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R. Guy Emerson¹

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.¹ 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).² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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, summarily described 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶ His successor, Thomas Shannon, echoed similar sentiments before the House International Relations Committee, noting that “democracy in Venezuela is in grave peril.”⁷ While less verbose, the following Assistant Secretary, Arturo Valenzuela, maintained that Venezuela was his country's “most difficult” relationship in the region.⁸ 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?’”⁹ 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.¹⁰

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."¹¹ 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."¹² 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.¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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."¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ An independent, revolutionary, "Bolivarian" identity forwarded by Chávez is made all the more difficult by claims that Venezuela is at the "cross-roads" 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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.²² 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.²³ The objective in moving beyond such a distinction, however, is not to begin investigation at a prediscursive 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ To this extent, interaction between different identity constructs is not a process involving actors with equal access to a common language.²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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."³¹ 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 strangeness are embraced by Caracas and redeployed as a positive value. Venezuelan particularity is reified—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 reorients the exoticizing process as an enabling tool.³² 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.³³ An oppositional depiction of the United States is both within the rules and, at the same time, against them.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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 incarcerates 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.”³⁶

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 *Patria*! 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, *compañeros* 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."⁵¹ 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."⁵² 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.⁵³

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]."⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵ 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."⁵⁶

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 "consciousness of *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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ "[I]n some parts they call us Iberian-Americans," Chávez recounted, "but I feel much more Indo-American than Iberian-American."⁶¹ 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 "[o]ur aboriginal race, Tupac Amaru, Tecún Umán, Guaicaipuro, Atahualpa," and then proceeded to shout with the audience: "viva the Indians of America!"⁶² 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.⁶³ 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), *día de las culturas* (day of the cultures—Costa Rica), *día de las Américas* (day of the Americas—Uruguay), and perhaps the most explicit example *día 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.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵ As a result, the influence of the U.S. media, for example, is depicted as a form of cultural imperialism.⁶⁶ 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."⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹ "*Telesur* is extremely important, *Telesur* is for cultural integration, to see our own faces, to see our own history, and not only watch CNN."⁷⁰ *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."⁷¹

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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.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.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.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 Latin 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.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.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.⁸⁰ The resonance of Chávez's anti-U.S. language in the region is dependent on existing beliefs and common frustrations within Latin America.⁸¹ To this extent, undoubtedly 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.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."⁸³ To this extent, like Bolívar and Martí before him, Chávez views Washington as a threat to a unified, free Latin America.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."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.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."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 Bolívar and Martí, 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 doctrinarian 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.”⁸⁸ Having worked contrary to the equitable, sustainable development that was promised or at least expected, Chávez argues that “the neoliberal strategy, [dating] from the end of the 1980s, that intended to impose itself on these peoples, failed.”⁸⁹ 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.”⁹⁰ 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.”⁹¹ The blame for this calamitous recent past is placed on the United States and their economic policies, pejoratively referred to as the Washington Consensus.⁹² “[T]he Washington Consensus is what has generated the highest grade of misery, inequality and infinite tragedy to the peoples of this continent.”⁹³ Put simply: “neoliberalism promised riches and has [only] multiplied poverty.”⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵ 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.”⁹⁶ 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.”⁹⁷ 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.”⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹

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.”¹⁰⁰ 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*.¹⁰¹ 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 maligned 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 problemization of received U.S. wisdom and a criticism of U.S. power; but also a discourse of solidarity, continental unification, and homogenization.¹⁰²

Concrete steps toward this new politics of integration and unity are already apparent. While organizations such as the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) predate 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.¹⁰³

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."¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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.

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44. Hugo Chávez, *Con El Alba Despiertan Los Pueblos: Palabras Del Presidente Hugo Chávez Frías* (Caracas: Ministerio para el Poder Popular para la Comunicación y la Información, 2008), 13, author's emphasis.
45. Nizar Messari, "Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Islam in U.S. Foreign Policy," in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, ed. Vendulka Kubáľková (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 236.

46. Hugo Chávez Frías, "Marcha Por La Paz Y Contra El Paramilitarismo En Venezuela, Cadena Nacional, Caracas 16 May 2004, 'Estamos Listos Para Enfrentar Cualquiera Amenaza,'" in *La Unidad Latinoamericana*, ed. Sergio Rinaldi (Bogota, Colombia: Ocean Sur, 2006), 43.
47. Mark Laffey, "Locating Identity: Performativity, Foreign Policy and State Action," *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000): 433.
48. Chávez, "Clausura De La III Cumbre," Note 37, 250, 266.
49. Hugo Chávez Frías, "Colocación De La Primera Piedra En La Refinería 'Abreu E Lima', Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil 16 December 2005, 'Estamos Dispuestos a Construir El Sueño De Nuestros Libertadores,'" in *La Unidad Latinoamericana*, ed. Sergio Rinaldi (Bogota, Colombia: Ocean Sur, 2006), 296.
50. Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992): 67.
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54. Chávez, "Colocación De La Primera Piedra," Note 49, 297.
55. Chávez, "Discurso Con Motivo Del Inicio De La Cátedra 'Simón Bolívar,'" Note 51, 2.
56. Chávez, "La Revolución Bolivariana Y La Construcción Del Socialismo," Note 30, 188.
57. Alan McPherson, "Antiyanquismo: Nascent Scholarship, Ancient Sentiments," in *Anti-Americanism in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Alan McPherson (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2008), 17.
58. Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 211.
59. Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), 33–5.
60. McPherson, "Antiyanquismo," Note 58, 18.
61. Chávez, *Con el ALBA Despiertan los Pueblos*, Note 45, 45.
62. Chávez, "Clausura De La III Cumbre," Note 37, 252.
63. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 182, 220.
64. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996), 15, 147.
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69. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Note 18, 178.
70. Hugo Chávez Frías, "Clausura De La XXIX Cumbre De Mercosur, Montevideo, Uruguay 9 December 2005, 'El Mercosur Tiene Que Ser Un Proyecto Colectivo,'" in *La Unidad Latinoamericana*, ed. Sergio Rinaldi (Bogota, Colombia: Ocean Sur, 2006), 285.
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75. David Campbell, *Writing Security: Us Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 220.

76. Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World," Note 51, 63.
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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.