State-managed Participatory Democracy in Venezuela: the case of the Communal Councils

by

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Liverpool in accordance with the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 2012

Words: 85,436

Abstract

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This dissertation is concerned with participatory democracy in Bolivarian Venezuela, and based on fieldwork conducted in Mérida, Venezuela, between 2008 and 2009. Two case studies of *Consejo Comunales* (Communal Councils, CC), one in a middle class parish, and another in a poorer part of the city, form the basis of the research. The dissertation contributes to the debate on participatory democracy, arguing that the CCs are state-managed and are therefore part of the development of a new state, one based on the principles of Socialism of the twenty-first century, as promoted by the PSUV.

As part of the development of Socialism of the twenty-first century, the PSUV views the CCs as the embodiment of the participatory element of the *Estado Comunal*. The development of the CCs can also be seen as an attempt to resolve the inadequacies of the previous Fourth Republic. The *Punto Fijo* party politics of the Fourth Republic saw two major parties form a pact and then share (negotiated) power from 1958-1998. Poor Venezuelans lived on the periphery of society, without basic amenities, and many were not even registered as citizens. There were few sufficient spaces for participation at a local level for poor Venezuelans, and this can be seen as an extended period of exclusion for the non-privileged population.

In stark contrast, the CCs are widespread and funded by the state. At a local level government agencies are responsible for financing and supporting the development of the councils, thus promoting the proposed *Estado Comunal* as well as Bolivarian principles such as endogenous development. As CCs are state-managed they can be seen as part of a 'dual government' structure that would have replaced Fourth Republic bureaucracy and local democracy, but these still exist alongside one another. This dual government is made up of participatory initiatives and *Misiónes Sociales* (Social Missions), which are designed to work together to provide government goods, services and financial resources to those in need. However, the co-existing strands of local government and the CCs are subject to conflict, and communities can be left without local government-supplied public works and services. This is exacerbated by the fact that dual-government has not been fully developed to facilitate this integration.

The central argument of this dissertation is that state-managed participation, reflected in a case study of two CCs in Mérida, can lead to conflicts between new instances of local government (i.e. dual government) and existing local democracy. As the process of participation is state-managed, the CCs are politicised according to the PSUV's desire to implement Socialism of the twenty-first century. CCs have had mixed results, which is reflected in both their relationship with state agencies and their acceptance or opposition to the dominant state political discourse.

This PhD dissertation is dedicated to my Mother. You showed me that another world is possible.

My love always.

Acknowledgements

An Economic and Social Research Council Studentship Award (PTA-031-2006-00300) made this dissertation possible. It has also benefitted from the support of two of the best supervisors in the world. My deepest gratitude goes to Dr Marieke Riethof, who has tirelessly supported both the research and writing of this dissertation. Her insight and support have been beyond helpful. My thanks also extend to my second supervisor, Dr Diana Raby, whose expertise on Bolivarianism and Venezuela, as well as constructive pub lunches, have been the backbone of progress for this project. At SOCLAS, University of Liverpool, Dr Chris Harris's support and reading of draft chapters has been immensely valuable. I also extend my deepest thanks to my friends in Liverpool. I am forever indebted to Tadgh O'Sullivan, who worked tirelessly to help correct this dissertation. Dr Kate Black and Dr Richard Worden deserve thanks for their unrelenting hospitality, kindness, friendship, and curries. Dr Andrew Reeves has helped me to steer the ship in the right direction. Dr Colin Campbell read several draft chapters and provided valuable feedback and friendship, whilst helping me navigate these difficult waters. Dr Helen Porter offered guidance on all matters life and PhD-related. Claire House, Grieg Campbell and Dr. Katinka Weber all helped to shine a light along the way too.

In Brighton, this work would not have been possible without the love and support of my family, including my mother Janet, my father Paul, my sister Emma, and my nephew Oscar, thank you all. With special thanks to Hannah your love and support has been vital to the completion of this work. A thanks goes to Ness, during the writing up stage. My sincere thanks are also due to Nadia Francis, without her support, friendship and patience, the research for this dissertation would not have been possible. To my friend and saviour, Helen Joubert, who provided me with a space to write this dissertation, my deep gratitude. My thanks also to my friend Ross, who provided motivation for me to keep going. To Simon, who has been an inspiration and a friend, and to John, for all of your vital chats and support. To Sean, for his late night meals and extended hospitality, the Godspeed You Black Emperor! sessions were so valuable to my progress. My thanks also extends to Worcester, to Jose Luis Santos Lopez, for your help with Spanish transcriptions and advice, and to Leith, Edinburgh, to all at the Social Research team at the Scottish Government. A special thanks to my friend, the legendary Dr Chris Ogden at St Andrews University, who looked over draft chapters, provided feedback, and has always been there to help. Gratitude is also due to my uncle, Peter Zelaskowski in Barcelona, for all of his help with translations, my love always. At LSE, my thanks to Matt Wilde for comparing field notes and for welcome discussion on participation in Venezuela. At Bristol University, my thanks to Dr Thomas Muhr for discussion and feedback on the research in Mérida and on our International Studies Association panel in New Orleans, 2009.

In Venezuela, my deepest thanks are to those who I interviewed and who helped in me Mérida – without you there would have been no dissertation. Salutations to my friends Dr Robert Kirby, Ian Woodward and Mary Bratt, who provided excellent meals and discussion over a drink or two. Special thanks also to Angela Hernandez for Spanish lessons and help with transcriptions. Thanks to all at the Mérida Buddhist centre, for providing an oasis of calm. I would like to extend my thanks to the warm, passionate people around Venezuela, their motivation to participate and promote change will always be a source of inspiration.

A special mention to give thanks to the memory of my dear friend, the late Dr Steven Rubenstein for his inspiration, knowledge, boundless time for discussion and film nights, you are deeply missed.

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Acronyms

AD	*Accíon Democrática* (Democratic Action Party)
ALBA	*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our Americas)
BC	*Círculos Bolivariano* (Bolivarian Circles)
BCRV	Bolivarian Constitution of the Republic of Venezuela, 1999
BV	Field work location 1
CAP	Carlos Andrés Pérez
CC	*Consejo Comunales* (Communal Councils)
CEBs organisations)	*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (Grassroots church
CESAP	*Centro al Servicio de la Acción Popular*
CLPP	*Consejos Locales de Planificacion Publicas* (Local Public Planning Councils)
CTU	*Comités Tierras Urbanas* (Urban Land Committees)
CTV	*Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (Venezuela Workers Council)
COPEI	*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (Independent Christian Party)
COPRE	*Comisíon Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado* (Presidential Commission for the Reform of the State)
ELPV People)	*Ejército de Liberación del Pueblo* (Liberation Army of the
EPG	Empowered Participatory Governance
EZLN	*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista National Liberation Army)
FALN	*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional* (Armed Forces of National Liberation)
FEDECAMARAS	*Federación de Camaras de Comercio y Produción* (Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Production
FIDES	*Fondo Intergubanmental para la Decentralización* (Intergovernmental Fund for Decentralisation)
FLN	*Frente Liberación Nacional*
FUNDACOMUNAL	*Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo del Poder Comunal* (Foundation for the Promotion and Development of Communal Power)
FONDEMI	*Fondo de Desarrollo MicroFinancerio* (Micro Finance Development Fund)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISI	Import Substitution Industrialisation
LAEE	*Ley de Asignaciones Económicas Especiales para los Estados Dervidas de Minas e Hidrocarburos* (Law of Special Economic Assignations for the States Derived from Mines and Hydrocarbons)
LCR	*La Causa Radical* (The Radical Cause Party)
MAS	*Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement for Socialism)
MIR	*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* (Movement of the Revolutionary Left)
MPS	*Ministro del Poder Popular para la Participación y Protección Social* (Ministry for Popular Power for Participation and Social Security)

MST	*Movimiento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem* Terra (Landless Workers Movement)
MTA	*Mesas Técnicas de Aguas* (Technical Water Boards)
MVR	*Movimiento Quinta* República (Fifth Republic Movement)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NUDEs	*Núcleos de Desarrollo Endógeno* (Nuclei of Endogenous Development)
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PB	Participatory Budgeting
PCV	*Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (Communist Party of Venezuela)
PDVSA	*Petroleos de Venezuela SA* (Venezuela Petroleum Company)
PEP	*Plan de Enfrentamiento de Pobreza* (Plan to Fight Poverty)
PPT	*Patria Para Todos* (Fatherland for All Party)
PSUV	*Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
SAFONACC	*Servicio Autónomo Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales* (The Autonomous National Fund for Communal Councils)
SPCs	Social Production Companies
TH	Field work location 2
UBV	*Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela* (Bolivarian University of Venezuela)
URD	*Unión Republicana Democrática* (Democratic Republic Union)
UBE	*Unidades de Batalla Electoral* (Electoral Battle Unit)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Hugo Chávez is both a controversial and revered figure in Latin American politics. He embodies the beginning of a leftwards shift in Latin American politics and has also forged some of the most important developments in participatory politics. Numerous studies conducted on the left in Latin America have focused on the new 'wave of left wing electoral gains' (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 1). These victories began in Venezuela with Chávez's election in 1998, and were followed by those of Lagos in Chile in 2000, da Silva in Brazil in 2002, Vázquez in Uruguay in 2004 and Morales in Bolivia in 2005. Daniel Ortega returned to power in Nicaragua in 2006, at the same time that Correa won in Ecuador, with Lugo's victory in Paraguay and Funes in El Salvador following soon after (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 1; see also Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Maxwell, 2009: 317). By 2009, Levitsky and Roberts remind us, the rise of Leftist government in Latin America was profound:

> The beginning of the 21st century witnessed an unprecedented wave of electoral victories by leftist presidential candidates in Latin America. The wave began in 1998, when Hugo Chávez, a former paratrooper who had led a failed military uprising six years earlier, was elected president of Venezuela. Chávez was followed in quick succession by Socialist candidate Ricardo Lagos in Chile (2000); Workers Party leader Luiz Ignacio Lula de Silva in Brazil (2002), an ex-metalworker who had finished second in three previous presidential bids; left-of-center Peronist Nestor Kirchner in Argentina (2003); Tabaré Vásquez of the leftist Broad Front (FA) in Uruguay (2004); and coca growers' union leader Evo Morales of the Movement toward Socialism in Bolivia (2005), the first indigenous president in that country's history. In 2006, ex-revolutionary leader Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) returned to power in Nicaragua, while independent left-wing economist Rafael Correa won the Ecuadorian presidency (2011: 1).

Unlikely victories were also gained in Paraguay, El Salvador and several 'incumbent presidents or parties' were re-elected around Latin America:

> in Venezuela (2000,2006), Chile (2006), Brazil (2006), Argentina (2007), Ecuador (2009), Bolivia (2009), and Uruguay (2009). By 2009, nearly two-thirds of Latin Americans lived under some form of left-leaning national government (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 1).

The governments elected in the 'post 1998 wave of leftist victories ushered in a new era of policy experimentation in which government's expanded their developmental, redistributive, and social welfare roles. The "left turn" therefore, changed not only who governed in Latin America, but also *how* they governed' (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 2; see also Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Hershberg, 2009). On reflection, the left in Latin America differed from earlier Soviet-inspired resistance models. Instead, the new left emerged out of opposition to the Washington Consensus and the neoliberal restructuring and austerity measures of the 1980s and 1990s.

New Left experiences have varied widely. These can be represented as two poles, on the one hand, 'institutionalized parties maintained the relatively orthodox macroeconomic policies and liberal democratic constitutions that they had inherited from non leftists predecessors', and, on the other, 'in Venezuela ... a populist outsider used plebiscitary means to rewrite the constitutional rules of the game, and he launched a statist redistributive project that broke with the Washington Consensus' (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 1). Decentralisation of politics to local levels was also of paramount importance (Willis, Garman and Haggard, 1999: 7).

The 'pink tide' perspective argues a cautious analysis of the rise of the Latin American left, maintaining that not all of the new left governments are the same, nor are they as strong as they could be.[1] New governments may have small majorities or form part of a coalition, meaning that 'electoral tides go out as well as in' (Lievesley and Ludlam, 2009: 3-5). As different agendas and economic constraints exist in each country, presidential majorities may not be reflected in a nationwide political consensus, and every national historical and socio-economic experience is different.

Seligson (2007) asks the question 'what are we to make of the rise of the left and the resurrection of populism' whilst also warning that 'some varieties of leftist

[1] For further discussion on the rise of the Left in Latin America, see: Artidi, 2008; Beasley-Murray, Maxwell, and Hershberg, 2009; Cleary, 2006; Collier and Handlin, 2009; Goldfrank, 2001; Huber and Stephens, 2012; Panniza, 2005; and, Weyland, Madrid and Hunter, 2010.

rule could represent a threat to democratic stability' (82). Here we can add a clear definition of populism in the left in Latin America:

> Populist leaders typically propose instead to "listen to the people" with the aim of personally carrying out their will while isolating "rejectionists" who would deny it. In practice, populism often can mean running roughshod over fundamental democratic guarantees of civil liberties, especially free expression and the right to due process (Seligson, 2007: 82).

There are a variety of right wing commentators on the rise of the left in Latin America who view these developments as populist. One such commentator details how many leftists fit into this category:

> In recent years, however, political challenges to the neoliberal model have grown, as evidenced by the rise of Chavismo, the election of left-leaning governments in Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile, and the toppling of presidents by mass protest movements in Ecuador, Argentina, and Bolivia. Although these challenges have not produced a well-defined economic alternative, they do suggest a potential opening of political space for new forms of popular mobilization. Given its organizational malleability and policy flexibility, populism is likely to thrive under these conditions and remain a central feature of the region's political landscape. Far from running its course, the cycle of populism appears to be in full swing (Roberts, 2006: 145).

Many right wing commentators characterize the rise of left governments in Latin America as populist which is often an ill-defined and misused representation of the Left in Latin America.[2] Corrales and Penfold-Beccera (2007: 103) detect what they call 'vintage populism' as a 'familiar standby of Latin American politics'. In another example, Cleary (2006: 36) states that Chávez was a 'bombastic populist' in comparison to other leftist presidents:

> In contrast to how it is sometimes portrayed in the press, the left in power is predominantly moderate. Chávez is the only sitting president who is unambiguously "populist", in the sense that he actively undermines independent sources of institutional authority and draws his political power primarily form a charismatic and paternalistic connection with the masses.

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[2] For further details see: Corrales, 2007; Corrales and Penfold-Beccera, 2007; Dominguez, Lievesly and Ludlam, 2011; Castañeda, and Morales, 2008; Remmer, 2012; Weyland, 2003; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; and, Hawkins, 2003.

In contrast, Lievesly and Ludlam state that populism can be seen as 'part of a continuum of social democratic and socialist politics... For right-wing American commentators 'populist!' is an insult thrown at leaders like Chávez and Morales' (2009: 16-17). The insult is, Lievesly and Ludlam claim, intended to:

> conjure up images of an alliance of charismatic leaders and unsustainable masses, threatening traditional oligarchies, circumventing established political mechanisms, and challenging a democratization based on the 'polyarchic' alternation of governing elites. At times the concept is used to portray the non-white masses as too infantile to participate in politics, hence their need for no-nonsense, dangerously charismatic leadership (2009: 17).

Whilst there are elements of populism in Leftist government approaches in the region it is not always the case, as other commentators concur.[3] In addition, Motta describes the use of populism in Western political science and its 'variety of assumptions regarding the main actors that shape politics and the desirable form of democracy' an attempt to make the 'alternative ways of organizing power and institutionalizing government' redundant (Motta, 2011: 28).

The attempt to overcome challenges and political problems in the region through participatory democracy and efforts such as Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) are discussed in this dissertation. These shortcomings of democracy are detailed in a 2004 UNDP report on Latin American democracy details several reasons for this:

> Deep inequalities remain entrenched, serious levels of poverty prevail, economic growth has been insufficient, and dissatisfaction with those democracies – manifest in many places by widespread popular unrest – has been growing, often with deeply destabilizing consequences (2004: 15).

The UNDP report proposes that power 'at all levels of government is structured and distributed in a way that gives real voice and space to poor people' and that the powerful are held to account (2004: 14). The report also details areas of

[3] For more detailed discussion on nuances of the term populist see: French, 2009; Raby, 2006; Cannon, 2009; and Schamis, 2006.

development especially with regards to low levels of political participation of citizens, which is of particular importance to this dissertation.[4]

The study recognizes that Latin America is in a 'period of transformation and crisis' and the need to 'create new options for the promotion of new and viable collective projects' lies at the core of 'the empowerment of citizens' (2004: 30).[5] There are several propositions for the development of participatory democracy:

> In order to make this sustainable it is essential to advance a type of politics that provides options, harnesses intentions and permits democratic empowerment. While institutional reforms must continue, these initiatives require a common thread with respect to the promotion of citizen participation. Only this kind of participation can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of such reforms. In this regard, a key institutional element is electoral reform, to ensure a better balance between governance and representation ... it is essential to promote strategies for strengthening civil society and its relationship with the state and political parties (2004: 30).

Therefore, we can see that the developments of the Latin American left to increase citizen participation in politics as conducive to the UNDP Report, yet the relationship between the state an political parties is an essential point of analysis in this dissertation.

The analysis of the Latin American left should rest less on merits and demerits,[6] but rather on the commonalities and diversities that exist between different leftist governments.[7] Rodríguez-Garavito, Barrett and Chávez (2008: 12-17) differentiate the main characteristics of the New Left into five aspects. First, there is the plurality of strategies and the articulation of decentralized forms of

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[4] Other areas of concern detailed in the report include how much control citizens have over the state; low representation of all people in the populations; Executive interference in the affairs of the Supreme Court; lack of protection under international treaties; 'administration of the justice system'; 'freedom of the press'; 'poverty and inequality'; and, especially 'social citizenship' (2004: 27-28).

[5] There are several recommendations made including the strengthening of party systems; and to develop increased legitimacy of the state; to enable greater capacity to 'promote and guarantee citizenship' as well as to 'uphold the primacy of democracy as the organizing principle of society' (2004: 30-31).

