HUMANITIES RESEARCH

GUEST EDITORS Guy Emerson and John Minns

EDITORIAL BOARD Paul Pickering (Chair), Ned Curthoys, Melinda Hinkson, Kylie Message, Kate Mitchell, Adrian Walter, Karen Westmacott (Managing Editor)

EDITORIAL ADVISORS Tony Bennett, University of Western Sydney; James K. Chandler, University of Chicago; Deirdre Coleman, University of Melbourne; W. Robert Connor, Teagle Foundation, New York; Michael Davis, University of Tasmania; Saul Dubow, University of Sussex; Christopher Forth, University of Kansas; William Fox, Center for Art and Environment, Nevada; Debjani Ganguly, The Australian National University; Margaret R. Higonnet, University of Connecticut; Caroline Humphrey, University of Cambridge; Mary Jacobus, University of Cambridge; W. J. E. Jenner, The Australian National University; Peter Jones, University of Edinburgh; E. Ann Kaplan, State University of New York, Stony Brook; David MacDougall, The Australian National University; Iain McCalman, University of Sydney; Fergus Millar, University of Oxford; Anthony Milner, The Australian National University; Howard Morphy, The Australian National University; Meaghan Morris, Lingnan University, Hong Kong; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, The Australian National University; Paul Patton, University of New South Wales; Kim Rubenstein, The Australian National University; Gillian Russell, The Australian National University; Monique Skidmore, University of Canberra; Mandy Thomas, The Australian National University; Caroline Turner, The Australian National University; Andrew Vincent, University of Sheffield; James Walter, Monash University.

Humanities Research is published by the Research School of Humanities & the Arts at The Australian National University. The Research School of Humanities & the Arts came into existence on 1 January 2010 and brings together the following schools and centres: School of Archaeology & Anthropology, School of Art, School of Cultural Inquiry, School of Language Studies, School of Music, Australian National Dictionary Centre, ANU Centre for European Studies, Digital Humanities Hub, Frettich Foundation, Humanities Research Centre, Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage & the Arts, and the Rock Art Research Centre. Humanities Research was first published in 1997 and in 2005 was transformed into an electronic journal published by ANU E Press. Issues are thematic with guest editors and address important and timely topics across all branches of the humanities.

Enquiries: Managing Editor, Research School of Humanities & the Arts, Sir Roland Wilson Building (120), The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia. Research School of Humanities & the Arts general enquiries: +61 2 6123 6674. URL http://rsha.anu.edu.au

Published by ANU E Press
Email: anupress@anu.edu.au
Website: http://epress.anu.edu.au

© The Australian National University. This Publication is protected by copyright and may be used as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 provided appropriate acknowledgment of the source is published. The illustrations and certain identified inclusions in the text are held under separate copyrights and may not be reproduced in any form without the permission of the respective copyright holders. Copyright in the individual contributions contained in this publication rests with the author of each contribution. Any requests for permission to copy this material should be directed to the Managing Editor, Research School of Humanities & the Arts. The text has been supplied by the authors as attributed. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher.

Cover image: Silvano Cuéllar, Allegory of the Nation (1938), Oil on canvas, 82 x 101 cm

Printed in Australia

VOL. XVII. NO. 1. 2011
ISSN: 1440-0669 (PRINT), ISSN: 1834-8491 (ONLINE)
Contents

Contributors ......................................................... iii
Introduction ......................................................... 1
Carme Riera’s En el último azul (1994): An encounter with Spain’s conflicted past ................................. 7
   Nicola Gilmour
Literary Patriotism in Ecuador’s Juan León Mera and Juan de Velasco .............................................. 21
   Eileen Willingham
White Hegemony in the (Re)Birth of Brazil ......................... 35
   Benito Cao
Confronting Genocide: Latin America, adventure fiction and the moral crisis of British imperialism .......... 59
   Kevin Foster
Rethinking the Nation in the Chilean and Australian Bicentenaries .................................................. 75
   Irene Strothoff
A Bolivarian People: Identity politics in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela ...................................................... 87
   R. Guy Emerson
A Bolivarian People: Identity politics in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela

R. Guy Emerson

Abstract

The 1998 electoral success of Hugo Chávez brought about a dramatic shift in Venezuelan identity. While rhetorically inclusive at first glance, references to the ‘Venezuelan people’ would not speak to all Venezuelans. Rather, the ‘people’ would come to denote a previously marginalised segment of society now at the centre of Venezuelan political life. More than a simple reorientation in political focus, this shift in the politics of Venezuelan identity sends out a set of messages that acts as a symbolic boundary to frame, limit and domesticate an official ‘Bolivarian’ identity. It is the construction of this new official identity assembled, in part, from the ruins of the previous order that concerns this article.

A Bolivarian People: Identity politics in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela

Hugo Chávez Frías arrived at the Miraflores Presidential Palace as the fifty-second President of the Republic of Venezuela, promising to dramatically refashion political life. Coming to the presidency during a period of institutional decay and popular exhaustion with traditional political parties, Chávez and his Bolivarian Revolution stood upon the ruins of the Punto Fijo system pledging to consign political corruption and economic hardship to the past. Foremost in the former Lieutenant Colonel’s message was the promise to return dignity to both the nation and its people. On the back of this narrative of national renewal began a period of dramatic transformation. The former constitution was consigned to the scrap heap, taking with it the country’s bicameral legislative system, while both the national flag and its emblem were modified to affect symbolic change. Not even the name of the country was left untouched, with the South American state becoming the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Beyond these structural and symbolic changes, however, the new Chávez administration would also affect a shift in Venezuelan identity. President Chávez’s inaugural address in 1999 pointed to the dimensions of this shift: ‘Today, the second of February
arrives the hour of the Venezuelan people.\textsuperscript{1} While seemingly inclusive at first glance, the phrase ‘Venezuelan people’ would not refer to all Venezuelans. Rather, the ‘people’ denotes a previously marginalised segment of society now at the centre of Venezuelan political life. More than a simple reorientation in political focus, however, Chávez would speak directly to the concerns of the previously marginalised, and later come to superimpose their history over that of the nation. It is specifically this transformation in the official state identity that concerns this article.

Beyond simply trading on the increased inequality that the poor majority faced in the lead-up to the 1998 poll, analysis below takes a broader view of the shift in identity that explores the structural underpinning of Chávez’s language as well as the boundaries within which a new official ‘Bolivarian’ identity operates. It does so by examining the political and historical parameters that greeted Chávez upon his arrival at the presidency and what effect his reading of these factors had on forging a new official identity. How does the Chávez reading of his failed coup d’État attempt in 1992, for example, serve to reinforce both the righteousness of the ‘people’ and the corruption of the ancien régime? A focus on the materiality of Chávez’s discourse asks how, having made an investment in an unjust account of the Venezuelan past, he is then able to draw dividends on these representations so as to solidify calls for change and call forth a ‘Bolivarian people’. Accordingly, the analysis below highlights how Chávez works within these structures to promote a particular reading of events—past, present and future—and to sponsor a particular Bolivarian identity. In so doing, it provides an insight into how the symbols, rules, concepts, categories, and meanings elaborated within Bolivarianism shape how the Chávez administration constructs and interprets its people and its world.

**Understanding the Shift in the Politics of Identity: From a maligned people to a Bolivarian people**

Explanations of the shift in Venezuelan identity tend to focus on the President himself and his style of leadership. Criticism of Chávez, who is portrayed as a populist, and of his divisive manipulation of social discontent for political gain is generally followed by references to the antagonism he generates through Manichean representations both at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{2} Chávez has developed a politics of inequality, so the argument goes, that mirrors Venezuela’s social and economic cleavages between rich and poor, and therefore exacerbates the

---


already polarised identities within the South American nation. The Bolivarian leader and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela emphasise social discontent so as to outmanoeuvre other parties who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the new socio-political realities. Moreover, the Bolivarian Revolution is often portrayed as a movement in reaction to past injustices, with the confrontation between rich and poor becoming a 'moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo (the people) and the oligarchy'. Honest people, positioned at one end of the spectrum, are in open confrontation with the corrupt elites at the other. While such antagonisms exist in Chávez's Venezuela (and indeed precede his administration), conflating this animosity with a new 'Bolivarian' identity is problematic.

Frequent references to a corrupt oligarchy and a glorious people make it tempting to attribute the shift in identity to a populist style of antagonistic leadership. Contributing to such a view is the continued exclusion of a historically threatening oligarchy. The oligarchy was responsible for the failed 11 April 2002 coup d'état attempt to overthrow his government, Chávez argues, while at the same time they threaten social reforms, as they want to 'turn off, alter the course or neutralise change' within the Bolivarian Revolution. Bolivarianism—committed to overcoming inequality and restoring justice—is placed in contrast to the corrupt, exploitative oligarchy intent on maintaining their privilege. Undoubtedly, elements of this narrative influence the ideas and identities within Venezuela. Antagonism between el pueblo and la oligarquía is not, however, the basis for the shift in Venezuelan identity. As is demonstrated below, the simple pueblo/oligarquía binary is not capable of authoring identity and difference. Rather, the new identity is multi-layered and depends on a broader narrative rather than its simplest binary part. Accordingly, this article suggests that a new appreciation of official Venezuelan identity is needed. In so doing, it argues that it is as much an understanding of how the socio-cultural and políti-co-historical environments are themselves discursively represented as it is the pueblo/oligarquía binary that underpins a new identity and gives Bolivarianism its symbolic boundary.

---

A Breakdown in the Previous Identity

The construction of a new 'Bolivarian' identity is made possible by a collapse in the previous state narrative of unity and progress. For most of the twentieth century, the promise of modernity served as a powerful narrative to unite Venezuelan society. The Punto Fijo pact signed in 1958 by the three principal political parties enshrined a modernising state at the centre of Venezuelan development.9 Designed to lift the South American nation from its economic and social backwardness, the Punto Fijo state would reconcile the complex and often opposing tendencies between a powerful minority and a poor majority.10 Rómulo Betancourt, a key architect of Punto Fijo, argued that the modernising state would mediate between the poorer labouring and landless classes, and a 'parasitic elite' that previously had enriched 'themselves at the public expense through political favouritism'.11 The placement of the state at the head of the march towards progress served as a coherent and unifying message that claimed to benefit all Venezuelans by relegating exploitation to the past. High levels of revenue derived from oil earnings enabled the Venezuelan state to create an exceptionally sheltered domestic space 'fertile for cultivating hierarchical alliances and weaving illusions of social harmony'.12 Increases in social spending maintained the confidence of the majority and enabled the state to channel and co-opt popular movements away from revolutionary or radical demands. Literacy rates increased from 51 per cent of the population in 1950 to 88.1 per cent in 1981.13 While Venezuelan workers benefited from some of the highest wages and the most heavily protected labour market in Latin America.14

9 In addition to the involvement of Acción Democrática (AD), Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) and Unión Republicana Democratica (URD), the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) also had popular support as a modernising force. They were, however, explicitly excluded from the Punto Fijo pact—a notable omission given their role against the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. For more, see Ellner, S. 2008, Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, conflict, and the Chávez phenomenon, Lynne Reiner Publishers, Boulder, Colo.


13 Roberts, 'Social correlates of party system demise and populist resurgence in Venezuela', p. 47.

Within this environment, class cleavages gradually eroded as the Punto Fijo political system allowed both Acción Democrática (AD) and Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) to develop into multi-class, catchall electoral organisations. An array of policy initiatives and institutions was organised along party lines—from beauty contests and choral societies to trade unions and professional groups—all designed to control societal demands. The success in uniting its peoples saw the Venezuelan state labelled ‘exceptional’ for its high levels of stability despite the ongoing political and social turbulence throughout the rest of Latin America. By the 1980s, however, limits to both Venezuelan stability and the belief in unified progress began to appear.

Amid a deteriorating economic outlook, the 1988 presidential campaign saw former President Carlos Andrés Pérez promise to maintain the wealth and social prosperity associated with the modernising state. Presiding over the 1974 oil boom in his previous term, Pérez incarnated the myth of oil wealth and progress like no other president in Venezuelan history. Traversing the country during the 1988 election campaign with the slogans of ‘the man with energy’ and ‘the man who really walks’, Pérez reinforced popular beliefs that progress would continue despite the unfavourable economic landscape. Fomenting perceptions of a leader willing to meet popular demands, President Pérez, during his inauguration celebrations, called on debtor nations to lobby against the policies of international banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Calling for a 50 per cent devaluation of Latin American debt, the Venezuelan President positioned his country as a leader of Latin American interests and their battle against oppressive international financial institutions. Like Betancourt before him, Pérez placed international exploitation at the forefront of his political narrative. While Betancourt had bemoaned ‘the exploitation of our large natural resources’ and spoke of defending ‘national industry...on behalf of all the people in order to promote national development’, Pérez offered a similar message in relation to debt. With Venezuela one of the World Bank’s top-20 ‘highly indebted nations’, Pérez labelled the bank’s economists ‘genocide

20 Coronil and Skurski, 'Dismembering and remembering the nation', p. 295.
22 Coronil, The Magical State, p. 96.
workers in the pay of economic totalitarianism' and described IMF prescriptions as 'la bomba solo-mata-gente' (the bomb that only kills people). A vote for Pérez thus seemed to reinforce the state's position between what Betancourt had defined as the poorer classes and a 'parasitic elite', in addition to reaffirming the previous redistributive measures of a paternalistic state. Such expectations, however, were short-lived.

