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The Social Contradictions of Regional Development in the ALBA-TCP: The Case of Food Production

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Abstract:

The Latin American regional institution of the ALBA-TCP (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos*) has garnered much deserved scholarly attention due to its radical rhetoric and novel forms of geopolitical cooperation and regional development. However, extant studies of ALBA provide little insight into the concrete actors at the helm of its development policies. To expand our understanding of this regional organisation, the present article offers a critical political economy perspective into the class dynamics of food production within ALBA, via empirically grounded research findings. Mobilising Nicos Poulantzas' theory of the capitalist state, as well as subsequent innovations in neo-Poulantzian theory, the analysis reveals how the spatial organisation of food production exhibits a markedly *statist* character. With specific focus on a series of ALBA-created rice-producing factories located in Venezuela, I show how the prevailing relations of production within these factories assumes a state-capitalist form, which runs counter ALBA's philosophy of social empowerment. Overall, the ALBA region's organisation of 'shared development' remains highly fragmented and un-coordinated in the context of food production, vastly underwritten by the circulation of Venezuelan oil rents, and ultimately subsumed under the power of the bureaucratic state. There is, therefore, a conspicuous gap between the discourse of ALBA and the reality of its political economy.

KEYWORDS: ALBA-TCP, regionalism, Venezuela, food, Poulantzas, state theory

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Introduction

The Latin American regional institution of the ALBA-TCP (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos* – Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples' Trade Treaty) has been variably framed by scholars as a stridently anti-neoliberal regional formation, with implicit leanings towards a type of post-capitalist development. As Claudio Katz identified early on, the social content of ALBA's philosophy points towards an 'explicit anti-capitalist horizon' (Katz 2006: 70). Muhr (2017: 852), for instance, notes that ALBA's development model 'drives a transition to socialism' via *cooperative advantage*, rather than competitive advantage, while Riggiozzi sees this post-hegemonic region as engendered by 'non-capitalist practices as alternative development principles', largely through 'endogenous development and a new internationalism based on the exchange of human capital' (Riggiozzi 2012: 26). This 'socialism in the 21st century', furthermore, goes beyond the 'actually existing' socialism of the Soviet era, by encompassing 'inclusive markets, the diversity of property forms, new debates including the communal economy, solidarity economy, *Buen Vivir* (*Sumak Kawsay*), [and] new forms of political and social inclusion' (Aponte-García 2014: 27-8).

However, while the first generation of ALBA studies has routinely noted the novelty of ALBA's mode of development – through cooperation, complementarity, social policy, and endogenous development (e.g., Briceño-Ruiz 2010; Muhr 2010, 2011a; Tahsin 2011; Aponte-García 2014) – such scholarship remains relatively trapped at the level of *description* gleaned from official documents and summit declarations, which consequently fails to penetrate the surface impression of ALBA's operation. Of course, there are some notable exceptions; both Muhr (2011b) and Artaraz (2011) present field-work based insights into ALBA's social policies, specifically that of education and healthcare. However, empirical studies of this kind have been entirely lacking within the realm of ALBA's approach to

regional *political economy*. While Aponte-García's (2014), Califano (2015), and Cusack (2018) have certainly gone the farthest in excavating not only ALBA's underlying development philosophy (the 'Grandnational Concept') but also hard data revealing trade and financial flows within this regional space, very little is known about the concrete actors involved in the formation of ALBA's regional economy. This article therefore seeks to go some way towards filling this gap by critically analysing the 'Grandnational Concept' from an empirically grounded *class analysis*, with particular focus on one of ALBA's food production networks. By specifying how different agents relate to each other vis-à-vis production relations, it becomes possible to de-mystify institutional discourse (e.g. 'socialism') by laying bare the class basis of political institutions.

As a means of theoretically framing the analysis of ALBA and its political economy, the article draws on Nicos Poulantzas' ([1978] 2014) relational theory of the capitalist state, which, I argue, provides theoretical nuance to the study of state forms and political strategy. While Poulantzas' analysis of the capitalist state focused largely on Western Europe in the late 1970s, his relational state approach remains sufficiently flexible for the analysis of other capitalist states within the Global South. Furthermore, his discussion of 'the democratic road to socialism' provides, as other authors have noted, a useful optic for dissecting Venezuela's own approach to '21st century socialism' (Muhr 2011b; Ellner 2017).

I then introduce subsequent innovations in neo-Poulantzian theory that bring to the foreground considerations on the dynamics of policy making as they emerge from the combination of a specific *accumulation strategy, mode of regulation, and hegemonic project*, and the differential political scales across which these dynamics operate. In this way, both Poulantzas and later neo-Poulantzian scholarship helps to work through different (though inter-linked) levels of analysis: the former by positing the specificity of a given capitalist state as a material condensation of class forces within society (crystallising its *institutional*

materiality), while the latter grounds these insights into the dynamics of accumulation/regulation/hegemony within a multiplicity of spatial scales. From this multivalent framework, it is possible to critically articulate the micro-foundational dynamics of class struggle with the macro-level contexts shaping national/regional political economy.

Empirically, the article will contrast the politico-economic philosophy of ALBA – understood through the regional-scale ‘Grandnational Concept’ – alongside in-depth insights (through semi-structured interviews) from within the Mixed Socialist Enterprise of ALBA-Rice (*Empresa Mixta Socialista del ALBA-Arroz*) – a company comprised of 7 different factory sites located in Venezuela’s federated states of Portuguesa and Guárico.¹ There are three principal reasons for concentrating on one specific factory network within a single national context (Venezuela), with respect to analysing ALBA’s regional development model. Firstly, as the analysis will demonstrate, the institutional materiality of ALBA’s *regional* ‘Grandnational Concept’ fragments along the frontiers of *state sovereignty*. In other words, despite its regional aspirations, ALBA’s accumulation regime (extrativism), mode of regulation (weak and ad hoc), and hegemonic project (elevation of *national* sovereignty) fragment the regional plane, and thus tends towards *nationalised* development initiatives. Accordingly, concrete analysis of ALBA’s political economy necessarily pushes the research framework towards national contexts. Secondly, the focus on ALBA’s food policy also channels the analysis towards the case of Venezuela, which hosts virtually all of ALBA’s food production sites. Thirdly, the focus on merely one of ALBA’s production networks within Venezuela (ALBA-Arroz) stems from the inherent difficulty of accessing state-led production centres due to bureaucratic gate-keepers. Indeed, it was only because workers at ALBA-Arroz had taken their factories under occupation, and removing the top layer of management from the factories, that I was granted access to these sites. Thus, while the central case study may appear somewhat restrictive considering the international-regional

problematic of the article, it does provide a unique vantage point into the real individuals ensnared by the contradictions of ALBA's regional development policies.