[6] See Castañeda, 2006, for the 'good' and 'bad' left argument. For an opposing point of view, see Cameron, 2009.

[7] See Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Herschberg, 2009; Cameron, 2009; Ellner, 2012; French, 2009; and, Schamis, 2006.

organisation. Within this there is a degree of organisational plurality and strategic political objectives as well as democratic reform. Second, there is a multiplicity of social bases and political agendas, which includes the development of social movements, such as the *Consejos Comunales* (Communal Councils, henceforth CCs). Third, there is a prominence of civil society, currently the most common space for political action to occur. Fourth, reformism can be found in peaceful rather than violent 'institutional or non-violent extra-institutional mobilization' is favoured (Rodríguez-Garavito et al., 2008: 12-17). Finally, there are moves towards extending democracy in which the 'expansion of the democratic canon, via proposals and practices that combine representative democracy with the radicalization of participatory democracy' (Rodríguez-Garavito et al., 2008: 12-17).

These points can be understood as a result of 'multiple factors, some of which are long-term and structural, while others are short term and contingent' (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 7). While there are a variety of different social, political and economic aspects to the Latin American left, there are some broad commonalities across the spectrum of governments that are relevant to this dissertation.[8] These include an emphasis on civil society and attempts at government from below, state-led development in aid of poor and marginalised groups, and finally a widening of political participation (Cameron, 2009).

Although autonomous social movements[9] that are broadly participatory exist in Latin America, there has been little attention to whether similar initiatives exist in Venezuela either because there are few (or none) of note, or because the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, or

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[8] Ellner also compares the leaders of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, and identifies several common features, such as 'an emphasis on social participation and incorporation over considerations of economic productivity, modifications of the Marxist notion of class, diversification of economic relations, preference for radical democracy over liberal democracy, and the celebration of national symbols' (2012: 97).

[9] Some autonomous participatory groups in Latin America include *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (Zapatista National Liberation Army, or EZLN) in Mexico, *Movimiento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Workers Movement, MST) in Brazil, and the *Piquiteros* in Argentina. On autonomous social movements see Chatterton, 2005, and Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010.

PSUV) have determined participatory roles and therefore potentially excluded such autonomous groups.

The PSUV and participatory politics

Chávez drew worldwide attention via media reports of a *coup d'état* against him in 2002 that lasted 48 hours, and which witnessed popular demands for his return (Gott, 2005: 1). He not only represents the regional growth of the left, but has also worked with other countries, including Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador, to develop local social and economic integration through the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (Bolivarian Alliance for the People of our Americas, or ALBA). Buxton explains the Bolivarian revolution as 'a paradigmatic example of the leftward shift in contemporary Latin American politics' (2009: 57). According to Buxton, ten years in office had been largely fruitful for poor Venezuelans:

> A decade of *Chavismo* (the term tends to be used interchangeably with Bolivarianism) has produced a truly transformative project in Venezuela, one whose sustainability and capacity for institutionalization are questionable, but which has without doubt seen a significant redistribution of economic and political power from an elite minority to the politically excluded and economically marginalized majority (2009: 57).

In Venezuela Chávez has taken majority state ownership of the oil company, PDVSA, and nationalised several other key industries. As Gott suggests, 'Latin America is witnessing the most extraordinary and unusual political process since the Cuban revolution nearly half a century ago' (2000: 3). Lievesley and Ludlam (2009: 1-2) have also viewed the 'pink-tide' shift in Latin America as an encouraging one: 'events are exciting for socialists and, we would argue, for social democrats ... For the left, recent developments represent the most inspiring changes anywhere in the world'.

Chávez launched his vision for creating twenty-first century Venezuelan socialism in 2006, suggesting that people become sovereign through social and

political participation, a proposition which this dissertation calls into question. Many people have benefitted from the policies of the Chávez administrations, including increased participation in education, the eradication of illiteracy and improved public health care facilities, all of which are heavily state-managed. The passionate defence of their president that many Venezuelans displayed during the 2002 attempted coup reflected the positive effects that Chávez's social and political transformational policies had on the poor. The mass mobilisation of poor Venezuelans provided the motivation to carry out the research for this dissertation, as it suggested that Chávez was appealing to many Venezuelans, and that his policies were having a largely positive impact.

The fact that several thousand people mobilised around the Miraflores presidential palace in Caracas in support of Chávez during the attempted coup suggested that many people might also be willing to participate in initiatives such as the *Circulos Bolivarianos* (Bolivarian Circles, BCs), *Comités Tierras Urbanas* (Urban Land Committees, CTUs) or *Mesas Técnicas de Aguas* (Technical Water Boards, MTAs). Many of the early participatory initiatives were consolidated in the CCs, particularly in their various committees and working groups. Participation is central to Chávez's policies, and was incorporated into the 1999 constitution. Involvement in the CCs is hugely important because they are 'partly a reaction to the inefficiency of the state bureaucracy, particularly at the municipal level' (Ellner, 2009b: 12). This participation is also fundamental to the construction of the *Estado Comunal* (communal state), which is supposed to replace local and municipal government, requiring the active involvement of people in initiatives such as the CCs.

Although CCs are the main mode of participation in Venezuela, there are other vehicles such as the *Misiónes Sociales* (social missions) and alternative forms of state-subsidised provision, such as *Mercal* (mini-markets). These initiatives reflect the role of the state in managing the provision of goods, services and financial resources at a local level, and in this respect provide space for participation. They also have the capacity to amalgamate the provision of services, goods and financial resources that state agencies are responsible for. State agencies are also responsible for managing projects and providing support

to the CCs. As such they are beneficial both for poor Venezuelans, but also for the state:

> It was clear to the administration that its survival depended on consolidating support among economically marginalized groups. Social policy and pro-poor economic policy strategies were the immediate response, and this explains the primacy of the Missions in this second phase (Motta, 2009: 70).

This highlights the development of a 'dual government' structure, as expressed in the coexistence of traditional government structures and participatory state-led initiatives. This process has incorporated participants into state-managed CCs, whose project finance is primarily aimed at the poor.

Central Argument

This dissertation is based on a case study of how people participate in CCs in a middle-class community in Mérida, Venezuela. It examines how participation is shaped, guided and constructed by the central state, and the PSUV. This is developed by identifying how people participate in the CCs, the processes of governance within them, and how the institutions that manage them influence their decisions, all within the context of local government in Mérida. A CC has been defined as a micro-government (Goldfrank, 2011a: 263), and as an aspect of how:

> the governing coalition's attempt to create a new state institutionality based on a process of the localization and regionalization of executive, legislative, juridical and financial power. The organization and exercise of such power are through a combination of deliberative, direct and representative procedures (Motta, 2009: 84).

CCs are also 'an attempt to create a new set of state institutions that bypass the traditional state, and distribute power in a democratic and participatory manner'

(Motta, 2009: 84-85). However, there have been very few studies[10] or empirical examinations of the CCs, and as a result there is much to resolve:

> As a result, more than hard data or consistent evaluations, what we find are doubts and unanswered questions. The CC, depending on the particular characteristics of the communities that have created them, the part of the country where they are established, and the previous experience of the respective communities of participation, will offer very different trajectories (Lopez Maya, 2010: 123).

The CCs are an exciting and innovative advance in the history of participatory democracy initiatives. They are spread across Venezuela and hold the potential to transform local politics by placing decision-making power in the hands of ordinary Venezuelans. As much of the participatory democracy literature suggests, participation in local politics supplements liberal democracy, to make it more inclusive and fairer, but in the case of Venezuela it is also about changing the political structure. Given the amount of money that has been made available for the CCs, they have the potential to be a truly impressive force.

The 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela includes articles devoted to participation of people in politics, suggesting great possibilities for participatory initiatives. A particular article on the inclusion of all citizens' political participation is defined as their 'hav[ing] the right to participate freely in public affairs, either directly or through their elected representatives' (Lander, 2008: 80). Furthermore, there are several articles detailing participation (Articles 70-74) that involve recall referenda and popular recall of policy (Lander, 2008: 80). Participation has become an important area of research in recent years, especially as a result of the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This literature has suggested ways in which the state can promote and even facilitate participation for the greater inclusion of people and to make democracy more inclusive (Abers, 1998; Evans, 1996; Fung and Olin Wright, 2003).

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[10] Exceptions include Bruce, 2008; Fehrer Ponniah, 2007; Garcia-Guadilla, 2007; Goldfrank, 2011b; Ellner, 2009b, 2011c; Lopez Maya, 2010. Not all of these explicitly focus on CCs.

This thesis explores the process of participation in the CCs as it relates to the Venezuelan political framework, and does so from several different perspectives. In the first instance there is a discussion of the Punto Fijo era (1958-1998), which includes a discussion of the failings of this system of government, often considered a major reason for Chávez's 1998 election. From another perspective, *Chavismo* or Bolivarianism, as it is also known (Buxton, 2009: 57), can be seen as the structure that governs the process of participation in Venezuela. This thesis provides an empirical in-depth case study of a CC in Mérida in order to analyse the working relationships between the various roles within the system of participation, with the empirical case study chapters elucidating the role of central state policy and management via its agencies.

As my analysis demonstrates, government initiatives, Missions and CCs can operate in conjunction with each other, especially with pro-PSUV mayors. However, this symbiosis is not evident in the relationship between the CCs and the anti-PSUV *Alcaldía*'s (mayor's office) in Mérida, and may not occur with other anti- or even pro PSUV mayors elsewhere in Venezuela. This lack of resolution between the state and participatory initiatives in Venezuela can result in conflict, creating a scenario where some organised communities are even left without services by the *Alcaldía.* Tensions are also evident in relationships within CCs, reflecting concerns about institutional design.

The Mérida participation case study also demonstrates tensions between CC participants and the *Voceros* (spokespeople for the CC), particularly evident in political opinions expressed in meetings. There have been reports that *Voceros* were unable to obtain finance on political grounds, which led to the CC being unable to obtain project finance, and as a result having low participation numbers. The empirical aspect of this dissertation explains how some people were deterred from participating in the CCs because of their politicisation and close links to the PSUV and support for the president, thus influencing the trajectory of participation.

Participation in Venezuela is state-managed via agencies and central regulations that have a legal constitutional basis. This is partly a reflection of the state's

ambition to develop away from the Fourth Republic to a Fifth, where a twenty-first century participatory socialism will 'complement' representative democracy (Lander, 2008: 79-80). This process has resulted in the creation of dual institutions and strategies that operate alongside existing ones. Lander also makes it clear that the state regulates participation 'in the formulation, implementation and control of public administration' (2008: 81).

Participation, therefore, can be seen as a state-managed 'dual government', one that operates independent of traditional local democracy. This is managed by the PSUV, and as such creates a politicised participation, as people view CCs as a PSUV vehicle, thus dissuading them from participating. In some cases, such as in Mérida, CCs would mobilise support for elections, formed part of PSUV rallies, and staffed *Punto Rojos* (PSUV information points). As the PSUV manages participation via state agencies, Bolivarianism has also been promoted, and at the time of research ideas of *desarrollo endógeno* (endogenous development), particularly concerning working within the community, formed part of this agenda.

Gott explains that the PSUV have borrowed the concept of endogenous development and that the term emphasises local sustainability:

> Chávez has also taken notice of Osvaldo Sunkel, an influential Chilean economist working for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, or CEPAL in Spanish) in Santiago, who has supported in his writings the notion of 'endogenous development' – the idea that local and sustainable projects should use local resources (2008: 478).

Although endogenous development is an admirable principle, it was nonetheless a PSUV policy that CCs had to accept, and one that it appeared the PSUV was hoping would become adopted across the country. As this is a state-managed process, it can be viewed as adding to the further politicisation of participation. According to spokespeople from government agencies, endogenous development principles had to be adhered to in order to be able to achieve the project finance explained in more detail in the case studies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

This dissertation's central argument is that state-managed participation can lead to conflict with existing local democracy and new forms of local government, all of which exist alongside each other, i.e. the dual government discussed here. At the same time CCs have had mixed results due to their institutional design, relationship with state agencies, and their absorption of dominant political discourses.

Literature Contribution

Of particular importance to the literature of participatory democracy – both Latin American and international – is that it does not define state-managed participation in the relationship between the state and participatory initiatives such as the CCs. The existing literature on participation is useful in defining how the state and society can work together, but in the case of Venezuela there is less, or in some cases, no separation between CCs and the state. Therefore, the state-managed participatory system in Venezuela has meant that clashes or conflicts of interest can occur between the state and local representative institutions where organised communities can lose out on vital public services because of the conflict between the central and local state.

The research for this dissertation was carried out in Mérida, where I found a suitably interesting location which had a mixture of pro- and anti-PSUV people.[11] Mérida, located high in the foothills of the Andes (1600 m) and with a recently estimated population of 744,986 (2000) is the capital of *Estado Libertador.*[12] Surrounding states are Trujillo, Barinas, Tachira, Zulia, and Mérida reaches north to the southern shores of Lake Maracaibo.[13] Overlooked by the largest mountain in Venezuela, Pico Bolivar (5007m), Mérida is in the *Parque Nacional Sierra Nevada.* Mérida is home to the oldest and most prestigious university in Venezuela, *Universidad de los Andes* (University of the

[11] Its full name is Santiago de los Caballeros de Mérida.
[12] Venezuelan Government online: http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/venezuela/perfil_merida.html#, accessed 23 October, 2008.
[13] Venezuelan Government online: http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/venezuela/perfil_merida.html#, accessed 23 October, 2008.

Andes). Tourism is a significant industry as it attracts many local and international visitors, who come especially for the world's highest *Teleferico* (chair-lift) and the abundant natural attractions in the surrounding national parks and mountains. Mérida is called the 'city of gentlemen' and was officially named by the Spanish captain Juan Rodríguez Suarez in 1558 (although not legalised until 1560) after his hometown in Spain.[14] Originally inhabited by indigenous groups, Mérida grew from a town to a city in the twentieth century, and roads were not built to Mérida until the 1920s. Besides oil development in Venezuela, areas around Mérida were significant coffee producing areas such as Boconó which was noteworthy for 'the processes by which peasants are incorporated and disincorporated within the world system' in the twentieth century (Roseberry, 1983: 7-8).

The decision to choose Mérida as a case study location was based on the heated political environment that existed between pro- and anti-PSUV groups. My desire to understand how a CC worked in a city that was not in the densely populated northern part of Venezuela also led me to Mérida. Its geography means that it is adjacent to many rural areas as well as the vast Los Llanos plains in the interior of the country, which are less populated. By researching in a city with such a unique geography and mixed political culture, I had hoped to reflect a unique perspective on CCs in operation, juxtaposed these with the exclusively pro-PSUV areas of cities in the north of Venezuela such as Caracas and Valencia.

Its mayor until 2008, Carlos León, was a member of the PSUV party as was the state governor, which made the political climate of the city interesting in the context of how CCs might operate. I had spoken to some people who felt that the PSUV mayor was unlikely to win office again, which meant that there was a good chance I could view the CC process in Mérida under both a pro- and anti-PSUV regime.

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[14] Venezuelan Government online: http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/venezuela/perfil_merida.html#, accessed 23 October, 2008.

My research into the operation of local Mérida CCs was based on a comparative analysis of two local councils. By chance I was referred to BV to speak with a woman who was drumming up support for that CC. In my mission to find this woman, I realised that the neighbourhood was mainly in opposition to the PSUV, but sympathetic to community development through participatory democracy. This provided an exciting opportunity to understand the workings and trials of implementing a radical transformative project (such as the CCs), aimed predominately at working class and poor Venezuelans, in an opposition and middle class community. My second case study provided me with limited access yet informative information about a CC in a poorer part of town that appeared more successful in what they had accomplished, providing me with perspective on what CCs are capable of, with the hope that both could provide me with examples that could be typical of other CCs in Venezuela.

Both names are fabricated to avoid recognising them, and to avoid potential conflict of interest. Bella Vista (henceforth BV), made up of a square of eight blocks of houses by eight, was positioned near an old church and the neighbourhood, or sector, overseen by the local CC. The community had several small, family run businesses, *posadas* (guest houses), and *panaderías* (bakeries). CC meetings were held at the local *colegio* (school). A taxi rank, newspaper-stand, and *arepa* stall (small corn-meal pittas, filled with a variety of ingredients) formed the communal (though often very male) spaces. Opposite this, was the business owned by the *Vocero* of the BV CC. The middle-class community was largely gated and shuttered, although people were intrigued by my presence and were always friendly. My meetings and some interviews were often conducted in the *panadería* over a *café fuerte* or two.[15]

My analysis of BV's context is supplemented by research into a poorer, pro-PSUV CC, called Te Hecho (henceforth TH). This is in order to provide a contrast to the difficulties BV faced in obtaining project finance. As the TH CC was in a poor *barrio*, their need was of a higher priority, and as such they received funding for several blocks of social housing. TH was a particularly

[15] The full list of interviews is stated in appendix 1

dynamic and impressively well-organised CC, and an example of the fact that CCs in Mérida have achieved mixed results for a variety of reasons.

Existing research on CCs in Venezuela is extremely limited (as discussed in Chapter 3), and as such it is difficult to understand how the case studies in this dissertation reflect the workings of others. However, from a theoretical point of view the CC examples are understood as being different from other participatory examples in Latin America as they are more state-managed. This state management has not been a common theme, or at least a perspective from which to view the CCs in the literature on Venezuela. The BV CC in my experience was one of the most dysfunctional in the local area with exacerbated issues of low participation and a lack of funding. TH was almost the mirror opposite in that it had a relatively high level of participation and had successfully gained a great deal of project finance. These cases can be understood as specific cases at a specific time and location but the issues that arise through analysing BV (in the main) offer a perspective of the CCs and Bolivariansim that stands apart from studies carried out to date. In doing this, I intended to see how a transformative project in a pluralist democratic framework operated in a largely opposition area. I also planned to ground this understanding by examining how CCs can operate well enough to successfully develop and implement projects.