In what later became known as 'el gran viraje' (the great turnaround), within a month of his inauguration, President Pérez signed a letter of intent with the IMF and announced his 'paquete económico' of macroeconomic stabilisation that promoted cuts in social spending, trade liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. As a consequence of the Pérez reform, the price of subsidised petrol increased immediately by 100 per cent, the bolivar saw an immediate 170 per cent devaluation as a result of being floated, while interest rates were freed and subsequently moved from 13 to 40 per cent. Faced with an immediate increase in food and transport costs, el paquete met with a series of urban protests in 17 cities, collectively known as the Caracazo uprising, which, according to official counts, left 287 people dead, although other sources claim the toll to be as high as 5000. Pérez's policy about-face coincided with a shift in official rhetoric. The previous talk of independence from foreign domination was replaced with the need to meet IMF prescriptions and conform to austerity measures now described as 'painful but inevitable'. Pérez shattered the myth of progress by disavowing the oil-protected past as an irrational fantasy and instead turned to the free market as the rational means of achieving progress.

More than a simple reorientation in message, however, the Venezuelan President would recast the relationship between the state and the poor majority. Just as previous governments had labelled those opposed to their policy prescriptions as impediments to modernisation, so too did Pérez. In contrast with Betancourt's talk of a 'parasitic elite', however, Pérez was distinguished from his predecessors in that his accusations identified the poor majority as obstacles to progress. In response to the protests, President Pérez sent in the armed forces and suspended

24 More specifically, Pérez's 'paquete económico' can be split into two parts: the short-term stabilisation measures implemented immediately, and the more medium-term structural reforms meant to permanently reverse the old development strategy. Short-term measures unified all exchange rates and floated the bolivar. Medium-term structural reforms sought to attack every area of government activity. Distortions in the foreign-trade regimes were abolished, all but a few sectors were opened up to private investment, and government enterprises were privatised, while others were significantly restructured to improve delivery of social services. Government borrowing was to be permanently limited, while subsidies for the agricultural sector were removed.
25 For official figures, see Hellinger, 'Political overview'; while for unofficial figures, see Harnecker, M. 2003, 'The Venezuelan military: the making of an anomaly', Monthly Review, vol. 55, no. 4, p. 17.
civil liberties, claiming 'we must safeguard the right to peace and safeguard the property of our nation', and told the audience in his televised address that 'this will be in your benefit'. Clearly directing his words to the economically well off, Pérez had shifted the state from its position at the centre of Venezuelan society between rich and poor. In a series of attacks, Pérez accused protestors of being 'committed to violence and willing to take advantage of difficult times'. These attacks intensified throughout the week, with the President describing protestors as 'phantasmagorical remnants of subversives [who] are still not convinced this is a democratic country'. The depiction of popular sectors as out of control 'subversives' not only reinforced a polarising discourse, but also offered the state a justification for its use of force. The effect of the bloody crackdown, however, was to further shake assumptions concerning paternalistic state–society relations and reinforce perceptions of a popular class inhibiting the forces of modernity represented by the state and the more prosperous classes. Indeed, perceptions among the upper classes that protestors threatened private property saw the very wealthy leave the country in their private jets, while sectors of the middle class organised armed defence groups to protect their property. The Caracazo uprising brought to the fore the social cleavages that the state—no longer able to unite all Venezuelans in the march to modernity—had previously absorbed.

With the official reading of the Caracazo differing from the claims of a 'massacre' by the popular classes, both the legitimacy of the state and its narrative of unity in modernisation came into question. As a consequence of state action, the poor majority no longer identified themselves within the official narrative. Far from becoming silent, however, the popular classes appropriated their exclusion and began to create their own counter-narrative. Depicted as an impediment to progress, the newly maligned openly confronted their role within Venezuelan society, crying foul at the silencing and manipulation of their demands. Shouts of 'we are no longer a passive pueblo' became common, while 'el pueblo está bravo' (the people are brave/angry) was scrawled across walls and repeated by protestors. Appropriating the official signs of nationhood, protestors sang the opening line of the national anthem: 'Glória al bravo pueblo que el yugo lanzó'

28 Cited in Simon, '100 said dead in riots'.
29 Cited in ibid.
31 Coronil and Skurski, 'Dismembering and remembering the nation', p. 327.
33 At the time, the Caracazo constituted the largest and most repressed uprising that modern Latin America had seen. For an excellent analysis of the Venezuelan setting, see Coronil and Skurski ('Dismembering and remembering the nation'), while for a careful comparative analysis of protests in Latin America against debt-related austerity programs, see Walton, J. 1989, 'Debt, protest and the state in Latin America', in S. Eckstein (ed.), Power and Popular Protest, University of California Press, Berkeley.
34 Coronil and Skurski, 'Dismembering and remembering the nation', p. 318.
(glory to the brave and angry people who threw off their yoke). State repression not only shattered the myth of unified progress, but also opened up new avenues for unexpected meanings and practices to come together in novel ways.  

By self-ascribing themselves as the brave people of *Gloria al Bravo Pueblo* (the national anthem), those officially maligned as ‘phantasmagorical subversives’ claimed to be representative of the legitimate people of the nation. Although state identities are always in negotiation, this rupture called into question the official identity of Venezuelans as a united people. Indeed, the marginalisation of the popular classes after the *Caracazo* would not only place in contradistinction rival identity claims over who were the authentic representatives of the nation, but it would also juxtapose rival interpretations of the events of February 1989. Claims of a ‘popular uprising’ and a ‘massacre’ interacted with official assertions that neutrally labelled the conflict ‘27-F’ and ‘the events’. While it would ultimately take 10 years, Hugo Chávez would best acknowledge this rupture and place his reading of Venezuela and its people on the national stage.

**The Politics of Identity**

The socio-political setting of an exhausted political and economic model offered Hugo Chávez a receptive environment in which to develop his political message. While Pérez ostracised the popular classes through his portrayal of the *Caracazo* uprising, Chávez would place the formerly maligned at the centre of his political narrative. Indeed, Pérez’s formerly ‘phantasmagorical’ subversives would become the authentic Venezuelan ‘people’ and, in the process, be converted into the subjects of the nation rather than those previously excluded. It is this placement of the popular classes at the heart of political life that underpins the new official ‘Bolivarian’ identity promoted by Chávez. Central to this process is a historically contingent narrative that placed the Bolivarian leader’s own political struggle alongside that of the previously maligned.

Described by Hugo Chávez as a ‘massacre’ and a ‘savage repression’ that ‘marked my generation’, the *Caracazo* is represented as the foundational myth of the Bolivarian Revolution, as it launched a desire amongst members of Chávez’s *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200* (MBR-200) to join the people in their opposition to the state. From that point onwards, he argues, MBR-200 could ‘no longer be the guardians of a genocidal regime’. Positioning his own political trajectory within the popular discontent generated by the *Caracazo*, the Bolivarian leader claims that the 1989 uprising acted as a catalyst for a series

---

36 Ibid., p. 311.
37 Cited in Harnacke, Hugo Chávez Frias, p. 13.
38 Cited in ibid.
of discussions within MBR-200 about how to overcome the corrupt Punto Fijo system. The outcome of these discussions was a coup d'état in 1992 launched against the Pérez government. More than a simple coup, however, Chávez claimed that if successful, he would gain popular legitimacy by restoring power to the people via a constituent assembly.\textsuperscript{39} While the coup ended in failure, Chávez has since positioned the events of 1992 within a larger narrative that picks up on the popular resentment of the Caracazo. The actions of 4 February 1992, he claims, are representative of the same revolutionary zeal that the people demonstrated some three years earlier. This shared struggle for change was encapsulated in two words: 'por ahora.' Making a television appearance to call on his co-conspirators to lay down their arms after the failed coup attempt, the then Lieutenant Colonel told viewers that his objectives had not been met 'por ahora' (for now). Stirring popular sentiment that the struggle had only begun, 'por ahora' has since been historicised as a popular rallying cry for the aspirations set loose by the Caracazo. By linking the fortunes of his political trajectory with that of the 'phantasmagorical' subversives, Chávez, in his ascent to power, was to represent the arrival of the previously marginalised at the centre of Venezuelan political life.

More than aligning his political history with that of the poorer classes, Chávez specifically traded on popular discontent with the Punto Fijo system. Perceived as responsible for declining living standards, official state institutions could no longer contain popular demands or channel protest through less-disruptive forms of mobilisation, such as marches or legal strikes.\textsuperscript{40} Between 1991 and 1994, the frequency and manner in which Venezuelans took to the streets changed significantly. Protest as a tactic was now used by indigenous communities, street vendors, retired workmen, oil workers, policemen, doctors, nurses and teachers in state schools, in addition to the unemployed, local residents, students and public transport drivers.\textsuperscript{41} Violent protests peaked between 1991 and 1993 during the Pérez government and again between 1995 and 1996 amid a second wave of economic austerity measures referred to as 'la Agenda Venezuela'.\textsuperscript{42} Before the Caracazo, confrontational protests accounted for less than one-quarter of the total protests. Subsequently, however, this figure rose to average about one-third for the 1990s and reached 43 per cent in the second half of that decade.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{41} López-Maya, 'Venezuela after the Caracazo', p. 213.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 100.
Chávez’s language in the lead-up to the 1998 poll spoke directly to these frustrations. Denouncing the old system as ‘not defending democracy...[but rather] trying to defend their privileges’, Chávez promoted a collective sense of injustice by likening the Punto Fijo system to a ‘gangrenous politics’, a corrupt system ‘encrusted right to the marrow’. Extending the illness metaphor, he claimed that Punto Fijo was ‘the most terrible cancer that we have...[in] the body of the Republic’. This perceived exhaustion of the political system was reflected by an increase in abstention rates for presidential elections from traditional levels of about 10 per cent to 18 and 39.8 per cent in 1988 and 1993 respectively. Capitalising on such a setting, Chávez maintained that only the return of the ‘people’ to the heart of Venezuelan politics would arrest this decline: ‘we are going to encourage, to push for and to reinforce solidarity in the streets, with the people, through the calling of elections for a national constituent assembly in order to redefine the fundamental base of the republic that came from below.’

Which People? Limits to a shift in the politics of identity

Far from speaking to all Venezuelans, the Bolivarian leader, in calling upon the ‘people’, does not refer to a civil society of legal equals who share a common national identity. Rather, he depicts el pueblo as the poor majority of Venezuelans who live at the margins of society. Viewed with this objective in mind, Chávez’s references to el pueblo are similar to the ‘demos’ outlined by Jacques Rancière. In each case, the ‘people’ are not an ontological whole, but rather are exposed as an outcast group previously excluded in a given order. Chávez affects a constitutive split within the term ‘people’, differentiating between what Rancière calls a populus and plebs—the whole populace and a maligned part. Chávez’s usage of the ‘people’ thus seeks to represent all groups that were previously marginalised.

46 Cited in Molero de Cabeza, ‘El personalismo en el discurso politico venezolano’, p. 318.
by the state. Moreover, by evoking the previously marginalised through his usage of the term 'people', Chávez attempts to appropriate their perspective and expand it to the entire populace. That is, although el pueblo represents the plebs, Chávez makes it reflective of the populus. 'I feel myself President for all', Chávez stated on the third anniversary of his 1998 electoral triumph: 'this revolution is for all, but especially for you the poor, those that were left unprotected during much of the time and were marginalised.'

As already noted, however, this reorientation is not a result of the Venezuelan President alone. During the Caracazo uprising, Pérez's 'phantasmagorical subversives' claimed themselves as the legitimate people of the nation. It is this appropriation, and later Chávez's acknowledgment of the 'people' on the national political plain, which demonstrates the shift in the politics of identity.