Overall, the article shows how the specificity of ALBA's regional development model (Grandnational Concept) in the context of food production emerges from the dynamic interaction between its accumulation regime, mode of regulation, and hegemonic project articulated at both the regional and national levels. While the specific relations between these elements will be further explicated below, the result is a tendency towards the reproduction of bureaucratic-state power at the expense of the popular class power, which thus undermines the spirit and philosophy of the ALBA project as a whole.

ALBA-TCP as a Regional Terrain of Political Struggle

In his last work, *State, Power, Socialism* ([1978] 2014), Poulantzas aimed to inscribe the dynamics of social struggle into a broader understanding of 'the state' as a condensation of social relations that extends into the very heart of society itself. For Poulantzas, the capitalist state is not an object of class rule, nor an autonomous subject, but 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' (Poulantzas 2014: 128-9, emphasis added).

As Gallas (2017) points out, the idea of the state *qua* 'material condensation' refers to two inter-related axes. Firstly, the 'materiality' of the state is underwritten by the relations of production, as the 'initial scaffolding of the State's institutional materiality' expressed by the *relative* separation from the economy (Poulantzas 2014: 53). But the state is also directly implicated in the constitution of these production relations: 'it organizes the market and property relations; it institutes political domination and establishes the politically dominant class; and it stamps and codifies all forms of the social division of labour – all social reality –

within the framework of a class-divided society' (ibid: 39). This 'social reality' is primarily marked by the division between *manual and intellectual labour*, a characteristic shared by both capital and the state through the monopolisation of knowledge/power – for capital, through monopolisation of means of production and strategic control of production, and for the state through means of technical/managerial control and strategic management of the nation (ibid: 54ff.). This does not mean that there is an 'empirical or natural split between those who work with their hands and those who work with their head' (ibid: 55); rather, workers possess relative amounts of knowledge concerning their specific roles, and through the course of social production become ever-more conscious of their fellow workers and their combined labour. But their position within the relations of production prevents them from taking hold of this knowledge and putting it to use for their own ends. As a result, the fragmented individuation of wage-workers becomes bound up with the reproduction of the political and ideological relations of domination under capitalism (ibid: 26-7). This materiality of state institutions therefore leads towards the predisposition, the 'selectivity', of policy-making, which *tends* to reproduce the political power of capital (Gallas 2017: 266).

Secondly, the notion of 'condensation' refers to the ways in which the state organises and concentrates within itself the ensemble of class relations throughout society. While the capitalist state primarily organises the dominant classes into a relatively coherent 'power bloc', dominated classes are also 'present' within the state, albeit through different mechanisms and 'distances' from the core of the state apparatus. This 'distance' refers to the ways in which the state extends outwards from its bureaucratic loci right through to the relations of production within society. In so doing, it forms a *strategic field of struggle*, rather than simply a walled citadel separated from 'civil society' (Poulantzas 2014: 18-9). The upshot is that class struggle traverses the entire strategic field of the state, and at differential distances from its core institutions; i.e., struggles for electoral power in parliament are more

‘proximate’ than class struggles within a factory. Yet every social struggle necessarily implicates the power and legitimacy of the state, insofar as they are ultimately *political struggles*. It is therefore the balance of class forces that shapes the orientation of the state and its policies; hence ‘[c]hanges in the State themselves refer above all to the struggles of social classes’ (ibid: 53).

Poulantzas’ approach therefore provides a more nuanced framework for unravelling the *class nature* of the state (cf. ibid: 117; Jessop 1985: 339). This is especially useful for the analysis of Bolivarian Venezuela, which formally adheres to the slogan of ‘socialism in the 21st century’ (cf. Lebowitz 2006: ch. 7). Read in a Poulantzian frame, the Bolivarian state comprises a contradictory condensation of class forces, expressed through the presence of both popular social movements and classes involved in antagonistic political and economic activity, and various fractions of Venezuelan capital (Kornblihtt 2015). The case of contemporary Venezuela is highly consonant with Poulantzas’ thoughts on the prospects of traversing the ‘democratic road to socialism’, in the context of liberal-parliamentary democracy combined with centres of direct self-management within society and the economy (Ellner 2017). Indeed, for Poulantzas, the co-presence of liberal democracy with radical antagonism was seen as a defence against the dangers of Soviet bureaucratism. Yet the transition to socialism must also take place through a series of ‘*real breaks*’ enacted by the popular classes at various points throughout the strategic terrain of the state (Poulantzas 2014: 258-9). In so doing, the socialist turn would engender the further development of ‘direct democracy at the political level and self-management at the economic level’ (Gallas 2017: 268). Even though these values are embodied within the development ideals of ALBA, and embedded in concrete practices within some parts of Venezuelan society, the case of ALBA’s approach to food production presents a puzzle when comparing its ideals to concrete

outcomes. In other words, ALBA's food policies lead not to popular empowerment, but to the reproduction of bureaucratic state power.