Distinct memories of the research combine the strong smell of coffee and petrol fumes, loud banter being shouted over even louder *reggaeton* music, all at the same time that bread was baked in the back of the *panadería.* Another reminiscence concerns the energy that people had with one another during discussions of local issues and national politics. The central research question for the dissertation was does PSUV-managed participation affect the CC process at a local level and is this process politicized.

The extent to which any case study is typical is not certain as the distinguishing characteristic of the case study is that it 'attempts to examine: (a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yinn, 1981: 59). However, common themes in this dissertation reflect how government in Venezuela is

creating spaces for participation, and how CCs that are not pro-PSUV (such as BV) can – or do – operate within this system. Much of the literature's attention focuses on the government and not on local examples of how policy is being implemented at the local level. More specifically, this dissertation offers an illuminating and innovative perspective on another aspect of this – that of how non-PSUV CCs might operate.

The questions posed below are asked throughout the thesis:

- How do participants and people in communities engage with (if at all) CCs?
- How does state-designed participation manifest itself in the CCs?
- Are there tensions between the CCs and the local state in Mérida that reflect flaws in the central design of participation?
- Who is responsible for the management and development of the CCs – the central state or the organised communities?
- How, if at all, is the central state managing CCs to ensure their efficacy?

Methodology

The research for this dissertation was conducted in three stages. A scoping exercise was conducted for a month in 2006, when I travelled around Venezuela in order to find a suitable case study location. I wanted to find a locale that was neither completely pro or anti-Chávez and that had a variety of political viewpoints represented within a CC, in order to have the potential to research a multiplicity of political actors and individuals involved in the CC process in a given research location.

In the second phase of research, I identified a CC willing to allow me to observe their *Asamblea de Ciudadanos* (Citizens Assembly) meetings as well as to converse with the participants. My contacts within the BV CC were mainly due to a chance meeting with a Venezuelan ordained member of the Western Buddhist Order[16] who had practised in the United Kingdom for several years

[16] Now called Triratna.

before beginning to teach in Mérida at a Buddhist centre where I went to meditate. The teacher suggested I went to a newspaper seller he knew to ask how to get involved. The newspaper seller instead directed me to a contact he had in a business in another part of town, to ask to speak to Señor M. Unfortunately, Señor M was not available and I was given his telephone number which I called immediately. His rapid fire Spanish was difficult to negotiate and I was passed over (without requesting to be) to someone who spoke some English. The other voice belonged to the person who would become my main contact at the CC, Miguel. He arranged a meeting the next day at what I later realised was the heart of community activity – the local *panaderia*.

The second stage of research was conducted between October 2008 and January 2009, and the third stage between June 2009 and September 2009. The period in between gave me time to reflect on the research in Mérida with greater awareness and gave me a fresh perspective for the second phase of research.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the understanding of interconnectedness between researchers and their subject(s) or environments. It can be seen as 'the way in which researchers come to terms with and indeed capitalize on the complexities of their presence within the research setting, in a methodical way' (Holliday, 2007: 138). In terms of this research, how I am 'implicated' in my research is of key importance:

> Reflexivity involves the realization that the researcher is not a neutral observer, and is not is implicated in the construction of knowledge. Far from being a disinterested bystander, the researcher is seen as someone whose observations are by their very nature, selective, and whose interpretations of results are partial (Gray, 2009: 498).

In the case of my project, several personal factors led me to ask the research questions outlined here. I began my academic journey by questioning the nature of people's involvement in politics in the UK. This interest was inspired by my work as a youth worker in Worcester while I studied for my A Levels in 2001. I

was aware of the profound sense of apathy that young people felt towards politics and the 'system' in the United Kingdom. I decided to pursue a Politics and Communication studies degree at the University of Liverpool in order to begin understanding this conundrum. I became interested in the amount of passion people in Latin America had for politics, how active people there could be and how governments could implement reformist and leftist agendas. The overwhelming sense of political activism around Venezuelan political engagement was a major contributing factor to decide to apply for the Economic and Social Research Council Studentship 1+3 Award in July 2006 for an MA and PhD in Latin American Studies.

My research project proposal was based originally on the Chávez-supported Urban Land Committees (CTUs) that appeared to be significant during this time due to their participatory nature. In the same year as I applied, the CCs were launched as part of the PSUV vision for twenty-first century Socialism. The decision to examine CCs and participatory democracy in Venezuela followed on from my original interest in how people are either encouraged through facilitation, or discouraged through prevention, from participating in political life.

Approaches to the Case Study

I adopted a case study approach to the operation of local CCs. This was in order to be able to 'explore many themes and subjects ... from a much more focussed range of people, organizations or contexts' (Gray, 2009: 246). Yin (2003: 13) defines a case study as the investigation into a phenomenon within its context, while Punch explains it as:

> The basic idea is that one case (or perhaps a small number of cases) will be studied in detail, using whatever methods seem appropriate. While there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions, the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible (2005: 144).

Following Yin's suggestion, I adopted a process of triangulation to 'establish

converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible' (2003: 9). One of the first tasks that I had to complete was to gain access to the 'field' of a CC in Mérida which was challenging. As one commentator has recently argued, 'Some "fields" exist in a concrete space into which an ethnographer must enter, and some are more loosely constructed' (Seale, 2009: 457).

I overtly observed several CC meetings, events and discussions in the course of my research. I arranged with the main *Vocero* of the CC that I would attend meetings to observe meetings. At my first meeting I introduced myself to the group and explained my being there, for my research at the University of Liverpool on participatory democracy in Venezuela. I was told when meetings would be on, and I continued to attend them, when they were actually on. I would sit and listen to discussions and take notes in my field diary about topics of discussion, any organisation and other general meetings organised, and then follow up with any relevant attendees about any forthcoming meetings that I might be able to attend, of which there were not any that came into fruition or I was not allowed to attend. I would also pay particular attention to what people said and what topics people felt they wished to talk about and take note on these to ask more about during my interview stage. The nature of my overt position had the effect of shaping my results, and also in gaining access:

> Observation, inquiry and data collection depend on the observer gaining access to the appropriate field and establishing good working relations with the people in it. They need to be relationships that are able to generate the data the research requires. The identity the observer assumes determines the success of this (Seale, 2009: 228).

By being overt, people might be embarrassed to talk, as they knew I was taking notes, or act excitedly because I was there. Therefore, there were occasions that people talked with me proudly about their circumstances, environments, or country, all in order to see how I responded, or if I was interested.

Observation is defined as that which 'involves the systematic viewing of people's actions and the recording, analysis and interpretation of their behaviour'

(Gray, 2009: 397). As Punch explains, observation in qualitative methodology tends to be less structured:

> In this case, the researcher does not use predetermined categories and classifications, but makes observations in a more natural open-ended way. Whatever the recording technique, the behaviour is observed as the stream of actions and events as they naturally unfold. The logic here is that the categories and concepts for describing and analysing the observational data will emerge later in the research, during the analysis, rather than be brought to the research, or imposed on the data, from the start (2005: 179-180).

Punch argues that observation evolves during several stages beginning from the selection of a location, observing changes, making the research focus sharper, and getting closer to clarity through carefully 'selected observations', ultimately resulting in 'theoretical saturation' so that data can be analysed (2005: 180). This process is applicable to my own observation process in the case study, which involved my sitting in on meetings of the *Asamblea de Ciudadanos* in BV's CC and taking notes about the topics of discussion, the key participants and any visible power dynamics that existed between them. On one such occasion I noticed that some participants would get rather upset at the lack of political discussion in meetings, or that small groups of people would talk among themselves during meetings, or that others might creep in and out.

The process of collecting field notes was an important part of my understanding of the CCs (Gray, 2009: 402-403). I wrote down key phrases and thoughts during the course of observation, and wrote them up as a research diary as soon as I could. The research diary proved essential as a means with which to document and reflect 'on the on-going research process in order to increase the comparability of the empirical proceedings and focuses in the individual notes' (Flick, 2006: 286). It recorded my thoughts, feelings and observational analysis of events and the wider process of participation in Mérida. Nonetheless, we make editorial choices when making field notes as we never record everything we hear and see (Seale, 2009: 460). The danger of note taking is that we presume that we will note some things later, and forget to do so (Gray, 2009: 403). I was fully aware of my role as editor of the actualities of the events taking

place before me, and I reviewed my findings with participants and supervisors in order to accumulate alternative opinions to help my own reflections. I would constantly check back with my fieldwork diary to capture as much detail of a day's research as possible and I would examine my results as often as I could by looking for other examples. However, there were moments that discussions became less useful than I first thought when I first imagined that they might be important for a particular avenue of research enquiry.

I also paid close attention to gender and class dynamics, as well as whether participants were happy (or at least able) to have their say. In this manner I observed peoples' interactions before, during and after meetings, as individuals would linger around discussing various political or personal issues. If I was ever asked a question about something in particular, I would answer, but I participated no more than this. I wanted to have as minimal an effect on the process of meetings and discussions as possible. It struck me that meetings were very casual in terms of sticking to the agenda, but also in terms of etiquette, such as whether or not one should make telephone calls or hold conversations whilst others were talking, and, to my surprise, this was largely accepted. Perhaps my English sentiments were too hidebound.

My presence was of interest to the members of the CC and the *Voceros,* and my attendance was announced at the start of each meeting, stating that a researcher for the University of Liverpool was interested in the CC process and people's opinions about it. As a result of this, exclamations of *¡Beatles!* would occasionally ring out from the meeting's participants.

However some participants regarded me suspiciously – and would ask several questions as to my interest in Venezuela, the CCs and President Hugo Chávez. My response was always the same that I found the country's politics fascinating, that they are far more interesting than in the UK, and that I was researching participatory democracy as it is so widespread and well supported in Venezuela, making it a unique example. Often, my enthusiasm for participatory democracy as a mechanism would be enough persuasion for those interested enough to ask.

The interest in my presence soon waned, but at the same time, so did the numbers of people participating.

My presence was used at times by the main spokesperson, Miguel, as a reason why CCs are to be taken seriously. He would exhibit the fact that their CC was the site for research from an international academic, who had presented some findings at an international conference in Rio de Janeiro, as if this might provide credence for the wider process. These exhibitions were more common in later months, as participation was declining. This example illustrates the values the *Vocero* exhibited, as he thought that this would attract more participants, which was not the case.

At an early stage I had business cards made up that acted as a 'pass' into the community. I had noticed that business cards were a kind of 'cultural capital' within the community and many people asked me whether I had one before we spoke. This concurs with Seale's suggestion that how we appear 'often determines the extent to which participants will trust us and whether they believe we understand the world in which they live' (2009: 458). In order to conform to the social norms of the community I had some business cards made at a local print shop and, as a result, the community treated interviews and my role as a researcher much more seriously. My physical appearance as a relatively well-built, light-haired, rosy-cheeked Englishman often resulted in my being confused with a typical North American, and my response that I was British often resulted in the response that they were one and the same. The neighbourhood of BV was largely middle-class, with family-owned businesses and gated homes, people would respond to me with interest and respect.

In the first stage of research I conducted several informal interviews[17] with Miguel in BV, and one with the secretary and main *Vocero* in TH. In the case of

[17] Only those that were available for research are included here. Semi-structured interviews and some observational research were conducted with the main agencies in Mérida responsible for the growing number of CCs that were forming throughout the city. Research also included state agencies whose aim it was to provide a service (both financially and logistically) to communities, which as a result also acted as part of the provision extended to CCs.

the interviews employed in this research, the methods are concurrent with Gray's explanation of semi-structured interviews: 'An interview is a conversation between people in which one person has the role of researcher ... questions might only be used as an *aide-mémoire*, to remind the researcher of the key areas that need probing' (2009: 369).

I would arrange interviews with the main *Voceros* of BV and some with TH, where permitted, via telephone or email. This was not a straightforward approach given how busy these people were. Once interviews with these people were arranged, I would meet them in the local café or their place of work, or at the home of the TH CC *Vocero*. I would record the meeting for sake of transcription, and with their permission. Follow-on interviews were held where possible throughout the course of the research. In the second phase of research, the bulk of community interview in BV took place in the street, or in people's home or workplaces. I would record these on my Dictaphone, with the respondent's permission, for the sake of transcription afterwards. There were no follow on interviews with the respondents in the second phase as these were to capture viewpoints about participation within the BV community. Follow on interviews in BV usually happened in the local café in order to understand the narrative associated with the development of the CC from a *Vocero* perspective or to learn of new developments during the life of the CC within my research calendar. The follow on interview in TH happened in the *Voceros* home. On the whole the need for interviews reflected the need of the *Vocero* to update me, or where I required additional information.

Interviews are can be challenging because of the 'human interaction between the interviewer and respondent' that exists in this process:

> The interviewer has to pose questions (in either a structured, semi-structured or unstructured format), listen to (and data capture) the responses and pose new questions. If the interview format is relatively unstructured, then these questions have to be constructed 'on the fly' ... noting other elements of the interview process such as the body language of the interviewee (Gray, 2009: 369-370).

However, the choice to use interviews lay in the knowledge that they are a great resource to understand peoples lived experiences and opinions. Interviews greatly enhanced my observations as I was able to delve into issues relating to why people did or did not participate, what concerns they had, and what their direct experiences were. Interviews gave people the space to reflect fully and offer their own personal perspective on the CC. The positive effect of interviewing is outlined by Gray: 'despite the challenges involved, the well-conducted interview is a powerful tool for eliciting rich data on people's views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviours' (2009: 370). As Seale explains:

> ... interviews are most importantly a form of communication, a means of extracting different forms of information from individuals and groups. The interactive nature of their practice means that interviewing is a highly flexible but also somewhat unpredictable form of social research (2009: 180).

The interviews in the first stage of research were most illuminating, grounded as they were in the experiences of the CC's development and growth from the perspective of the *Voceros*, who in my experience were hugely motivated in making the project succeed. Alongside this I asked pertinent questions to anyone who would listen, ranging from taxi drivers to people on the bus, explaining to them that I was a researcher at the University of Liverpool. Although these interactions provided background to the case studies, they were not properly interviewed, and as such, the information has not been formally included anywhere in the thesis, although it has informed the development of research questions within the dissertation.

In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all of the available six *Voceros* in BV. Semi-structured interviews can be defined as being 'somewhere between the structured and unstructured types. They contain elements of both, with some being closer to structured interviews, and others closer to unstructured ones' (Sarantakos, 2005: 268).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with standardised questions used as prompts, to develop an understanding of trends in individuals' responses. As May identifies, my questions were in place as prompts, but some questions were also fixed:

> Information about age, sex, occupation, type of household and so on, can be asked in a standardized format. The interviewer, who can seek both *clarification* and *elaboration on* the answers given, can then record qualitative information about the topic. This enables the interviewer to have more latitude to *probe* beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee (2001: 123).

May also identifies the positive impact that semi-structured interviews can have on research: 'These types of interviews are said to allow people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused interview' (2001: 123).

All participants were informed, and I made sure they understood the implications and purpose of the research and I also offered anonymity to each participant. Ultimately, given the fragmented and polarised political opinions in Mérida, I decided to give all participants anonymity. Although I reference the places, such as the *panadería* or *colegio*, these are likely to be common in Mérida, and are less likely to be identified. There were two *Voceros* in BV who declined to be interviewed for reasons unknown to me. I was unable to interview anyone from the *Alcaldía*, although I had made contact on several occasions. I also conducted a semi-structured interview with the *Vocero* of TH following the same procedures, in which he allowed me to return after meeting him and the CC secretary some weeks before. Gaining access was particularly difficult as they were suspicious of my motives, but I explained that I had great respect for the CC process and that I only wanted to understand their views, rather than influence theirs, and that I would represent them in this way in my dissertation.

In order to obtain the 'voice' of the community in BV, I interviewed a non-representative sample of 30 people in the community. In some cases sampling is unavoidable: 'Very often indeed, the researcher must take whatever sample is

available ... All research, including qualitative research, involves sampling. This is because no study ... can include everything' (Punch, 2005: 101). The aim of the research sampling was in order to collect and analyse responses that would hopefully reflect the views of the wider community: 'sampling enables the researcher to study a relatively small part of the target population, and yet obtain data that are representative of the whole' (Sarantakos, 2005: 152). Of this sample, Miguel arranged around five, and I was aware of the potential problems associated with his role as gatekeeper. As discussed in Chapter 4, 8 out of the 30 only gave preliminary responses as to why they did not want to participate. These participants are listed in Appendix 1, as 'Anonymous Members of BV Community'.

I was aware of the potential of Miguel (the lead *Vocero* for BV CC) to become the gatekeeper of my research, and its potential impact on my work: 'Gatekeepers are the sponsors, officials and significant others who have the power to grant or block access to and within a setting' (Seale, 2009: 228). Therefore I decided to conduct the remaining 25 interviews alone, at random intervals with semi-standardised questions, and with people who lived within the geographically defined area of the CC. The reason I did not interview many people from the *Asamblea de Ciudadanos* was that by the time I carried out the interviews there were not many attendees and the CC was very near to closing down.

Further semi-structured interviews were carried out with available *voceros* in various government agencies in Mérida. These included the *Fondo de Desarrollo MicroFinancerio* (Micro Finance Development Fund, FONDEMI); *Banco de la Mujer* (Women's Bank, BANMUJER); *Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo del Poder Comunal* (Foundation for the Promotion and Development of Communal Power, FUNDACOMUN); and an official I interviewed at the *Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social* (Ministry of Popular Power for the Communes and Social Security), housed at the State Governor's office since 2009.

The final stage of research involved examining archival documentary data, such as the book of minutes that was a sort of registry of events for CC meetings. Documentary data is useful in several ways:

> Documents, both historical and contemporary, are a rich source of data for social research ... In other research, for example case studies or grounded theory studies, documentary data may be collected in conjunction with interviews and observations (Punch, 2005: 184).