Although highlighting the placement of the formerly maligned masses at the centre of Chávez's political project, this shift, of itself, is not enough to constitute a new Venezuelan identity. Neither the Caracazo nor Chávez's electoral success acted as a singular foundational moment of rupture whereby a new political subjectivity was created. The shift in focus was only the first constitutive step in the production of a new identity. As it stands, Chávez's language constitutes a political subjectivity (the 'people'); however, the ideas and demands of the formerly maligned are varied and lack the unity required to produce the new identity. In order for the new 'Bolivarian' identity to have any resonance amongst the polity, references to the 'people' must carry a unifying logic that speaks to, and represents, the diverse ideas and demands of the formerly maligned. It needs to interlock the various ideas and frustrations launched by the Caracazo and the decadence of Punto Fijo, and reorganise them in a harmonious way, so that to refer to one issue comes to evoke another. To speak of issues relating to housing must also be to evoke concerns over health, education, landownership, social inequalities and so forth. More than material themes, it must also encompass the varied frustrations, ideas, symbols, beliefs and narratives, and re-aggregate them within an official 'Bolivarian' narrative. The resonance of Chávez's language thus becomes temporally contingent on speaking to the (varied) future aspirations of the 'people'.

While acknowledging the production of unity, this is not to suggest that a new official 'Bolivarian' identity is a relatively harmonious set of parts that function smoothly. Rather, its coherence is dependent on blocking and reorganising

certain ideas, symbols, beliefs and narratives. Moreover, the subjectivity of a
given social agent (or more precarious still, of a social collective) can never be
finally established as it is provisionally and often precariously constituted of
multiple overlapping identities, enabling a plethora of possible constructions,
and myriad intertwining subjectivities. Far from disabling an exploration
of identity construction, however, to acknowledge this fragility is to do two
things. First, rather than focusing on the contingent nature of identity and its
multiple overlapping elements, analysis below centres on one dominant (official
Chávez) reading of identity and its attempts to codify what it means to be
Bolivarian. In so doing, the point is not to examine the veracity of the official
reading, but to explore its specific elements and their attempts to construct
a stable identity. More than just a superficial reading, however, it looks at
how specific narratives interact so as to discern both the boundaries they
configure and what possibilities they enable. Second, it is to recognise that
the construction of identity is ongoing and can take multiple forms. Be it a
reading of the Caracazo that elicits a brave, angry people or commentary on a
fraudulent state that stands in relief with a repressed, marginalised populace,
the articulation of a Bolivarian identity is ongoing and multidimensional. The
‘people’, as representatives of a ‘Bolivarian identity’, become performative
subjects that are continuously invoked in Chávez’s discourse, be it through a
policy position or a particular political narrative. In this sense, the ‘Bolivarian
people’ are not some pre-existing sociological category but rather come into
being through Chávez’s discourse as a formerly outcast group now rightfully
taking their place at the centre of Venezuelan society. The remainder of this
analysis explores this reorientation and the construction of a Bolivarian identity
through an analysis of Chávez’s political narrative.

The Production of a Bolivarian Identity

While analysis below centres on Chávez’s attempts to speak to and represent the
diverse ideas and demands of the formerly maligned, this does not mean that
the Venezuelan leader has carte blanche to construct a Bolivarian people. Rather,
to be of value, Chávez’s statements must not only speak to the experiences of
the people, they must also fit within a series of expectations that is temporally

Press, Ithaca, NY, p. 204.
54 Slater, D. 1991, ‘New social movements and old political questions: rethinking state–society relations in
55 Devetak, R. 2005, ‘Postmodernism’, in S. Burchill and A. Linklater (eds), Theories of International
56 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, p. 66.
57 Butler, J. 1995, ‘For a careful reading’, in S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell and N. Fraser (eds), Feminist
contingent on a common understanding of the past and, also, the future. Further to the already mentioned message of an unjust (recent) past associated with the Punto Fijo system, Chávez speaks of a revolutionary (distant) past and a hopeful future. It is through this temporal division that the central themes of past injustice, a return of dignity and ultimate emancipation are elaborated so as to codify a Bolivarian reading of Venezuela and its official identity.

A (Recent) Past of Injustice and the Rise of a Bolivarian People

Although depictions of an unjust past underpin the shift in the politics of identity by placing the previously maligned at the centre of political life, this message also generates a discourse of blame. Just as the party Acción Democrática was able to claim itself as ‘el partido del pueblo’ (the party of the people) in opposition to the oppressive regime of General Isaías Medina Angarita, the Bolivarian leader constructs a similar representation of himself and his party today. Be it the oligarchy or the Punto Fijo system itself, this politico-economic elite is placed in opposition to the interests of the ‘people’ and is blamed for the country’s failure to achieve its potential. They were responsible for robbing the nation’s wealth and for steering the country away from its glorious destiny.58 More than eliciting the two basic identity claims of the present (the ‘people’ versus the ‘oligarchy’), a blame discourse also conveys a sense of righteous indignation that clarifies the meaning associated with each subjectivity. It reinforces a conviction amongst the ‘people’ of their virtue in contrast with the absolute corruption of those before them. To this extent, the public performance of shaming acts as a mechanism through which to build solidarity around a new Bolivarian identity.59 Not only are the ‘people’ morally superior to the oligarchic elite, the difference between the two is represented as dangerous. The Chávez narrative explicitly feeds into the supposed risk associated with the economic and political elite by emphasising the traumatic history of the Caracazo as a ‘massacre’ (rather than as ‘27-F’ or ‘the events’) and by fuelling common perceptions of rampant corruption and the pain caused by widespread and endemic poverty. The blame discourse thus codifies the interpretation of Venezuelan history, whereby any ambiguity in the reading of the Caracazo, for example, is easily clarified as a ‘savage repression’ by a ‘genocidal regime’.60 Similarly, Chávez’s failed coup attempt is easily portrayed as an attack against a corrupt state in the name of a righteous people.

58 This point was initially made in relation to the most recent debt crisis in Argentina, by Armony, A. C. and Armony, V. 2005, ‘Indictments, myths, and citizen mobilization in Argentina: a discourse analysis’, Latin American Politics and Society, vol. 47, no. 4, p. 44.
Although such a setting gave Chávez’s claims of a decadent state greater resonance, these sentiments were already common within the South American nation. La paradoja venezolana—the Venezuelan paradox—is a case in point. Unable to explain the contradiction of so much wealth being generated by oil rents amid so much poverty, the indignant citizen reasoned that theft by governing elites was the only explanation for this paradox. La paradoja not only reinforced the distinction between the people and the elite, it expanded this division to include an ethical struggle whereby the exploitative oligarchic forces needed to be collectively overcome.

While Chávez’s narrative of injustice feeds into these concerns, he also offers a hopeful vision of the future. A shameful, corrupt past is recognised so that the dignity of the people can now be restored. Placed against previous injustice, the official narrative of returning dignity to the nation enables Venezuelans to become aware of their inglorious (recent) past, and empowered by its new role in the creation of a just and dignified era: ‘Venezuela will be great again, it is on its way towards greatness. Venezuela will be glorious again, it is lifting the flags of glory, the glory of the people, the hope of the people.’ The ‘people’ are at once conscious of how weak they have been and of how strong they could be thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez himself gives voice to these expectations: ‘the most important thing that Venezuela can have today is not a man, but a conscious people, you conscious of what is happening, awake, conscious, marching.’ Moreover, by returning dignity to the ‘people’, so the argument goes, no longer will they be subservient to the politico-economic elite. ‘We the Bolivarians, we the revolutionaries, we are not afraid of any threats by any oligarch no matter how rich or powerful.’ The appeal of the Chávez narrative, beyond mere antagonism directed towards the elite, comes from its ability to both recognise and (re)construct the frustrations and aspirations felt by the formerly maligned. A Bolivarian people are a glorious people who require no external inspiration—nor ought they be subordinate to anyone. Rather, they will be the inspiration for others. ‘Bolivarianism is not only a thesis for Venezuela. We, with much humility, propose it for the world, especially to the

63 Chávez cited in Moreno, ‘Metaphors in Hugo Chavez’s political discourse’, p. 115.
65 Cited in ibid., p. 100.
Latin American and Caribbean world, it is Our America. This allusion to ‘Our America’ and its author, the Cuban revolutionary figure José Martí, points to the second temporal dimension in Chávez’s narrative: a distant, revolutionary past.

A (Distant) Revolutionary Past and the People’s Emancipation

More than any of his predecessors, Chávez often invokes historical figures and events when surveying the contemporary political landscape. The ideals of the War of Independence that liberated Venezuela from Spain, for example, are replayed today for new emancipatory purposes. Evoking the Federal Wars (1859–63) in the lead-up to the 2004 elections to recall his presidency, Chávez equated the ‘No’ campaign with the Battle of Santa Inés of 1859. In this battle, General Ezequiel Zamora used tactical retreats (just as Chávez utilised the recall elections) to draw his conservative enemies into a strategic trap. Similarly, present-day policies are named after historical figures with the effect of reinforcing a connection with the revolutionary past. Social-welfare and education programs are named after figures such as Ezequiel Zamora (for land reform), Simón Robinson (a pseudonym for Simón Rodríguez; for literacy), José Félix Ribas (another figure in the fight for Venezuelan independence; for education) and Guacípuro (an indigenous anti-colonial resistance leader; for indigenous rights).

The synthesis between the past and present is more than a static invention of tradition. By isolating and reifying particular elements of Venezuelan history, Chávez is also able to naturalise both the subjectivities (‘people’ versus the elite) and the narratives (returning dignity) within his political discourse. Evoking a sense of continuity among the subject positions of the two epochs, Chávez noted that ‘[t]he oligarchy of today are the same as yesterday [only] with different faces and names and the Bolivarians of today are the same as yesterday with different faces and names’. Placing the antagonistic positions of the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ in a historical context, Chávez is able to naturalise this classification of Venezuelan society by acknowledging its existence in the past. ‘You know that Bolivar was betrayed by the predatory oligarchy, this same oligarchy that now...
threatens in a ridiculous manner this revolutionary government. Not only was the nation constructed in a struggle against an oligarchy, Chávez argues, these elites have always acted at the expense of the people. Accordingly, the hardships and the challenges faced today by the 'people' are, in essence, the same as those that the people of Venezuela suffered in the past. The appeal to lost traditions, the recovery of histories and the construction of an alternative historical narrative all serve to exclude the oligarchy, painting them as impediments to the Bolivarian Revolution, while also reinforcing the primacy of the 'people'.

Moreover, the narrative of historical continuity also promotes a sense of a common emancipatory outcome: 'we are the same fighters for independence, for dignity, for liberty and for equality for our people.' By configuring this historical link, Chávez is able to reinforce the central themes of the Bolivarian narrative with the quest for 'dignity and equality as prescient today as it was 200 years ago'. To this extent, the synthesis of the past with the present (re) introduces the theme of emancipation as the historical struggle of the 'people'. 'We are this year precisely, commemorating 180 years since the heroics of Ayacucho, where the united peoples converted into liberation armies...[and] overthrew imperial Spain...Today before the evident failure of neoliberalism...our peoples are retaking that spirit.'

The mythical weight of Simón Bolívar—who liberated present-day Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela during his own lifetime (1783–1830)—is central to an emancipatory struggle. The historical importance of Bolívar within Venezuela provides Chávez with a broad framework within which to situate his own emancipatory 'Bolivarian' representation. Dating from 1842, Venezuelan presidents of different ideological persuasions have invoked the image of Bolívar. Whether it was President José Antonio Páez (1830–35), who ordered the repatriation of Bolívar's remains in order to arrest a slide

---

72 Cited in ibid., p. 34.
73 Zúñiga, 'The missionary politics of Hugo Chávez', p. 102.
74 Cited in Arreaza, 'El discurso de Hugo Chávez', p. 32.
75 Persaud, 'Situating race in international relations', p. 67.
76 Chávez, H. 2006, 'Discurso en la Instalación de la XII Cumbre de Jefes de Estado y de Gobiernos del G15, Teatro Teresa Carreño, Caracas 27 February 2004, "El Sur También Existe", in S. Rinaldi (ed.), La Unidad Latinoamericana, Ocean Sur. Bogota, pp. 29–30. Beyond Bolívar himself, the Venezuelan President uses a combination of historical sources, known collectively as 'el árbol de las tres raíces' (the tree with three roots) to underpin the Bolivarian narrative. Recycling existing ideas and fitting forgotten actors and events into new situations, the historiography of Bolivarianism is based on a nationalist trinity of figures: Simón Bolívar, Ezequiel Zamora and Simón Rodríguez. Zamora, the federalist martyr from the same llanos region of Barinas as Chávez, is exalted for his anti-oligarchic rhetoric and has come to symbolise the unity between the peasantry and the army. Simón Rodríguez is portrayed in a similar light. As Bolívar's tutor and mentor, Rodríguez comes into the trinity by virtue of his educational qualities and the redeeming value of educating the masses. Additionally, Rodríguez is represented as a force for independence, with his famous comments 'we innovate or we will disappear' recontextualised to appeal to a nationalist doctrine of self-determination and emancipation. For more, see, Sanoja, 'Ideology, institutions and ideas', pp. 401, 406; and Heilinger, 'Teccumundismo and Chavismo', p. 11.
in his popularity, or Hugo Chávez today, Bolivar has served as a nationalist veneer within which policy decisions are legitimated and political careers are energised.77 Outlining the mythology surrounding the Liberator’s life, German Carrera Damas describes the cult of Bolívar as a complex historical-ideological formation that permits the projection of Bolivar’s values (however defined) over all aspects of political life.78 As a result, Bolivar has become a divine-like figure—‘the Son of Venezuela, its immortal Creator’—who represents the highest values of the people.79 The cult of Bolívar enables President Chávez to activate a particular reading of the Liberator and reinscribe a more radical, emancipatory interpretation of an already established nationalist ideology.

