted upon the ways they approached their overall strategies. Many of the immediate answers were more strongly aligned to the paradigm of food security, rather than food sovereignty *per se*, for instance, "assuring that the people have access to food, and to try and bring it to them directly, without the use of intermediaries (Interview Píritu III, 30.16.2016); or:

> "To guarantee every Venezuelan or every family their food, that no one is left out, from the poorest to the richest, and that there is a distribution to all without exception, and that this food comes at a just price, or a real price – a just price for the Venezuelan, which should also be a just price for the industry" (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

Yet it was also made abundantly clear that this urge to satisfy the food supply and food needs of the country would not come about solely through the use of state-led industrial enclaves scattered throughout a vast countryside to the exclusion of other rural actors. Rather, a dynamic integration between them constituted the key driving force towards the making of a truly independent food sovereignty regime:

> "I think that in this part of the process [i.e. industrial plants] it should not be doing 100% of the process. I think that it is to the small producers where they [the government] have to come and say: 'continue as you are, continue the struggle, we're going to continue helping you, we will finance whatever shortfalls you have, whether its technical assistance or whatever. Why did you stop farming those lands? Instead you should increase the amount of lands you produce.' Here for me is where the ultimate foundation lies, in stopping the importation of food, and thus where lies the triumph of food sovereignty and food security of the country – in the countryside. The plants, those that process, are merely a fixture, because if the fields don't bring me raw material, what am I going to process? It is here, in the countryside, in the fields, where the true strength of food sovereignty consists, in partnership with the small, medium and large producers." (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016)

As the coordinator further explained to me, there are abundant channels of investment through which the strengthening of the countryside might be realised, through the provision of credits, tools, technical assistance and legal support. Via this partnership, it is thought that a bilateral contract would then emerge between peasant and state, where (for example) credits given would be returned through payments in kind:

> "Before the revolution, it was the same but this time through the private firms. However, according to government studies, the private sector did not cover every producer, but rather favoured the large producers, with the small peasantry left out… So what was Chávez's vision? To try to capture all of those people that could sow any type of crop for the struggle for food sovereignty. As *comandante* Chávez put it, 'Come to me and we can work together' [*Ven a mí que tengo flor*]. That was the vision, to help the small and large producers, and to bring them to the state industries, through the state, with the expectation that those in receipt of government help would in turn sell their product to the same people." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)[56]

As it turned out, the major bottleneck in the smooth functioning of the ALBA-Arroz network derived from the lack of raw materials supplied from the surrounding fields.

[56] The expectation of a contractually reciprocal relationship between peasant and state was sought as a way out of the common problem in which direct producers would receive state aid in order to complete a harvest, and simply sell their product to the private sector (Interview, Agua Blanca workers, 30.06.2016).

I wondered initially whether this was due to the traditional problem of urban flight, and whether there was enough labour in the countryside capable of supplying the requisite industrial capacity. However, I was firmly told that the agricultural labour force had not moved at all, and are still producing their plots as normal, even if under varying conditions of difficulty (Interview, Payara workers, 30.06.2016). In one respect, the constricted price structure within which direct producers from Portuguesa must operate (in terms of fixed, state mandated farm-gate prices coupled with inflationary input costs) incentivises switching out of rice production, and dedicating more land to non-regulated products in order to cross-subsidize their remaining losses from rice (Purcell, 2017: 309). As such, production during 2014-2015 took a precipitous decline (see Figure 11). Given falling rice volumes, peasants may also seek higher unit prices for their output in order to cover their losses, often resulting in a switch towards the private sector:

> "The problem is the private companies buy the paddy [raw material] for 100Bs [per kilo], whereas we buy it for 70. And to whom are the producers going to sell? To whoever is willing to give them more. Sometimes they even buy it for 120Bs, just to engage in dirty competition, buying at 120 so they can sell it to the people at 400." (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016)

Yet while falling land area under cultivation is a major problem, it is not the only cause of falling output. While Purcell (2017: 309) takes surface area (hectares, ha/s) as a proxy for output levels, on closer inspection of Figure 12, even if surface area and output are *mostly* positively correlated, this is not always the case. For 2008-2009 and 2011-2012, total hectares under use for rice production increased by 738ha/s and 5,493ha/s (respectively), while total yield *decreased* by 116,693tns and 24,184tns (respectively). These sporadic negative correlations would therefore have to be explained by a number of other factors, which may be partly shaped by the specific materiality of the crop in question. Unlike corn (*maíz*), the production of rice remains prone to a number of complications that may adversely impact crop development, such as weeds, viruses, bacteria, fungi, and a large variety of underbrush, many of which are resistant to chemicals due to the rapid rate of genetic mutation (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016).[57] Interestingly, and somewhat inconsistently with the general

[57] The material resilience of corn probably helps to partly explain why production levels have seen a secular increase for the past 15 years, as in Figure 11.

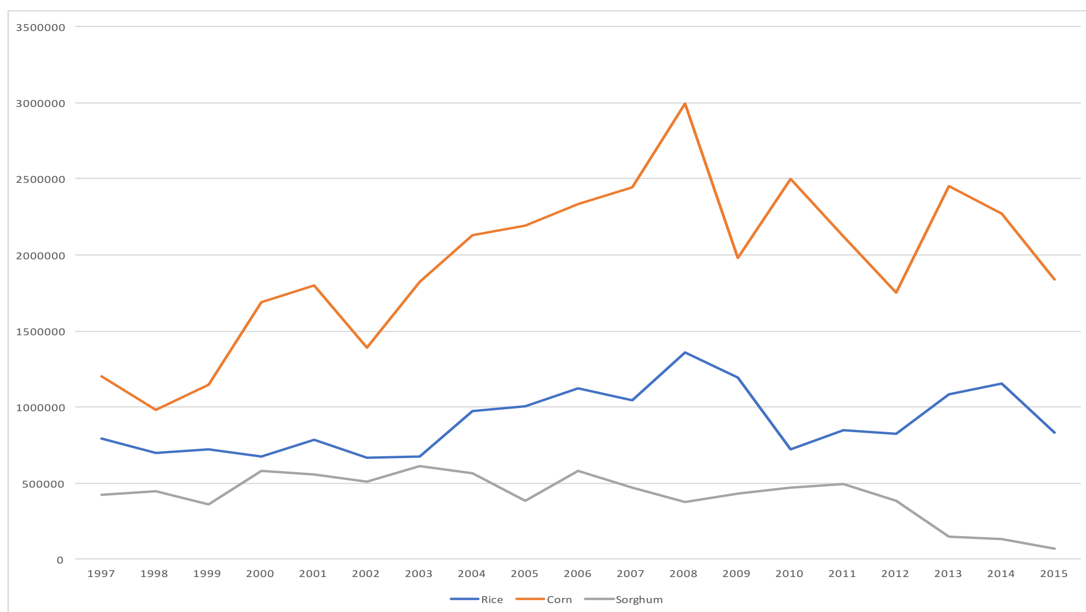

Figure 11: Production volumes (metric tons) of Rice, Corn, Sorghum

Source: FEDEAGRO

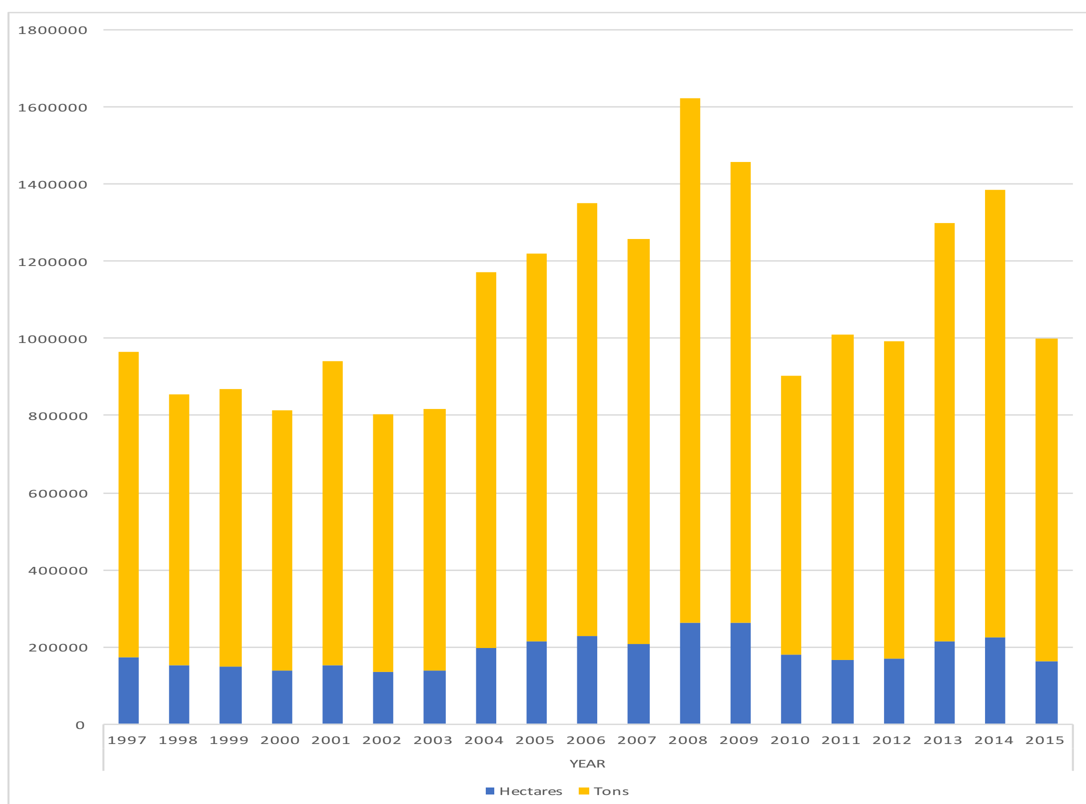

Figure 12: Ratios of surface area (hectares) to yield (metric tons) of rice production.