I used this to supplement my analysis of how many participants attended and what topics were discussed. As a result, I discovered that attendance was highest in the earlier months and dropped towards the end of the research. Nonetheless, such archival texts can only produce a partial view of the reality of what is being researched:

> If archived texts are to be used as *evidence*, as they are from a realist viewpoint which takes them to be a means of accessing past social realities, a number of issues of validity and reliability arise. Archives are *partial*: certain documents are archived whilst others are not (Seale, 2009: 255).

I also accessed the *Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales* 2006 and to some extent 2009, the FONDEMI guidelines, some CC advertisements from BV and an advertisement for the CC process nationally. All of this documentary evidence was analysed with consideration to its accuracy, particularly as they may not offer a complete view of the CCs. For example, in the case of the BV 'book of minutes' that I was allowed to see, there were only certain parts of the book made available to me. Therefore, I used my own judgement and decided to focus on what the meetings discussed, rather than attempting to speculate on what was omitted, in order to avoid inaccuracies.

Ethics

Christians (2005: 144-145) argues the importance of ethics in research: 'In value-free social science, codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles'. A code and adherence to, and application of, ethics to this research project informed my research design and

practice. Christians (2005: 144-145) sets out three principles: informed consent, privacy confidentiality, and accuracy. I will address each one according to the measures and concerns I took for each during my research and preparation of this dissertation.

In carrying out interviews I made sure that participants were made aware of their role in the research and asked if they agreed to give their consent to them. Informed consent can be broken down into two parts:

> Proper respect for human freedom generally includes two necessary conditions. First, subjects must agree voluntarily to participate-that is, without physical or psychological coercion. Second, their agreement must be based on full and open information (Christians, 2005: 144).

All of the participants were made aware of the circumstances of the research, and that it would be included in my *tesis* (thesis) and that they could let me know if they were not happy for me to use the information they provided. Sieber provides an assessment of the two-way process required for voluntary informed consent:

> Voluntary informed consent is an ongoing, two-way communication process between subjects and the investigator, as well as a specific agreement about the conditions of the research participation. *Voluntary* means without threat or undue inducement. *Informed* means that the subject knows what a reasonable person in the same situation would want to know before giving consent. *Consent* means explicit agreement to participate. Informed consent requires clear communication, not technical explanations or legal jargon beyond the subject's ability to comprehend (1992: 26).

Prior to their being interviewed, all of my participants were asked if they agreed to being interviewed. During each interview I informed the participants who I was and what my research was about, and that I was at the University of Liverpool as a PhD student, and carrying out research into people's opinions on the CCs. I offered each person my contact details (business card with telephone and email) and explained that if at any time, during or after the interview, they wished to withdraw from participating they could do so. I informed the

participants and made sure they were clear of the consequences of participating and what I would use the information for.

In order to maintain a strictly professional approach to interviews, I offered anonymity to each participant. Privacy and confidentiality can be defined by several elements:

> Codes of ethics insist on safeguarded to protect people's identities and those of the research location. Confidentiality must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwilling exposure. All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity (Christians, 2005: 144-145).

Privacy and confidentiality are complimented with the addition of data protection: 'Care regarding data protection needs to be taken at all stages of research though particular sensitivity may be required at different stages' (Seale, 2009: 120).

Although I offered anonymity to each interviewee, and only three or four said they would like it, I eventually made every participant's name anonymous or used a pseudonym, in order to avoid any traces back to those involved. This reflects the British Sociological Association's 'Statement of Ethical Practice 1992' on anonymity:

> The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information (1992: 706).

The decision to do this was based on the fact of the city's polarised political opinions, and the need to avoid fuelling any disagreements, should participants discover the results. I also wanted to avoid all actors being able to trace back opinions to anyone in particular, and removed certain information including relations to other community members, etc. However, as a result of case study research, anonymisation is never completely effective in removing identity traces (Elliott, 2005: 142), which is why I informed participants of how I would use the

information provided, which everyone accepted. Although I describe some participants in the research, I do so without facilitating their identification with an individual or location. I stored all of the data electronically, which was password protected and available only to me.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I illustrate the importance of the Fourth Republic in influencing the trajectory of participatory initiatives by questioning whether or not the Punto Fijo (1958-1998) system of government, where centralism ruled, led to such dissatisfaction in society that third parties were elected, or was it due to economic mismanagement, corruption and neoliberalism? The legacy of years of this two-party pact was that government was closed to the general public's influence, resulting in unresponsive, elitist rule, where poor Venezuelans suffered due to inadequate provision and economic mismanagement and its associated austerity measures. It was the financial crises and neoliberal restructuring that led to organised civil society campaigning for change and the poor responding with protests that were a precursor to the *Caracazo*. As I will argue, combined with the fact that he represented an alternative to PF parties and politics, this is why Hugo Chávez was elected. This chapter also highlights the political emphasis on participation post-1998.

In this chapter, I ask if participatory democracy has been designed, managed and implemented by the central state as a means of creating a new local government. The chapter divides into two distinct sections that explore and critically evaluate the trajectory of *Chavismo* both theoretically and politically. The first section outlines Chávez's thinking on Socialism of the twenty-first century and Bolivarianism, as well as participatory democracy. In the second section I address the practical implementation of the President's thinking, especially in the construction of the CCs. This is analysed from early initiatives to the most recent developments. In both of these sections the nature of *Chavismo* is applied to current debates on CCs including politicisation, clientelism and the role of the state. The chapter focuses on how participatory initiatives, as well as other

development procedures, have been centrally designed and managed by the national government. Two distinct lines of enquiry include an assessment of the development of participatory initiatives that operate under the control of the government, and secondly, the creation of dual systems that the CCs operate within. Opposition pressure on Chávez has also helped to shape alternative avenues of participation, culminating in dual government.

In Chapter 3 within the existing literature on participation I develop a conceptual framework that can be applied to the CCs. The central question here is how participatory the state-managed CCs are according to different theoretical discussions. Focus is placed on both Latin American examples and participatory literature to address the space between state and society. As I have mentioned, the literature explains how CCs are participatory, but not how they fit within the state. Furthermore, because of the politicisation of participation in Venezuela, and its state control, the literature provides a basis for the CCs to be considered as an example of state-managed participatory democracy. In order to examine state-led participation in Venezuela, Chapter 3 argues that the CCs are part of the state, and that the politicisation of this process has created certain tensions and conflict, particularly as the various institutions are in competition for financial resources, power and influence.

In Chapter 4's empirical analysis of a CC in BV, Mérida, I discuss the process of state-managed participation in a CC by the observation of meetings and events, as well as interviewing participants and the wider community. This is the first of two in-depth case-study chapters that detail the process of participation. This chapter also asks whether the process of setting up and applying for project finance is the same for all CCs, and how this correlates with the PSUV's intention to create dual government. I identify tensions both within the CC and outside of it. The political stigma attached to CCs in BV actually repelled some in the community from participating, and *Voceros* felt that the government agencies had prioritised pro-PSUV CCs. On the other hand, the TH CC was successful in maintaining sufficient numbers of participants as well as continually obtaining money for community projects. The chapter also explains the processes and functions of the CCs more generally, as well as highlighting

tensions between the *Asamblea de Ciudadano* and the *Voceros*. Three issues explain these tensions: participation; local governance in Mérida; and ideology. These issues open into a discussion of what dual government is, and how it functioned by using the CCs both as a channel of provision and a vehicle to promote endogenous development. This process creates disagreements about the processes of the CCs, their funding and ideological discrepancies, including between CCs, *Voceros* and government agencies.

Chapter 5 extends this insight into the fault lines within the process of governance between the *Voceros* and the government agencies in the instance of BV's CC. The question remains whether the mixed results in the case study CCs can be attributed to state-managed participation, or whether the conflict is shaped by discrepancies between new forms of local government and existing grassroots democracy. This evaluation connects the prevailing discussion on tensions between government agencies and local government (and on a state level) to wider issues associated with the provision of basic services and goods to local communities. These arguments include the politicisation of funding and local government opposition to new processes of governance in local politics.

In this case study, *Voceros* in BV found it difficult to obtain finance from agencies for various reasons, and the local government wished to operate separate to central state initiatives. This highlights a grey area in dual government – that is that goods, services and their provision from the central state do not always fulfil community needs, as local government is still needed to deliver certain services. If the constitutional amendments had been passed in 2007 they might have carried out the proposed replacement of local democracy with the *Estado Comunal* and popular power. As it stands, the proposed *Comunas* (communes) tentatively rely on the politically immature and state-dependant CCs to support such a structure. A summary of the theoretical framework and case study findings are discussed in Chapter 6 where particular attention is placed on the shortcomings of participation in the Venezuelan political system.

Chapter 2: The development of the Venezuelan state and its people, *Chavismo*, and participation

The period between 1958 and 1998 has been described as the most consistently stable period of democracy in Venezuela before the election of President Chávez. During this time the country's two major parties, *Acción Democrática* (Democratic Action, AD) and *Comité de Organizacion Political Electoral Independiente* (the Venezuelan Christian Democrat Party, COPEI) competed for power, in what some have claimed to be free and fair elections, and agreed to share power in the historic *Pacto de Punto Fijo* (hereafter referred to as the 'Pact'). I contend that this Pact saw the implementation of neoliberal restructuring policies which had a destructive effect on the Venezuelan poor and led to the widening of social polarisation between the rich and the poor, and to growing inequality. In order to understand the popularity of the political system in Venezuela since 1998, it is first necessary to analyse the social and political conflicts that occurred as a result of the neoliberal policies agreed under the Pact between the ruling parties. Bolivarianism is understood in this dissertation as an attempt to rectify the inequality, social polarisation, and economic failure caused by this Pact.

The Pact dominated the system of Venezuelan politics from 1958-1998, eventually failing because of the model of government it employed, its closed political and electoral system, and the exclusion of the political left, and a loss of legitimacy due to corruption, economic mismanagement and the implementation of neoliberal restructuring and austerity measures. Although it ended in 1998 with the election of a non-PF President, Hugo Chávez, and the system of the Pact in the Fourth Republic was not fully eradiated, particularly as manifested in bureaucracy, corruption and clientelism, as well as a centralised state that encourages state-managed participation.

The question arises whether the period of the Pact in Venezuela was, in reality, characterised by the arrival of stable or genuine democracy. Specific attention should be devoted as to why Venezuela suffered severe economic crises up until the late 1980s. This chapter also analyses the socio-political effects of neoliberal

policies within Venezuela as well as the wider Latin American context. The decline of elitist consensus-based politics towards the end of the 1990s challenged the notion of 'Venezuelan exceptionalism', and I argue that Hugo Chávez's anti-neoliberal reformist presidential platform was a response to a political space left behind after the Pact finally collapsed in 1998.

Once in office, Chávez and the PSUV have created a system of dual government that is intended to replace the political structures of the Fourth Republic, but in actual fact exist alongside it. Dual structures have been in use from the outset of the Bolivarian Revolution, including the civilian-military alliance, the Constituent Assembly and the Social Missions. More recently Venezuelan state-managed institutions, such as the *Consejo Comunales* (Communal Councils, CCs) are in operation alongside the structures governing local democracy. This chapter argues that the process of policy delivery from central government (i.e. the PSUV) to the CCs is constructed in such a way that they are dependent on state agencies for the goods, services and financial provision they require.

An interesting development in the dual government process is the promotion of endogenous development. Endogenous development can be defined as working within and for the greater good of a community, often using resources that exist there for collective improvement. This is discussed in a section below as part of an exploration of the meaning, and implications, of Socialism of the twenty-first century. The principles of Bolivarianism have affected or influenced communication at a local level, especially in the setting up and participating involved in the CCs (even if they do not receive discrete resources). This interpretation of Socialism derives from Bolivarianism, which is based on Chávez's desire to create a Bolivarian society, an important element of his political agenda. Bolivarian policies have (in some cases) been successful in matching resources with institutions in order to deliver services, or linking up state agencies, PSUV mayors and governors, as guided by the central government.

Official explanations state that the PSUV intended to create an *Estado Comunal* in which several CCs joined together to form *Comunas* (Communes) thus

replacing existing local and state level government, but since 2008 this has ceased to be part of government rhetoric. In the short term, dual government can be read as an attempt to bypass *Alcaldes* (mayors) and *Gobernadores* (state governors), who have the potential to sabotage the Bolivarian processes of participatory democracy and the delivery of endogenous development at a local level. This has created a situation where local government is in competition with CCs for available financial provision.

The dual government process, part of the Bolivarian system, has been created in order to overcome the inadequacies of previous *Punto Fijo* parties (often attributed to neoliberalism) that often overlooked the needs of the poor. However, dual government institutions have not replaced local government and currently exist alongside them, and the relationship between these institutions is a turbulent one and can result in conflict. Because CCs are state-managed and dependent on government finance for projects as well as seen as part of the construction of the Bolivarian state, they can be seen as intensely politicised.

CCs follow in a line of participatory initiatives that have often become centrally controlled, and in some cases clientelist, exacerbated by their dependence on local and state government institutions, services and provision. All this is due to their being based on previous participatory initiatives that have helped to create an institutional blueprint, also given the PSUV's central control of the CCs. Not all CCs are effectively developing towards the *Estado Comunal* or dual government as the PSUV had hoped they would, and they still depend on local government structures which still maintain a certain influence over local communities.

The chapter focuses on the development of *Chavismo* from 1998 to the present day, and builds on the social and political context presented here. The argument is that a clear plan exists to create developmental and participatory initiatives, one shaped by the radicalism of Socialism of the twenty-first century, as well as by other national and international factors. This assessment of Bolivarianism suggests that it has advanced consistently in two distinct areas, namely the development of participatory initiatives and the creation of support networks to

assist and help poor Venezuelans, which are often separate from local government. It is necessary to devote particular attention to the development of participatory initiatives by illustrating tensions created by central government control. This chapter discusses the PSUV's government participation in the control of the CCs and identifies certain faultlines, as well as examining how dual government operates, and concludes by discussing the conflicts that have arisen within local democracy.

This chapter argues that the Venezuelan state has developed in such a way as to depend on strong leaders (such as *Caudillos*), and central figures with strong states. The development of a pact based democracy in Venezuela also led to a demise in legitimacy and support for this type of government, but it also led to great destruction. The chapter sets the background as to why a participatory state emerged in Venezuela in 1998, but in doing so also highlights the on-going problems of the Venezuelan state that in turn impacts on the trajectory of a participatory democracy leading to a scenario termed state managed participation in this dissertation.

The development of the Venezuelan state

In order to understand how the pact came into being, the emergence of democracy in Venezuela and *caudillismo* dictatorships must also be considered.[18] Venezuela's societal and political development in the twentieth century was shaped by a turbulent assortment of dictators, democratic parties and the development of a state established on revenues generated by the sale of oil.

Under Spanish rule, Venezuela was not considered as valuable as other parts of South America, as there was little knowledge of its natural resources and an indigenous society resistant to ready exploitation, and 'owing to Venezuela's

[18] According to O'Toole (2007: 23) *caudillos* 'were often military leaders who had won a reputation in the independence wars or ensuing revolts but nurtured an image of men of the people. The phenomenon of *caudillismo* reflected a pragmatic move to consolidate centralized power, in a single source, presaging the emergence of stronger states'.

limited economic importance, the Spanish Crown's presence was weak and colonial institutions were rudimentary' (Ellner, 2008: 21).

While Bourbon kings attempted to centralise Venezuela due to the increased economic importance of cacao, there was 'resistance from diverse sectors of the population' (Ellner, 2008: 22). When the Spanish left Venezuela in 1819, they did so without the establishment of many stable centres of government. This led to a chaotic and violent environment in which powerful families and *caudillos* fought for control of territory for several years before a functioning state began to develop.

Although Venezuela's economy developed around the export of cash crops such as cacao, sugar, hides and tobacco, it was not until 1912 that oil was first drilled and became economically dominant (Levine, 1973: 16; Wilpert, 2007: 88). It was at this time that the economy went through a transition in focus from agriculture to oil and was mirrored by mass migration to its production zones, which were based in the northern cities of Caracas and Valencia (Buxton, 2001: 10). Internal migration happened at the same time that immigrants from Northern Europe began to move to oil producing regions in Venezuela, thus stretching the over-subscribed cities to their limits.

Therefore, the early development of politics and society was shaped by the prevalence of *caudillos*, and continued in the more centralising dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). However, as the economy and the northern cities began to grow, Gómez 'sought to restore order' to the Venezuelan state by attracting foreign investment such that 'By the late 1930s, Standard Oil and Shell had come to control 85 percent of oil extraction in Venezuela (50 and 30 percent, respectively)' (Coronil, 1997: 76).

Gómez became leader of Venezuela after he (in collaboration with Cipirano Castro) successfully won control of the country from enterprising *caudillos* and he presided dictatorially for 27 years. It was not until his death that Venezuela began the transition to a more democratic state. As Coronil notes, 'Gómez's death freed Venezuela from the grip of his personalised rule and allowed the

nation to begin a democratizing process' (1997: 2). The following two governments (Eleazar López Contreras (1936-1941) and Isaías Medina Angarita (1941-1945)) led to the legalisation of political parties. This created a scenario where democratic parties and supporters could articulate themselves, and attract more followers.

Although Medina empathised with democracy, a selection of party leaders and members of the military joined forces and carried out a *coup d'état* in 1945, creating a civil-military junta headed by Rómulo Betancourt (provisional president from 1945-1947) and Rómulo Gallegos (president 1947-1948). The Junta paved the way to a three-year period of democracy (1945-1948) called the *trienio*. The *trienio* was short-lived as the rapid change it generated challenged many Venezuelan elites, including members of the military, the church and business. Although there was a period of dictatorship after the *trienio*, Levine and Crisp (1999: 376-377) remind us that the democratic period had been successful in creating universal suffrage, free and fair elections, and the poor enjoyed more service provision. Although defeated, the *trienio* acted as a kind of blueprint for what people came to expect ten years later, during the democratic government of 1958.