The task below is to locate the particularities (focal points and silences) in the Chávez usage of the Liberator. Indeed, amid the multiple representations of Bolivar, the question of interest becomes how Chávez is able to turn a member of one of the largest landowning families of the Creole oligarchy, a provincial leader and a liberal ideologue into a figure who speaks to the ‘people’.80 In part, he is able to do so by simplifying the complex story of Bolivar, and by reassembling the already existing myths regarding Bolivar’s life and times. While not discarding the traditional, liberal readings of Bolivar—readings that pose the Liberator as Venezuela’s greatest exponent of the concepts of liberty and equality—the Chávez interpretation radicalises these concepts.81 Bolivar’s concern for freedom and the national transcendence of exploitation (both foreign and domestic) is emphasised over themes of political equality. Similarly, on this issue of political equality, a more radical notion of natural equality is extrapolated.82 While ideas associated with the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution served as a template for Bolivar’s feelings on republicanism and the centralised role of government, Chávez localises these themes and, in the process, affects a more radical reading:

[W]e were born for liberty, they [‘imperialist infiltrators’] were born for world domination; we were born Bolivarian, we were born together with el pueblo...and we are here to carry out the mandate of Simón Bolívar, in order to...defend the guarantees of the people, the happiness of the people, the freedom of the people, not to dominate them or to insult, nor violate them.83

79 Ibid., p. 61
The qualities of liberty, equality and fraternity are elevated to an emancipatory struggle against the despotism and inequality of political and economic power demonstrated in Chávez’s readings of the recent past. 84

In emphasising the social-justice dimensión of the Liberator, Chávez aligns Bolivar with steps to return dignity to the people. The Liberator gave ‘land to the peasants in order to liberate them from slavery, from hunger and from misery, for this reason the revolution of independence was consolidated with the support of the Venezuelan people’. 85 Moreover, in affecting this radical reading, Chávez both emphasises and confines the Liberator’s emancipatory value to the ‘people’. While other readings of liberation call attention to the equality given Creoles in respect to their local colonial equivalents, the Chávez narrative emphasises the freedom of slaves from their owners, and the indigenous struggle for equality in front of the strong landed and commercial aristocracy. 86

‘The liberation of slaves, the liberation of Indians, the dividing of land for the Indians, for the poor, that all should be equal, that freedom without equality has no meaning, it was for this that the oligarchy of the Americas overthrew him [Bolivar].’ 87 This emancipatory reading is forwarded despite the abolition of slavery occurring as a result of political expediency on the part of Bolivar so as to obtain military support from Haiti. Neither Bolivar’s political calculations nor the equality given to Creole elites is, however, put forward by a Venezuelan President intent on fashioning a more radical Liberator so as to legitimate his own Bolivarian project.

Having made an investment in certain emancipatory accounts of who Bolivar was, Chávez is able to draw dividends on these representations. 88 As a defender of social justice and equality, Bolivar’s struggle can be repositioned and applied to the enduring social and political asymmetries of today. 89 Referring to the Battle of Carabobo that sealed the country’s independence, Chávez said ‘that battle is the same struggle as today. This is the continuation of that revolution, the Bolivarian Revolution’. 90 The present-day Bolivarian project embodies the same emancipatory quest for dignity and justice as did the actions of Bolivar.

84 Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolivar, p. 42.
86 Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolivar, p. 44.
90 Cited in Moreno, ‘Metaphors in Hugo Chavez’s political discourse’, p. 206.
These representations enable Chávez to absorb the spirit of emancipation and place himself and his Bolivarian project as the natural heirs to the life and work of Bolívar.

Deceived during his time, already dying, almost solitary, betrayed, expelled from here, he [Bolívar] said 'the great day of South America is yet to arrive'. Two hundred years later we believe that now the day of the Americas has arrived, and more than just America, the great day of the people. The great day of freedom, of equality and of justice is arriving.91

Carrying the Bolivarian sword into the future, Chávez now makes possible the emancipation previously unachieved by Bolívar. Indeed, far from a failure, Bolívar comes to represent all that was not obtained during the independence struggle in the first half of the nineteenth century.92 'Simón Bolívar, father of our patria [homeland] and guide of our revolution, swore not to give rest to his arm, nor respite to his soul, until America was free. We will not give rest to our arms, nor respite to our souls until we save humanity.'93 Speaking to this emancipation, on the seventh anniversary of his coming to power, Chávez told the assembled that today, thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela is a 'society totally different to that of exclusion and privilege'. As a result, '[w]hat is happening now is a truly second independence'.94 Failures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries become the possibilities of what Chávez has termed 'twenty-first-century socialism'.

Conclusions

A new 'Bolivarian' identity was predicated on a shift in the politics of identity that placed the previously maligned masses at the centre of political life. With the former 'phantasmagorical subversives' and impediments to national progress located at the forefront of Venezuelan politics, Chávez elicited and expanded upon the experiences of the 'people' so as to make their history congruent with that of the nation. Examining the social interface between the Chávez narrative and its resonance amongst the polity, it was found that the shift in identity was enabled by a common belief in the exhaustion of the previous politico-economic structures associated with the Punto Fijo system. The rise in popular protests against official austerity measures, in addition to the increase in abstention

91 Chávez, 'La Revolución Bolivariana y la Construcción del Socialismo en el Siglo XXI', p. 198.
92 Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolívar, p. 55.
rates for presidential elections, reflected popular perceptions of a corrupt state. Picking up on these perceptions, Chávez’s descriptions of the Caracazo as a ‘massacre’ and of the Punto Fijo system as a ‘gangrenous politics’ not only reinforced the need for change, they also placed his Bolivarian Revolution as best equipped to dramatically reorientate Venezuelan society.

Having demonstrated the shift in identity, attention then turned to the construction of a new ‘Bolivarian’ identity. Rather than being authored by a simple pueblo/oligarquía binary, however, the new identity was dependent on a matrix of history and narrative. Within this matrix, Chávez sought to bring together the various aspirations of the ‘people’ by constructing a recent past of injustice and a distant, revolutionary past. Chávez spoke to the disenchantment with the Punto Fijo system, but did so as a means of consigning such hardship to the past. Buttressing this argument were allusions to a more distant revolutionary past, which, in turn, served at least two rhetorical purposes. First, the links forged between the Chávez administration and the revolutionary past enabled the Venezuelan President to present the recent Punto Fijo past as an anomaly in Venezuelan history. Indeed, more than making static allusions to events 200 years ago, Chávez, by evoking the dignity of the Liberator, claimed to be returning the nation to a more just normality. Second, the supposed revolutionary links were also based on the promise of emancipation to come. The present-day Bolivarian Revolution would fulfil the emancipatory potential unattained by Bolívar himself. This Bolivarian world view—encompassing both a revolutionary past and the promise of emancipation—thus sought to codify the multiplicity of frustrations, ideas, symbols, beliefs and demands into a shared view. Significantly, however, it was the investment in an emancipated future that acted as the cornerstone of Bolivarian politics. Indeed, in the lead-up to the 1998 poll, an improvement in the socio-political setting and the disavowal of the Punto Fijo system were the principal factors that determined Chávez’s political legitimacy. Moreover, the subsequent investment made in a new Bolivarian identity was predicated on the betterment of the lives of Venezuelans. To refer to a Bolivarian ‘people’, therefore, was to refer to an emancipated people.

The link between the promise of emancipation to come and the Bolivarian identity exhibited a symbiotic relationship between the ‘people’ and Chávez. On the one hand, by reifying the maligned masses and their interests, the Venezuelan President was able to justify his policy initiatives as furthering the people’s emancipation. Be it the successful ‘no’ vote in the 2004 recall election or the exclusion of the oligarchic elite from political life, both were framed as consistent with the people’s emancipation. On the other hand, by claiming that it acted in the historical interests of the formerly marginalised, the Bolivarian Revolution came to speak for the ‘people’. Indeed, the ‘people’ became increasingly dependent on the Chávez presidency, not only for their
recognition on the national political stage, but also because their interests were interpreted for them by the Chávez administration. Looking forward, there is a potential danger in this scenario should there develop a meaningful distinction between the leader and the led. That is, if the interests of the formerly maligned come to differ significantly from those constructed by Chávez for the 'people' then the resonance of the Bolivarian narrative and the political longevity of Chávez himself are likely to be limited. The question becomes for how long can the promise of emancipation resonate if an actual betterment in the lives of the 'people' fails to materialise? While Chávez was able to affect a shift in the politics of identity—an accomplishment for which he deserves credit—the permanence of this movement remains contingent on a receptive audience mindful of their past exclusion, but also weary of previous disappointment.
Introduction

The articles in this special edition of *Humanities Research* began as papers presented at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Association of Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australasia in 2010. The conference marked a momentous occasion for those involved in Iberian and Latin American Studies: the bicentenary of independence from Spain for five Latin American countries—Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. Moreover, 1810 really represented the beginnings of the struggles that led to independence for all of the possessions of Spain and, later, Portugal in the Americas.

The republics of the Americas that began to emerge at this time provided a model for many in the colonial world. Along with the French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century, Latin American independence stands as a great shift in the political make-up of the modern world. It is easy to look back on these world-changing events with a sense of their inevitability. To those living at the time and taking part in them, however, there was no such certainty. The American Revolution—after a long war—eventually established a constitutional republic. The notions of independence and liberty that this struggle helped to forge were, however, far from triumphant or even well entrenched at this time. Even the French Republic had slid back to a crowned emperor on the throne. A defeat in the great struggles that took place between 1810 and 1825 in Latin America would have seriously weakened what eventually became a global movement: the removal of hereditary monarchy and its replacement with some form of constitutional rule.

In place of vice-royalties governed from the Iberian Peninsula, new nation-states were created—governed, it is true, by local elites. But they were nation-states with the potential—often left unrealised—for eventual broad democratic representation. Along with these nation-states were created various forms of nationalism. While the dream of Simón Bolivar was for a unified state—*Gran Colombia*—rivalry between regional elites made this impossible and the borders of the region, more or less as we know them today, were soon set.

Once such independent states were formed each set out to forge a nationalism to legitimate its existence. This was to be no small effort since they contained people of remarkably diverse backgrounds. Those of Iberian origin often made up the elite. Other Europeans played a part—recalled in the name of the great liberator of Chile: Bernardo O’Higgins. Indigenous people had survived to be numerically predominant in some places. Africans—slaves or their descendents—were also strongly represented. A large *mestizo* population of mixed European and indigenous background was to become the largest group in others. Moreover, the colonial class structure remained intact through the
upheavals, with the newly independent regimes still populated by slave-owners and slaves. Patrician haciendas and latifundistas kept campesinos in serf-like conditions. Simón Bolívar was one of the wealthiest men of the continent when he took up the independence struggle. Joint citizenship alone was not enough to bind these disparate groups together. In many cases, the putative nationalism of the wars of independence defined itself solely against the colonial power, rather than by any broader agreement or common purpose.

Nationalism had to be created in Latin America—largely after the nation-states themselves were born. As Ernst Gellner wrote, 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'. These new nationalisms were constructed by a political and a cultural process. A historia patria was created and streets and public spaces were adorned with the names of the heroes of independence and of the battles they fought. Literature became a major means for the development and transmission of nationalist themes. The language of politics became—and remains—littered with nationalist references to the processes by which these states were created. President Hugo Chávez has declared Venezuela a Bolivarian Republic. The legacy of José Martí is claimed both by the Cuban Government and by the Cuban exiles in the United States. 'Ownership' of nationalist symbols and figures has become part of daily political struggle, for which parties and ideologues vie.

It is easy to forget how modern is this development of nationalism. In the eighteenth century, the term 'patria' was used in Spanish to refer simply to the locality in which one was born. Until 1884, the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy continued to use the word nación only in the sense of a group of inhabitants of a region rather than in the modern sense.