Source: FEDEAGRO

approach to food sovereignty, the use of transgenics was invoked by one participant as a potential solution to these myriad problems in the process of rice cultivation: "We have laws against transgenics, though transgenics are not necessarily bad, you just have to know how to use them" (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016). Nevertheless, the main concern with such techniques is rather the pattern of ownership and control over their distribution, not necessarily the agro-ecological impact:

> "Our agriculture is very depressed. This is because everything that is brought to the process is imported, the chemicals, seeds, transgenics… The problem is that Monsanto manages the Roundup molecule, and has a strain of soy that is resistant to Roundup. They manage the monopoly, and this company has effectively monopolised the economy of the country." (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

It was understood that the problem of foreign monopolization was considerably aggravated by the overall structure of agrarian production in Venezuela, which was contrasted sharply with other agrarian based societies:

> "I had the opportunity to be in Haiti, in Cuba and in Iran, with the state, and there it is different. There they have better productivity but more people working per hectare. There everything is by hand. Here in Venezuela everything is industrialised and mechanised. In Iran, practically everything is manually produced, one or two people per hectare. It's a rice that is distinctly natural and without chemical inputs. In Venezuela it is different. We have been introduced to a lot of things; at most our ancestors managed rice in a much cleaner way. Here there have been problems of compactification… which has degraded the soil… A lot of producers have changed to corn, that have changed to sugar cane, or even live-stocking, simply because of costs, even though Venezuela has the advantage of having two production periods per year, one during the dry and one during the rainy season." (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

Thus, Venezuela's highly industrialised form of agrarian production makes it considerably more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of global markets and foreign firms related to agro-industrial inputs and biotech, in clear distinction to more labour-intensive methods found elsewhere. The path dependence of Venezuela's production practices was well understood, and that the peasantry could not immediately switch out of more conventional farming practices:

> "You might say to the small producer, 'we're going to stop using agro-chemicals'. But the producer comes from a very old culture that has been applying these inputs for decades. So you could say, 'we're going to substitute chemicals for agro-ecological inputs', but the producer

> will say, 'well, let's do a test and see the result'. The thing is, they prefer quick results. In the case of insecticides and other chemicals that are stronger the producers can see the results, above all in economic savings… To incentivise these practices will take time, but it can be done. You can incentivise it by saying that ecologically there is less damage to the environment, it's going to have better strength in germination for the crops, the food grown will be cleaner, and you can suggest this to the producer because they are primarily the ones who will be consuming their own food. It's very much an iterative process, little by little. But people put into practice only that which accords to their circumstances, to the way they are living." (Interview, Píritu I workers, 29.06.2016)

As with many of the participant responses found at the IALA School, the ALBA factory workers were well aware of the major challenges faced in the transition towards a viable food sovereignty model. Older industrial practices, as well as the entrenched methods of production adopted by the peasantry, represent two inter-locking obstacles towards the re-organisation of the entire production chain, from the acquisition of agro-ecologically based inputs to the contradictory dynamics inherent in facilitating adequate levels and prices of raw product through the transfer of ground rent. Overcoming such obstacles thus requires the concerted cooperation between those working throughout the social economy, in both the factory and field.

6.6 Factory Points and Communal Circles: The Political Economy of *chavismo*

As well as assessing the immediate problems facing the ALBA-Arroz network, and the ways in which the current patterns and contradictions of rice farming in Venezuela converged or diverged with the overall goals of food sovereignty, much of the conversations meandered around more general considerations of politics and economics, which provided some insight into the overall political consciousness of the interviewees, and the concomitant solutions and strategic orientations that were informed by these understandings. A significant number of participants continued to express support for the state and the public sector, despite the enormity of the problems faced by the workforce:

> "I voted for Maduro, I voted for PSUV to the AN, and I'm not going to sign anything against my revolutionary compañeros. That's not my form of being. I have clear and precise guidelines, I know towards where I should be going. Sadly, there are things in the government, as with all governments, which are proving to be very difficult problems,

> or at least precise problems… However, there has not been a coup because there are a lot of Venezuelans that are conscious, that the government is trying to do the most it can to reassure food for the people. They are trying to find alternatives. The problem is we don't have leadership. Maduro is trying but it is costing him a lot." (Interview, Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

Clearly the affective content underlying this discourse shows a positive orientation towards the political class, even if expressed in a highly qualified form. Yet these sentiments were not merely expressed through feelings of loyalty to the state or the associated political parties constituent of it, but also through the organic connections established throughout the wider communal space of *Bolivarianismo*; for instance, in the 'Point and Circle' initiative, "an idea bequeathed to us by our president Hugo Chávez Frias, to be closer to the people and to help them in any way we can" (Interview, Píritu III, 30.6.2016). This conception of socio-spatial change was envisioned by Chávez as a means of transforming the social landscape in the service of building socialism, though without necessarily "expropriating" the private sector in its entirety (i.e., manufacturing, medical services, education etc.). Rather, the emphasis is placed upon specific locales (e.g., a state-run factory) which act as springboards for the molecular process of transforming the values, consciousness and practices of the surrounding social spaces and their associated activities (whether economic, political or otherwise). One example of this strategy was seen during my conversation with the coordinator at the Payara plant, periodically checking his watch, and seemingly in anticipation of another meeting:

> "Right now I am waiting for the communal council because they are managing 30 tons of rice for the town of Payara. And that's what we are doing, we are bringing the vanguard in direct contact with the people: company to people, communities, peasant councils, community councils, and communes. This is the alliance we have that helps guarantee food sovereignty and to combat the economic war that has befallen this country." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

Despite the utility of this Point and Circle strategy, there were no illusions as to the scale of the problems that afflicted this process of socialisation, particularly in the views of lower levels of the workforce. As one group expressed to me:

> "Since about 2013, we've seen a diminishment in this type of political formation. We don't know if this was lost by those that were in the company as such, those who lead, but it was degenerating, and in turn this had a bearing on the community because when we started in 2007

> the presence of the plant and the workers towards the communities was protagonistic; it helped for instance towards a nutritional census, and it helped us to estimate what the community needed in terms of food supply… But even before the onset of the economic situation we have now, we had stopped seeing this help of the government towards the communities, and this disinterest was seen many times in the ways in which communities started to look at us with suspicion, because we had stopped helping them, and so the community had started to feel mistreated. A lot of times the community said: 'Before they gave us a bag of food and now they don't need us, they are already in power'." (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2013)

Somewhat more ambiguous were the precise sources of these problems. At a very general level, it was expressed that there was a certain amount of (perhaps almost inevitable) contradictions, or at least complications, involved in such comprehensive transformations:

> "There are always internal problems, there will always be organisational problems, at least in the world of industrial management – there are always ideas, necessities, but beyond that, it's an organisational problem embedded in this transformation for the future. There is a model crafted through the ministry of food or through CVAL that they are giving to ALBA Arroz in order to improve it, but any industrial change of this sort generates fear, uncertainty, mistrust, but you have to see it from the point of view of the economy as a whole." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

Upon elaboration of this point, it soon became clear that what was at stake was not necessarily the structural transformation of socio-economic parameters for the sake of re-adjusting the coordinates of economic activity, but the overall socio-cultural attitudes and practices of the population at large – a sentiment that emerged clearly from the following interaction:

> "What happens is that there is a culture here, where no one is accustomed to gaining 30% or 20%, but rather everyone is seeking 100% gain. Have you ever eaten an empenada?"
>
> *Sure.*
>
> "How much do you pay for it?"
>
> *About 300Bs*

> "And how much is a kilo of flour?"
>
> *No idea*
>
> "A kilo of flour is 180Bs and an empanada they sell you is around 200-300. You know how many empenadas you can get out of a kilo of flour? Almost 20? This is the problem that we have, of consciousness – that we are not accustomed, like those developing countries that profit some given percent, like 20 or 30, but here no. Here everyone wants to profit 150%. Or take another example, a tomato; ask here how much a tomato is, they are going to say to you 600Bs, but go to Acarigua and its 800. There is just no uniformity of prices; everyone manages the price differently. So there is no equilibrium among prices in this economy and that has an impact on inflation … No one has had the consciousness to adapt to profiting only a certain percent… so this is one of the wars that the government is battling. To battle this inflation we should make 30% the maximum margin for foreign companies." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