More recent neo-Poulantzian approaches help to further enrich Poulantzian state theory through critical deconstruction of the relations between specific policies and societal dynamics, and the multi-scalar nature of institutions. Bob Jessop's 'strategic-relational approach' to the capitalist state provides one conceptual bridge between the iron law of capital accumulation on one hand, and purely empiricist examinations of class struggle on the other (Jessop 1991). In order to pinpoint the dynamic processes of policy-making, Jessop distinguishes between *accumulation strategies*, *modes of regulation* and *hegemonic projects* (1985: 344). The first refers to specific growth strategies under the hegemony of a particular fraction of capital (productive, commercial, financial), laying the material basis of political life. The second indicates how and on what basis the production and circulation of material wealth takes place via institutionalised rules and codes demarcating the distributional channels among various classes and class fractions. Finally, hegemonic projects denote a complex articulation of discourses and practices that unite various classes – both dominant and dominated – which seeks to reproduce the foundation of capitalist class rule and thus the relations of production as a whole. As a result of this complex social process, state institutions do not simply produce a 'globally' coherent line of policy, but a contested and micro-foundational iteration of 'strategic' and 'spatial' *selectivity* in policy making. Thus, the 'strategic-relational' approach 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). The strategic and spatial selectivity inscribed within certain states or political institutions thus speaks to the always-contradictory and *relatively* 'coherent' fit between accumulation strategies, modes of regulation and hegemonic projects. And they are inherently affected by the balance of class forces that

constantly re-orient the direction of selective strategy and the institutional materiality of the state itself.

Jessop's second innovation is through a multi-scalar reading of Poulantzas' framework. Because institutions exhibit spatial selectivity *in conjunction with* the prevailing geography of production, 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 power bloc. Contemporary globalisation has seen a host of different political scales gaining new prominence, as 'policy-making functions are transferred upwards, downwards and sideways' in line with the dominant accumulation regime (Jessop 2006: 146). Inter-state regional spaces are just one instance of these re-spatialized forms of governance, albeit with significant differences between their respective strategic and spatial selectivities – 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).

Institutionally, the Western hemisphere offers a wide variety – indeed, an *abundance* – of different regionalisation schemes (Tussie 2009; Malamud and Gardini 2012). NAFTA and MERCOSUR constitute perhaps the most significant as well as qualitatively different cases of regionalisation in the Americas (Katzenstein 2005: 231). NAFTA's accumulation strategy is premised on a specific economic division of labour between its three members (with Canada and Mexico as low-cost raw material/semi-assembled supply 'spokes' to the US manufacturing 'hub') facilitated through iron-clad free-trade legal commitments, and ideological appeals to 'market rationality' (Ciccantell 2001; Kühnhardt 2010: 28-9). MERCOSUR, meanwhile, has always positioned itself as an inherently *integrationist* project, aiming towards a common external position as a protection against the wider world market. Yet the predominant accumulation strategy of all MERCOSUR states relies overwhelmingly

on an ‘extractivist’ model (whether mineral or agro-industrial), which severely skews individual-country trade patterns towards states in the Global North or the BRICs (Petras and Veltmeyer 2014: 124-5). Hence, turbulence within the wider world market (i.e. slowdown in global demand) exerts adverse impacts on intra-regional trade and stability – Brazil’s unilateral currency devaluation in 1999 being a case in point (Meissner 2017). By and large, regional integration within MERCOSUR 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 world market to the benefit of the bloc as a whole (cf. Grinberg 2010: 199; Burges 2005).

Such variation between regional spaces points towards the differential array of social forces, developmental patterns and institutional complexes, which together forge the *strategic terrain of the region*. As such, regional formations are understood here as *second-order condensations* of social relations of power (Brand et al. 2011), representing a *reorganisation* (not ‘dilution’) of state power via differentially constituted scales, spaces, institutions, and classes (Demirović 2011).

Poulantzas’ relational theory of the capitalist state, as well as Jessop’s multi-scalar ‘strategic-relational approach’, each provide distinct yet inter-related frameworks for the complex dynamics interlocking different political spaces. In terms of the relationship between the nation-state and regional scales, there is no linear relationship, such that all regional dynamics are reducible to state policies; rather each scale provides (uneven) conditions of possibility for the resolution of societal conflicts and contradictions in other scales (Brand et al. 2011: 162-3). Thus, it is important to understand the common dynamic of accumulation/regulation/hegemony that becomes refracted through different political spaces and scales.

The empirical sections below will first outline the ALBA's rationale and approach to food policy, drawing upon Jessop's strategic-relational approach that helps frame the institutional materiality of the ALBA space. The peculiarity of its institutional form in the context of food production (the 'Food Grandnational') will be traced through the specific relations held between its accumulation strategy, mode of regulation and hegemonic project. Indeed, the result is one that merely brings the centrality of the state (particularly Venezuela) front and centre, at the expense of more regionalised endeavours. Consequently, and given that ALBA's food production sites are almost entirely within Venezuela, the latter section of the article will draw more broadly upon Poulantzas' relational state theory in order to frame the contradictory political economy of Venezuela, and the class struggles that traverse the strategic terrain of the Bolivarian state.

ALBA's 'Grandnational Concept' and the Nationalisation of Regional Food Policy

Established in 2004 through a bilateral accord between Venezuela and Cuba, ALBA had grown to 11 member states by 2014 (it now stands at 10, with the withdrawal of Ecuador in 2018). The mechanisms of ALBA's integration were envisioned along the lines of international solidarity, cooperative advantage in trade, and the mobilisation of mineral wealth to underwrite social 'missions' (*misiones*) and development policies (Muhr 2011b: 138-9). A significant innovation came with the integration of social movements within its upper echelons, as the 'Council of Social Movements', which sought to fuse popular, protagonistic social struggles with ALBA's formal institutional structure (Martinez 2013).

The emergence of ALBA was not merely reflective of the ideological dispositions of its founders, but also expressive of the switch in Venezuela's strategic and spatial selectivity due to the increasing expansion of US-led neoliberalism in the Western hemisphere. Foreign policy was not at the top of Chávez's agenda upon assuming office in 1999, focusing instead

on re-organising the country's socio-economic relations and institutions. It was only after attending the various international negotiations over the US-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) that the strategic selectivity of the Venezuela state began to crystallise 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 (Nelson 2015). However, while the FTAA offensive proved to be a *precipitating* factor in this switch in the Venezuelan state's strategic/spatial selectivity, it should be recognised that the significant upturn in oil prices – from their low of \$10 in 1998, to an accelerated increase after 2005 (Socorro 2013: 32) – became a *permissive* factor in building ALBA as a regional alternative to the FTAA.