The rulers of states in the past had attempted to command loyalty from their subjects on the basis of a personal allegiance to a noble family house or in obedience to the word of God. The world that was taking shape—and decisively so with Latin American independence—was built on a more abstract idea: an 'imagined community', in the words of Benedict Anderson. For the old rulers—such as the Hapsburgs—who sometimes commanded non-contiguous territories of numerous languages and cultures, the question of what nationality they considered themselves to be would have been incomprehensible and probably insulting. For the new rulers in Latin America it was central to their legitimacy.

Independence in Latin America also underlined the long, slow decline of the once great Iberian empires. They, left behind by more economically advanced

---

and vigorous European rivals, found some of their American possessions were wealthier than they were. Interestingly, the modern form of nationalism that became established in the Americas had to wait much longer to take root in Spain and Portugal.

Two hundred years after the dawn of Latin American independence, we now hear predictions of the 'end of the nation-state' and claims that the nationalism that accompanies it is increasingly a nostalgic dream of past glories destined to play a minor part in our lives. But as several of the papers in this edition show, nationalism is not something that—once constructed—is put aside. There is a constant process of renewal in multiple fields including literature and politics. Even the celebrations of the bicentenaries are themselves part of the process. All the papers here deal, in different ways, with this process.

The article by Nicola Gilmour, 'Carme Riera’s En el último azul (1994): An encounter with Spain's conflicted past', is a discussion of an attempt at a historical apology through a work of literature. The apology is by Carme Riera to a group of Jews persecuted by the Inquisition in late seventeenth-century Majorca, resulting in the execution of 37 of their number. The expulsion and forced conversion of the Spanish Jews are connected both with Latin America and with the construction of nationalism in several ways. The Edict of Expulsion was issued in 1492—at the same time as Columbus set out to colonise the New World. It was an early attempt to establish the homogeneity that later nation-building projects would require, but in a world in which religious uniformity was still more crucial than secular ideas of nationality. The article also explores the importance of a nation's past in its own identity and of an apology such as this in undermining 'fantasies of unified identity'.

Eileen Willingham’s contribution is also about the ways in which literature and history can shape a nation's vision of itself—in this case, the Ecuadorian historian Juan de Velasco in the late eighteenth century and the writer Juan León Mera in the nineteenth century. Willingham traces the work of both men in creating continuity in Ecuadorian history extending even to pre-Hispanic times. The past is used to validate the creation of an 'Ecuadorianess' to serve the interests of the state and local elites.

Tensions in the formation of a nationalist narrative of the creation of the nation are also evident in the article by Benito Cao. Here is developed a historiography of the birth of the Brazilian nation. Central to this is a series of revolts during the colonial period. These are not, however, treated equally in the mainstream—and even some of the progressive—histories. In some cases, relatively small upheavals are accorded primacy of place while actually more significant ones are

---

4 See, for example, Ohmae, K. 1995, The End of the Nation State, Harper Collins, London.
relegated to a minor position. Part of the reason for this is that white people—
of Portuguese background—emerged as the dominant group in colonial and
independent Brazil. The newly emerging national identity was therefore based
around those aspects of the colonial experience and transition to nation-
statehood in which their role was predominant or could be painted as such.
The important part indigenous and African people played in the process is
correspondingly, and systematically, marginalised.

Kevin Foster deals with the self-reflection of a nation through its own literature
and culture. Rather than the early formation of a national identity through the
process that others in this issue have explored, his subject, however, is a fully
formed national, indeed imperial, identity—that of Britain in the late nineteenth
and early twentieth centuries. This article explores the relationship between
Britain's view of itself as a superior civilisation, the realities of increasing
competition from other emerging imperialisms and the self-doubt and soul-
searching that this sometimes produced. Latin America—as a region in which
Britain had only very limited formal colonial possessions—afforded British
writers the opportunity of 'an ideal symbolic space, free from the complications
of "official" rule, within which narrative fiction might unpack and illuminate
the contradictions of imperialist discourse'. Conan Doyle's The Lost World
(1902) is analysed as a fascinating example of the battle between civilisation and
barbarism played out in an imaginary Latin American territory where, finally,
contradictions in the imperial project itself are exposed.

Irene Stridthoff brings the process of the ideological construction of the
nation-building project up to date. Her article on the Chilean and Australian
bicentenaries illustrates that the national self-image so central to nation
building is unfinished business. It investigates the similarities between the way
the Australian bicentenary (1988) and the Chilean (2010) dealt with the question
of incorporating indigenous people. Nation building in both cases was done
through conquest and colonisation of indigenous people: Australian Aboriginal
people and the Mapuche and other indigenous groups in Chile. In each case,
much of the following years were marked by a virtual exclusion of the indigenes
from official representations of the nation. Moreover, whereas the bicentenaries
were officially celebrated, many indigenous people often mourned these events
as a loss of their own sovereignty.

The final article deals with national identity in a situation of intense contemporary
political consequence. First elected to office in 1998, President, Hugo Chávez,
has attempted a redefinition of Venezuela as a 'Bolivarian' nation. Here, Guy
Emerson shows that the battle for national identity can be of enormous political
consequence. Chávez has attempted to construct in the popular imagination a
recent past—an unjust one ruled over by his political predecessors and current
Introduction

opponents—and contrast it with a more distant, but revolutionary one. In this construction, the Bolivarian past is now being reclaimed by a Bolivarian people—a formerly excluded group now taking its rightful place in Venezuela.

We hope these articles will be a significant contribution to continuing discussion of the nation-building project, its flaws and contradictions, in relation to a part of the world that played such an important part in its birth.

Guy Emerson and John Minns
Embracing Strangeness: The Politics of Solidarity
R. Guy Emerson
Alternatives: Global, Local, Political 2011 36: 221
DOI: 10.1177/0304375411418598

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://alt.sagepub.com/content/36/3/221

Published by:
©SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

Published in Association with the Center for the Study of Developing Societies

Additional services and information for Alternatives: Global, Local, Political can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://alt.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://alt.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
Embracing Strangeness: The Politics of Solidarity

R. Guy Emerson

Abstract
Be it the ideal of liberal democracy, the opening of local markets to the fluctuations of international capital, or the elusive quest for development, the discursive strategies of the North and the policy orientations that they enable toward the South are well explored. Less explored, however, is the way in which the South interacts with this received wisdom. This article explicitly focuses on how Venezuela, as one of the more outspoken southern states, works within and subverts the dominant U.S.-authored tropes in Latin America. It suggests that while U.S. representations of the Chávez administration as a strange anomaly in the America’s resonate in Venezuela and beyond, it is possible for Venezuela to subvert these messages by “embracing strangeness.” That is, by embracing and expanding the difference attributed to them onto the rest of Latin America, Venezuela is able to use “strangeness” to open up possibilities for new meanings and political spaces in the Americas.

Keywords
identity, discourse, resistance, strangeness, global south

In 1988, Michael Shapiro published *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Political Analysis*. Analyzing the relationship between politics and language, Shapiro sought to contest the boundaries of international relations scholarship as well as extend the politics of analysis to the fields of art and literature by examining the practices of representation and their consequences. While these were undoubtedly important and overdue points of investigation, the present interest in Shapiro’s text centers on a number of specific questions he posed in relation to U.S. representations of Guatemala. Seeking to understand the politics of U.S. involvement in Central America, Shapiro spoke of a geopolitical discourse embedded with assumptions of moral superiority that in turn offered Washington a powerful vindication for action.

One of Shapiro’s more succinct insights, one that this article intends to pursue, involved the process of exoticizing the Other, or, put more succinctly still, making the Other “strange.” Arguing that such a process invariably amounted to constituting the Other as a less-than-equal subject, Shapiro demonstrated how “strangeness” came to be viewed as threatening and therefore legitimized a series of foreign policy forays into the region. Continuing a similar line of investigation, a number of international relations scholars began exploring the production of strangeness and the

1 Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Corresponding Author:
R. Guy Emerson, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia
Email: guy.emerson@anu.edu.au
representation of less-than-equal subjects in the foreign policy avenues of the North (official, journalistic, and academic). While these investigations provide valuable insight into the complexity of North–South relations, less explored are the ways in which Northern representations circulate in the South. To what extent have these representations been reproduced, manipulated, exchanged, combined with already existing narratives, and/or destroyed? More to the point, what effect has this reproduction had both in the South but also in the North? It is to this series of questions that this article speaks.

Using the U.S. representation of Venezuela as a starting point for analysis, the article illustrates the way in which the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and its president, Hugo Chávez, are made strange. However, rather than focusing on U.S. representations, analysis quickly turns to how narratives of strangeness and discourses of danger play out in Caracas. Deliberately concentrating on one of the most outspoken leaders in global politics, the interest below lies in how President Chávez interacts with claims that he is, at best, a firebrand and, at worst, akin to Adolf Hitler. It is argued, however, that more than contesting these representations, Hugo Chávez plays within the discursive structures largely elaborated in the North. Put alternatively, far from solely opposing U.S.- authored representations, Chávez embraces the strangeness attributed to him and, in the process, casts it as a positive attribute. An understanding of this reappropriation, I will suggest, is central to Venezuelan attempts to create a new politics in the Americas.

Making Venezuela Strange

By way of introduction, the appearance of former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger F. Noriega, before the U.S. Senate on June 24, 2004, summarized the themes apparent in Washington’s understanding of the Chávez administration. Depicting the Bolivarian Republic as inconsistent with the expected norms of behavior, Noriega maintained that the U.S.–Venezuelan relationship “has suffered over the past four years, largely as a result of President Chávez’s opposition to key U.S. security and economic goals, his penchant for associating himself with dictatorial regimes, and his anti-U.S. rhetoric.” While far from the most critical comments made by a U.S. official, the Noriega testimony is significant in that it clearly portrays Chávez as the anomaly in the 40-year history of U.S.–Venezuelan relations. Reflecting this abnormality and the corresponding sense of frustration, Noriega began his 2004 testimony by stating “I appear before you today at a critical moment for Venezuela. For years one of Latin America’s most stable democracies, Venezuela today is at a crossroads.” His successor, Thomas Shannon, echoed similar sentiments before the House International Relations Committee, noting that “democracy in Venezuela is in grave peril.” While less verbose, the following Assistant Secretary, Arturo Valenzuela, maintained that Venezuela was his country’s “most difficult” relationship in the region. Expanding on the nature of this difficulty and again emphasizing the irregularity of relations, Assistant Secretary Valenzuela reasoned that although “we have bolstered a partnership” with the majority of other Latin American states, with Venezuela “we are still in a situation where we wonder: ‘do they really want a dialogue?’” This commentary, spanning 6 years and three Assistant Secretaries of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, highlights the parameters in which Washington represents the Chávez administration. The emotive language of “critical moment,” “crossroads,” and “grave peril,” not only reinforces the danger that Chávez represents to democracy and U.S. interests more broadly but it also underlines the abnormality of Venezuela within the Americas. The separation of Venezuela from the region was made no more apparent than in President Bush’s address to the Summit of the Americas at Fort Lauderdale in June 2005.

In the new Americas of the twenty-first century, bringing a better life to our people requires choosing between two competing visions. One offers a vision of hope—it is founded on representative government, integration
into the world markets, and a faith in the transformative power of freedom in individual lives. The other seeks to roll back the democratic progress of the past two decades by playing to fear, pitting neighbor against neighbor, and blaming others for their own failures to provide for their people.  

Imposing its own interpretive framework over the Americas, Washington demarcates the region into a democratic “vision of hope” and, in a thinly veiled reference to Caracas, a competing authoritarian ideal. Expanding upon these competing visions and foregoing any veiled criticisms, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice argued before a Senate committee that “[t]he Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela offers a competing vision of authoritarian leadership and commodity-driven economies.”  

Similarly, her successor, Hillary Clinton, noted on a trip to Brazil that she was “deeply concerned about the behavior of the Venezuelan Government, which we think is unproductive with respect to its relations with certain neighbors, which we believe is limiting, slowly but surely, the freedoms within Venezuela.”  

By placing Chávez outside of their vision for Latin America, Washington is able to shore up the internal consistency of what both presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama have interchangeably termed “our neighborhood” or “our hemisphere.” If democracy and freedom are the hallmarks of “our neighborhood” then an authoritarian Venezuela is clearly outside of this community. Chávez becomes the illiberal anomaly of the democratic Americas, with inter-American relations structured by competing logics of freedom and totalitarianism; a remarkable consistency with the ideological struggle that underpinned the cold war.  

While the above reading of Venezuela is likely to tell us as much about Washington and their disposition/dispositions when viewing their southern neighbors as it is about Caracas itself, the focus of this article centers on how such narratives are received in Venezuela. To this extent, the analysis below is not concerned with whether or not the Venezuelan threat of authoritarianism is “real.” Rather, it attempts to understand how these representations are interpreted/reinterpreted in Venezuela and, in turn, what consequences they have on inter-American relations.  