I ask him about what role the difference in exchange rate makes, and what should be done about it, to which he merely replied that this was the work of "the economists", in order to find a solution, "not that this social group or that social group wins, but that everyone wins". In relation to this last point, the coordinator also referred to governmental measures in early 2016 that opened up a wider space of participation for the private sector in the management of economic problems. While the existence of a "tactical alliance" between the government and certain allied-fractions of Venezuelan capital had been in place since the oil lockout in 2002-2003 (Marín and Ellner, 2015), the Maduro administration has placed a renewed impetus on the formation of new tactical alliances with the private sector in order to battle the nation-wide economic crisis. In February of 2016, Maduro had appointed Miguel Pérez Abad, a former businessman and ex-president of the business lobby FEDEINDUSTRIA (representing small and medium sized firms), to the Vice-Presidency for Productive Economy, replacing the left-wing political economist Luis Salas (Koerner, 2016b).[58] Since then, Abad noted that more than 90% of the private sector had been in dialogue with the government, carried out through weekly meetings at the National Economic Council (Lorca, 2016). One prominent and recent example in the state of Portuguesa (surely in

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[58] Abad had been a long-time business ally of *chavismo*, and whose replacement of Salas was most likely a highly coordinated affair. Just a few months before Salas' exit from his post, he was reported as saying that there existed "honest" business people in Venezuela with which the government could work, such as Abad (*Correo del Orinoco*, 2016b).

the mind of my interview participant in Payara) was the establishment of a partnership between local private producers and the *Comités Locales de Abastecimiento y Producción* (Local Provision and Production Committees) to supply more than 250 tons of food. As the Secretary for Food Security and Sovereignty in Portuguesa, Akalapeizime Castro, explained, the alliance was based upon the participation of "responsible businessmen that receive raw material from the Corporation of Agricultural Supply and Service (CASA), and in turn dispatches us part of their final product" (cited in *AVN*, 2016). In addition, such moves have recently recorded a striking level of support from the public, with 75% of Venezuelans holding a favourable view of the government's dialogue with the private sector (Alavarado, 2016), and 74% approval of a common strategy of price setting with private businesses (*Correo del Orinico*, 2016c). In relation to this socio-political context, it was explained to me that:

> "It's not only us that has problems in the area of rice, the private companies have felt it and have lowered production margins – I have friends in the private companies; we have shared ideas and we will solve the problem together, not only the state… If we come together and don't lose perspective we are going to be able to have a better country… He who thinks that he is simply harming the state [by engaging in hoarding or price speculation] is in fact harming the entire country, and we are all the country…. Obviously we have to work with a supply and demand, but we are going to work with the supply and demand where everyone wins, win-win, where the business man wins and the consumer wins, through the 30% [profit] cap, which would be my recommendation – because there is no real price, it turns into a speculative price, and then you have mega inflation which simply misaligns the whole economy." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

The above clearly refers to the 2011 Law for the Control of Fair Costs, Prices and Profits, updated in 2013 that stipulates a 30% profit cap for companies across the board (Robertson, 2013; 2014). For my participant, this policy was not so much a line in the sand for the cooperation of the private sector, but rather the basis through which cooperative relations and economic health would go hand in hand:

> "I think that in the medium term this is going to get solved but not only through the state, but also through the private sector which has to help and collaborate, and that shares ideas and thoughts so that we might grow as a company… we need to manage supply and demand but that we also compete in the same area on the basis of the quality of the product, not to compete on price, because when we compete on price, we affect the whole collective, we affect our food. We have to respect

> the rules of the game, that this percentage [of profit margin] is maintained and that we solve things internally. If one has to form a structure of costs, we're going to do it together. You're not going to make one, and I make another. We do it together; we're going to work and construct this country together, through free thought. You can think, everyone can, but in maintaining the rules, and knowing that there is a state that assures these things… I assure you that there [UK] the rules are followed, 'rules' in the economic sense; there are standards of prices or a policy that reflects your country, I believe that no one is going to violate that. Even if you are against the State, you should not want that economy to fail. We always have to look at the wellbeing of the collective, we cannot have individualist thought; we have to think in the collective so that the country can prosper." (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016)

As can be seen from these comments, quite apart from the somewhat scattered musings on economic strategy, the emerging sentiment was clearly oriented around the faith in state-led management in conjunction with other (private sector) actors in the service of collective wellbeing, which is entirely in line with ALBA's general principles concerning a 'mixed economy' composed of various forms of property (cf. Aponte-García, 2011). Nevertheless, there is a raft of tensions and complexities involved in such cross-class collaboration, particularly in light of Venezuela's unique systemic crisis. At the most general level, the above comments seem to indicate a type of 'native bourgeoisie' perspective – a political outlook characteristic of the post-war ISI development model, in which a forward-looking capitalist class would (in the words of the coordinator, above), "look at the wellbeing of the collective". And yet, as Chibber (2005: 162) points out, "State managers… laboured under the impression that, since their agenda was devoted to strengthening national capitalism, it would elicit the support of national capitalists." Such an impression, as Chibber further notes, was quite unwarranted, given that the systemic conditions under which Latin American firms operated (tight domestic markets and monopoly positions) militated against innovation and upgrading, which thus led to a stagnant rate of accumulation. By and large, it was precisely because the state did not (or could not) directly intervene into the investment/production decisions of national firms that the latter so easily maintained rules of reproduction that ultimately served their own narrow interest.

It would seem that the Venezuelan state is, perhaps out of tactical desperation, leaning more heavily towards the participation of the private sector in kick-staring production. Indeed, as Abad noted in May 2017 (this time as head of the Banco Bicentenario, one of Venezuela's leading public banks), the 1999 constitution, as well

as the (currently proposed) new Constituent Assembly (2017), guarantees the right to private property in the means of production, "as an instrument of democracy" (cited in *Noticia al Dia*, 2017). However, the standoff between the state and domestic capital remains. As Abad noted elsewhere, "In 2016 practically not a single dollar was given to the private sector, they are working with their own effort" (cited in Marco, 2017). This drop off in the rate of appropriate of ground rent (mediated by an over-valued currency) is largely the result of a raft of corrupt practices carried out by the private sector, including expatriation of ground rent, overseas asset purchasing, and outright fraud through ghost imports, which (in conjunction with a lower absolute volume of oil rents) disincentivises the constant transferral of rent to capital (cf. Dachevsky and Kornblihtt, 2016; Yaffee, 2015). Thus, whether in the form of individual appropriations of state-mediated ground rent, or whether (as we saw in the previous section) investment decisions are guided by differential price movements rather than producing for key consumables (e.g., rice), capitalists pursue merely the accumulation of capital (through whatever means) rather than production for the 'public good'.

On average, workers displayed a higher propensity for such scepticism, particularly blaming the state and associated political functionaries or leaders:

> "The truth is I don't believe him [Maduro], that things are not so bad, because of this situation we have… he says: 'Be calm, we are not going hungry.' But we are going hungry, the Venezuelan is going through hunger and crisis, and no one speaks of what comes. The only thing that we are waiting for is for God to come. He who commands is God, and it is he who gives and takes away… But we continue struggling and hoping for what will come. Those that stay are our children that are living in difficult times. It's difficult, but we are struggling on." (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June, 2016)

As I was further told, these aspects become significantly aggravated through the ossification of political discourse, and the concomitant inability to adapt to political circumstances:

> "If you analyse this system, but look at the discourse, it's always the same: economic war, *los gringos*, the invasion, imperialism, and people dying of hunger. So this has to do with what I'm saying. The system can change, but we have to change the ideas, to generate new ideas, our form of thought, and our form of evolving. Because right now, this country is something else – you cannot keep people entrapped in the same discourse we've had for 10 years, because we're living in a different reality. You cannot pretend that the people are with you because you gave them a bag of food, with a litre of oil, some flour,

> beans and butter – this is not supplying the people. You have to find alternatives so that Venezuelans can dress themselves. Venezuelans have the same clothes they've had for the last 11 years!" (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June, 2016)

More strikingly still, lower level workers at the Payara plant did not share the optimism expressed by their coordinator concerning the strategic partnership with the private sector:

> "Even with the salaries that we have, our wages aren't enough. And so there is not enough to cover all of the demand that there is. Despite everything the government wanted to do, that is to say, to sell to the people at a just and economical price, we simply don't have enough companies created for this particular system because they created some but the majority of the companies are capitalist, at least the companies operating at the national level." (Interview, Payara workers, 01.07.2016)

Thus, views on the nature and ultimate resolution of the country's economic woes clearly varied among participants, specifically between whether the private sector could be relied upon in terms of bringing about a just and economical price to the population. For the workers at Payara, state-led firms (such as those within the ALBA network) represented something of a qualitative alternative or even rival to capitalist enterprises, with the corollary that only with the balance of economic forces in favour of the public sector would the way be open to a lasting resolution to the current crisis. These sentiments thus seem to correspond to the complications (outlined above) with respect to relying on the native bourgeoisie; given their *particular* outlook with respect to augmenting the firm's capital, the summation of many such instances of capitalist 'rationality' cannot amount to a coordinated form of national endogenous development. From the workers' perspective, only a relative dominance of state-led firms operating with calibrated levels of profit needed for firm survival and investments funds could break the economic deadlock.