The first phase of ALBA's development consisted of re-invigorating the region's welfare regime, initially in the form of the 'oil for doctors' initiative established between Venezuela and Cuba (see Feinsilver 2008), as well as the far-reaching literacy and health missions (SELA 2013; cf. Artaraz 2011; Muhr 2011b). With the fallout from the world food crisis in 2008, ALBA formed an 'ALBA Food Fund' with an initial capital of \$100 million, \$49 million of which would go towards the creation of a regional institution for the production of food (the Food Grandnational) (Suggett 2008, 2009).

The emergence of the Food Grandnational was thus reflective of the wider push towards ALBA's 'Grandnational Concept'. At the 6th Summit of the ALBA-TCP, a new productivist paradigm was declared, under the label of 'Conceptualization of Grandnational Projects and Enterprises in the Framework of ALBA' (ALBA-TCP 2008). Broadly speaking, the Grandnational concept seeks to build 'a Mega-State', through common lines of action, yet this vision is somewhat contradictorily underpinned through the principle of 'exercising National and Regional Sovereignty' (ALBA-TCP 2008). The Grandnational Concept developed further with the 'Economic Space of the ALBA-TCP' declaration (ALBA-TCP

2012). This economic space internalises two major ideas: *endogenous development* and *the social economy*. Somewhat different from the classical pattern of Import-Substitution Industrialisation – which not only imported advanced production technologies, but also Western patterns of consumption favouring upper and middle class consumers at the expense of the majority of the population – endogenous development promotes both inclusive development (maximum utilisation of all local, non-scarce resources and producers) as well as increased domestic consumption, which favours the expanded production of goods (either agricultural or manufacturing) most immediately consumed by the wider population rather than heavily protected industrial goods skewed to a narrow domestic market (Perroux 1983; Sunkel 1993: 56, 31). Strategic exports still play a role, in accumulating foreign exchange used for strategic imports of necessary capital goods. Yet rather than following the ‘export or die’ model laid down by neoliberal development policies, export-import strategies used for satisfying endogenous development goals aim towards tighter synergistic links between necessary inputs mobilized for socially-oriented development. From this basis, ALBA seeks to 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’ via enhanced productivity, economic diversification, and the expanded consumption of the popular classes, as well as export surpluses beyond the region (ALBA-TCP 2012).

The second major dimension of ALBA’s development philosophy was the by-product of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador’s independent formulations of the ‘social economy’ (Parker 2007; Hillenkamp 2014; Radcliffe 2011), which was envisaged as a vehicle through which endogenous development would attain a ‘socialist’ character, promoting social equality, empowerment, self-management, cooperative production, and the satisfaction of local/national consumption (see El Troudi and Monedero 2006). This broad spectrum of

development goals was subsequently integrated into the ECO-ALBA declaration, including (most notably), ‘the equitable distribution of wealth and the socialization of the means of production’ (ALBA-TCP 2012).

However, there is a relative ambiguity in exactly how GNEs take institutional shape (Califano 2015: 123). Under the GNE umbrella, there exists the ‘Mixed Socialist Enterprise of ALBA’ (*Empresa Mixta Socialista del ALBA – EMSA*), characterised by the establishment of a single production array (factory or factory network) through a bilateral ownership scheme, with the majority ownership (51%) assumed by the host country, and the participating country holding the remainder (49%) (Solórzano Cavalieri 2012: 146). On the other hand, there is a *transnational* GNE proper, which would imply the differentiation of productive tasks across borders under the aegis of a parent company.ⁱⁱ In absence of any true transnational GNE, ALBA’s Food Grandnational takes shape through a series of nationally constituted EMSAs located within Venezuela, with a focus on the following products: rice, legumes, pork, chicken, fish, and dairy (*Gaceta Oficial* 2010a).ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, in the context of ALBA’s Grandnational development scheme, national frontiers have become more, rather than less, entrenched.

This fragmented landscape of ALBA’s ‘regional’ development can be explained through the interconnections between its accumulation strategy, mode of regulation, and hegemonic project. Firstly, ALBA’s regional accumulation strategy is dominated by ‘extractivism’ (either mineral or agricultural), which is heavily integrated into the global division of labour, and exerts a centrifugal force upon the internal integration of the bloc (Purcell 2016; Vergara-Camus and Kay 2017). This centrifugal pattern was further entrenched by the increased value of primary commodity prices on the world market (and thus magnitudes of ground rent) during the first decade of the 21st century. Primary products went from 46 – 76% of total exports between 2004-2013 across the continent, with Ecuador

reaching 92% and Venezuela and Bolivia at around 95% (Sankey and Munck 2016: 354). However, as noted above, the generation of foreign exchange via mineral or agricultural exports does not *necessarily* lead to fragmentation. Rather, the relative debilitations of this pattern of accumulation must be read within the context of world market institutions. The fate of ALBA's trade agreement, the 'People's Trade Treaty' (*Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos*), is a primary example of this problem. One of the principal obstacles to the consolidation of an intra-ALBA trade regime is the simultaneous subsumption of ALBA states under WTO trade rules. Often these states are wary of losing trade opportunities (the lifeblood of their accumulation regimes) should they violate WTO regulations. As well as the fear of opportunity loss, there was the fear of uncertainty over ALBA's own rules and mechanisms for intra-regional trade. As one Ecuadorian official noted: '... we [ALBA] haven't constructed models of economic and productive complementarity. We don't know how to enhance our capacity jointly, in terms of resources, industrial development... If you want to do an FTA [free trade agreement] everything's ready' (cited in Cusack 2018: 111). Integrated into global institutions regulating the prevailing international division of labour, ALBA's pursuit of more endogenous regionalisation schemes was hampered by a significant level of risk and uncertainty in the absence of more robust regional planning institutions.