A military junta was presided over by a 'relatively progressive' (Raby, 2006: 135) General Carlos Delgado Chalbaud (1948-1950) and replaced the *trienio's* democratic civilian government. Pérez Jiménez (who ruled 1950-1958) led one of the most ruthless and politically repressive dictatorships Venezuela had ever suffered (Ellner, 2008: 47-48).[19] One of the reasons Jiménez was able to lead a dictatorship was that he enjoyed the acquiescence (or at least avoided the criticism) of the United States government as he allowed oil companies to operate freely, granting them immense concessions 'by opening up oil fields to a multiplicity of companies' (Ellner, 2008: 47). It was only when an economic downturn occurred towards the end of Jiménez's rule that support of businesses, the military and the church began to ebb away.

[19] According to Ellner (2008: 40) Chávez had 'positive words for various military rulers including General Pérez Jiménez' as he lauded the civilian-military alliance (discussed further in Chapter 2).

Whilst Pérez Jiménez was losing his grip on consensual support, a subversive collective called *La Junta Patriótica* (Patriotic Junta) organised protests against the dictator, which soon developed into a *coup d'état* led by sections of the military. Jiménez loyalists and supporters, including some parts of the military, soon extinguished this attempted takeover. The Junta led mass popular protests against the dictator, which eroded his political supporters' faith in his leadership, and who requested that he stand down, Jiménez fled the country, and a national presidential election was tabled for later in 1958.

Rómulo Betancourt (1959-1964) won the presidential elections, representing the AD party, a political victory based on his experience in the *trienio* government. However, Betancourt's election also marked an end to the values he represented during the *trienio* period: 'AD was less progressive than it had been in the Trienio and Betancourt in particular had come under strong US influence during his years in exile' (Raby, 2006: 136). This less progressive agenda was largely due to the fact that Betancourt had won the support of the church and other elites on the basis that his presidency would be less reformist than during the *trienio*, and some considered this an excellent approach:

> For many years, historians considered Venezuela's "pacted democracy" a masterstroke, which avoided the interparty discord and clashes with the church and the military that characterized the 1945-1948 period (Ellner, 2008: 59).

This avoided another dictatorship (as was the response to the *trienio*) and began the interconnected network of interests and cohesion between elites and the political classes in the shape of a Pact, as well as forming an anti-Communist shaped repression of the left. The combination of centralised leadership and political collaboration ensured a long period of rule lay ahead for the parties of the Pact.

Venezuelan Exceptionalism

Before developing an understanding of how Venezuelan society and politics progressed from 1958-1998, I examine the assumptions that justified the Pact. The Venezuelan exceptionalism thesis offers an intriguing point from which to analyse the Pact in Venezuela, as it was an image defended by the parties in power. According to the thesis the country was seen as being free of the problems associated with dictatorships found in many other Latin America countries due to the economic buoyancy provided by high oil revenues. Exceptionalism can be categorised in three ways:

> Venezuela was privileged with respect to the rest of Latin America, that it remained free of the acute conflict and cleavages that threatened political stability elsewhere, and that its democratic system and political culture were healthy and solid (Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2005: 7).

Lander points to the success the government had in the 1960s with its defeat of armed insurgency efforts and the country became a 'showcase democracy' that was widely considered as stable with solid and legitimate institutions (2005: 25). Venezuelan consumption rose alongside expectations of state provision in areas such as health, housing and education, which were financed by oil revenues, and 'popular sectors ... expected continued upward social mobility' (Lander, 2005: 26).

A profound effect of this was the fact that there was a general expectation of the 'sustained growth and improved living conditions [which] had sunk deep roots in the Venezuelan mode of thinking' (Lander, 2005: 26; see also Coronil and Skurski, 1991). Venezuelans had begun to rely on continued growth and state spending in the 1960s and the economic decline came as a shock.

This thesis has been refuted by political scientists such as Ellner and Tinker Salas (2005), and Raby (2006), who have argued the situation was not particularly politically stable. The basis for the exceptionalism thesis was the notion 'that the country was exceptional in Latin America because of its economic development and liberal politics and was on the point of attaining First-World status' (Raby,

2006: 140). In doing so the parties created a system of government that eventually ran completely contrary to their own intentions. Institutions proved unstable, and unable to prevent and contain conflict while social polarisation and alienation due to corrupt, clientelistic relationships fostered by government and elite self-interest eventually threatened the stability of the Pact. The reality behind Venezuelan stability was considerably different to the exceptionalism discussed by some academics.[20]

Puntofijismo: 1958-1998

The Pact of Punto Fijo was essentially one aspect of a two-part arrangement (the second part was the Minimum Programme of Government) that was agreed to by the major parties, AD, COPEI and the *Unión Republicana Democrática* (the Republican Democratic Union, URD) in 1958.[21] The pacts or agreements were party political arrangements and depended on the following principles: '[to] support democracy, band together to resist challenges to its legitimacy and survival, respect elections, and strive in general to institutionalize politics, channelling participation with democratic vehicles and arenas' (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 381). Such controlled governance eventually became unresponsive to the electorate and led to the ineffective economic management that eroded their political dominance.

The parties of the Pact dominated the political landscape from 1959-1998. Decisions were arrived at between AD and COPEI, with an emphasis placed on consensus. As the parties became increasingly interested in party discipline and cohesion, clientelism and corruption became commonplace. At the same time, the electorate's interest came second to the Pact's dual party machine.

As discussed, the Pact was also a means to avoid or contain the elite conflicts experienced during the *trienio* and other times of discord, and as such Venezuela

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[20] See Abente, 1988; Alexander, 1964; Betancourt, 2001; Levine, 1977, 1978, 1989; Martz, 1984; and, Naím and Piñago, 1984. See Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2005 for an excellent critique of these works.

[21] The Pact was intended to only last for two years, but ended in 1998, when a non-Punto Fijo president was elected.

became a less progressive democracy, '[the] Pact of Punto Fijo acted as a low intensity democracy' (Ellner, 2008: 90). While people could vote and generally participate in democracy much more freely, there were a restricted choice of parties, and political organisation was outsourced to those the government had a working relationship with. The three main parties were also hostile towards the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV), historically one of the largest parties in Venezuela, even though they were also part of the successful fight to overthrow Jiménez that ended in January 1958. The parties had a strong desire to have US blessing and an association with the PCV would hinder this, especially as they viewed them as having more loyalty to international Communism than to Venezuela (Myers, 2006: 15). Furthermore, Levine and Crisp also view this exclusion as a means to 'reassure elements in business, the church, and the military' (1999: 381).

Elite interests were paramount within the system of government during the Pact, and parties conducted politics within a clientelistic framework that settled disputes. This has been broken down into five key elements by Levine and Crisp as: 'pacts and coalitions; inter-elite consensus; programme limitation; encouragement of participation; and, exclusion of the revolutionary left' (1999: 380; Levine, 1973: 14). Although the five elements were evident, there was little encouragement of participation other than to fill the gaps left over from the minimal state required by the implementation of neoliberal policies.

The Pact is also termed a *partidocracia* (Party Democracy) because it favoured the mechanisms of the party above the interests of the electorate (Buxton, 2001: 16-17). Another key feature of the Pact was that elections results were respected by the loser, in solidarity with Pact's drive towards consensus, which favoured discipline over disagreement. Therefore the internal dynamics of the Pact overrode all other interests.

The parties had strong societal connections and exerted political control over social groups such as peasants, workers and students. These relationships were corporatist in nature, and reflected similar trends in other Latin American countries at the time. COPEI had the church's backing, AD had a large

institutional infrastructure, while the URD had a strong charismatic leader, Jóvito Villalba, and 'after two decades of destructive and often brutal conflict, these three parties desired a new and less destructive mode of competition' (Myers, 2006: 14). Although there were democratic institutions and practices, there were several strict controls in place.

An additional aspect of the pact of *Punto Fijo*, the Minimum Programme of Government, deepened the consensus built around the government's policies and strategies for economic development. The model was based on 'foreign and local private capital, subsidies to the private sector, principles of compensation for any land reform, and a generally cautious approach to economic and social reform' (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 380). Both of the elements in the Pact set up a system of tripartite agreement that effectively pardoned the military for their bloodied past and invested in them more heavily (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 380). The Church was also rewarded with a more inclusive role in policy making (especially in education), and was granted improved legal status and more security for their loyalty to parties of the pact (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 380). The parties placed the greatest emphasis on involving business and trade organisations, including *Federación de Camaras de Comercio y Produción* (Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Production, FEDECAMARAS) and *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (Venezuela Workers Council, CTV) and together the Pacts were in place to govern in this manner for years to come, a corporatism which had been sustained by steady and high oil prices.

Even though there was party pluralism between 1958-1968, when nine parties ran for public office, none gained more than 30 per cent (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 382) and this pattern continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Although pre-1993 AD and Copei had enjoyed up to 80 per cent of the vote (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 382), this began to dramatically decrease after this date. While people could vote more freely, there were extremely strict controls over choice and political organisation was tightly limited to select groups. The left was completely excluded, especially after the guerrilla coup attempts of the 1960s.

This elite consensus failed to navigate economic decline successfully enough to avoid the imposition of neoliberal structural reforms, which led to increased poverty and further alienation of the poor, finding its political expression in the Pact's loss of legitimacy due to sustained economic mismanagement. Although democracy was minimal, during the initial period of economic stability due to high oil prices Venezuelans had enjoyed a relatively high standard of living (Lander, 2005: 25). This was only the case up to the late 1970s and early 1980s when the economy began to slow.

Wilpert argues that because of the oil booms between 1958 and 1978 Venezuelans had high hopes for joining the developed world, but the years from 1979 to 1999 led to 'bitter disappointment, not just economically, but politically' (2006: 10). McCaughan states that the dominant parties during the 1960s and 1970s had provided services to a high standard in which, 'Venezuelan workers enjoyed the highest wages in Latin America and subsidies in food, health, education and transport, and this is the main reason why the guerrilla campaigns failed to take off' (2004: 31).

During this period the oil economy in Venezuela peaked in the early 1970s, illustrating Coronil's argument that an imaginary, 'magical state' existed that functioned as 'a single agent endowed with the magical power to remake the nation' (1997: 4). Ultimately these improvements slowed down as the economy and oil prices declined in the late 1970s and especially in the early 1980s in which

> The government cut back on plans to increase the productive capacity of the state sector, eliminated certain protective measures as well as most subsidies for industrial production, and increased interest rates and the process of regulated products (Ellner, 2008: 79).

As a result of a 'loss of confidence in the economy at a time of declining oil prices', President Herrera implemented exchange controls in 1983 (Ellner, 2008: 79). In the ensuing Venezuelan economic collapse, poverty increased faster than in any other Latin American country in modern history as discussed further below. The Pact's structure also resulted in unresponsive government. This was

evident during the economic decline of the 1980s and 1990s, as social polarisation, discontent and the inability of the parties of the Pact to act on these issues became increasingly obvious.

AD and COPEI emphasised the maintenance of party discipline in order to avoid another military dictatorship. They established deep-rooted support amongst interest groups and actively discouraged internal political disagreements. The parties themselves became too rigid to cope with the economic problems of the late 1970s and this resulted in a loss of faith in both the system of government as well as the Pact of Punto Fijo. As long as oil provided for the Venezuelan population the Pact would be supported. The development of a left wing opposition that was vehemently opposed to the clientelistic nature of the Pact made the situation worse.

The rise of the Venezuelan Left

The rise of the left in Venezuela, and its earlier political exclusion by the PF parties, also reflected the exclusion of those Venezuelans who lived outside the concerns of the system. Some leftist groups who had earlier used violence gradually gained electoral support. Punto Fijo exclusionary tactics eventually gave way to concessionary measures, such as decentralisation of the vote for mayors, which opened up local politics for leftist parties (Raby, 2006; Gott, 1970; Wilpert, 2007; Buxton, 2001).

In 1959 worker and student demonstrations against Betancourt's anti-left and pro-US stance were violently ended by government forces. In response to this, the majority of the youth section of AD formed a break-off group called the *Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR). The MIR and PCV joined together in 1962 to begin using guerrilla tactics. Later in 1963 they joined other leftist groups and collectively formed *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (Armed Forces of National Liberation, FALN), and became a more organised guerrilla collective (Raby, 2006: 137). The FALN also had an ad-hoc political arm, *Frente Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Front, FLN) (Raby, 2006: 137). The FALN manifesto was highly progressive,

according to Gott, including several distinct agendas: 'To enforce respect for national sovereignty and independence, the freedom and democratic life of Venezuelan people ... to set up a revolutionary, nationalist and democratic government' (1970: 197-8). This manifesto was an early draft of future Venezuelan leftist political positions, and framed in direct ideological opposition to the traditional Pact parties.

The guerrilla movement had disbanded by 1970, due to its failure to achieve any lasting impact. They also decided to pursue electoral politics, although there was a visible lack of political cohesion within the groups themselves due to a variety of ideologies and agendas. In 1964 MIR and PCV declared an end to armed struggle but Douglas Bravo and Fabricio Ojeda reorganised it and intended to use it as a platform to continue the struggle. In 1970 the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement for Socialism, MAS) broke away from MIR and calling for: 'electoral participation, concentration on urban areas, diversity of forms of struggle and tactical flexibility; they also broke publicly with the Soviet Union' (Raby, 2006: 139). Other leftist groups included political parties such as *La Causa Radical* (The Radical Cause, LCR). The government had successfully contained the attempts by the left to violently overthrow the state and, as a result, these groups formed political parties and hoped to legitimately gain power. This was achieved in 1993 and in 1998 with thanks to Mayoral elections being decentralised. When oil prices dropped and the economic slide began a viable alternative to Punto Fijo politics was already in place.

Economic decline and Neoliberal restructuring

Although post-1958 AD had prioritised Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) and social welfare, the debt crisis of 1983 led to increased unemployment, poverty and inflation, and governments began to borrow colossal sums. Coronil notes that Black Friday was a result of Luis Herrera Campíns' (1979-1984) huge spending and misuse of state funds.[22] Foreign borrowing grew from c. US$ 9

[22] Black Friday relates to 28 February 1983 which resulted when Campins 'relented and announced the implementation of a new, three-tiered, exchange system ... with devaluation, the economic bubble was pricked' (Hellinger, 1991: 127).

billion to approximately US$ 24 billion from 1980-1983, the currency was devalued and capital flight controls were put in place (1997: 370). During the presidencies of both Campíns and Jaime Lusinchi (1984-1989) Venezuela suffered high inflation and a 'disequilibrium in the principle macro-economic indicators, a deterioration of public-sector salaries, the flight of capital, and internal and external indebtedness' (Fernandes, 2010: 68). Furthermore, the economy continued to decline and debt rose in tandem, leaving Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979 and 1989-1993) to implement the *Gran Viraje* (Great Turnaround) (Coronil, 1997: 371; Fernandes, 2010: 68; Lander, 2005: 20-38).

In this scenario, poverty grew, and Ellner notes, 'social polarization increased the distances and the tension between the unorganized sectors of the population and organized and privileged ones' (2003: 21). Increased poverty also had the effect of minimising the access poor Venezuelans had to basic healthcare, housing and education, thus making 'growing urban segregation and social polarization,' as Fernandes points out (2010: 74). Even when the state had certain social welfare polices in place they often proved ineffective, once again calling into question the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Pact. This social polarisation was matched by developments in the political realm during the 1990s when the traditional (AD, COPEI) parties identified completely with middle and upper class interests, while the parties *La Causa Radical* (The Radical Cause, LCR) and (later) *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR) represented the poor, thus signalling a break with the consensus-based elite politics of the Pact.

None of the social programmes that were implemented in response to the crisis effectively mediated the impact of neoliberal structural adjustment. According to Fernandes, by 1997 unemployment and inflation grew and real income had fallen (2008: 40). Poverty had become more commonplace, and even though oil prices rose in 1991 and the economy started to grow, social and economic deprivation continued to rise (Buxton, 2003: 118). Social tensions became increasingly pronounced in everyday life. The number of homicides increased dramatically, and the middle and upper classes responded by privatising roads, and putting bars and electric fences in place in order to keep out the 'dangerous class'

singled-out by the media as the cause of social discontent (Lander, 2005: 27). However, the situation in Venezuela had reached its pinnacle by the end of the 1990s according to Fernandes:

> By 1998, 81 percent lived below the poverty line and those living in extreme poverty had risen to 4.8 percent. In December 1997, there were 3 million homes in poverty and more than 1.6 million homes in situations of extreme poverty (2010: 73).

Poverty had become an acute symbol of the inefficiency of the Pact, and compounded by the effect of neoliberal restructuring the Venezuelan political landscape was starting to shift.

Neoliberalism

The post-1970s economic downturns occurred in Venezuela either because the government failed 'to control the expansion or because oil prices fell, or both' (Ellner, 2008: 85). This resulted in the state accepting macroeconomic restructuring policies that foreign financial institutions recommended, thus eroding government control, increasing poverty and further intensifying social polarisation (Ellner, 2008: 85). Neoliberal reforms affected many Latin American countries even though the speed of change occurred at different paces.[23]

According to Lander, during the 1960s there was a shift in the redistribution of power that favoured the under-privileged on a global scale – as national liberation movements spread, social welfare became established and democratisation occurred, which in Latin America led to a crisis among oligarchical regimes and a widening participation in popular struggles against them (2005: 22). In Venezuela, oil rents had helped improve the conditions of the majority of the population after the foundation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 (Lander, 2005: 22). Despite

[23] See: Albo, 2008; Coker, 1999; Denis in Spronk and Webber, 2011; Gwynne and Cristóbal, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Parker, 2005; Sader, 2008; and Stokes, 2008.

this, the distribution of power continued to favour the privileged, especially in terms of the business relationships the parties of the Pact had established.

By the 1970s profits the threat of profit loss and communism as a result of the redistribution of democratic power led to Neoliberalism being promoted by neo-conservatives such as Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher and this occurred 'at all levels: military, political, technological, and economic' (Lander, 2010: 22-23). Foreign debt was a central weapon in this global strategy, as if a country defaulted on debt payments, severe economic controls would be imposed by supranational institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation and Bretton Woods multilateral financial institutions (Lander, 2005: 23-24). These "recommendations" became increasingly more important than the opinions of anyone else in the polity, a stark statement of the power these institutions have (Lander, 2005: 24).