Generally speaking, however, it becomes clear that the entire array of preceding problems and contradictions afflicting the ALBA factories imparts a series of ruptures across the entire terrain of rights, territory and (food) sovereignty. For with the statisation of property rights – as against the implementation of worker control – in combination with the specific accumulation regime and hegemonic project constitutive of the 'social economy' (price subsidisation at the *consumer*, rather than production, end of the chain) had merely re-created a territorial 'grid' separating the

factory and wider communal spaces, which together aim to become concentrically integrated circles of production, supply, and distribution. In this way, sovereignty remains concentrated within the bureaucratic landlord state, rather than within a multiplied terrain of cooperative spaces.

6.7 From Occupation to Re-Normalisation: The Uncertain Fate of ALBA-Arroz

At the time of my visits to the ALBA factories, the workers' union, *Unión Socialista Bolivariana de Trabajadores de Arroz del Alba*, was in negotiations with the president of CVAL and other officials. As one of the union *voceros* (shop stewards) noted, it was important for all the workers to maintain constant contact across all factory sites, "so we can speak with one voice." Yet there was also a level of pragmatism involved in their strategies: "our demands have to be something more or less equilibrated, and what you ask should be according with the reality of the company and the reality of the country, because neither can it be that we go and ask for something below what is necessary in order to satisfy the workforce" (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). One particular aspect was the establishment of a new price structure:

> "Rice at the competitive price is almost 470Bs. So we have petitioned CVAL to increase the price to at least 130Bs, for us to be able to be profitable, and to be sustainable as a company. The problem is that the costs vary a lot, for example packing bags used to cost 8Bs and now they cost around 120Bs… and you can't maintain a company like this, because when we have to invest in certain services, like fixing the boilers, this costs millions. And you have to do this every 6 months, and if you don't you're going to seriously damage your machinery." (Interview Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

However, the main item of negotiation revolved around returning the factory to operational status, which legally requires the appointment of a company president. But given the early stages of this negotiation, the future remained unclear:

> "What's been happening is that they have been naming top administrators that last for about a year, then they bring other administrators, who then leave after a year, then comes in yet another administrator, who lasted only two months, because we kicked him out. The state as such is making a restructuring of these types of companies; we are currently in a moment of transition with the bosses of the administration of CVAL, the workers and the Ministry of Work… We are in a transitory stage to see what will happen and what will change, if they change the name, if they will close it down, all conjectures that

> one can't be sure of because still nothing has been finally established." (Interview Píritu II, 11.05.2016)

Given the centrality of the Píritu II plant, the fact that it was one of two factories (along with Píritu I) that was officially under occupation, and thus effectively led the ALBA-Arroz workers through the process of struggle (and negotiation) against (and with) the state, I was curious to know more about their progress in these talks. The following month I returned to the plant. Having read the most recently published price regulations from SUNDDE (at which the maximum selling price for White Rice grade 1 was now 120Bs) I wondered whether this re-adjustment had fully taken on board their grievances that were surely aired during the negotiation process with CVAL and other high-level officials. After all, two kilos of rice paddy costs 140Bs, which already puts the cost of production above the new (higher) sale price. Does this not simply reproduce the same problem that was so strenuously pointed out during my first meeting? "Yes, we are losing, but this company was not created to gain" (Interview, Píritu II, 21.07.2016). Somewhat taken aback by the seemingly straightforward answer, I enquired as to whether this does not threaten once again the sustainability of the company:

> "Sure, but what is the sustainability that should be inside this company? To look for an alternative product to sell. Remember that white rice, table rice, has something that is called sub-product. And those products also are commercialised because they sell as concentrated foods, so you compensate one thing for another; the price that you are losing with packaged rice, you are compensating it with the sub-product or you compensate it like we are producing rice crackers… but we cannot close the percentage of the people which is at 120Bs, because this company was created with this objective: to be self-sustainable but never at the detriment of the people in the street." (Interview, Píritu II, 21.07.2016)

It was not made entirely clear whether or not the sum of derivative products and their sale was enough to offset the losses incurred through the sale of white rice, as I was told that hard data were off limits. It is plausible to assume that the company may well be operating at an absolute loss, given the voracity of protestation I experienced from our first interview, during which time it was likely the factory was also selling derivative products. What remains central, however, is the remarkable change of tone between the first and second interview, which is most likely due to the process of negotiation with the government, a 'normalisation' of factory protocol (arrival of a

new ALBA president – also a military man – whom I met quite unexpectedly during our second interview), and the concurrent re-orientation of subjective disposition towards the larger state apparatus. As I shook his hand for the last time, and walked out of the factory, I wondered whether or not the workers' struggle had all been in vain, for in the end, it appeared as if the nature and operation of the ALBA-Arroz factories had merely assumed the same form as it had the day before the occupation.

6.8 Reprise and Review: The Politics of Production in ALBA

The following subsections will seek to bring into a type of analytical coherence the findings of the above case study. To do so, we will focus on two levels of analysis. From a micro-foundational perspective, we will enquire into exactly what type of factory regime prevails under the ALBA-Arroz factories, and the politics of production that emerges from them. Secondly, we will enquire into the broader macro-economic dynamics that shape and impact upon the internal political struggles of these factories.

Between Hegemonic and Bureaucratic Factory Regimes

How, then, can we attempt to understand the form, rationale, strategies and subjectivities of the workers at the ALBA-Arroz factories? This is by no means an easy task, as the breadth and variety of the 'sociology of work' or 'labour studies' literature would suggest (see e.g., Cornfield and Hodson, 2002; Taylor, 2011). However, in order to elaborate some preliminary conclusions regarding the above analysis, I draw upon Michael Burawoy's taxonomy of labour struggles under different political regimes. One of the guiding questions of his study asks exactly "[w]hat determines the short-term, everyday interests [of workers], and how shall these turn into labour's long-term, imputed or fundamental, interests?" (Burawoy, 1985: 28). In many ways sharing Poulantzas' conception of the social formation, "[t]he productive process must itself be seen as an inseparable combination of its economic, political and ideological aspects", though ultimately dominated by the economic moment in which the relations of production prevail (Burawoy, 1985: 24-5).

We can therefore approach specific forms of institutionalized production relations with reference to Burawoy's distinction between particular types of "despotism". As we saw in Chapter 2 with Marx's notion of "factory despotism", the

relation between capital and labour is characterized primarily by the absolute dependence of labour to capital, insufficiently low wages (thus hampering the process of realisation from surplus value into profit), and therefore the emergence of over-production and under-consumption. Thus, under this early era of 'competitive capitalism' in the 19th century, it is (as Marx often pointed out) the "[a]narchy in the market [that] leads to the despotism in the factory" (Burawoy, 1985: 124). However, with the growth of firm size (and the corresponding contraction in the number of firms), market competition eased while the organization of work became highly mechanized. Thus, the added leverage enjoyed by workers meant that capital could no longer coerce work-effort, but had to persuade labour to perform its tasks. Thus, the transition from factory despotism to "hegemonic regime" inside the factory was mediated through the institutionalization of collective bargaining (unions), added social security, and increased state intervention into the struggles between labour and capital (ibid: 124-6). In this way, despite the variations among despotic regimes and hegemonic regimes across space and time, their analytical distinction consists in the "unity/separation of the reproduction of labour power and capitalist production" (ibid: 127).[59]

The final typology emerges within the context of "state socialism". For Burawoy, there are of course different types of socialism, not simply those of the statist variety as found in the former Soviet bloc. All such socialisms are marked by "fusing production politics with state politics"; further differentiation emerges between socialism "from below" in which the "guiding forces come from organs of producers in a… collective self-management" system. Thus, socialism "from above" emerges from the central organs of the state, or "state socialism" (ibid: 158). A primary characteristic of state socialism of the Soviet type is the absence of coercive market pressures (competition), which are mediated through price signals; rather, "the plan guides the flow of inputs and outputs of production. The planners represent a class of teleological – that is, purposeful – redistributors" (ibid: 159). The firm therefore faces

[59] There another typology of the hegemonic regime, corresponding to the most recent structural transformation of capital over the last 30 years. The increasing internationalization of capital and its increased mechanization or mobility thus subordinates labour far more than under the Fordist hegemonic regimes, in the form of a type of "hegemonic despotism": "where labour used to be *granted* concessions on the basis of the expansion of profits, it now *makes* concessions on the basis of… the rate of profit that might be earned elsewhere" (ibid: 150).

soft budgets, relaxed by state support, rather than hard budgets induced by market competition.