However, ALBA's thin institutionalism is also a function of its *regional* mode of regulation, which is shaped not only by the region-wide centrifugal accumulation regime, but from the contradictory projection of Venezuela's *national* accumulation regime and mode of regulation onto the regional scale. Firstly, certain aspects of ALBA are directly affected by Venezuela's oil-rentier accumulation strategy, and hence the magnitude of ground rent available for regional projects. ALBA's social missions (noted above), or the EMSAs located in Venezuela (as we will see further below), are *directly* dependent on flows of oil rent to continue their operations. Thus, the rise and fall of certain regional projects will

reflect the wax and wane of the international oil price. Secondly, the material centrality of Venezuelan oil wealth to the operation of the regional bloc severely skews the institutional materiality of ALBA towards the Venezuelan fraction of the regional apparatus. As a result, the institutional materiality of the ALBA bloc tends to reflect the materiality of the Venezuelan state itself. Under Chávez, the Bolivarian state has seen the effective consolidation of power within the executive branch relative to other major branches of the state, reminiscent of Poulantzas' notion of 'authoritarian statism' (Poulantzas 2014: 203ff.), though, paradoxically in the Venezuelan case, one that is functionally linked to sectors of grassroots popular power (Azzelini 2016). Through a change in the Venezuelan Central Bank's charter in 2005, Chávez began to directly appropriate a larger share of oil-rent via the newly-created National Development Fund (FONDEN) under the discretionary management of the executive branch. Receiving around \$29bn between 2005-2010, FONDEN provided much-needed financing for social policy, including the ALBA-TCP (Labaqui 2014: 35; Cusack 2018: 105).

And yet, such an institutional arrangement, which could be viewed as the construction of a 'parallel' state apparatus, possessed little oversight or transparency, even for those grassroots actors within ALBA's Council of Social Movements (Lubbock 2017: 109-10). Given Venezuela's dominant position within ALBA, its mode of regulation (opaque and improvised) was projected onto the regional scale, through myriad regional initiatives, with 'abundant proposals, limited and unstable human resources, multi-agency participation with unclear responsibility, infrequent and irregular oversight, weak accountability, and shallow planning' (Cusack 2018: 39). Despite appeals from Bolivian and Ecuadorian officials for greater consolidation and consistency in regional policy making, these requests were never heeded by their Venezuelan counterparts (ibid: 108, 111).

Finally, all of these levels and vectors of determination should be read through the prism of ALBA’s hegemonic project. By and large, ALBA established its *raison d’être* on the quest for greater regional autonomy from the pressures of US-led neoliberal globalism (ALBA 2004). As such, the discourse of *sovereignty* – in the form of ‘National and Regional Sovereignty’ (ALBA-TCP 2008) – has occupied a central place in ALBA’s legitimation. Yet

Scale / Strategic-Relation	REGIONAL	NATIONAL
HEGEMONIC PROJECT	Regional/National sovereignty	Dominance of national sovereignty across ALBA
MODE OF REGULATION	Oil dependent Ad hoc institutionalism	Parallel state apparatus Enhanced executive power Diminished regulatory oversight
ACCUMULATION STRATEGY	Centrifugal Oriented to world market	Venezuelan oil rents

Figure 1: A strategic-relational view of ALBA

the relative primacy given to the national scale – as a function of ALBA’s goal of cooperative non-interference with regional partners – has acted as a bulwark against tighter regional integration (ALBA-TCP 2012, Articles 2.2, 2.6). In effect, the continued clash (rather than

resolution) between different scales of sovereign independence leads to the continuation of external dependency (cf. Grinberg 2010: 199).

The above strategic-relational analysis of ALBA has been summarised in Figure 1. Clearly, the relations between ALBA's accumulation strategy, mode of regulation and hegemonic project, as well as the lines of political force between its different scales, encompass a complex picture of region-building. It should be noted that there is no linear relationship between a strategic relational element or scalar level, while each element or level will exert a certain influence on all others (Brand et al. 2011: 162-3). Figure 1 therefore presents a somewhat more schematic portrait, in order to reveal the main lines of determination structuring the institutional materiality of the ALBA space. Three major points stand out: firstly, both the regional accumulation strategy *and* Venezuela's national accumulation strategy each influence the regional mode of regulation. Secondly, Venezuela's national accumulation strategy and mode of regulation are mutually reinforcing; as we will see later, the magnitude of ground rent does not determine the precise nature of institutions and policy (mode of regulation), but rather sets the limits of possibility within a spectrum of policy-making (*selectivity*). Thirdly, the cell at the intersection of Mode of Regulation/National refers only to Venezuela, in order to narrow down the dominant determinations acting upon the rest of the ALBA space (i.e. all other national modes of regulation within ALBA states exert a relatively negligible effect on the regional scale).

Thus, the two dimensions of ALBA's regional development philosophy – endogenous development and the social economy – tend to materialise within national contexts, which (contrary to ALBA's goals) culminates in merely an aggregation of states, rather than a regional bloc. And it is because of the particularities of the Venezuelan context – particularly with regards to its food import dependence – that we find food production enterprises entirely within the Venezuelan national territory. The upshot of this policy outcome is that the process

of ALBA's development in food production is entirely exposed to the intense contradictions and class conflicts within the strategic terrain of the Venezuelan state itself, while the principles of endogenous development and the social economy are distorted according to those conflicts and contradictions. The following section will thus examine how this process plays out in the context of the ALBA-Arroz factory network.