A cursory glance at Venezuelan interaction with Washington confirms a level of mutual antagonism. This was no more apparent than in President Chávez’s 2006 address to the UN General Assembly. In one of the most overtly hostile attacks against a U.S. President, Hugo Chávez likened President Bush to the Devil and made specific reference to the sulfuric smell that had survived his General Assembly address the day before. This demonic association later included the Obama administration. Speaking at the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Chávez noted that “it smells of sulfur here. It continues to smell of sulfur in this world.” In addition to these comments, the United States is often depicted as a morally degenerate character, as “a cruel combatant,” “an assassin,” “a violent invader,” “a usurper,” and “an old dirty person” within the inter-American community. Similar to Washington, therefore, Caracas maps the Western Hemisphere into conflicting camps, painting its adversary as the potentially dangerous aberration within the region.  

However, while Venezuela appears to simply mimic U.S. antagonistic identity practices, there are limits to this understanding of difference. This inadequacy is best reflected in the difficulty associated with othering a country like the United States. Not only does Washington have the hegemonic reach, and/or soft power, to actively promote a positive image of itself in Venezuela, but it also has the capacity to invert any attempts at other-ing; an ability far less apparent in Caracas. Indeed, the institutionalized nature of U.S. dominance in regional organizations, in addition to its geographical proximity in the Western Hemisphere, appears to make the other-ing process difficult. Washington can simply dismiss Chávez, as demonstrated by President Obama, as a “disruptive force in the region.” Moreover, the U.S. reach means that its representation of Venezuela—Chávez as a threat to democracy and the region—is likely to be internalized within Venezuela. That is, in addition to the difficulties in painting a negative image of Washington, so too does Venezuela have to deal with its own negative image projected back onto itself. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to this process as making the “native” see themselves as the Other. Fixed differentiation between a Venezuelan
self and a U.S. other becomes more difficult in a scenario where Venezuelans are increasingly placed between a range of contradictory places that coexist. An independent, revolutionary, “Bolivarian” identity forwarded by Chávez is made all the more difficult by claims that Venezuela is at the “crossroads” and led by a president who fails to act in the interests of his people. Similarly, with the self/other distinction often supplemented by the inside/outside binary that (partially) disciplines the uncertainty of global politics, the capacity for Venezuelan foreign policy to secure an internal space located in opposition to an external, insecure Other is again rendered problematic given the danger of Chávez’s purported authoritarian tendencies. With these obstacles in mind the dynamics of identity formation appears different for Venezuela than for a country like the United States. Indeed, the production of identity through difference alone appears ill-equipped to understand the unique aspects of identity formation in states subjected to the foreign policy of an outside power such as Washington.

Given such limitations how is an antagonistic Venezuela to be understood? Hostility toward the United States is often explained via stated political objectives on the part of Chávez. In the local sphere, antagonism toward Washington is seen as distracting attention away from any domestic shortcomings, while also acting as a means of social cohesion by promoting Venezuelan unity in the face of the common adversary to the north. Within this polarized environment, Chávez is able to dismiss his political opponents as allies of U.S. imperialism, thereby contributing to a scenario in which opposing the Bolivarian Revolution is equated with opposing the state itself. It is Chávez who defends the state from foreign exploitation and maintains the integrity of the nation and its people. Meanwhile, in the international sphere, the Venezuelan leader’s antagonistic rhetoric is also said to offer him a platform from which to question the U.S. role both within the region and internationally. While not seeking to question the validity of the above explanations, the analysis below steps back from this interface of hostility so as to explore the production of difference. Rather than taking an antagonistic relationship as a given, it argues that a more nuanced appreciation of difference offers an insight into how the South generally, and Venezuela specifically, is able to subvert dominant narratives from the North.

The Production of Difference

The key to understanding how Venezuela is able to employ exclusionary identity practices relates back to the production of difference itself. This understanding is impeded by viewing relations between the Self and the Other in dialectic or dialogic terms. A dialectics of self–other interaction that results in the production of a new relationship (positive or negative) or the creation of new dialogic meaning through understanding and self-reflection impede an awareness of difference. This is due, in part, to the already established distinction between Self and Other that is presupposed by both perspectives. There already exists a Self and an Other. As a consequence, the distinction between “our inside” and “their outside” is rendered unproblematic. The objective in moving beyond such a distinction, however, is not to begin investigation at a pre-discursive foundation before the construction of identity and difference. Rather, it is to explore how Venezuela is able to create antagonist relations with Washington in a culturally, economically, and politically interconnected and interdependent world. Difference should not be viewed as absolute and spatially fixed but rather as a production across nation-states and between boundaries, akin to the global flows of capital, information, arms, and technology. Far from a free and unimpeded process, however, difference is produced and maintained in a field of power relations in a world always, and already spatially interconnected. To this extent, interaction between different identity constructs is not a process involving actors with equal access to a common language. In contrast to dialogic interaction, multiple and overlapping language games are in play that, in turn, grant their respective participants greater or lesser importance in the international system. Moreover, the overlapping, interconnected nature of difference means that identity is unlikely to be constructed in a vacuum, but rather composed of multiple
sources. Accordingly, the question of interest becomes how difference is produced/reproduced in an interdependent world of varying power relations by a less-than-equal actor. Viewed in relation to Venezuela, the insights of Tzvetan Todorov point us in this direction.

Examining Self/Other interactions during the Spanish conquest of the New World, Todorov suggests that it is possible to locate the production of difference along three axes. The first, *axiological*, relates to value judgments of the Other by the Self (they are good or bad); the second *praxeological* level is formed in reference to the proximity of the Other to the Self and any potential power differential (submission of, or submission to the Other); while the third *epistemic* level refers to the acknowledgment or ignorance of the Other's identity. Applying this typology to the Venezuelan production of difference, it is clear how Caracas behaves in relation to the first axis of interaction. Comments likening both presidents Obama and Bush to the Devil make a negative *axiological* judgment abundantly clear. However, as demonstrated, such representations are limited given that they must counter U.S. projections of their own positive value in the region. Limits at the *epistemic* level appear similarly commonsensical, given that ignorance of the U.S. Other is impossible. The soft, institutionalized power of the United States in addition to their geographical and historical immediacy to Venezuela makes lower levels of knowledge regarding the Other unworkable. This leaves the *praxeological* level and the issue of submission and proximity.

Viewed from a *praxeological* perspective that is mindful of power differentials between Caracas and Washington, the submission of the United States to Venezuela is highly unlikely. As demonstrated in reference to the U.S. hegemonic reach, if submission is the issue then it is submission to Washington that is the ever present danger for Caracas. Significantly, it is this fear of submission, combined with the proximity of U.S. representations, which provide an insight into the Venezuelan production of difference.

Limited in its capacity to "other" Washington by simply constructing a negative representation of the United States (*axiological*) and/or unable to ignore its existence (*epistemic*), Chávez "others" Washington by emphasizing the fear of potential submission to the United States and by subverting the proximity of their representations. With respect to the former, descriptions of President Bush as Mister Danger and the United States as an imperial threat demonstrate how Chávez uses a threatening Other as a central pillar in the production of difference. While such claims are often *axiological* judgments (Bush and Obama as the Devil and so on) and by themselves carry the potential to author difference, Washington, as demonstrated, can more easily dismiss these value judgments. In contrast, when combined with the *praxeological* level that places such comments within a context of potential U.S. aggression, then Chávez's statements are more likely to resonate in the Americas. For example, in response to President Bush's axis of evil remarks in 2002, Chávez contested the received ideals of good and evil to argue that, "[t]he axis of evil is Washington, this is the axis of evil, with its allies throughout the world that threaten, invade, kill, and assassinate. We are constructing an axis of good, a new axis for the new century." Such a statement works at both the *axiological* and *praxeological* levels with a value judgment (Washington as evil) placed in the context of historically founded fears of potential U.S. intervention. The utility of this distinction is not to predict the potential resonance, or not, of various Chávez statements. Rather, the utility of the Todorov typology is to provide an insight into how Venezuela produces difference in an unequal environment. The disproportionate level of U.S. influence that has enabled multiple interventions into the Western Hemisphere is subverted by Venezuela emphasizing the potential for future intervention, or at least the U.S. capacity to work contrary to local interests. More than just a negative representation, Washington is placed within a broader discourse of danger. However, in contrast to the discourse of danger attributed to it by Washington, the Venezuelan-authored narrative takes place from a position of inferior material capabilities; a position that potentially lends greater credibility to the production of danger.

While the detour through Todorov's typology may appear excessive if only to highlight a discourse of danger, its utility is further demonstrated by acknowledging the proximity of U.S.
representations of Venezuela. Using the U.S. capacity to present Venezuela as the strange Other throughout the region (the proximity of U.S. representations), Chávez is able to reappropriate this difference to new effect. Put simply, the circulation of U.S.-authored claims of Venezuelan strange-ness are embraced by Caracas and redeployed as a positive value. Venezuelan particularity is rei-fied—its unique history, culture, and identity—and promoted in opposition to the United States. Rather than transcending or being disrupted by U.S. representations, Venezuela reorientates the exo-ticizing process as an enabling tool. Rival identity claims are maintained and reproduced with a different and dangerous United States placed in opposition to a unique, threatened Venezuela.

Far from contesting identity construction in international politics, by embracing its strangeness and appropriating a discourse of danger, the Venezuelan production of difference is consistent with the dominant rules of identity and statehood. Firmly established within the distinction between an inside and an outside, Venezuela simply appropriates the tools of constructing identity through difference and employs them in a novel context. An oppositional depiction of the United States is both within the rules and, at the same time, against them. It plays by the rules through creating identity in relation to the Other, but does so within the margins by inverting the exclusionary practice of the hegemon as a form of self-differentiation. To this extent, assumptions that less powerful actors are less “other-ing” may be due to a lapse into a view of power as a negative and not a productive force in the Foucauldian sense. More than simply differentiating the Bolivarian Republic, however, Chávez works within the U.S. distinction to not only challenge the discourse from the north but also to undermine the U.S. position within the Western Hemisphere. By acknowledging a subversive dimension within the production of difference—“embracing strangeness”—it is possible to see how Chávez expands “strangeness” onto the rest of Latin America, thereby opening up possibilities for a new politics in the Americas. It is this construction of Latin American particularism in opposition to Washington that concerns the rest of the article.

**Constructing a Latin America: Positive Pan-Americanism**

The production of difference explored so far can be conceptualized as having both positive and negative dimensions. While a negative production of difference via a discourse of danger is highlighted as a means of protection from submission to Washington, difference in the Venezuelan case also has positive dimensions. With respect to this positive aspect, difference, or more accurately “strangeness,” becomes a foundation from which Venezuela has the ability to construct a uniquely Latin American identity. While difference and exclusion are often by-products of identity construction, difference in the Venezuelan case is significant in that it goes beyond the confines of the nation-state to encompass a whole region. Indeed, as is demonstrated below, Chávez embraces and actively promotes a cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic distinction between the states north and south of the Rio Grande.

Loosely promoted under the banner of Our America, Chávez attempts to forge a Latin American community by promoting its particularity vis-à-vis the United States as a source of unity. At its most fundamental, Our America spatially incorporates a Latin American Self and attempts to reappropriate the notion of America. Recontextualizing U.S. President James Monroe’s famous declaration “America for Americans” (1823), Chávez stated:

> Men and women of Mar del Plata, and from further afar in Patagonia, you are as much Americans as those from New York, from Washington, from Quebec, and those from whichever corner of this continent, we are all Americas; “America for Americans.”