Although neoliberal discourse identifies economic growth as the only way to aid the development of democracy, it has been quite unconvincing in most of Latin America. Authoritarian governments around Latin America restructured the state to adapt to the demands of the new global economic order and 'deregulation, liberalization, privatization, reduction of the state's social activity, and the limitation of social rights' were put into practice (Lander, 2010: 20). Poverty and unemployment had increased, the informal sector had grown, income gaps had widened, and there was less protective legislation in the 1990s than during the 1960s (Cannon, 2009; Fernandes, 2010: 42; Lander, 2005: 25). This was compounded by the effects neoliberal reforms have on democracy: 'because market reforms have frequently intensified social inequalities, this agenda may actually undermine the prospects for genuine democracy in Latin America' (Adams, 2003: 79).

According to Wilpert, in Venezuela, 'the results of neo-liberalism, which meant privatization of state assets, free trade, state fiscal austerity, and deregulation of the labor market, were far from as good as neo-liberalism's apostles had claimed they would be' (2007: 3). Wilpert argues that Venezuela reflected the inadequacies of neoliberalism 'between 1980 and 1999, during the height of

neoliberalism in Latin America, per capita economic growth of the continent was a paltry 11%, compared to an 80% per capita GDP growth the previous 20 years (2007: 3). In Venezuela the gains of the golden years of the oil boom in the 1970s were unpicked during neoliberal reforms and privatisation of the 1990s (Ellner, 2008: 85).

Therefore, although the pre-1990s economic decline had a huge impact on the poor, neoliberal restructuring and international financial control of the Venezuelan economy helped shape substantial changes in society and politics. Writing in the late 1990s, Coronil suggested that:

> No longer able to rely on state support, major economic groups have pursued profit-making by controlling key aspects of the market ... While some of the economic groups which grew under protectionism have now declined, others, particularly those with diversified national and international investments, have become new centres of economic and political power. Under neoliberalism, centralized power has not been dispersed, it has changed form (Coronil, 1997: 382).

Fernandes (2010: 67) stresses the effect neoliberal reforms had on the state-urban relationship, also arguing that for Venezuela to become a global actor, it had to move away from the previous system of a state-based development model which increased social inequality because of the demands of neoliberal restructuring (2010: 67). This had the effect of increasing inequalities and raising tensions within society.

A significant expression of discontent with neoliberal reform in Venezuela was evident in the *Caracazo* discussed in the next section.[24] Therefore neoliberalism can be seen as having a destructive effect on the poor in Venezuela, increasing social polarization and inequality that added to the growing discontent felt about the parties of the Pact that contributed to their eventual demise and the beginnings of radically different forms of government.

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[24] For more on the *Caracazo* and a detailed discussion of political violence in Venezuela see Lopez-Maya, 2003; Lopez-Maya and Lander, 2005, and Coronil and Skurski, 1991.

The end of the Pact and the rise of third parties

COPEI's Rafael Caldera (1969-1974) was elected in the early 1970s, and the economy was strong to the point of Venezuela being called "Saudi Venezuela".[25] In this economic and political climate the majority of people supported the parties of the Pact. Parties of the Pact and their system of government had attracted a great deal of criticism from the left, inspiring guerrilla movements and the mobilisation of the poor. Buxton points to the leftist armed movements as having estranged most Venezuelans, thus inadvertently helping to strengthen support for the Pact (2001: 17-19).

One of the main reasons the economy began to decline in the 1980s was the reliance on clientelistic relationships between business and government – the larger business grew, the more small businesses failed (Buxton, 2001: 31-35). This system of preferential treatment was a corrupt method that ultimately affected any chance that Venezuelan development could detach itself from oil revenue dependency and towards alternative industries and economic models. Government in Venezuela had continued to haemorrhage legitimacy. The Pact eventually became unworkable as crises developed in several key areas, including the economy, society, and in the legal system. The Pact's complacency also extended to internal structures, a fact reflected in their financial security and closed-list electoral systems, the latter, which facilitated centralised leadership elections (Buxton, 2001: 17-19). All of these factors calcified the Pact's capacity to deal with social and economic developments. As Buxton argues, 'parties and their affiliated organisations became increasingly detached from society. But given limitations of autonomous organisation, the result of political alienation was popular disincorporation rather than political change' (2001: 20). Thus, the contained system meant influence was hard to obtain, further fuelling the alienation of the poor and other interest groups. This detachment was exacerbated by the electoral system which the Pact had developed.

[25] Scholars coined the phrase Venezuelan exceptionalism at this time.

Until the 1990s the system of electing mayors and state governors was centralised, which severely limited the influence of third-parties on the political system. The presidential elections were first-past-the-post, and a closed-list system was in place for regional elections, which in turn were packed with AD and COPEI representatives as they could afford a national platform. The Organic Law of Suffrage awarded incumbents with funding allocations based on previous results, which 'provid[ed] successful parties with a rolling advantage and the funding base for the creation of powerful electoral machines' (Buxton 2001: 23). The development of these powerful electoral machines further prevented third parties from gaining access to political power unless they formed coalitions with the major parties of the Pact. A variety of restrictions, particularly around election rules, maintained the Pact's elevated position.

As parties of the Pact developed electoral systems in their favour, as well as fostering financial and organisational advantages, they also ruled immune to any serious political opposition. As a result, the PF parties often enjoyed complete control of the house, congress, and control of legislation passed (often setting out law by decree), all resulting in a lack of checks and balances in a presidential democracy (Buxton, 2001: 25-30; Levine and Crisp, 1999: 404-406). Alongside these issues, local level positions were often given out as rewards for loyalty, while public funds were redirected back to party headquarters to be used as campaign finance (Buxton, 2001: 31-35).[26] As a result, Transparency International's report of 1980-1992 set Venezuela as the second most corrupt country in Latin America and ex-Presidents Lusinchi and Leoni were investigated for associated issues (Buxton, 2001: 31-35).[27] This heightened the political alienation felt towards the party and electoral system, especially among the poor majority of the population.

The legal system began to show signs of breakdown as trials for several thousand inmates became backlogged, leading to ever more overcrowded prisons. This resulted in prison riots and deaths, while the recommended number of judges per

[26] This was especially due to the erosion of accountability due to the lack of a taxation system which allowed massive financial corruption to happen (Buxton, 2001: 31-35).
[27] Raul Leoni was president from 1964-1969.

capita slipped below the United Nations average (Buxton, 2001: 33). The judiciary placed little value on complaints; meanwhile, as waiting times for judicial decisions stretched up to fifteen years, state repression and violence in the *barrios* became commonplace (Buxton, 2001: 33). The central state's failure to maintain law and order called into question both legitimacy of the state itself, as well as that of the two Pact parties. All this led to growing calls for an alternative system of government that would be more reflective of society.

Venezuelan people had no channels available to them to express their interests unless they were beneficiaries of *Puntiofijismo*. Media outlets were aligned with the Pact and third parties suffered due to the aforementioned electoral system. In 1983 a think-tank called *Roraima* developed proposals to reform the economy in terms of *Proposición al país* (Proposition for the Country) and in *Más y Mejor Democracia* (More and Better Democracy). Later, *Roraima* informed the development of the *Comisón Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado* (Presidential Commission for the Reform of the State, COPRE). Through COPRE, President Lusinchi had hoped, in principle, to introduce a package of progressive reforms. COPRE set out the devolved election of mayors and state governors, strengthening checks and balances and lessening the influence of Pact parties in elections, as well as promoting greater political transparency (Fernandes, 2010; Levine and Crisp, 1999: 344; Wilpert, 2007). Although COPRE actively hoped to influence these changes, Lusinchi was called into check by AD (and the consensus politics of the Pact), and it was not until Carlos Andrés Pérez's second term that political crisis gave way to serious political change.

As earlier discussed, neoliberalism had a negative effect on the poor in Venezuela, and became an out of favour mode of economics within the Venezuelan polity. The way the parties of the Pact implemented neoliberal policies and the mis-management of the economy became one the key reasons the Pact failed. Other factors include the on-going corruption and loss of legitimacy the Pact created as well as providing insufficient space for people to participate in their polity. In terms of the huge impact neoliberalism had on the

fate of the Pact, events such as implementing huge reform packages had a devastating effect.

In 1988 Pérez was re-elected as president on an election platform based on the previous boom period as well as for his anti-neoliberal reform stance. During Pérez's second term in 1990 he introduced neoliberal reforms due to the pressure he was under from foreign creditors to 'implement an IMF-style austerity program, [which meant that] he dismantled protections, deregulated prices, and reduced social spending' (Fernandes, 2008: 40).[28]

Reduced social spending manifested itself in a move away from universal access to social welfare and towards the privatisation of social services and 'creating compensatory programs designed to mediate the effects of the neoliberal reforms' such as was evident in the *Plan de Enfrentamiento de Pobreza* (Plan to Fight Poverty, PEP) (Fernandes, 2008: 40). Later Pérez implemented the *Plan de Solidaridad Social* (Social Solidarity Plan, PSS), but this was too ambitious and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) took on much of the work, as public resources were scarce (Fernandes, 2008: 40). Attempts by Pérez to minimise the impact of neoliberal adjustment policies were ineffective and far too damaging in any case to be contained by token social programmes.

Because of Pérez's *volte face* on his election promises and his implementation of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) backed policy, fuel prices rose dramatically. The period of protest known as the *Caracazo* first took place in Caracas and spread around Venezuela, all due to the doubling of bus fares overnight. The protests were followed by looting, rioting and the government ordered the military to suppress the unrest leading to an official death total of several hundred but with unofficial estimates closer to thousands (Fernades, 2010; Raby, 2006; 142; López Maya, 2003). According to López Maya, the protests were not a spontaneous event, but were linked to the long-standing

[28] This particular plan was called *El Gran Viaje: Lineamientos Generales del VIII Plan de la Nación* (The Great Turnaround: General Directions for the VIII Plan of the Nation). Pérez was also guided by his VIII Plan of the Nation which set out how the state should 'reduce its field of action, focussing on assigning public resources only to areas strategic for encouraging private investment' (Fernandes, 2010: 70).

Venezuelan University movement, an active political participant dating as far back as the nineteenth-century which became most active in reaction to the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s (2003: 122). Student involvement in the *Caracazo* can also, in some ways, be linked to violent student protests in Mérida some days previously, which resulted in the death of a student (López Maya, 2003: 122). The *Caracazo* was, therefore, an expression of people's opposition to Pérez's macroeconomic package, and the only way they could react given the lack of adequate channels to express themselves to 'those in the corridors of power' (López Maya, 2003: 135).

The *Caracazo* had the effect of inspiring two *coup d'état* attempts led by Hugo Chávez in 1992 yet, more importantly, signalled that the political system was in grave crisis and seriously questioned how stable and exceptional it really was. As Ellner and Tinker Salas have written, 'the mass disturbances in opposition to neoliberal austerity measures known as the *Caracazo* led Venezuelans and especially scholars to question the premises of the exceptionalism paradigm' (Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2005: 10). López Maya also suggests that the weakness of Venezuelan state institutions was evident in their inability to contain the conflict, negotiate with key figures in order to maintain order, and highlighting the fact that political actors and unions should have 'been in tune with their constituencies [so that] they could have foreseen the trouble arising' (2003: 136). Cannon also concurs that 'the Venezuelan state could not execute the policies needed to ameliorate these social fractures, illustrating the inability of successive governments in Venezuela to ensure legitimacy and avoid chaos' (2010: 31). Lastly, Coronil and Skursi (1991: 318) note that rising petrol prices in an oil-producing nation negated the imagined bond between state and *pueblo* (the people), as petroleum was seen as jointly owned. Therefore, the *Caracazo* can be viewed as a symbolic revolt, breaking the illusion that the economy could be 'adjusted with popular acquiescence' (Coronil and Skursi, 1991: 318). The *Caracazo* can be read as an event reflecting people's discontent with the parties and government of the Pact as well as frustration with neoliberal reform agendas. In turn this 'welfare gap' between people's need and the reduced legitimacy of the political status quo led to the left's growing popularity (Stokes, 2008: 2).

The Pact became vulnerable to the efforts of civil society groups to diminish the political structures so important to the PF parties.

As these issues developed in Venezuela, civil society groups attempted to influence and inform democratic change. Civil society did much to change the negative effects of the Pact, as Levine and Crisp argue, they:

> proposed and constructed alternatives, campaigned for their incorporation into the law, and maintained steady pressure on public opinions and institutions including women's and human rights groups, cooperatives and neighbourhood movements (1999: 408).

By the 1990s, political parties had lost legitimacy and power to civil society groups, who were vehemently opposed to party influence in general, in turn gaining support both nationally and internationally. While they managed to get their agenda into the public sphere, their opposition to electoral politics resulted in a long-term lack of political power, apart from the short-lived LCR, which eventually became a political party (Levine and Crisp, 1999: 408-9). One of the most successful of these civil society groups was the *Asociación de Vecinos* (neighbourhood association) which, according to Levine and Crisp:

> ... spawned a range of organizations and pursued a variety of goals, from neighbourhood preservation and local political action to major institutional changes, municipal reforms (and related changes in the electoral system) have been central to their agenda from the start (1999: 408).

Another among the emerging of civil society groups figured was *Queremos Eligir* (We Want Choice), which also campaigned for electoral change, and the middle class *Asociaciones de Vecinos* (discussed further below), which had a great deal of political influence but were primarily interested in middle class issues to the neglect of those resources necessary for the poor (Fernandes, 2010: 56-58; Hellinger, 2011: 31, 53).

Groups such as these also exerted a certain degree of influence over the development of policy. When presidents such as Pérez came up against questions about their legitimacy and corruption, they facilitated civil society

groups in order to try to rebalance public discontent with their system of leadership and government.

As violent state repression of the poor and those who operated subversively continued, the legitimacy of the parties of the Pact declined and civil society groups responded by resisting their inclusion into party politics. Groups such as the Justices of Peace were successful in helping to secure the *Ley Orgánica de Tribunales y Procédimientos de Paz* (Organic Law of Tribunals and Procedures) in 1993 in response to escalating violence. As Buxton explains, the Justices of Peace placed specific emphasis on 'the concept of restructuring civil society, encouraging autonomous community action, participation and resolution of problems independent of the *partidocratic* system' (2001: 35). Nonetheless, civil society groups such as this did pave the way for developments by influencing policy with a more democratic and inclusive agenda, making the most of political crises during the Pérez administration in order to achieve these changes.

As Pérez was losing legitimacy in office he gave COPRE several important concessions that were important landmarks in the decline of the Pact's political hegemony. In an act of desperation, Pérez granted COPRE ministerial status and allowed for mayors and state governors to be elected at a local level, national and local elections were separated, and a more mixed and fairer electoral system was introduced (Buxton, 2001: 44-45). These developments opened up the political system more than any other event in Venezuela's political history before 1998.

Participation became important for activists in poor *barrios* because it was a means of survival. Later, during Carlos Andrés Peréz second presidency (1989-1993) the middle classes became particularly active in participatory processes. However, participation before 1998 was not far reaching or greatly impacting.

During the 1980s funds for people living in *barrios* were essential but participation was carried out mainly by activists, and was therefore relatively limited. Nonetheless, Bruce notes that during the 1980s community meals (*sancocho comunitario*) were organised in order to raise money for projects in

various *barrios* (Bruce, 2008: 25). This reflected an on-going struggle in communities during this time:

> an impressive and more or less uninterrupted history of self-help initiatives, alongside a stream of demands and complaints levelled at local and national authorities, and a dynamic of rapid response to each and every opportunity opened up to it from above (Bruce, 2008: 27).

As discussed above, the *Asociaciones de Vecinos* were mainly set up in – and by – middle-class neighbourhoods (they only appeared in working class areas later) in order to challenge Punto Fijo parties' failures both nationally and locally, and to have more influence over local government. The *Asociaciones de Vecinos* operated in a manner common to neoliberal states with a minimally interventionist government, and as such implemented social policy given the practical absence of the state. However, once they became legal, parties began to influence them, eventually co-opting them and they were debilitated by bureaucracy. The *Asociaciones de Vecinos* were eventually subsumed by the parties and served the interests of a few, not the collective and, as a result, much of the community no longer participated (Bruce, 2008: 28). *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (grassroots church organisations, CEBs) inspired by liberation theology became prominent in the *barrios* and later cultural, sporting and educational organisations appeared which offered community support for local residents (Bruce, 2008: 29). In response to the corruption of *Puntofijismo* the groups were largely anti-political parties, and wanted to avoid political clientelism, including in those of a leftist bent.

From the introduction of political reforms third parties were able to operate in a much more open system, operating more actively than either AD or COPEI, and further discrediting their approach to governance. Neither AD or COPEI displayed a great deal of urgency in directly appealing to the electorate at a local level and they were substantially disengaged. In a context that has been described by Lander as 'social apartheid' – evident in the society's divisions, lack of inclusion and access to resources – institutional political reforms 'could make only a partial and limited contribution to the achievement of a nationally integrated political system' (2005: 28). However, the reforms did go some way

towards reforming potential access to political representation and led to a decline of the dominant parties' influence. Although Pérez had granted concessions to COPRE (arguably in a controlled attempt to maintain the status quo), he was put on trial in 1992-1993 for corruption charges while third parties made gains in Caracas, Aragua and Bolivar states.

These developments worried the major parties so much that they stated campaigning for the presidential elections in 1993. As the Pact and associated parties had lost much of their respect and their generally weak electoral appeal at a local level, a 'third party' called *La Convergencia* and headed by COPEI founder Rafael Caldera (1994-1998) won the presidential elections primarily because of his public distancing from the Pact parties and his (initial) anti-neoliberal rhetoric. Many of Caldera's followers had left COPEI to join his newly founded party, which in turn meant his old party was crippled.