Class Struggle and the Systemic Contradictions of Venezuela's Social Economy

The specificities of Venezuela's political economic terrain emerge both from its predominant accumulation strategy and the contingent class struggles that have marked the emergence of the Bolivarian Republic. Firstly, the valorisation of oil within the world market, used to finance productive infrastructures and price-subsidisation for popular consumption (Kornblihtt 2015), creates a sharp vulnerability with respect to the wider dynamics of global accumulation, particularly in light of the recent economic downturn among oil-consuming nations like China (Rosales 2016). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, due to a series of conjunctural class struggles across the entire strategic terrain of the Venezuelan state – from a business-led general strikes to a failed military coup (2002-2003) – Chávez turned to a policy of exchange controls in order to stem capital flight, through the creation of a new institution, *Comisión de Administración de Divisas* – CADIVI (the institution was renamed *Centro Nacional de Comercio Exterior*, CENCOEX, in 2014). Implementation of exchange controls, in combination with a windfall of oil dollars, led to a conscious policy of currency overvaluation for the purpose of subsidising capital and consumption-good imports (cf. Purcell 2013; Hellinger 2017). Thus, in exchange for their local currency, the *bolívar* (Bs), Venezuelan capitals could apply for 'cheap' dollars to import goods that, in theory, would go towards fostering endogenous development.

Yet as a result of the Venezuelan state's weak mode of regulation, factors of production (and even consumption) rarely ended up where they should. For instance, Venezuelan capitals may acquire cheap dollars in the promise of importing essential goods, while simply over-invoicing or importing empty containers; this type of fraud amounted to around 20% of all imports and roughly \$20bn in 2012 alone (Lampa 2017: 210; cf. Kornblihtt 2015: 66-7; Sutherland 2016a). More significant, however, has been the prevalence of capital flight among Venezuelan elites (both in the private and public sectors), at around \$295–341 million between 2003-2014 (Sutherland 2016b: 53), circumventing capital controls through loop-holes in regulation over international financial investments (Lampa 2016: 12). Consumption goods may be further diverted through 'rentier arbitrage' (Purcell 2017: 304), in which subsidised Venezuelan goods (particularly gasoline) are sold across the border in Colombia for *pesos*, which are then re-converted into *bolivars* at the real (black market) rate, and thus fetching a sizeable profit from which the entire process may begin anew. Finally, the widespread practice of *bachaqueo*, or the hoarding of commodities for the sake of price speculation (to be sold at a later date, and higher price, in the black market), radically reduces the normal availability of consumption goods.^{iv} Despite the diversity of these contradictions, they all stem from the same source of state policy over the (mis)management of oil wealth, weak or corrupt regulatory institutions, and the consequent persistence of inflationary pressures that significantly distort the productive economy.

Seen in Poulantzian frame, the above characteristics congeal into the specificity of the state's institutional materiality. The political content of Chávez's Bolivarian project (primarily through plebiscitary re-drafting of the constitution), and the hostility of the old ruling class bloc, led to the concentration of power within the executive branch, at the expense of more hostile factions of the state apparatus (e.g., the National Assembly). Tensions between the state and the old ruling class bloc (comprised of large national

capitals) ultimately reduced business confidence, and in turn the level of investment and accumulation, which displaced class conflict from the terrain of production to that of consumption (Chiasson-LeBel 2016: 211). On the one hand, in order to construct a hegemonic project based on the material satisfaction of the popular classes, social expenditure in Venezuela rose from 8.2-13.6 percent of GDP (1998-2006), with social security as the largest area of this expenditure (at 28% of the total by 2009) (Nakatani and Herrera 2008: 295; Kornbliht 2015: 71), all of which stimulated popular consumption. On the other hand, national capitals switched their accumulation strategies from production to imports, taking advantage of augmented consumption while simultaneously protecting the value of investments from currency devaluation by expanding inventories rather than fixed capital formation (Chiasson-LeBel 2016: 212). From a Poulantzian perspective, these divergent class alliances, as a specific material condensation of class forces, result in:

‘shifting and contradictory tactics, whose general objective of institutional crystallization takes shape in the state apparatuses... [These tactics] intersect and conflict with one another, finding their targets in some apparatuses or being short-circuited by others, and eventually map out the general line of force, the State’s “policy”, which traverses confrontations with the State’ (Poulantzas 2014: 136).

Thus, the institutional materiality of the Bolivarian state, and the strategic selectivity of its policy-making, ultimately stems from the limits of possibility provided by windfall oil revenues *in combination with* the underlying balance of class forces across the strategic terrain of the state, particularly in terms of the contradictory links between the state apparatus to capital (through CADIVI), and to the popular sectors (through FONDEN, or the parallel the *Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social de Venezuela*), which together

produces an ‘authoritarian state’ form (increasingly autonomous executive), yet one committed rhetorically (and in many ways practically) to the construction of a social economy and socialist values.

The combination of these factors increasingly led the state further expand its role in the productive economy (in lieu of productive investment by the private sector), through the creation of worker co-operatives, Social Production Companies (*Empresas de Producción Social* – EPSs) and expropriated capitals that were absorbed into the public sector (Ellner 2017: 42). Many of these production spaces were established for the purposes of strengthening endogenous development, and in some cases internalised the values of the social economy, particularly with regards to co-management (*cogestión*) between workers and traditional management layers, and self-management (*autogestión*) as worker-run enterprises (Larrabure 2013; Azzellini 2016). By and large, these production units facilitate the formation of endogenous development and the social economy through a ‘triple subsidy’: wages significantly above the minimum wage; inputs acquired through local producers at above market prices, and final goods sold at below market prices (Larrabure 2013: 184).