More than recapturing America, however, allusions to Our America enable Chávez to invoke regionally specific tropes. Originally articulated by Cuban poet and revolutionary hero José Martí, the very
reference to Our America provides a revolutionary aide-mémoire as it draws on a rich, distinctively Latin American series of events, figures, and narratives. Contesting the then dominant trains of thought that saw a Latin American future as either assimilation of U.S. practices or increased national insularism, Martí’s publication of “Our America” in 1892 instead promoted regional unity.37 “Those who shake their fists, like jealous brothers coveting the same tract of land,” Martí wrote, “... should clasp hands and become one ... It is the time of mobilization, of marching together, and we must go forward in close ranks, like silver in the veins of the Andes.”38 More than just calling for unity, however, Vibha Maurya argues that Martí’s differentiation between Our America and the “other America” to the north provided a point of departure for identity politics in Latin America, with a unified regional self constructed in opposition to the U.S. Other.39 To this extent, Our America subverts the label imposed by the oppressors, in that it still maintains Latin America as a classifiable whole but, in so doing, it enfranchises an emancipatory counter-identity based on essentializing difference between it and external actors.40 It enacts a double articulation by calling for an end to the past oppression of an enforced identity yet, at the same time, it offers a break from this past by subverting the dominant order.41 It is this break, as is demonstrated below, that increasingly sees Our America promoted as a surrogate for an emancipatory politics.42

At its most fundamental Our America aspires to Latin American solidarity. By emphasizing common links and characteristics, Chávez promotes a Latin American identity via claims of racial, religious, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity. At its most radical, however, Our America constructs a unity that extends the ideational inside/outside boundaries beyond the confines of the nation-state to encompass the region as a whole.43 As maintained by Chávez himself, Latin Americans share a “strength of conscience, morality, revolutionary mystique, revolutionary spirit, the consciousness of the great nation, we are a single nation.”44 The construction of Our America relies on this continual representation of sameness.45 Speaking in Colombia, Chávez told the assembled that “we are the same people, we share the same history, we are from the same soul and we have the same dream.”46 Our America, combined with terms like Patria Grande (the great/greater homeland), are reinscribed as markers of a cultural identity that, in turn, correspond to the geographical division of the Americas so as to affect a pan-national imaginary south of the Rio Grande.47 Speaking in Argentina, Chávez started by declaring “Viva la Patrial Viva la Patria Grande.” Later reinforcing its importance, he stated: “[t]o have a Patria, in order to achieve our dreams, to make utopia possible, in order to achieve the salvation of our peoples. Unity, unity, unity!”48 Later that same year Chávez pleaded with a Brazilian audience “to join together as one people and battle for our independence, for our freedom, for our development. We are aware, compatriots and compatriots of this Patria Grande, that only united, truly united will we be free.”49

The above quotes by Chávez demonstrate how a shared Our American consciousness is buttressed by an imperative for unity and a common emancipated future. While not seeking the abolition of state borders (a la Gran Colombia), calls for Patria Grande engender a unified imagined community, whereby the Venezuelan leader can reposition the particular interests of Latin American states within a broader, common struggle.50 A politics of solidarity is central to this struggle. While promoting a united future, calls for solidarity are very much normalized via references to a common revolutionary tradition. In addition to the revolutionary aide-mémoire offered by Martí’s “Our America,” Chávez makes explicit links with revolutionary figures and epochs throughout Latin America. Through this distinctively Latin American history, Chávez constructs a sense of revolutionary continuity whereby past calls for revolution and unity are as crucial today as they were 200 years ago during the time of independence from colonial Spain. Simón Bolívar is central to this construction. Leading Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela to independence during his own lifetime (1783–1830), Bolívar represents the dream of a Latin American confederacy like no other revolutionary figure. Alluding to the Congress of Panama (1826) that saw Bolívar attempt to fashion a Latin American union, Hugo Chávez argued that “Bolívar convoked all the
countries and peoples of this Southern America calling for ... 'a point of cultural coming together, where a new civilization would flourish' ... we need to return to this original approach. I believe it is like this: either we unite or we collapse.' Further to this message of unity, in 2005 the Venezuelan President quoted Bolívar: "the great day of South America is yet to arrive.' Two hundred years later we believe that now the day of the Americas has arrived, and more than just America, the great day of the people. The great day of freedom, of equality and of justice is arriving."

A politics of solidarity is clearly premised on the importance of unity as the historical responsibility of the region but also as a practical means for achieving a better future.

Beyond Bolívar himself, Chávez also promotes revolutionary continuity via references to other independence heroes throughout the hemisphere. In Brazil, for example, Chávez spoke of José Inácio Abreu e Lima. Emphasizing his revolutionary credentials and association with Bolívar, the Venezuelan leader described how both "crossed the Andes in that memorable campaign ... the Battle of Boyacá [to liberate New Granada, present-day Colombia]." Chávez then went on to conflate their steps toward independence with his own mission to unify the Americas. "Brazilians and Venezuelans we have come together a lot, inspired by the same spirit of Patria, liberty, justice, equality that Simón Bolívar and José Inácio de Abreu e Lima inspired. Men who fought for the same ideal that represented, from the same birthplace in our Patria, a sign that should be eternal: Latin American union." Casting the heroic net wider still, speaking at the World Youth and Student Festival in 2005, Chávez would invoke the revolutionary heroes of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, and Nicaragua. "It is not only that we are galloping or following the sword of Bolívar again through Latin America, not only the sword of Bolívar, but also the sword of San Martín, it is the sword of Artigas, that of O'Higgins and it is the gallop of Pacho Villa and of Emiliano Zapata and also of Sandino."

This construction of a common revolutionary tradition should be viewed as part of a broader narrative that demonstrates the link between the politics of solidarity and a particular Our American identity. The production of similarity, apparent in calls for a common past, future, and consciousness, becomes imperative not only to minimize the internal differences between the various Latin American nation-states but also as a reified particularity to be placed in opposition to Washington. Claims of a shared "consciencia de Patria Grande" not only work to reinforce calls for solidarity but they also reinforce a unique Our American identity that explicitly excludes the United States. Viewed in a historical perspective, similar practices of inclusion and exclusions were apparent in the narrative of Hispanism that previously united Latin America under the banner of the Romance languages, Catholicism, traditional gender roles, and the subordination of racial minorities to a nation-state managed by the Creole elite. These principles of inclusion, however, were placed in opposition to, and credited with the rejection of, U.S. values and Anglo-Saxon ways in the early-twentieth century. Just as Hispanism reified certain common values in opposition to Washington, so too does Our America function on the simultaneous production of difference and similarity. An imagined Our American community is promoted by linking a shared history, subjectivity, and spiritual essence that, in turn, differentiates it from the beliefs and values of the United States.

Echoing Martin Wight, it is argued that an understanding of these principles of inclusion is fundamental to the construction of an Our American belief system and central to an understanding of how the imagined community operates.

Based on the idea of an original, common kinship within the region, a narrative of ethnicity confirms the division of the Americas and the particularity of Latin America. Similar to former Peruvian President Victor Haya de la Torre, Chávez promotes "Indo-America" as a means of distinguishing Latin America from Europe and the United States. "[In] some parts they call us Iberian-Americans," Chávez recounted, "but I feel much more Indo-American than Iberian-American." More than differentiating Latin America from their neighbor to the north, a racial narrative carries with it an emancipatory value. Attending the Summit of the People in Argentina, Chávez spoke
of "[t]he aboriginal race, Tupac Amaru, Tecuin Umán, Guicaipuro, Atahualpa," and then proceeded to shout with the audience: "viva the Indians of America!" References to prominent indigenous leaders of the colonial period not only naturalize resistance to oppression (however defined) but it also promotes such resistance as an original characteristic common to all Our Americans; each carries a distrust of foreign powers and a willingness to resist their oppression. Moreover, claims of indigenous kinship hold an implicit emancipatory message, as they directly cite a marginalized segment of Latin American society. With ethnicity often acting as a marker of social hierarchy, a conflation inherited from colonial times, the reification of indigenous tropes itself carries an appeal of a new, more just horizon. To this extent, Our America stands in contrast to Hispanism and its subordination of racial minorities, as it seeks to elevate the previously excluded by claiming a Latin American ethnicity as a positive characteristic that distinguishes the region from North America. Viewed in a regional perspective, movements in this direction are apparent throughout Latin America. Traditionally known as Columbus Day, recently a number of Latin American countries have sought to distance themselves from this colonial remembrance and instead rename the celebration día de la raza (day of race), díaz de las culturas (day of the cultures—Costa Rica), díaz de las Américas (day of the Americas—Uruguay), and perhaps the most explicit example díaz de la resistencia indígena (day of Indigenous resistance), which is commemorated in Venezuela.

Claims of Latin American particularity also extend to the cultural sphere. Activated as a further dimension of difference, a unique Latin American culture both reinforces an exclusive Our American identity and enables a larger transnational politics. Indeed, rather than viewing culture as a relational site involving the exchange and production of new meaning via interaction, Chávez operationalizes a single Latin American culture and places it in zero-sum competition with the United States. As a result, the influence of the U.S. media, for example, is depicted as a form of cultural imperialism. Within this zero-sum perspective, Chávez has launched Telesur so as to remedy the perceived U.S. domination of the airwaves. Broadcasting under the banner "the South is our North," Chávez argues that "it is necessary that we see ourselves with our own faces, we hear ourselves with our own voices, not those of CNN and the big channels of the North. That we want to see ourselves, in order to rescue our traditions, our cultures; Telesur is born, the transmitter of the South." Similar to calls for a New World Information and Communications Order voiced by the Non-Aligned Movement in the late 1970s, the creation of a Latin American television station attempts to rupture the U.S. control of news and informational services. Propelled by the fear of cultural submission to the United States, Chávez promotes the emergent cultural identification forwarded by Telesur as an enactive, emancipatory site for the reification of Latin American traditions and as a site for new meaning and narratives to develop. "Telesur is extremely important, Telesur is for cultural integration, to see our own faces, to see our own history, and not only watch CNN." Telesur becomes consistent with calls for a Latin American identity that insists on "recuperating our past," "promoting our values," "searching for authenticity," "combating foreign ideas," "avoiding alienation," "being faithful to ourselves," and "denouncing cultural imperialism."

This cultural exclusivity is mobilized so as to promote an Our American imagined community. According to Benedict Anderson, one of the most important mechanisms for imagining citizenship, including a sense of involvement and interaction with fellow nationals, is via the mass media. In his view, the ability to imagine the nation is closely tied to print capitalism. Invoking Walter Benjamin, Anderson talks about the simultaneity of time and space offered by the medium, whereby a particular event can be experienced by all the citizenry via the print media without actually being there. It creates a sense of community by representing different events from various parts of the nation under the one date. This phenomenon is equally applicable to television and a larger, continental space. The production of new forms of localized news, entertainment, and information leads to the invention of new forms of cultural difference and new ways of imagining community/communities. To this extent, culture, like ethnicity, becomes a relational site for the politics of
identity in which Our Americans are placed in opposition to CNN and the United States.\textsuperscript{75} As a result, the Rio Grande border separating the United States from the rest of the Americas to the south becomes an almost “natural” marker of cultural and ethnic difference.\textsuperscript{76} It acquires an imaginary and figurative value that not only constitutes an imaginary community but affects a space of representation whereby an Our American identity is continuously constituted (and potentially undone) by the daily social relations, material conditions, and discursive forms that are broadcast and lived through.\textsuperscript{77}

Claims of a single Latin American people and culture essentialize the region into a monolithic whole. Potentially coming at the expense of collective identities at the national and subnational levels, a collective “Our American” identity perpetuates the same ahistoricism as imposed by labels like Our America. In that it ignores the multitude of identities and histories within the region. Our America remains a totalizing, inscriptive valorization of a unitary, albeit revolutionary, identity.\textsuperscript{78} For Spivak, however, such essentialism can be viewed as strategic to the extent that it confers a level of solidarity on a people so as to achieve social action.\textsuperscript{79} Having so far explored calls for Our America in a positive dimension, that is, Chávez’s ability to construct an exclusively Latin American entity, attention now turns to how a negative discourse of danger promotes Our America and the need for social action as a means of protection from Washington.

**Negative Pan-Americanism**

While the analysis below highlights the hostility generated towards Washington, it is important not to dismiss anti-U.S. language as solely a political tool designed to manipulate the masses for domestic and/or regional purposes. Rather, it needs to be understood as a complex set of thoughts that are part of a wider set of shared values that, in turn, make certain policy initiatives possible.\textsuperscript{80} The resonance of Chávez’s anti-U.S. language in the region is dependent on existing beliefs and common frustrations within Latin America.\textsuperscript{81} To this extent, undeniably the long and largely unbroken period of U.S. military, economic, and cultural hegemony over the Americas, in addition to a series of interventions, both direct and indirect, underpin any anti-U.S. narrative. In contrast to anti-U.S. sentiment in France, for example, Alan McPherson argues that it is these perceptions of subordination and fear of submission that typify Latin American hostility to Washington.\textsuperscript{82} The focus below, therefore, centers on how Chávez is able to speak to and cultivate an anti-U.S. message that furthers the case for regional solidarity.