However, Caldera governed in much the same way as the Pact had in the past, and he continued introducing neoliberal reforms, making him unpopular and little different to the Pact's system, thus placing a question mark over the plausibility of calling *La Convergencia*'s a legitimate third party. During his first year in office, Caldera implemented a hybrid mix of neoliberal and anti-neoliberal policies but eventually he fully accepted restructuring reforms (Fernandes, 2010: 71). Caldera also replaced the PEP with several plans to save the Venezuelan economy, including the *Plan de Solidaridad Social* in 1994 (which had an economic development emphasis) and the *Plan de Recuperación y Establización Económica* (Plan for Recuperation and Economic Stabilisation). By 1996 he was in consultation with the IMF in order to create a macroeconomic stabilisation plan called *Agenda Venezuela* (Buxton, 2003: 121; Ellner, 2008: 101-102; Fernandes, 2010: 72; Fernandes, 2008: 40). Even so, by the time the agenda was in place, unemployment and poverty had risen dramatically and Venezuela's infrastructure was rocked by power shortages and blackouts (Buxton, 2003: 121).

Caldera also further discredited his position by attempting to privatise the aluminium, steel and oil industries (Ellner, 208: 101-102). By maintaining the

status quo Caldera also carried on the system of government that he started in, thus creating a 'softer' version of a Pact government. As Caldera failed to halt the implementation of neoliberal restructuring, the newly politically empowered Venezuelan general population desired a complete break with anything associated with the neoliberal-elite consensus that underlined the Pact. As Ellner and Tinker Salas state (2005: 10), the Pact parties' loss of prestige can be ascribed to the fact that two presidents were elected on an anti-neoliberal campaign platform only to accept neoliberalism once they were elected. The combination of factors that led to this decline in legitimacy also created a political vacuum to be filled by an alternative party leader. As a direct result of the Pact's ideology, politics and the system of government, a leftist President was elected in 1998.[29] Chávez responded to the injustices that occurred during the Pact and represented the desire for change that existed among the Venezuelan poor, but several Pact-era problems continue to trouble the Venezuelan government, including issues associated with clientelism and state-managed participation.

The Pact eventually became completely discredited for several reasons at different points in time. Firstly, the system of consensus between the parties over the representation of the electorate, as well as the policy responses to the developing crises, helped de-legitimise the ideologies of AD and COPEI. Secondly, given internal political crises and the placing of the party before the interests of the electorate, clientelism became a necessary method for maintaining influence of elites and corruption escalated. Thirdly, the effects of the discontent with, and alienation from, the political system felt by the poor (and to some extent the middle classes) led to crises such as the *Caracazo* that the

[29] Ellner and Tinker Salas also argue that as Caldera 'unexpectedly implemented neoliberal formulas that aggravated social inequality. These turnabouts created political and social tensions that led to the electoral triumph of the leftist former coup leader Hugo Chávez in 1998' (2005: 7). Ellner also states that Venezuela response to free market reforms was a deepening crisis and that this 'was evident in the rejection of three presidents who supported neoliberalism [and] the ultimate election of Chávez in 1998' (2008: 90). While it is true that neoliberal formulas aggravated social inequality and led to crises of political legitimacy, there are other factors that contributed to the election of Chávez and the complete break with the Pact, as I argue throughout this dissertation. Several authors (Cannon, 2009: 31; Lander, 2005: 21) also point to individual causes for the election of Chávez, which are not full explanations for the reasons behind this.

government contained with violence, thus fuelling the coup attempts of 1992. These events exacerbated on-going social polarization, as the gap between rich and poor widened and neoliberal-restructuring policies impacted on an alienated society. These were exactly the problems that Chávez campaigned against for his presidency in 1998.

The *Chavismo* Phenomenon

Hugo Chávez Frias was born in 1954 and had lower-middle class parents who worked as teachers in Venezuela's poorest state, Barinas. He took up a military career that educated young officers to university degree level. During his education he 'received university courses in social sciences – some of them from Marxist or left-wing lecturers' (Raby, 2006: 145). His first posting was to confront guerrillas in the 1970s and although he did not agree with their methods, he began to question the 'repressive role of the military' (Raby, 2006: 145). Chávez was also indirectly linked with the left in Venezuela as his brother Adán was involved with the guerrilla movement.[30] These experiences may have influenced his decision to set up the *Ejército de Liberación del Pueblo* (Liberation Army of the People, ELPV) in 1977. During Chávez's time in the military, the ELPV became the EBR-200. The EBR-200 was an acronym using some of the initials of the following revolutionaries: Ezequial Zamora, Simón Bolívar, and Simón Rodríguez. It also had another meaning – the *Ejército Bolivariano Revolucionario* (Bolivarian Revolutionary Army, EBR), whilst the number 200 stood for the 200th anniversary of Bolívar's birth. The ELPV were inspired by revolutionary figures, but became decreasingly active until the 1989 *Caracazo*.

The *Caracazo* inspired EBR-200 to take action. The military officers in EBR-200 had resolved that the repression in the *Caracazo* was completely unacceptable and the clandestine group planned a response, and in 1992 attempted to overthrow President Pérez. The 1992 coup was unsuccessful as

[30] This was especially true as Adán was a member of the *Partido de la Revolución Venezolana* (Party of the Venezuelan Revolution) led by ex-guerrilla Douglas Bravo (Raby, 2006: 145).

informants betrayed the EBR-200 and, as a result, Chávez was left surrounded by pro-government forces in Caracas. He promised to surrender in return for a one-minute television slot to announce for members of the EBR-200 to lay down their arms in order to avoid any killings. The television appearance had a lasting impact:

> Chávez's one-minute television appearance, which gave a face to a military rebellion that enjoyed widespread popular support, turned him into a folk hero, both for taking responsibility for the failed rebellion – something practically no other politician had ever done – and for suggesting that he would try again sometime because his group's objectives had not been achieved "for now" (Wilpert, 2007: 17).

President Caldera capitalised on the popular support for Chávez by pardoning him in 1994. Such was the success of the *Por Ahora* (For Now) speech that many *Circulos Bolivarianos* (Bolivarian Circles, BCs) were set up around Venezuela to discuss the ideas of Bolivarianism that Chávez had introduced before his imprisonment. Chávez decided to capitalise on support and began to campaign in the 1997 presidential elections. He discontinued the use of armed struggle and, as a gesture to the move to unarmed electoral politics, changed EBR-200 to MBR-200 to emphasise *Movimiento* (movement) rather than *Ejército* (army). Consequently, Chávez entered electoral politics with a vision to become the elected head of state. The MBR-200 changed to *Movimiento Quinta República* (Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), suggesting the aim to create a fifth republic (V is the roman numeral for five) and to mark a definitive break with *Punto Fijo* party politics. MVR decided to select Chávez as their presidential candidate and formed an alliance with *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement to Socialism, MAS), the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (Communist Party of Venezuela, PCV) and *Patria para Todos* (Homeland for All, PPT), plus other minor parties in a coalition called *Polo Patriótico* (Patriotic Pole), thus obtaining enough electoral support to win the 1998 elections with 56.2 per cent of the vote (Raby, 2006: 157).[31]

[31] For a detailed assessment of the political and electoral history of Chávez see Gott, 2000, Raby, 2006; Wilpert, 2007; Buxton, 2001.

The middle classes made up a great deal of the 1998 vote for Chávez, while he also attracted the votes of the poor: 'He won the vote with support from nearly all classes of society, but especially from the disenchanted middle class which had slowly been slipping into poverty for the previous twenty years, and from the country's poor' (Wilpert, 2007: 18). By 2004, however, there was almost blanket support for Chávez from the lower social classes (Wilpert, 2007: 18-19). Therefore, the shift from having some middle-class support to mainly working-class represents a transformation in his appeal, which can also be seen as a reflection of his policy to remove many elites from privileged positions (such as the Supreme Court and the National Assembly) and by those social and economic initiatives that favoured the poor. This had the effect of polarising Venezuelan public opinion, as well as international commentators, and challenged Chávez's legitimacy in several ways and also helped shape the development of his tenure.

The development of *Chavismo*

There are several factors fuelling the development of *Chavismo* towards the 2006 pronouncement that Venezuela would follow a socialist agenda. Strong national and international opposition to the Bolivarian project helped to shape the trajectory of Chávez's policy delivery, along with the implementation and development of specific ideological goals ranged from general reformism to a more specific Venezuelan Socialism. Firstly, it has always been developed with a focus on supporting the poor. Secondly, the notion of widening participation has been at the core of the project from the outset, and was made a constitutional provision in 1999. Thirdly, the international oil economy exercised a profound impact on the Venezuelan economy and at times has allowed Chávez to financially underpin various social initiatives. Fourthly, regional integration policies, such as ALBA, have also entrenched Bolivarianism, and the regional support Chávez has received has enabled him to radicalise his agenda. Finally, one of the most significant defining elements shaping Bolivarianism has been opposition to Chavez's project.

The trajectory of Chávez's presidency has been set by a fusion if his own ambitions but also as a result of external factors. In the first instance *Chavismo* developed with a focus on the poor in Venezuela that had in one way or another been affected by *Puntofijismo* and this correlates with the notion of widening the means of participation which became constitutional. The international oil economy also helped the participatory and developmental initiative to grow especially in response to opposition both nationally and internationally. The entire Chávez project has survived with thanks in part to the regional support within ALBA and this has helped provide a base to implement a more radical agenda. This journey has also shaped how people are able to participate especially in the way that the Venezuelan state has managed it and the provision of finance the initiatives depend on. Furthermore, participation is shaped by the types of bureaucracy the state has in place to manage participation, as this has problems that can affect how participatory initiatives are played out. Other important issues such as the dependency of participatory initiatives on the state are reflected in the states dependence on the international oil economy for revenue to run the country.

Photograph 1: Picture of Chávez campaigning for PSUV (Adam Gill).

President Chávez has faced several attempts to oust him from office, including energetic and often ruthless opposing groups in Venezuela, usually drawn from the middle and upper classes. The omnipresent opposition has served as a catalyst for the social and political change that Chávez desired, and they have marked different distinct stages since 1998 (Buxton, 2009; Ellner, 2008; Wilpert, 2007). Many of these have developed from his outspoken stance on international politics as well as leftist reforms promoted in Venezuela. In this way, Chávez's position on US foreign policy has provoked further discontent from international political figures. This is potentially one of the reasons Chávez has sought international political allies both in Latin America, through ALBA, and outside the region, through the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Several examples have attracted negative responses in the international political arena.[32] An important consequence is that those who oppose his Bolivarian project are more able to focus on his unconventional political discourse rather than the positive impact Bolivarianism may have had on Venezuela.

The central government provides resources to the Bolivarian projects by using oil revenues from the state-owned *Petróleos de Venezuela* SA (Venezuela Petroleum, PDVSA) oil company. Oil is the principle commodity in the international economy and is subject to volatile price fluctuations although Venezuelan efforts have attempted to reinvigorate OPEC in order to create more price leverage for oil producing countries and, by extension, over, their economy. Venezuela is still heavily dependent on oil revenue as the level of internally generated taxation is extremely low and petroleum prices also fluctuate.[33] This dependency of the Venezuelan system, which only became a functioning state on the basis of oil production and the negotiation of international contracts in the 1920s (Coronil 1997; Karl 1996), directly links the country with the international economy and also poses the on-going dangers associated with 'Dutch disease'.[34]

This chapter concurs with two studies (Buxton, 2009; Ellner, 2008) that delineate the different phases of Chávez's presidency and its growing radicalisation. Ellner offers several economic and political factors or stages in explaining the development of Chávez's presidency:

> (1) a moderate period (1999-2000) in which socioeconomic objectives were subordinated to political proposals; (2) A more radical stage (2001-

[32] After President Bush stood down from the podium at the United Nations (2007), Chávez stated that he could smell sulphur, as if to suggest a negative image of the US President. In another example, Chávez was asked *¿por qué no te callas?* (Why don't you shut up?) by King Juan Carlos I of Spain as he repeatedly interrupted Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at the Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, Chile in 2007. These examples serve as an illustration of how Chávez has attracted negative reactions, both to himself and to his projects in Venezuela and Latin America.

[33] It is cheaper than bottled water in some cases.

[34] 'Dutch disease' is a term which reflects the dependency of a country on natural resource exploitation and the apparent decline in other sectors of the economy, such as agriculture. It also refers to 'the recessionary impacts of a booming resource-based export sector based on inflationary pressures and the appreciation of the real exchange rate generated by the booming sector, which in turn makes other exports less competitive or attractive' (Robinson, 2008: 66).

> 2004) in which the government followed an anti-neoliberal course, by ruling out privatization, and at the same time confronted an insurgent opposition that refused to recognise its legitimacy; and (3) the emergence of the outlines of a new economic model (in 2005) made possible by greater political stability as a result of the weakening of the opposition and the windfall in oil revenue. Chávez's resounding victory in the presidential elections of December 2006 and his announcement of economic and organizational changes signal the possible initiation of a fourth stage (2008: 110).

The second analysis, by Buxton, argues that Bolivarianism is more a 'case of Socialism by default than design' (2009: 57). Bolivarianism has responded to external factors such as the opposition of the USA, oil prices and the left wing tide in Latin America (Buxton, 2009: 58). She identifies three distinct stages in the evolution of Bolivarian socialism: 'its moderate social democratic beginnings; its more radical left-of-centre proposition; and the final third stage of creating a model of Twenty-first-century Socialism' (2009: 62). While external factors, such as the oil economy and regional support (and also integration into ALBA), have shaped this radicalisation, it seems uncertain that it was intended as a form of Socialism from the outset. Instead, Bolivarianism appears to have started out as a reformist government that later became radicalised.

Buxton's evaluation focuses on *external* factors whilst Ellner's four-stage analysis addresses *internal* politico-economic factors. Fusing both perspectives creates a view of developments that shaped Bolivarianism, of which participatory democracy is an essential aspect. In order to analyse this more closely, it is necessary to understand those moments when Chávez strengthened his efforts to create what appeared to be a form of dual power, an outcome which he evidently desired but which was not achieved. Instead, dual government occurred as the political structures of the Fourth Republic continue to exist and were not replaced.

During earlier reformist stages Chávez set up an *Asamblea Nacional Constituyente* (National Constituent Assembly), drafted a new constitution (and held a referendum on it), which already contained the principles of participatory democracy (Wilpert, 2007: 41, see also, Ellner, 2008: 111-112). Some in the left were worried that Chávez would not oppose capitalist interests enough, but they

were satisfied with his opposition to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) proposal during this period (Ellner, 2008: 112). He also confronted business by reforming the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (Workers Confederation of Venezuela, CTV), who combined with opposition parties and *Federación de Camaras de Comercio y Produción* (Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Production, FEDECAMARAS) in support of the *coup d'état* against Chávez in 2002. As Ellner has remarked, 'The prolonged alliance between FEDECAMARAS, the CTV, and the parties of the opposition was unprecedented in Venezuelan history' (Ellner, 2008: 114; see also, Wilpert, 2007: 23).

In order to provide assistance to poor Venezuelans, Chávez set up *Plan Bolívar* which deployed the military in several early Social Missions, thereby creating a civil-military alliance to help rebuild vital infrastructure. The use of separate channels for the provision of goods or services, as in the case in Plan Bolívar, is a method that took many forms during various stages. These have bypassed the state structures left over from the Fourth Republic, which have proved largely ineffective.

The next stage is seen as a more radical and anti-neoliberal phase due to Chávez's resistance to privatisation and his defiance of the opposition (Buxton, 2009: 62; Ellner, 2008: 110). He used forty-nine enabling laws to challenge and overturn neoliberal policies that had been previously implemented reflecting oil production, land and agriculture.[35] In addition the PSUV was formed to consolidate the various left wing parties that supported Chávez.[36] These radical developments were a catalyst for growth of the opposition, even though Chávez had attempted to make concessions to them. This led to some of the most

[35] The *Leyes Habilitantes* (enabling laws) of 2001 were far-reaching and included majority ownership of oil production as detailed in the *Ley Orgánica Hidrocarburos* (Organic Hydro Carbons Law) and Chávez asserted his government's position further in the *Ley de Tierras y Desarrollo Agrario* (Land and Agricultural Development Law) and *Ley de Pesca y Agricultura* (Fisheries and Agricultural Law).

[36] This consolidation also mirrored the CCs acting as a catch-all participatory initiative in 2006. This further reflects the centralised nature of the CCs and the role of participation in the construction of the dual government.

problematic years Chávez's presidency, despite the fact that it enabled him to pursue a more radicalised agenda.

The opposition was involved in an attempted coup in 2002 that lasted for forty-eight hours. Many poor people descended into Caracas from their *barrio* homes and surrounded the Miraflores presidential palace, demanding the reinstatement of Chávez, which eventually occurred after loyal troops had recaptured the palace and the interim government vanished. The opposition then organised a three-month oil and business lockout attempting to starve supporters of the government, but ultimately affecting their own incomes, as many Chávez supporters were dependent on the informal sector. The final attempt to oust Chávez was to demand a presidential recall election (as well as others) in 2004, which Chávez won by a greater margin than in 1998. The opposition were left without much direction other than an increasingly savage media. The opposition also boycotted congressional elections in late 2004, which left much of the house packed with *Chávistas*. As a final gesture to defeating Chávez, the opposition supported the governor of Zulia state, Manuel Rosales, in running for president in 2006. Rosales lost, with Chávez winning 62.8 per cent of the vote (Buxton, 2009: 67). The attempts to overthrow Chávez led to the further entrenchment of his support base among the poor, through the deeper implementation of participatory democracy (CCs), state provision (Missions) and state control (majority state ownership of PDVSA).

The development of participatory initiatives in Venezuela

This section analyses participatory initiatives that were introduced or incorporated by the state after 1998. It also outlines problems such as clientelism, corruption and co-optation that have been identified since this period. It could be that state-managed participatory initiatives such as the CCs may continue many of the problems of previous participatory initiatives such as the *Asociaciones de Vecinos*.