Yet there remain two specific dimensions that continue to frustrate the consolidation of this development strategy. Firstly, the recent economic crisis in Venezuela – resulting from a major contraction of ground rent capture, continued capital flight, and the constant deterioration of the real value of the national currency – has drastically reduced the state’s fiscal position. In response, the Bolivarian state has attempted to reproduce its hegemonic project by effectively *monetizing* its fiscal and budgetary shortfalls through printing ‘inorganic’ money (i.e., unmatched through equivalent expansion of goods). Thus, the state has expanded the monetary base by 2.5 million percent between 1999-2018 (Sutherland 2018). This monetary expansionism is periodically followed by the raising of the minimum

wage in order to protect working class incomes. Yet in light of depressed production and imports, such nominal wage gains both contribute to, and are effectively wiped out by, hyperinflation. The second challenge to the social economy, as other authors have noted (e.g. Kappeler 2013; Larrabure 2013; Enríque and Newman 2015), emerges from public sector firms that continue to operate under conditions of (state) capitalist relations of production, in the shape of rigid and inefficient workplace hierarchies and the reproduction of the manual/intellectual labour divide. Venezuela's state-run enterprises – from aluminium to food – have been periodically marked by class struggles for greater worker control over company operations (cf. Purcell 2015). Within the food sector, several ALBA-created firms, such as PescALBA and ALBA-Leguminosas, have been subject to struggles between the workforce and bureaucratic management, with the latter either consciously blocking worker protagonism, or allegedly stealing produced goods for the sake of personal enrichment (Azzellini 2015; *Correo del Orinico* 2016). Both of these dimensions – inflation and bureaucratism – eventually led to a series of class struggles that took place within the ALB-Arroz factory network.

ALBA-Arroz and the Struggle Over the Social Economy

On the 7th April 2016, workers at the ALBA-Arroz rice-producing factories had taken the flagship plants (Píritu I and II) under occupation, 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). 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). Upon interviewing the workers at ALBA-Arroz, it was immediately clear that the problems affecting the ALBA factories stem from the same systemic problems afflicting the entire country, in the form of falling oil revenues (Interview, Píritu II 11.05.2016). The decreased magnitude of oil rent ultimately crippled the capacity of the firm to continue its production; while the production cost of a kilo of rice came to 34Bs, the sales price was 25Bs (Interview, Píritu II 11.05.2016). Under these conditions, each unit of production incurs a loss, which can only be sustained through the continued transfer of ground rent to the factory. In the absence of normal magnitudes of ground rent, capacity utilisation fell to 10 percent (Interview, Píritu I, 13.05.2016). Worse still, systemic inflationary pressures increasingly complicate the very notion of economic planning; the time it takes to analyse the necessary values for a given purchase often undermines the very same process, for by the time a solution is obtained, the values no longer hold (Interview, Píritu III workers 30.06.2016).

These systemic pressures therefore call into question the feasibility of any organisational reform within the factory and its operations, especially with respect the ideals of the social economy based on worker-run firms. However, we should not discount the *politics of production* within the factories themselves, and how the power relations within them become imbricated with the wider bureaucratic structures of the Venezuelan state. For even with the immense challenges faced by system-wide inflation, it became clear from discussions with ALBA-Arroz workers that their frustrations did not stop at the problem of inflation alone.

From their inception, the ALBA-Arroz factories have employed a top-down, centralised bureaucratic form of management (Interview, Píritu I 13.05.2016; cf. MPPAT 2013: 647). Instead of approaching technical problems through the utilization of the living labour force that attains its knowledge through the everyday experiences of daily production,

the problems experienced by the ALBA-Arroz network are ‘solved’ through the simple rotation of personnel at the top level of management (Interview, Píritu II workers 28.06.2016), a major organisational weakness that was highlighted early on by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MPPAT 2013: 650; 2014: 622), and a characteristic that tends to afflict the broader (dis)organisation of the ALBA institution at the regional level (Cusack 2018: 111). As one example of bureaucratic myopia, the Píritu III plant previously received various raw materials from the countryside, but had been restricted to processing and sorting rice under the ALBA accords. As the workers put it: ‘There are peasants that are producing corn... 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).

Thus, while ALBA-Arroz is formally subsumed under public/political control, rather than the private economic control of capital, the broader power relations constitutive of the capitalist mode of production – specifically in the form of the *separation between manual and intellectual labour* – become reproduced within these factories in the form of state-capitalism, or the ‘statization’ in the relations of production as opposed to a genuine *socialization* among the working class (Poulantzas 2014: 175), with the latter being more in line with ALBA’s stated principles. Those at the ALBA-Arroz factories were keen to pursue such institutional innovations, specifically in the form of worker self-management (Interview, Píritu III workers, 30.06.2016; Interview, Píritu I workers 29.06.2016), yet painfully aware of the political and economic obstacles standing in the way of such a transition: ‘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, from ministers, vice-presidents’ (Interview, Píritu III workers 30.06.2016). Indeed, the prolongation of the economic crisis was, in the view of ALBA-Arroz workers, compounded by the degeneration in state-led ideology:

‘If you analyse this system, but look at the discourse, it’s always the same: economic war, *los gringos*, the [American] invasion, imperialism, and people dying of hunger.... The system can change, but we have to change the ideas, to generate new ideas, our form of thought, and our form of evolving’ (Interview, Píritu II workers, 28 June, 2016).

This reference to the re-generation of the hegemonic project embedded within *Bolivarianismo* thus refers to far more than simple ideas or discourse. Rather, as Poulantzas points out, ‘Ideology does not consist merely in a system of ideas or representations: it also involves a series of *material practices*, embracing the customs and life-style of the agents and setting like cement in the totality of social (including political and economic) practices’ (Poulantzas 2014: 28, emphasis in original). Thus, while ‘state socialist’ discourse is *partially* reflected in the material reality of economic sabotage by certain fractions of national capital (Curico 2017), as well as the threat of US imperial intervention that has become increasingly real under the Trump administration (Boothroyd-Rojas 2017; Hetland 2018), state discourse *predominantly deflects* the real tasks ahead in terms of re-organising state-sanctioned policies towards rebalancing national production, and thereby reproduces the dominant position of corrupt state elites. For the ALBA workers, on the other hand, their everyday material practices and ideological commitment to *Bolivarianismo* led them to take their factories under occupation for the sake of forcing the state to adapt its approach.