Finally, it is necessary to enquire into the types of class struggles that emerge under state socialism. Under capitalism, the relative separation of the economic from the political is primarily marked by the relative obscurity of exploitation; i.e. exploitation perfectly coincides with production, and is thus masked by it (through the 'equality' of exchange in the form of a money-wage). This predisposes workers in capitalism to both hitch their fortunes to that of the firm, and direct their struggles within the confines of the firm, rather than across the political field of struggle as a whole. Under state socialism, wages do not emerge from profits, but from state discretion while appropriation and distribution emerge from state dictates – hence, workers must be coerced into producing surplus through flexibilisation of the labour process (systems of compensation corresponding directly to work-effort) (ibid: 195). In this way, "enterprise struggles are immediately struggles against the state" (ibid: 196). As a corollary, the subjective disposition of workers in the former corresponds to an individualized bond under the hegemony of capital rather than within the common class; under the latter, class identity prevails, posed against a relatively antagonistic class of bureaucratic planners who conceive the plan, while the former executes the plan, and thus reproducing the separation between manual and intellectual labour. In Burawoy's estimation, these conditions of state socialist factory regimes also tend towards the development of worker consciousness towards the interests of self-management; for both the weak organic integration (hegemony) with the exploiting class, and the general lack of confidence in the teleological power of central planners, predisposes workers to seize factory operations entirely. Thus, "[t]heir hostility to the 'bureaucracy' is exacerbated by their knowledge that the supposed conceivers do not appear to conceive anything, this function being actually carried out by the direct producers" (ibid: 197). One finds from this model that the emergence of socialism from below is more likely to appear under conditions of "bureaucratic despotism", rather from within the confines of capitalist hegemony.

The above differentiation of Burawoy's categories is necessary for our purposes precisely because the characteristics of the factory regime found within the ALBA-Arroz network do not correspond in a neat one-to-one fashion with any given model, but rather resembles a complex mix of elements from each. In many ways, the factory regimes found within the above case study strongly point towards a type of

'bureaucratic despotism': factory operations are mediated through central planning rather than through competition and the movement of price signals; the conception of work plans are formulated from above (at the state level in terms of product mix and price formation); the broader economic environment is also constrained by supply squeezes, in which various types of inputs are generally scarce and thereby adding a level of uncertainty into the shop floor itself; while the form of class struggle that took place behind the factory gates penetrated the entire strategic field of the state, and in turn ensnaring higher levels of the state bureaucracy into the process of dispute settlement. However, there are other aspects that conform to the type of 'hegemonic regimes' found in advanced capitalism: the reproduction of labour is attained through a set of stable wages (due to institutionalized bargaining rules, workers were still paid even during moments of down-time and for the period of occupation itself); while the general outcomes of the workers' struggle did not (as was the case with Burawoy's studies of the command economies in Poland and Hungary) turn towards the immediate seizure of the means of production and a new system of self-management. In terms of this latter aspect, workers tended to display a higher loyalty to the survival of the firm itself, more commonly found within capitalist firms. The combination of these (somewhat contradictory) elements amounts to a factory regime and form of worker subjectivity and agency that combines relative job security and loyalty to the firm that is mediated not through the labour-capital relation by a *labour-state relation*.

One could therefore surmise that worker loyalty to the status-quo of the factory regime – seeking simply to return the factory to its normal functions, which in any case would require a new factory president (despite the ire that this layer of factory power drew from the workforce) – reflects merely the narrow self-interest of labour attempting to reproduce itself. However, and despite the relative impossibility of verifying this conclusion 'objectively', I would offer a somewhat different take. Undoubtedly the issue of job security looms large – particularly given the general problem of consumer price inflation and the tendency for public sector workers to enjoy periodic wage increases from the state as a means of defending workers' purchasing power – yet the continuous exhibition of positive affect towards the general social values and philosophy of *Bolivarianismo* suggests that the workforce maintain a strong internalization of broader political goals that are principally marked by the production for society (rather than mere accumulation of capital). This is not to say that ALBA-Arroz workers are slavish automatons to state ideology; what was equally

clear from the chapter's findings is that, as is common in regimes of bureaucratic despotism, the workforce constantly bemoaned the complete lack of understanding on behalf of state planners, which were characterized by poor knowledge of the production process, insufficiently politically minded, and generally tainted by corruption. And while possibilities towards self-management were present in the minds of the participants, this strategic push was side-lined given that broader power structures would be quite unwilling to devolve power to the workforce, while at the same time, resuming production for the immediate needs of the community took priority. In sum, saving the factory impacted both on the reproduction of worker security and the broader political goals held among them in terms of fulfilling their roles in the social economy.

And yet, in addition to Burawoy's suggestive model, these contradictions were precisely those identified by Poulantzas in his review of the Western capitalist states of the late 1970s. As Poulantzas described it, the "transformed form" of the state – in terms of its enhanced role in economic functions – becomes inscribed within a number of techniques aimed at recalibrating the popular classes towards a given set of policy goals. Yet it also opens up the state to a host of contradictory dynamics: "through its expansion, the State does not become more powerful, but on the contrary more dependent, with regard to the economy", which thus results in the "'overpolitcization' of the actions of the State" (Poulantzas, 2014: 169). In this way, "the contemporary state is caught in its own trap… the State can go neither backwards nor forwards… At one and the same time, it is driven to do both too much (crisis-inducing intervention) and too little (being unable to affect the deep causes of crises)" (ibid: 191). The major difference between the Western European variety and the contemporary state in Venezuela is that this transformed form is not induced through a falling rate of profit, but rather directly from the social mandate laid down by the accumulation strategy of endogenous development, yet under conditions of rentier-induced inflationary pressures. The presence of a specific form of systemic crisis (in the rate of inflation) has similarly caught the Bolivarian state into a deep trap.

The statisation of industry further entrenches this stasis, for the subsumption of capital under the state does not fundamentally alter capitalist relations of production, but rather results in a form of state capitalism (ibid: 193), wherein the division between manual and intellectual labour remains. Only in the face of a true socialization would one find not only "a change in state power, but also substantial

modification in the relations of production and the state apparatus" (ibid: 175). For Poulantzas, these marked shifts towards state capitalism would most likely occur in social formations that lack a substantial "native bourgeoisie", with state capital linked into the imperialist chain, *or*, "in countries that have undergone upheavals in a failed or aborted process of transition to socialism" (ibid: 193). Avoiding a "failed" transition process therefore requires a more fundamental reorganisation of the economic apparatus of the state (even before the question of the relations of production and social division of labour are put on the table), so that the economic interventions of a left government, and the transition process more broadly, may "retain a socialist character" (ibid: 195). Venezuela seems to fit these prognostications only somewhat, insofar as it still retains a relatively dominant native bourgeoisie (particularly the import sectors), yet exhibits what can be seen (at least in the case of ALBA's productive infrastructures) as an aborted process of socialist transition, insofar as the persisting gap between the rhetoric of ALBA's politico-economic philosophy and the concrete social relations between workers and the bureaucratic state. The first step on a renewed path to a socialist transition would surely centre on the reorganisation of the economic apparatus containing the ALBA-Arroz network, by simply severing the factories from their institutional straightjackets, imputing them with operational autonomy, switching the target of oil rents towards developing the productive forces, which may then provide the greatest opportunity and scope for the workforce to decide on day to day operational objectives as a necessary step towards self-management.

Nevertheless, some days before my departure from Venezuela, it emerged that, according Juan Vicente Perdomo, one of the specialist engineers at the ALBA-Arroz factory in Guárico, the workers' *vocero* had filed a law-suit against the state over the transparency of a procedure pertaining to a possible transferal or shut-down of the factory. As Perdomo claims, the state has not negotiated or included the workers in this process, thus violating Articles 92 and 142 of the Organic Law of Work (Carrillo, 2016). It would appear as if the issue of worker security is therefore a most pressing concern at this stage; given the level of bureaucratic secrecy permeating the state, it is quite possible that workers in other factories in Portuguesa are also looking on with some trepidation. Furthermore, should the ALBA-Arroz factories go into liquidation, it is more than likely that these productive infrastructures would revert to private ownership, which would further entrench the aborted process of socialist transition.

Ground Rent and Soft Budgets

Venezuela's current economic crisis is, by all accounts, largely the result of the drop in world oil prices beginning around 2014. As such, the issue of ground rent, as a portion of surplus value captured by 'landlord states' (Hellinger, 2017) through the valorisation of their national wealth in the global market, becomes a key driver in the pursuit of national development policy. As Thomas Purcell notes, the mobilization of ground rent as the primary mediator in the establishment of "egalitarian exchange and social property relations" has tended to undermine deeper transformations concerning "the way production is organized, both technically and socially" (Purcell, 2013: 162). In relation to the ALBA-TCP, a similar conclusion is drawn with respect to the structural limits of the Grandnational Enterprises, which "reproduce the same normative and voluntarist logic of initiatives in Venezuela – such as social production companies… – whose explicitly stated aim is to satisfy social needs by producing use-values outside the 'logic' of capital accumulation" (Purcell, 2016: 117-8).