Drawing on a history of U.S. intervention, Chávez emphasizes Latin American solidarity as the way of mitigating regional submission to Washington. Citing the cases of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala, João Goulart in Brazil, Juan Bosch in the Dominican Republic, Salvador Allende in Chile, Juan Perón in Argentina, and Cipriano Castro in Venezuela, Chávez told the assembled “in each of these cases, [and] there is not one exception, the hairy, smelly hand of North American imperialism was involved in order to defeat these governments. All of them, without exception.”\textsuperscript{83} To this extent, like Bolívar and Martí before him, Chávez views Washington as a threat to a unified, free Latin America.\textsuperscript{84} More than promoting a common history, such representations solidify the identity claims of the present, with the enemies of yesteryear presented as the same as those of today. “Well should be repeated by the peoples of Latin America . . . that we struggled for our freedom, for our independence, for our dignity, that we have [for] centuries and centuries endured imperialist violations of different colors and different languages.”\textsuperscript{85} Whether it is imperial Spain or the United States, Chávez intends to crystallize both a mutual enemy and a shared history of submission to foreign powers.\textsuperscript{86} Demonstrating this unity, Chávez continued: “[b]rothers and compatriots of this Patria Grande, only united, but truly united, will we be forever free in this great nation of Latin-Caribbean America.”\textsuperscript{87} Any internal differences within “Our America” are thus minimized by accentuating the differences between it and the United States.
Just as the Venezuelan President historicizes a distant past to affect a sense of revolutionary continuity with the eras of Bolivar and Marti, so too does he historicize a more recent past of injustice that extends the danger associated with Washington to the economic sphere. Invoking the hardship suffered during the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, Chávez clearly attributes blame for these failings on neoliberal economic policies. Neoliberalism within Latin America “reached the category of a doctrinaire dogma and applied itself with special rigor,” and as a consequence the “exploitative model has converted Latin America and the Caribbean into a real social bomb ready to explode.”

Having worked contrary to the equitable, sustainable development that was promised or at least expected, Chávez argues that “the neoliberale strategy, [dating] from the end of the 1980s, that intended to impose itself on these peoples, failed.” Central to this narrative is poverty. Painted as a threat to humanity, the Bolivarian leader maintains that poverty “kills children through hunger, kills children through sickness, it takes many people to the grave. It leads others to desperation, taking them to jail.” With the potential to destabilize society, Chávez argued in 2004 that “[p]overty is an atomic mega-bomb, it threatens the peace of all peoples, [and] it threatens daily political stability.”

The blame for this calamitous recent past is placed on the United States and their economic policies, pejoratively referred to as the Washington Consensus. “[T]he Washington Consensus is what has generated the highest grade of misery, inequality and infinite tragedy to the peoples of this continent.” Put simply: “neoliberalism promised riches and has [only] multiplied poverty.”

The narratives of poverty and injustice reconfirm the subject positions of a just Latin America placed in opposition to an unjust Washington and, in turn, reinforce the perceived need for unity. With respect to the former, the Americas are segregated into opposing camps by virtue of the suffering incurred by Latin Americans at the hands of their northern neighbor. Avoiding any ethical ambiguity, this representation of the recent past affects a humanist message that buttresses the moral authority of Venezuela not only in contesting Washington, but also in legitimating calls for unity. “The poorest of the poor have said ‘enough already’ and they are clamoring for a new model in Latin America.”

Unsurprisingly, this new model is predicated on regional integration, a step that “is essential in order to negotiate in conditions of equality and dignity with the North, and with the rest of the world.” Furthering this humanist message, the unity proposed under Our America is promoted as the means of defending the interests of the poor majority against unfettered capitalism. “Our America will be free and, what’s more, great; but united it will be greater in order to orientate the construction of a new world different to the insatiable capitalism that destroys, that threatens humanity.” By claiming to serve humanity Chávez inverts the U.S.-authored less-than-equal representations of Venezuela and places Washington as the “cruel combatant” of the region. Moreover, it also speaks a message of injustice that undoubtedly resonates with those seeking alternatives in a region described by the UN as the most unequal in the world.

**Enabling a New Politics**

Claims of Latin American particularity, in conjunction with the danger posed by a different Washington, provide a powerful vindication for Our America. Indeed, both positive and negative impulses for pan-Americanism are very much entwined. While Our America promotes a (positive) ethnic and cultural particularity, this distinctiveness is placed in opposition to Washington. Speaking in Brazil, Chávez declared: “[w]e are aware, compañeros and compatriots of this Patria Grande.” In saying this, however, he made clear that such claims were predicated on opposition to a threatening U.S.: “... only united,” he continued, “truly united will we be free.” Moreover, the construction of a (negative) narrative that compels Latin American unity in the face of potential submission to Washington is also made via references to a unique, common Latin American history. In 2005, Chávez argued that “200 years ago a project was born here that encompasses this continent, the South American union, the union of the Caribbean, the union of the pre-Spanish republics; this
project collides with the project of the North, the project of the Patria Grande." By combining both positive and negative pan-American calls for solidarity Chávez forwards a new form of politics and subjectivity. In terms of subjectivity, criticism of the Washington Consensus, for example, reinforces the essentialized identity claims of the present (a malign Latin America against the United States), while, with respect to politics, it also provides a blueprint for an emancipatory project based on regional unity. Our America therefore is simultaneously a discourse of resistance, a problematization of received U.S. wisdom and a criticism of U.S. power; but also a discourse of solidarity, continental unification, and homogenization.

Concrete steps toward this new politics of integration and unity are already apparent. While organizations such as the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) predates the Chávez administration and the region-wide swing to the left, other organizations such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), PetroAmerica, and the Bank of the South all exemplify a new Latin American politics. Taking the latter as an example, the Bank of the South with its executive made up of regional finance ministers, attempts to lay the foundations for an autonomous financial system within South America. First among its priorities is to redress the outflow of member-state reserves by recycling currency within the region. This involves attracting members' international reserves from northern banks, and promoting the treasury bonds of the Bank and its members as alternatives to those of the U.S. Treasury. There is also talk of the Bank expanding to a monetary fund; a move which would directly challenge the role of the International Monetary Fund in South America.

Significantly, however, the promotion of a new politics is not confined to Caracas. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a predominantly Brazilian proposal founded in 2008, was heralded as another step toward regional integration that again emphasized a movement away from active U.S. involvement. While UNASUR is more than a security organization, the South American Defense Council established within its framework sets the basis for the creation of a regional armed forces and the further coordination of defense policies. The U.S. position in this new organization was made clear by Brazil's then defense minister, Nelson Jobim, "there is no possibility of participation by the United States because the council is South American and the U.S. is not in South America." While the future of these institutions may be uncertain with each at multiple stages of development, clearly apparent is a possibility of a new politics in the Americas. Undoubtedly, Venezuela and the Chávez administration are at the forefront of these steps.

Conclusions

This article has examined how a Southern state was able to construct a counter-hegemonic narrative and subjectivity both within and against the dominant discursive structures emanating from the North. Playing within, yet subverting, the rules of the game, Venezuela was able to promote an alternate identity for the Bolivarian Republic and the region. Embracing the strangeness applied to Venezuela and constructing a discourse of danger associated with potential U.S. interference, Chávez was able to promote a narrative that excluded the United States from an Our American community. Attempts by Washington to disavow Venezuela were consequently unable to foreclose the possibility of its own practices of exclusion (making strange) acting as an enabling tool to promote a counter-hegemonic reading of the Americas. Far from being external and in opposition to power, resistance in this case was immanent to power. Describing the dynamics of this process as positive and negative pan-Americanism, the Venezuela leader was able to manufacture a Latin American consciousness in opposition to Washington based on claims of a particular culture, ethnicity, and history. Similarly, negative pan-Americanism was forwarded via a discourse of danger that promoted unity as a form of protection from Washington. Both claims to Latin American solidarity, positive and negative, were reinforced by a specific deployment of history that spoke to a common
revolutionary tradition that had bequeathed Latin Americans a desire for solidarity in the face of foreign oppression. This promise of unity, in turn, was predicated on the realization of greater dignity and equality in the Americas; an ideal which the recent past of neoliberal U.S. interference had temporarily foreclosed.

More than excluding Washington from the region, the Chávez narrative explicitly confronted U.S. representations of itself. In perhaps one of the most explicit examples of this, Chávez subverted President Bush’s conceptions of good and evil to argue that it was Washington that represented the axis of evil. Through this and other similar comments Chávez distorted the Manichean distinctions, which some analysts describe as the principle discursive method of reinventing and legitimizing U.S. identity as a global power in the post-cold war era. Moreover, within Latin America itself, similarly subversive comments were shown to have tapped into and cultivated perceptions that undermined the U.S. position. Claims that the Washington Consensus and U.S. economic policy brought only misery and greater poverty delegitimized the U.S. capacity to economically intervene in the region and also undermined their standing as the foremost source of economic knowledge and expertise. In the short term, these sentiments gave greater credence to Chávez’s calls for alternatives, such as the regional integration envisaged by the Bank of the South. In the long term, however, the effects remain unclear. For example, does the action of Venezuela point to foreseeable limits in U.S. capacity to rely on the Americas as its subservient “backyard,” or does it simply reflect a temporary change in the status quo that is potentially tied to the political fortunes of the Chávez administration and other left-of-centre governments in the region?

Irrespective of the uncertainty surrounding the future of inter-American relations, this article made more immediately apparent the limitations in Washington’s ability to control how it represented the region and its “strangest” actor. However, while the Venezuelan leader undoubtedly confronted Washington and its understanding of the region, it would be a mistake to view the Chávez discourse as breaking with the dominant mode of identity construction in international politics. Firmly based within the distinction between an inside and an outside, Venezuela appropriated the tools for constructing identity through difference, but applied them in a novel way by expanding the inside through the concept of Our America. To this extent, the construction of the Chávez discourse worked within already established discursive elements, concepts, and ideas that came from various origins. Having already demonstrated the antecedence of the dominant inside/outside distinction within the Chávez discourse, so too apparent was the embrace of historical claims by Latin American revolutionary figures such as Martí and Bolívar on the utility of coming together in order to achieve a more promising future. The background for the Chávez discourse thus appeared to confound absolute spatial boundaries and instead involved a complex process that negotiated seemingly contradictory discursive surfaces from both North and South. The result was an Our American identity partially constructed with the image of its own otherness but also carrying an awareness that this otherness opened up possibilities for new cultural meanings and spaces for new politics.

While it is important to acknowledge the potential for a new politics enabled by contesting dominant narratives, this should not come at the expense of ignoring the productive value of Northern discourses. It is not to ignore the capacity of the North to frame the South in a less-than-equal way nor is it to deny the practical effect that such narratives have in determining and perpetuating policy orientations of Northern governments that continue to run contrary to local interests. Rather, it is to recognize, in the case of Venezuela at least, that the antecedent elements both from within Latin America, but also from the North, offered the Chávez leadership a series of tropes from which to reconstruct and reorganize claims of Latin American solidarity and difference from Washington. To this extent, the Venezuelan case exemplified the possibilities of a Southern state represented in a less-than-equal fashion.
Acknowledgments
This paper is a revised and updated version of one delivered at the International Graduate Student Research Conference on Latin America and the Caribbean at York University. It was also developed while a visiting scholar at the Department of History at the University of California, Berkeley. The author thanks Scott Emerson and Jim George for their contribution to and support for this article. All translations and any mistakes are those of the author.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

Downloaded from all.sagepub.com at Australian National Univ. on August 26, 2011


6. Ibid., 1.


24. Ibid., 14.
40. In making this point, it is acknowledged that the label “America” is Spanish in origin, named after the explorer Amerigo Vespucci. It is “Our” America that suggests a process of overcoming. For more, see: R. Radhakrishnan, “Ethnic Identity and Post-Structuralist Difference,” Cultural Critique 6 (1987): 211.
41. Ibid.
43. In making this point, I am not suggesting that Chávez is attempting to construct a Latin American state, akin to the Gran Colombia of Simón Bolívar. Rather, it is an ideational expansion of boundaries, an expanded imagined community that extends the inside/outside marker to Latin America as a whole.
44. Hugo Chávez, Con El Alba Despiertan Los Pueblos: Palabras Del Presidente Hugo Cháves Frias (Caracas: Ministerio para el Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información, 2008), 13, author’s emphasis.


53. Solidarity in this sense is founded upon a constructed common “selfish hope” for a brighter future. For more, see: Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92.


61. Chávez, Con el ALBA Despiertan los Pueblos, Note 45, 45.


65. Ibid., 12.


69. Bhambra, The Location of Culture, Note 18, 178.


77. Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America (London: Routledge, 1996), 27.
91. Cited in Ibid.
92. The Washington Consensus was initially elaborated in a document written by John Williamson for the World Bank. Outlining a ten point set of guidelines that acted as the consensus on how to pursue economic reform, the Washington Consensus has since carried with it the ire of many Latin American states for its perceived role in exacerbating poverty in the region.
97. Chávez, “Clausura De La III Cumbre,” Note 37, 266.
98. Chávez, Con el ALBA Despiertan los Pueblos, Note 45, 14.

Bio

R. Guy Emerson is a PhD candidate at The Australian National University. Focusing on issues of identity and international relations, his current research explores relations between Venezuela and the United States, and their respective visions for the Americas.