Nevertheless, one consequence of this loyalty to Bolivarian ideals, and specifically to the idea of the social economy, was the relative priority assigned by workers to re-activate factory operations for the sake of satisfying community consumption, yet without necessarily pursuing self-management. As I was told at a second interview with the coordinator from the

Píritu II plant, the occupation came to an end by mid-July 2016, through negotiations with CVAL that had resulted in an increased sales price, yet one that was still below production costs, and with the old top-down management structure. Thus, the unbalanced implementation of ALBA's two core components – re-distribution of wealth and the socialisation of the means of production – finds expression in the former through the sale of subsidised rice, yet becomes frustrated in the latter, as worker protagonism continues to be subsumed under ALBA-Arroz's 'functional centralisation' under the state (*Gaceta Oficial* 2010a). Dissolving bureaucratic management structures would help to partially overcome the factory's paralysis given that, by many accounts, worker-run firms tend towards more organisational efficiency and productivity (Azzellini 2015: 150; cf. Purcell 2016: 186-7).

While the class struggles at ALBA-Arroz forcefully pushed the issue of production politics back onto the agenda of the Bolivarian state, they remained disconnected from wider struggles across the state's strategic terrain. Cognizant of such a tension within the 'democratic road to socialism', Poulantzas was clear as the necessity of organising the popular classes in order to affect real change in state policy:

'For state power to be taken, a mass struggle must have unfolded in such a way as to modify the relationship of forces within the state apparatuses, themselves the strategic site of political struggle... In the democratic road to socialism, the long process of taking power essentially consists in the spreading, development, reinforcement, co-ordination and direction of those diffuse centres of resistance which the masses always possess within the state networks, in such a way that they become the real centre of power on the strategic terrain of the State' (Poulantzas 2014: 258).

Conclusion

This article has sought to shed some much-needed light upon the social contradictions of ALBA's regional development model via an empirically informed neo-Poulantzian approach. From a neo-Poulantzian perspective, this reality can be better grasped at a deeper level of social relations and their attendant discourses and spatial practices. ALBA sought to consolidate regional development through the instantiation of the 'Grandnational Concept' and the 'Economic Space of the ALBA-TCP', which amounted to a region-wide 'social economy'. Yet its concrete policies within the food sector, which emerge from the dynamics between its accumulation strategy, mode of regulation and hegemonic project, become refracted along national frontiers. Thus, ALBA's 'extractivist' accumulation strategy, tied to the world market and its attendant institutions, induces regional fragmentation; the regulatory role of Venezuelan oil rents and the projection of Venezuela's national mode of regulation onto the regional scale similarly dilutes the power of region-wide rules and institutions; finally, the hegemonic project embedded within the discourse of 'sovereignty' tends to favour the national scale over the regional. Taken together, ALBA's regional approach to food policy ends up being *nationalised* under the aegis of the Venezuelan state.

ALBA's food production sites are therefore hostage to the systemic crisis of the Venezuelan economy, and the dysfunctions of a bureaucratic 'landlord' state. For some observers (e.g. Purcell 2016), the triple subsidy underwriting Venezuela's social economy (including ALBA-Arroz) represents an inefficient development model based on unsustainable subsidies for food consumers. While selling commodities below their value obviously requires external injections of capital, subsidised food – or at least, *cheap food* – may also be a necessary plank in any popular economic policy. However, this policy can be approached in a number of ways. Subsidisation may be shielded by diversifying sources of hard currency income (export industries). Alternatively, the productive forces employed in food production

might be upgraded in order to capture efficiency gains that may lower the margin of loss, or perhaps generate firm profits. While the present article cannot substantially address these problems, they nevertheless point towards political and economic dimensions that extend far beyond the factory gates, and towards the broader issues of state policy and the class interests that inform them.

However, it is clear that the strategic-selectivity of the Bolivarian state has tended to favour the class interests of domestic capital. Allocating cheap dollars with inadequate oversight has ultimately created enormous bottlenecks in the circulation of goods, and provided ample room for quick profit-making at the expense of consolidating endogenous development (Sutherland 2018). Combined with the expansion of inorganic money, the resulting price inflation significantly constricts agent strategies, and severely complicates the continued operation of ALBA-Arroz. Inflationary pressures thus seriously undermine any attempted social or technical re-organisation of production. Yet even in light of this overwhelming obstacle, we should not turn a blind eye to the real struggles of workers within these factories. Even under the nightmare of severe inflation, workers' grievances turned again and again to state bureaucracy, corruption, mismanagement, and the restriction of worker protagonism.

The class struggles within the ALBA-Arroz factories were able, however temporarily, to strike at the heart of the Venezuelan state apparatus, by calling into question the legitimacy of bureaucratic structures, the divisions between manual/intellectual labour, and bringing focus back to the protagonistic role played by the working class. Unfortunately, these efforts have produced little qualitative change; indeed, by December 2017, it was decreed that the ALBA-Arroz factory network suspend its activities, and begin its eventual liquidation (*Aporrea* 2017). The fate of ALBA-Arroz thus presents serious lessons for radical social change; limited to isolated factory occupations, the ALBA workers faced an almost

inevitable defeat in the absence of deepening their struggle towards the ‘diffuse centres of resistance’ occupied by the dominated classes in order to build the requisite capacity to affect a real change in the state apparatus itself (Poulantzas 2014: 195ff). In light of the deep crisis currently afflicting Venezuelan society, the only way forward would be towards the enactment of *real breaks* with the decrepitude of government policy, and towards the strategic unity among peoples within Venezuela and the wider ALBA region.

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ⁱ Interviews were conducted across 5 of the 7 sites of the ALBA-Arroz network (Píritu I, Píritu II, Píritu III, Agua Blanca, Payara), all within the federated state of Portuguesa. Within each of the five research sites, I 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). 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. I was unable to visit the remaining two production facilities of ALBA-Arroz in Guárico due to logistical difficulties and time constraints. Not all of these interviews have been included in this short article, yet they will be more substantially revealed in future publications.

ⁱⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱⁱ 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*, 2010b).

^{iv} While the existence of black markets in Venezuela has had a long though uneven existence (Petras and Morley 1983), Purcell (2017: 297) notes that the verb, *bachaquear*, entered the popular lexicon around 2014, which probably signifies the heightened prominence of the black market within Venezuela’s everyday economy from that point on.