We can therefore see many of these contradictory dynamics at work in the above analysis of the ALBA-Arroz network. As a guiding strategic selectivity of the 'social economy', the provision of subsidized goods represents one of the cornerstones of Bolivarian politics in contemporary Venezuela, as a form of socializing the products of society in the spirit of egalitarianism, "so that no one is left out, from the poorest to the richest" (Interview, Payara, 06.07.2016). Yet in creating a cost-structure that leads to a permanent loss with each unit of production, these enterprises are therefore vulnerable to variations in the volume of ground rent available via a series of socio-economic forces emanating from outside the state's frontiers – in the form of surplus-value formation and purchasing power from across the oil-consuming world – and thus severely hampering the drive towards endogenous development. Paradoxically, the manner in which oil rent, and the permanent presence of soft budgets, underwrites the process of endogenous development simultaneously undermines this very endogeneity. The contradictory mix of the Bolivarian accumulation regime and hegemonic project – understood as stagnant or declining investment in the productive forces, and the maintenance of political support via subsidisation of consumption (cf. Kornblihtt, 2015) – ultimately reproduces the dependency relationship that Latin America has for so long been battling against.

However, it is also clear that the use of petroleum as a material foundation for the development and creation of new productive infrastructures need not necessarily

lead to the failure of endogenous development as such, so long as they are couched within a sufficiently dynamic range of strategies and modes of organization. One problem noted above is the political move towards the fragmentation of productive activities across the ALBA-Food Grandnational, via the creation of specific entities dedicated to one particular strategic product (rice, legumes, pork, etc.). In the case of Píritu III, the eventual narrowing from a multi-product capacity to merely the processing of rice represented a marked contradiction of overall plant utilization, which could be returned to its previous status merely through switching of sieves and filters for sifting particular grains (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016). Thus, while it is obviously necessary to segment agrarian production according to the material capacities of a firm or sector (one cannot process rice in a pig farm), under-utilization of plant capacity may emerge as a form of "plan fetishism" (Burawoy, 1985), wherein politics outdoes socio-economic strategy.

Thus, it would seem that endogenous development might in fact reach the goals inherent to it, if only these voices from the shop floor could make a substantial impact on the management of the social economy. Yet at the same time, it must be acknowledged that any given strategy, whether formed from above or below, would have to deal with the broader systemic pressures that emanate from the general rate of inflation, which constantly thwarts any attempt at rationally organizing production and consumption levels; in other words, even if the workers were able to set the price at some marginal level above the cost-price of production (at least in order to accrue re-investable surplus), it is likely that this might lead to a cost-push inflationary spiral that includes consumer prices, and thus ultimately negating the entire project of egalitarian distribution and endogenous development. Perhaps the only way in which such a disaster could be avoided would be through the systematic socialization in the entire national infrastructure, from production to circulation. As various radical intellectuals inside Venezuela argue, subsuming finance and commercial sectors under public ownership (the latter concerned with imports and internal circulation of goods in the national market) would break the stranglehold that certain fractions of Venezuelan capital hold over the wider economy, and thus potentially subvert inflationary pressures by calibrating production, prices and consumption through a socially oriented plan guided by self-organised popular worker collectives (see Yaffe, 2015). Yet problematically, state personnel have been equally implicated in the hoarding and contraband sale of goods for the sake of accruing surplus profits, though

for individual, rather than corporate (company) gain (*Aporrea*, 2016; *Prensa*, 2016). In light of these challenges, Purcell offers a potential route out of this developmental impasse:

> “if the [ALBA] project could move to concentrate ground-rent at the scale necessary to put ALBA-TCP on a par with world market levels of productivity, but under a social form of regional state-control that redistributes and re-invests to meet the political and social goals of ALBA-TCP, then something other than an integration of ‘underdeveloped’ landlord states dressed up in ideological platitudes could emerge” (Purcell, 2016: 118).

But as is clear from the various levels of corruption, incompetence, state-bureaucratic confusion and relative disempowerment among workers struggling under the ALBA umbrella, redirecting economic resources and investment towards the true consolidation of the social economy and endogenous development will not come about merely through the transition towards regional state-control, but through the transition towards popular class control affected by strategic alliances between various subaltern actors within and beyond the factory gates. Under such conditions, it would be possible to begin the long road to socialist transition, by breaking down the divide between manual and intellectual labour, instituting and socialising property rights, which in turn lays the ground work for the re-territorialisation of production/distribution/consumption as is adequate to the general struggle for food sovereignty.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has offered a comprehensive account of the international regional organization of ALBA in the context of its stated aim to institute a 'food sovereignty' regime. It is, therefore, primarily intended as a contribution to the first generation of ALBA studies, by way of offering an in-depth analysis (from both the macro- and micro-foundational levels) of the actors, processes and challenges encountered on the long road to food sovereignty. As a multidimensional struggle, food sovereignty engenders the call for a democratisation in the world's food regime, in which those at the helm of production become politically empowered with respect to ownership and control of the agrarian commons, and with strategic decision-making powers over said resources. Thus, the present study has been equally wide-ranging, by offering a series of case studies among agrarian social movements, spaces of radical pedagogical practice, and worker struggles. In order to articulate the living experiences of these actors, I employed a tripartite schema that aims to capture the complex dynamics of struggle throughout the terrain of society, namely, through the lens of *rights, territory and sovereignty.* Such a vantage point helps reveal the inherently uneven process of instituting food sovereignty in ALBA. For while the status of food sovereignty within this regional institution is far from making real headway into a qualitatively new food regime, it has also witnessed very real transformations in the form of agrarian rights, territorial practices, and nascent forms of popular sovereignty.

Given the conceptual pallet with which I have sketched the variegated terrain of struggle, this thesis has primarily been focused on the *politics* of food sovereignty, and the attendant class conflicts and differential powers that inform the making of a new, yet embattled, food regime. We have also seen how the politics of ALBA, and its discursive content of *Bolivarianismo*, have strongly shaped the developmental pathways of rights, territory and sovereignty, particularly with respect to the distinctive political technology constitutive of 'post-liberalism'. As such, the concomitant indicators of agrarian development and production patterns – principally examined in the context of Venezuela – have demonstrated that the lacklustre progress in attaining a food sovereignty regime points towards the internal contradictions within the Bolivarian state form. Speaking in 2014, president Maduro claimed that "national unity is the magic formula to continue walking the path of the 21st century" (cited in, *El Universal*, 2014a). It would seem, then, that the legacy of Venezuela's

magical state appears to be ever-present within the very same struggle that seeks its dissolution. In order to trace the main findings of the research, the following will readdress the three research questions shaping the thesis.

(1) The transformation from the dominance of capitalist agriculture to a more socially just mode of agrarian production has been an explicit component of the Bolivarian turn, and a central concern for the politics of Food Sovereignty. Yet it is difficult to see much progress of such a transformation *at the specifically region-wide scale*. While intra-ALBA trade in food goods has shown marked growth, this dimension tells us little about overcoming the social logic of capitalism (dominated by exchange-value and the accumulation of capital for its own sake), based not on exchange relations but *production relations*. As such, social transformation – even while aided by international and transnational linkages and solidarities – must take place in territorially specific spaces (be they spaces of production, communities or nations). The favoured scale for such a transformation is undoubtedly the sovereign-state, imbued with the knowledge/power that enables capitalist relations of production to endure. At this point, only Venezuela has taken notable steps to implement a 'social economy' and food sovereignty regime (cf. McKay et al., 2014), quite unlike the other two largest ALBA members (Bolivia and Ecuador), which have substantially reproduced traditional patterns of capitalist agriculture (Henderson, 2016; Webber, 2017). ALBA's regional space, at least in terms of agrarian policy, resembles merely an aggregation of states rather than a consolidated bloc forging a unified agricultural policy. And while various international agreements have been made (particularly with respect to Grandnational Enterprises), it is difficult to ascertain the precise status of the various bi-lateral agreements established by ALBA members (short of conducting location-specific fieldwork). Venezuela was therefore a crucial test case, given the number of ALBA-brokered projects and production sites residing within its territory.

    Yet even in Venezuela, the move towards consolidating food sovereignty and the social economy contains its own complexities. By and large, untangling these complexities can be achieved by deconstructing the

‘strategic selectivities’ constitutive of the Bolivarian state. Thus, as characteristic of an ‘oil nation’ and ‘landlord state’, the mobilization of social wealth in the form of ground rent provides a material basis for the development of the productive forces – including new modes of knowledge and agrarian practice – as well as the source for establishing a substantial level of social security for the popular sectors. And yet, it is precisely in favouring the latter policy at the expense of the former that has led to a contradictory situation in which higher social security and purchasing power throughout the population leads to new demand-pressures that cannot be met without the expanded production of basic goods.

In this way, while Venezuela has clearly sought to affect a positive rights regime with respect to the social guarantee to food, this approach to the social economy is distorted towards consumption at the expense of production, thus leaving in place the central mechanisms of dependence in the form of global oil prices and state largesse. Consequently, the two central components of the food sovereignty model, in the form of ‘endogenous development’ and ‘labour-centred development’ have been unevenly implemented, with the latter aspect showing little sign of progress in ALBA’s spaces of industrial production (though perhaps more so in the case of IALA, based on the democratisation of agroecological knowledge), while the former remains ensnared by an over-reliance on oil rent circulation in order to paper over the limits of an underinvested productive foundation. Additionally, and as a result of this contradiction, the strategically limited use of oil revenues merely exacerbates the ‘export-or-die’ compulsion from which ALBA is attempting to extricate itself. The above contradictions have therefore seriously hampered the effort to implement a far-reaching food sovereignty regime, leading instead to a state-capitalist rentier economy, with a fragmented peasantry undergoing enormous strains in resource procurement and sustainable marketing channels, as well as a working class subsumed under a bureaucratic factory regime.

(2) While such macro-level contradictions may be readily identified, their interpretation remains obscure without enquiring into the social agents at the helm of these dynamics and their sources of agency and capacity for action. At the regional scale, the ALBA bloc remains relatively overdetermined by the

magnitude of ground rent available for funding specific policies, a material basis that is equally central to the transformation of the Venezuelan state itself. This has certainly provided ample room for manoeuvre for the Venezuelan state and its personnel, by providing enormous levels of social spending on the popular classes, as well as experimentation with new forms of rights and territoriality (autonomy and decentralization). What makes these new spaces of popular politics so vibrant is the manner in which radical social forces breathe life into them through myriad strategies of popular collaboration and independent initiative. Very often, such forces are adept at creating facts on the ground – a *de facto* set of popular political technologies – that later become enshrined in national law.

Workers at the ALBA factories exhibit the classic forms of structural power in their workplaces, through collective strategies of resistance (strikes and occupations), though with somewhat short-term goals with respect to merely re-activating production along the same organisational path. Workers within the ALBA-Arroz factories thus represent an often-unacknowledged component of food sovereignty politics, in terms of operating intermediary spaces of production that are capable of scaling up the mass of raw-material generated by peasant production. Yet like peasant actors, the ALBA workers' strategic power and agency become substantially deflected, and subsumed, under the hegemony of the Bolivarian state, often to detrimental effect. The systemic challenges facing these factories, as well as the social economy in general, thus tends to sever and disorganise what would be organic lines of connection and cooperation – from the 'point and circle' philosophy linking spaces of production and reproduction together, to the broader networks of peasant production, industrial processing and publically planned distribution. More often than not, these diverse agencies (from above and below) come into relative conflict, which can be traced to the contradictory forms of strategic and spatial selectivity of the Bolivarian state and the push for autonomous yet interconnected spaces of popular democracy from below. In other words, the overdetermination of oil rent in combination with a set of policies designed to increase social welfare tend to side-line more strategic considerations in terms of consolidating peasant and working class power within community- and production-spaces.

(3) The broad socio-political substratum of agent-strategy convergence around the Bolivarian ideal and the ALBA regional space can be concretely traced to the generalized revolt against neoliberal discipline beginning in the 1980s, a common denominator that similarly sutures together transnational peasant movements and the wider ALBA bloc. Yet it is equally clear that the entire regional space is riddled with cracks and fissures. Again, the Council of Social Movements is more symbolic than real (despite the continued support among social movement actors for the ALBA initiative); peasant movements in Venezuela may experience fragmentation around class or gender lines (either through the formation of small landholders satisfied with limited land reform, chauvinist elements in peasant communities that inhibit a fuller role for women in the countryside, or relative class differentiation and competitive pressures), as well as confronted by a Janus-faced state apparatus, at once ally and enemy (depending on the institutional branch in question and the specific conjuncture); the dissemination of new knowledge in the IALA institute remains delimited by the socio-spatial realities of the country (over-urbanisation and the concomitant dependence upon the transfer of ground rent for urban dwellers, as well as the diminishment of transnationalisation of the institute); while ALBA workers are unable to utilize their full capacities of knowledge/power (and consequently the full production capacity of the factory) due to a contradictory development model based more around consumption than production. The precise reasons for such divergences are of course complex, yet they can be traced back to the specific institutional materiality of the Bolivarian state – embodying a hybrid form of a centralized, bureaucratic 'landlord state' that simultaneously (if not unevenly) forges new spaces of grassroots democracy and empowerment in partnership with social forces from below.

7.1 What Kind of Post-Hegemonic Region is ALBA?

In approaching the project of food sovereignty within the ALBA space, the thesis offered a class analysis of this initiative as a means of overcoming both the black-box tendency of state-centric analyses and the overtly voluntarist and discursive approach

of Thomas Muhr. As such, I proposed a critical problem-solving theory methodology that takes seriously (rather than glossing over) the real contradictions, tensions and struggles permeating the ALBA project. In doing so, this middle-range methodology seeks to navigate between the more traditional 'problem-solving' approaches found in realist IR theory and state-centric accounts of regionalism, with the more critical-discursive neo-Gramscian approach that too often becomes ensnared by the statements, proclamations and institutional documentation underwriting the ALBA space. As Christopher Absell notes in perhaps the most comprehensive account of the first generation of ALBA scholarship, the past 10 years of research has provided an extensive yet *descriptive* account of ALBA's principles, philosophies and policy initiatives. Thus, there is a great need to "confront the discourse of official documentation with the observable practice of reality" (Absell, forthcoming). And in the case of ALBA's central productivist institutions – the Grandnational Enterprises – there is in effect no transparency with respect to the operation and core status of these infrastructures. For these reasons, I have therefore drawn upon extensive interview data with key participants in both agrarian social movements and workers within the ALBA factories. As noted above, by critically engaging with these actors' perspectives, experiences and hopes, I aim to bring greater attention to the critical lines of convergence and divergence permeating the ALBA project, and in turn providing important insights into the troubled future of 'Socialism in the 21st Century'.

As a preliminary conclusion, then, we might ask: what kind of a post-hegemonic region is ALBA? In many ways, this answer cannot really emerge from a pure theory of regionalism. One could argue, in fact, that the only true theory of regionalism – functionalism – died on the back of the great variation that occurred throughout the world's international regions. For precisely this reason, perhaps the most promising route to understanding these supra-national institutions is through a comparative approach, which brings into focus what functionalism cannot: variation in institutional design and their political effects (Acharya and Johnston, 2007). However, while not discounting this methodological approach, I have opted for a different angle, emphasizing the creative and often differentiated agential strategies pursued by various actors in the face of common structural pressures (Knafo, 2010). Even when we look at the emergence of the European Union – the birthplace of functionalist theory – its various twists and turns (let alone the social origins of the institution itself) cannot truly be known outside of the various class compositions,

struggles and elite strategies aimed at both counter-acting radical social forces and the re-establishment of European accumulation and geopolitical re-normalisation (Cocks, 1980). In short, while the comparative method is useful, it is not the only one. I have, then, attempted to understand and explain the rise, evolution and status of the ALBA regional institution from within the parameters of its own states and social forces.

Nevertheless, and in line with a critical IR approach adopted here, it was first of all necessary to contextualise the history of international regionalism in order to grasp the specificity of post-war geopolitics, and the historical legacies out of which the ALBA region was itself emerging. Thus, unlike many studies of ALBA, Chapter 3 sought to help presage the question of what kind of region ALBA really is by delineating the geopolitical pressures emanating from the evolving global food regime, which becomes refracted time and again through the regionalisation of world politics. The Poulantzian frame offered by Jessop, in tandem with other insights from a Marxian theory of social space, offers a window into the changing dynamics of regionalism in Latin America – from ISI developmentalism to neoliberal discipline. The contradictions of capitalist development pushed subaltern classes to contest their continued subsumption under the dominance of Atlantic capital, and forced the reorganisation of hegemony on behalf of dominant classes. Thus, the new hegemonic project congealed within the idea of ALBA sought to more fully bring the practice of sovereign politics under the control of the nation, and in turn re-politicise the regime of civil and political rights through a decentralised territorial regime.

In this way, ALBA represents a highly unique post-hegemonic region, one that is deeply committed *at a discursive level* to the principles of social justice and popular empowerment, yet refracted through a statisation of welfarist policy making. Hence, the specific accumulation regime and hegemonic project permeating the ALBA space – namely, mobilisation of state-generated resource rents embedded within various yet unevenly extended modes of popular participation – does give space for more substantial political agency for previously disenfranchised groups, yet often trapped within the nation-state grid. The overriding geopolitical logic of ALBA, as the re-assertion and preservation of national sovereignty operationalised through loose, non-legally binding forms of ad-hoc diplomatic negotiation, thus serves to reproduce the power of the bureaucratic sovereign state as the privileged space and site of political struggle. In light of these conclusions, I would argue that there certainly exists a type of 'transnational organized society' (as Muhr describes it) – in which La Vía

Campesina and its attendant institutions (like the IALA school) represent important examples – but that its organic integration into a 'state-in-revolution' (or even a region-in-revolution) remains quite displaced. In other words, once we recall that the key to capitalist (state) power is not simply the formal separation between state/civil society (politics/economics) but the relative disorganization of the popular classes maintained through exclusion from the realms of knowledge/expertise, then it would seem that not only is there much work to do with respect to radicalizing this 'post-hegemonic region', but that this work will continue to focus on working in and against the sovereign state.

7.2 The Terrifyingly Real Effect of the Bolivarian State

With these broad conclusions in mind, and with a focus on 'real world problems' (but from the perspective of the underdog), I sought for the appropriate theoretical frame with which to capture the various themes, actors and power relations that slowly emerged throughout the fieldwork. Realising that so much of what constitutes ALBA's food sovereignty project essentially resides within the frontiers of Venezuela, as well as the fact that the very philosophy of political economy underwriting the ALBA project predisposes the political economy of this regional space to maintain a relative focus on the national scale, it seemed apparent that a more critical theory route into the *post-liberal state* was the necessary strategy.

I therefore turned to the Marxian state theory of Nicos Poulantzas, particularly his last work *State, Power, Socialism* (*SPS*). Though seemingly an arbitrary choice – particularly given Poulantzas' more extensive work on class analysis and political power in earlier volumes, as well as the somewhat unfinished and speculative nature of *SPS* – there are several core components to this volume that stand out as exemplary tools for both the analysis of ALBA's post-hegemonic regionalism, and the wider understanding of the problems and prospects of food sovereignty as a counter-hegemonic food regime. Nevertheless, the analysis was also supplemented by reference to subsequent generations of neo-Poulantzian scholarship, as well as considerations on the politics of space itself, in order to reveal the complex contours of social change and class struggle.

This then led to my examination of food sovereignty through three thematic lenses: rights, territory and sovereignty. Each of these elements was chosen due to

what I perceived to be their continually recurrent presence throughout FS discourse and practice. More importantly, I believe, it is through these inter-connected angles that we can better understand the real challenges faced by FS protagonists, who seek nothing more than a substantial transformation in the social relations of power in both the countryside and society at large. In this way, reading these components sociologically led to the formula of rights + territory = sovereignty, which reveals the ways in which struggles over each component has a determinate effect on the others.

And yet, this conceptual formula is not necessarily transhistorical; despite the presence of bounded communities, divided by frontiers of various kinds over the ages, national sovereignty is something unique, an historically specific institution born from the ashes of feudalism (Hinsley, 1986; Elden, 2013). Here, the dynamics of politics or ideology are not the central mediators for the reproduction of the modern social formation. 'Economics' (in a narrow sense) effectively emerges as a structure of social relations that is capable (formally speaking) of reproducing itself; hence, the apparent separation of politics from economics, the spectacular ascendance of abstract formalism, calculation and scientific discourse, and the depersonalization of the sovereign state. Yet only by penetrating the 'pristine' realm of the economy do we find its secret lodged between real individuals in the process of production: the class of direct producers possessing only their bodies, and a class of owners that turn their factories into their own miniature fiefs. Starting from this level of analysis – the relations of production shaping structures of ownership/control, and the social division of labour as its result – thus overcomes the fetishised view of the state/civil society dichotomy to reveal the interpenetration of economics with politics, in both the factory and the sovereign state. For the monopolization of the means of knowledge constitutes the common denominator between capitalist power and state power, even though in one we find a monopoly of the means of production, and with the other a monopoly of the means of coercion.

In this way, the struggle for a new regime of rights, modes of knowledge and forms of territorialisation, comprising three of the fundamental areas of contention for peasant movements in La Vía Campesina, thus congeal around the double confrontation against landed capital and the bureaucratic state. This is not to suggest that the Bolivarian state is simply masked in a progressive discourse while continuing to act as a bourgeois state. Indeed, the continued dedication to the Bolivarian project (and state) exhibited by social movements, peasant groups, and the working class

itself, demonstrates clearly the inherently fragmented nature of the state apparatus, which by its own form establishes differential class alliances across the entire strategic terrain of struggle. Only by tracking this contested terrain do the key parameters of accumulation regime, hegemonic project and the strategic and spatial selectivities that unite them make themselves entirely apparent. It is precisely form this structural differentiation of the state apparatus that radical social forces can be with/in/against the state simultaneously, even if the lines of battle are constantly redrawn as a result of multiple struggles across its strategic terrain.

In terms of the political economy of ALBA itself, the lines of struggle become even more prominent. Again, this must be understood not as an organic outgrowth of ALBA's own principles, but rather the regional normative framework refracted by the domestic contradictions permeating Venezuelan society. In the case of the ALBA-Arroz factories, we can further observe the contradictory embodiment of working class values adhering to the Bolivarian ideal, yet struggling against the Bolivarian state. This again serves to illustrate the 'terrifyingly real' effect of state power, which from the perspective of its own institutional materiality creates a set of practices and logics that often diverge from its normative formalism. In other words, the struggle for the social economy cannot take place through the mere repetition of Bolivarian ideals; for as one of the ALBA workers lamented, change will only come about through "a change in the oxygen" – through the formation of new ideas that emerge through new material institutions. It is equally important to critically analyse the concrete strategies of workings class fractions within the social economy, lest we impute them with a potentially misplaced 'revolutionary' current. For what these workers sought was not the reorganization in the relations of production (though they did not discount it), but rather than re-normalisation of factory operations, even if this goal remained couched within Bolivarian discourse. Thus, it is clear that struggles within the social economy, by their very nature, become struggles within and against the state: *the politics of production and the production of politics become one and the same*. And if the road to food sovereignty necessarily embodies a transformative process towards the fundamental reorganisation and socialisation of rights, territory and sovereignty, then it is arguably true to say that this road necessarily leads through the domain of socialist transformation.

What, then, are the prospects for the democratic road to socialism, and indeed a more socialised food regime? As we have seen from both Poulantzas' own theoretical

commitments, as well as the complexities involved in the empirical findings of this thesis, one cannot prejudge this question through clever theoretical formulations. Poulantzas' wager was, after all, given on the back of his suspicion of statism, from both the bourgeois and communist angles. The hegemony of parliamentary democracy and the dangers of dual power each produced within Poulantzas' thought a scepticism of past practices that inevitably reproduced the power of the state. If we therefore view the Bolivarian road to socialism as one approximating a democratic variant, what does the continuing power of the state bureaucracy tell us about the prospects of Socialism in the 21st century? This question constitutes, in a sense, the outer frontier of the thesis, the answer to which would require an entire thesis in its own right. But it is a question that revolutionaries and critical scholars cannot ignore, and which (I hope) will be further explored in the future.

7.3 Avenues of Further Research

In terms of potential avenues of further research, there is of course much to be learned with respect to the intersection between struggles for food sovereignty inside the ALBA's post-hegemonic region. Firstly, with reference to the promise of comparative analysis, it would be useful to compare and contrast the ways in which food sovereignty, as a philosophy and practice, emerge within, and become contested through, other Latin American regional organisations. A promising route would be to examine the relative presence or absence of food sovereignty discourse within MERCOSUR, particularly given the spatial overlap between the geopolitical centre of this regional space (Brazil) and one of LVC's most militant peasant groups (MST). Gaining a better handle on the 'how and why' of food sovereignty's success or failure across regional cases would provide greater scope of understanding with respect to the various opportunity structures faced by agrarian social movements within and across regional organisations. Additionally, and in line with the comparative method, it would be equally useful to compare cases of state-led food sovereignty policies *within* the ALBA bloc itself. Though some preliminary work has already been done in this regard (McKay et al., 2014), a more concerted 'horizontal' analysis to intra-ALBA food sovereignty politics would provide much needed contextualisation to the more 'vertical' (intra-national) case studies as with the present thesis.

From a similar angle, further field investigations should take place with respect to working class organization across the ALBA space. It is apparent that there is currently no umbrella labour union that integrates all workers integrated into all ALBA-related worksites or sectors. Further conversations with key stakeholders (workers across ALBA countries) as well as elite interviews (with the relevant ministers comprising nationally constituted economic institutions) would surely expand our understanding of labour politics within what is ostensibly a regional space dedicated to the 'social economy' and 'labour-centred development'.

Finally, a series of potential questions might be posed in terms of what the fate of Socialism in the 21st Century spells for the current conjuncture of revolutionary politics elsewhere. While the struggle for food sovereignty opens one set of debates over the nature of socio-political change, the broader dynamics of Venezuela and the ALBA provide ample food for thought over the resurgence of the political right within the Latin American continent, not to mention the wider turn to what somewhat have called 'global Trumpism'. The task ahead, as indicated in the Introduction of the thesis, pivots on a measured abandonment of monotonic evaluation of revolutionary struggles, in order to reveal the inherent crises and contradictions that afflict any substantial project to transform society. It is therefore hoped that the substance of this thesis has provided some contribution towards a measure of soul-searching, if not for the sake of turning our dreams of a better future into a present reality.

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