The *Círculos Bolivarianos* (Bolivarian Circles, BCs) were one of the first participatory outlets to be promoted by Chávez. The BCs became increasingly

popular around the time of the 1998 elections. Their aim was to form cadres to support the Bolivarian revolution, the constitution and ideology of Simón Bolívar as well as to serve community interests (Hawkins, 2010: 36). As early participation outlets they had the following role:

> According to the official information, the Círculos Bolivarianos are the basic organizational forms to mobilize and direct the participation of individuals and communities in the revolutionary process, with the goal of building the free society and nation of which Simón Bolívar dreamed (Salamanca in McCoy, 2004: 107).

BCs could be formed anywhere in Venezuela, including institutions such as schools and workplaces. The minimum membership of a BC is between seven and a maximum of eleven people. Once a BC had formed, the protocol was to go to the Miraflores Palace to meet the President and to become trained by the *Comando Supremo Revolucionario Bolivariano* (Supreme Bolivarian Revolutionary Command). At the pinnacle of the BCs' mobilisation, the central government formed *Comités de Salud* (Health Committees) that worked alongside the *Barrio Adentro* mission and it is estimated that there were some 6,500 in operation by 2007 (Hawkins 2010: 37). This suggests a close link between the President and participatory initiatives. Nonetheless, there were problems with the BCs that are common to other forms of participation in Venezuela.

The BCs eventually became electoral mobilisation groups designed to raise awareness and promote Chávez, and their early (post-*por ahora* speech, 1994) role as discussion and activism groups dwindled. In a study of BCs, Hawkins and Hansen (2006) analyse how they contribute to civil society, how they are organised, and the types of problems that they have faced. This study is useful here as it analyses an earlier participatory initiative that was centrally controlled to see if that affected its potential politicisation.

Hawkins and Hansen's investigation shows that the BCs were often clientelistic as they depended on directions handed down from central government. The BCs in their view 'did not broadly enhance the level of pluralism in the broader civil

society' (2006: 104) when looked at as a movement to widen participatory democracy.[37] However, BCs are less prominent now that the CCs are widespread. This is a theme that has been evident throughout Venezuela's participatory outlets. BCs as well as other outlets helped to form a blueprint for how participation would be structured as part of the dual government. This is a reflection of how the bureaucracy managed the participation the government introduced as well as how people participated in these initiatives.

Chávez was the first President to formally acknowledge that the *barrios* existed and called for the *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees, CTUs) to make censuses of these areas and for the inhabitants to be able to own the land they are built on:

> The Constitution of 1999 recognises to only the obligation of the Venezuelan state to guarantee the right of every person to adequate housing, but also the right of all citizens to participate via various methods in public affairs and in the formation, execution, and control of public administration (Articles 6, 62, and 70). To this end Presidential Decree 1.666, which started the process of land tenancy in popular urban settlements, was promulgated on February 4, 2002 (García-Guadilla, 2011: 87).

The CTUs were a precursor to the CC process and had similar mechanisms in place to set up, elect and manage them.[38]

There were reportedly more than 6,000 CTUs in 2006, which were: 'covering almost a million dwellings and organising more than 1.4 million families or 7 million people. Between 2004 and 2006 they had succeeded in winning 281,578

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[37] The impetus of the study is that more autonomy from the state is necessary – even if the finance it provides is seemingly separately funded – to maintain autonomy from influence.

[38] They were to include around 200 families within a community-defined geographical area, and were required to elect assembly members with at least fifty per cent of the population voting. The CTUs were then obliged to register with the National Urban Land Office and to conduct a census of their community. The census is a requirement in other participatory initiatives like the CCs, as is the on-going registration and documentation of details such as *cédula* identity cards. In the case of the CTUs, the information was used to legalise ownership of the plots of land that people had been squatting on. The census also documented that a lack of provision of services existed and there were serious health and social problems in the *barrios*.

title deeds benefiting more than 400,000 families or more than 2 million people' (Bruce, 2008: 32-33). The CTUs also proved to be extremely mobile and underlined a significant shift in the mobilisation of poor Venezuelans, thus creating a foundation for participation and community organisation during the post-coup period of the Chávez presidency (Bruce, 2008: 37). Therefore, the CTUs can be seen in some ways as providing a roadmap for the institutional development of the CCs.

The CTUs now operate within the CCs as part of Urban and Rural Land Working Committees. However, although CTUs are able to maintain their autonomy and horizontal hierarchy because of their constitutional definition, there are also fears of government co-optation (García-Guadilla, 2011: 98). These worries can be distilled into two tendencies, including

> ... one that promotes autonomy by focusing on the self-governing, protagonistic role that is at the core of their identity; another that pushes them toward neoclientelist co-optation by the government and the political parties that support it (García-Guadilla, 2011: 98)

Other existing pro-Chávez groups that were also institutionalised by the government had similar problems with bureaucracy and centralised control. The tendency of participatory initiatives to be managed and consolidated centrally has become an essential characteristic of dual government.

Another example of state-sponsored promotion of dual government are worker cooperatives. During 2004-2006, the cooperative movement won huge investments from the government and the government directed its members:

> The cooperative movement took in large numbers of poor people with little experience in the formal economy who learned administrative skills and were exposed to new attitudes toward cooperation and solidarity. Thousands of cooperatives have survived the test of time and carry out community work free of charge, even while some of their practises do not conform to the vision of a revolution in practise (Ellner, 2011: 430).

The workers cooperatives are also now partly institutionalised (since the 2009 CC Law) as part of the CC process and their promotion of socialist economies.

Consejos Locales de Planificación Públicas (Local Public Planning Councils, CLPPs) were modelled on the local Participatory Budgeting (PB) system pioneered in Porto Alegre, Brazil.[39] The CLPPs were made legal in Article 182 of the Constitution and in June 2002 the National Assembly passed a regulatory law concerning the CLPPs. Wilpert explains the role of the CLPPs:

> The central purpose of the councils is to gather and evaluate proposals for community projects, to work on the municipal development plan, to develop a map of the community's needs, to elaborate the municipality's investment budget, and to coordinate with other municipalities and with state authorities, among others (2007: 56-57).

With the creation of CLPPs, municipalities were split into decision-making sections that went though several stages to decide on what was of importance for the local community they represented. The council then ranked claims in order of priority and distributed money to communities accordingly.

One complicating factor was the fact that local government still exercised control over the allocation of funds and that the Venezuelan Participatory Budget groups played a purely advisory role. The decisions of CLPPs are legally binding and local authorities are obliged to facilitate them. This has not always been the case, and increasingly the CLPPs have become more overtly politicised. For example, if a CLPP decides on a road repair, the council has to perform the work and claim the money for the task from the central state. In reality, this depends on whether or not that council has prioritised the action. Therefore, if the local council has other urgent agendas, it can take a very long time for any CLPP task to be fulfilled. The local state bureaucratic organisations can also be viewed as part of a lingering legacy of the Fourth Republic that may be both inefficient, and often hinder, CLPP decisions.

The various participatory initiatives in Venezuela that existed from 1998-2006 are often seen as key to the experiments in participatory democracy. Either they

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[39] These were different from the Brazilian example in that, while the system of participation was borrowed, citizens do not have rights in the same way as in Brazil. See Chapter 3 for a broader discussion of these issues.

were consolidated within the CCs in 2006, or were no longer in operation by this date. Participation was more successfully strengthened in the CCs, and services continued to be provided by the Social Missions. The section has also identified concerns about their institutional design, resulting in several conflicts. Some of these issues are evident in the resulting scenario termed in this dissertation as dual government.

Dual structures and Socialism of the twenty-first century

Before 2006 dual structures were not as entrenched in the Venezuelan polity, but since then they have been developed and consolidated in policy and political terms. In 2006, the government announced its intention to introduce Socialism for the twenty-first century. This was to develop based on five 'motors' of the revolution:

> The moral struggle (developing popular revolutionary consciousness); a new geometry of power (decentralizing authority down to the communities); the economic role of the state (extending nationalization); constitutional reform (to introduce a strongly socialist orientation into the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution); and, enabling powers (with the right of the president to introduce change by decree) (Buxton, 2009: 72).

These five 'motors' can all be seen as dual approaches to politics from traditional channels, albeit within a liberal democratic system. These form the aspects of dual government that are in place today and in which the CCs operate. With the 'new geometry of power' came the 'explosion of communal power', which the CCs embodied across Venezuela.

As mentioned in 2006, the government consolidated many of the left-wing parties that supported Chávez into a single unified party, the PSUV.[40] This centralisation reflected the greater control by the central state over its institutions, including participation:

[40] In a similar way the various participatory initiatives that existed before 2006 were unified in the CCs.

> Through the PSUV Chávez seemed to be aiming to resolve the contradictions among three different tasks: (1) mobilizing citizens for social and economic transformation; (2) linking citizens to government through the participatory institutions of twenty-first century socialism; and (3) carrying out the political aggregation common to pluralist democracies (Hellinger, 2011: 34-35).

The PSUV also helped to deepen the process of implementing Socialism of the twenty-first century from the top down. Chávez has outlined rather unclear definitions of Socialism of the twenty-first century in speeches and has set out a variety of aims and principles. During his January 2005 Speech to the World Social Forum, Chávez first announced his vision of twenty-first century socialism for Venezuela (Hellinger, 2011: 34-35). In May 2006 Chávez further stated that, 'we have assumed the commitment to direct the Bolivarian revolution towards a socialism of the twenty-first century, which is based in solidarity, in fraternity, in love, in justice, in liberty, and in equality' (Chávez, cited in Wilpert, 2007: 238-239). The focus is on grass-roots participation as well as posing a challenge to neoliberal hegemony in Venezuela. It is opposed to 'the institutions and values of capitalism' and the negative by-products of capitalism, such as individualism, which is one of the reasons so much emphasis is placed on participatory democracy in the constitution and in practice (Wilpert, 2007: 241).

Endogenous development (henceforth ED) has been used as a key example of the policies that the PSUV intends to implement in Venezuela. Endogenous development in a Bolivarian context means *desarrollo desde adentro* or, 'development within the country' (and similar to Latin American south-south economic strategies) by using its own resources (Raby, 2006: 73; Sunkel, 1973). Wilpert expands this concept, by stressing the implication 'that the resources, in terms of skills and materials, come from within the country or community that is being developed' (2007: 80). The central government also began to promote producer cooperatives, which were financed by grants given to promote endogenous development (up to 200,000 Bs.F), 'which encourages economic diversification and national self-sufficiency' (Hawkins, 2010: 37). Raby also discusses how this works in practice: it 'is a proposal for development based on the use of natural and local resources, with emphasis on popular cooperatives and other forms of social enterprise in conjunction with public corporations' (2006:

180). As Chávez has stated, 'This means we don't depend on the International Monetary Fund, we don't depend on what they say we should or shouldn't do. Here we depend on ourselves' (cited in Bruce 2009: 8).[41] Finally, Wilpert explains what endogenous development means in more practical terms:

> The Chávez government defines endogenous development as follows: 1. Based in existing capacities and necessities; 2. Motivates community participation in the planning of the economy, via new forms of organization, such as cooperatives and social networks; is organized below towards above; 4. Is based on the values of cooperation and solidarity; 5. Uses appropriate technologies of the region without compromising the ecological equilibrium (2007: 80).

Endogenous development was also a factor in the development of the (defeated) 2007 referendum on constitutional reform, an effort to use participation as a plank of the *Estado Comunal*, and aiming to remove existing local and state government institutions. This can be viewed as both the ideology and the policy of the PSUV, which intends to promote its programme through growing participation. Nevertheless, since 2007 there have been few movements in this direction.

This policy informs the process of dual government and is evident in the requirements by state agencies responsible for the financing and management of participatory initiatives. Therefore, the dual government process is underwritten by ED (amongst other) principles, and as such is part of a politicised participatory agenda. As the PSUV is currently constructing mechanisms for the development of Bolivarianism (of which the CCs are the 'fifth motor' discussed further below), they clearly fit in with a government-managed process, and are also politicised along these lines. The CCs were intended to become the foundations (forming themselves into *Comunas*) of the *Estado Comunal*, and were to develop the *Economía Popular*, thus becoming more self-sufficient and less dependent on the state, and indeed eventually replacing the local state altogether. The effects of politicisation are manifest and they may dissuade some

[41] This can appear contradictory when considering the fact that Venezuela refines a sizable percentage of its oil in the USA (and trades much of its oil there) and depends on around 80 per cent food imports. Venezuela still operates within a capitalist framework and does not challenge private property in the 1999 constitution.

people from getting involved in CCs and other Bolivarian initiatives such as the *Misiones Sociales*.

The *Misiónes Sociales*

The Social Missions are the institution that the government has set up in order to meet the needs of the poor as well as deepening Bolivarianism among the population. They reflect the Bolivarian government's public commitment to improve support and services to the electorate, particularly the poor. Many of the Missions were launched in reaction to the 2002 opposition coup attempt, the oil lockout (2002-3) and recall referendum (2004). They provide services such as health care, education, subsidised food, tree planting, housing and other forms of government support. Social Missions are the key service provider of the dual government structure and tend to work in a 'joined-up' fashion.[42] Their importance is demonstrated by the high levels of state investment they received between 2003 and 2004.[43] By 2006, PDVSA provided US$6 billion to the Social Missions (Buxton, 2009: 64).

The government established the Social Missions in 2003 with a specific anti-poverty focus (Hawkins, 2010: 38). This is apparent in a speech made by President Chávez:

> These Social Missions are the nucleus of the strategic offensive to progressively reduce poverty, to give power to the poor. That is their challenge, to solve old ills and simultaneously create the structural conditions to facilitate the construction of a new society, in which everyone will be members with equal rights and duties (in Sanchez, 2005: 8-9).

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[42] In using the term 'joined-up', I draw on Bogdanor (2005). Joined-up government is not a term used in Venezuela, but one that I use to describe government agencies and institutions working together in order to deliver a common government agenda. In the context of the case-studies this relates to the collaboration of the public and private sector in the delivery of public services. In the case of Venezuela, this could also mean 'joining-up' with government agencies such as FUNDACOMUN, with a particular application to government initiatives such as PETROCASA. Naturally, if the *Alcaldia* or *Gobernador* are in opposition, they might not do this. On the other side of the spectrum, agencies do often join-up in the delivery of services.

[43] Estimates reach as high as 3.5 percent of GDP (Corrales and Penfold-Beccera, 2007).

The Social Missions work alongside the CCs and also mobilise participation by attracting volunteers to help with service provision. They coordinate projects and events as well as promoting electoral mobilisation, and perform a significant role within dual government in the sense that central government provides services via these channels. The participatory character of these state-sponsored and managed initiatives is based on their mobilisation of individuals who play an essential role in running them. In addition to the CTUs, they also help supply the participatory impetus that the CCs were initially based on when introduced in 2006. The Social Missions have also helped pave the way for the development of citizen participation in their own community-led decision-making bodies, thereby forming another mechanism bypassing existing local state bureaucracies. Some of the Missions have developed beyond what was first expected and this is a reflection of the extension of the state into local politics.

Although the Missions are responsible for development in several areas of Venezuelan society (including helping to entrench participation), they face serious challenges, especially in terms of the extent of central government bureaucratic control, and the dependency of the Missions on resources which can affect the quality of both delivery and outcome.

Photograph 2: Sign from *Misión Barrio Adento* (Adam Gill).

Barrio Adentro (inside the barrio) is a general healthcare drive for poor Venezuelans which was particularly importance given the lack of freely available medical care before 1998. In 2004, *Barrio Adentro* helped enable 76 million consultancies, whilst between 1994-1998 there were barely 70 million consultations in the Venezuelan public health care system (Sánchez, 2005: 12). Cuban doctors (in return for subsidised oil for Cuba) assisted people in the *barrios* with great success and this expanded into eye care, dentistry, minor operations as well as the standard consultancy and dispensing of medicines. The popularity of this particular Mission exceeded expectations, as the middle classes also participated in it.

Misión Robinson is a literacy drive was launched as part of the early military-civil alliance outlined in Plan Bolivar 2000 as access to education for poor Venezuelans had been a neglected area of development.[44] It formed:

> ... an ambitious programme of public works and social action using the military in cooperation with local communities, repairing roads, schools and community centres, providing basic health care and other services for poor communities (Raby, 2006: 160).

Barrio Adentro and *Misión Robinson* were the first initiatives the Chávez administration created in order to develop alternative means of achieving policy aims. It has also been argued that *Misión Robinson* avoided the Congressional debate over the budget, where Chávez lacked a majority (Gott, 2000: 177-178).[45]

Although the Social Missions have benefitted many poor citizens, they have several weaknesses. The quality of delivery has been questioned as well as their emphasis on quantity over quality, which has serious implications for those involved, e.g. for students trying to gain access to higher education establishments after training (Ellner, 2011: 431). As with other Bolivarian initiatives set up by central government, there are concerns around how clientelist the Missions are. For Hawkins, Rosas and Johnson they are not so much programmatically clientelist, but rather charismatic-populist:

> Participants and workers in the misiones show an unusually high level of support and affection for Chávez ... they give this support without any sense of individualized, overt conditionality in the receipt of government goods and services, and they seem unaware of or concerned by the fact that few non-supporters of Chávez are using these same programs, despite the open-door policy at program sites (2011: 211).

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[44] Before 1998 'school attendance stood at just 59 per cent; there were 1.5 million illiterates, more than two million adults who had only reached sixth grade, and close to a further two million who had been unable to complete their secondary education' (Sanchez, 2005: 12). This was compounded by the fact that poor students could not compete with those from private schools for university places (Sanchez, 2005: 12).

[45] These developments were followed by various others, including *Misión Robinson II*, *Misión Ribas* (a secondary school Social Mission), and *Misión Sucre*, this being a higher education mission that led to the creation of Bolivarian Universities and scholarships for poor Venezuelans.

There are more serious concerns when considering the provision of 'district-level allocation of program services' such as *Mercal* stores, places in educational programmes and the award of scholarships, as the authors found these to be correlated with those districts subject to electoral swings (Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson, 2011: 211). In this way, the government was using these 'universalistic' Missions to 'buy' votes from those who may not have previously been an electorally solid support base, but the authors insist that this is not a complete return to *Puntofijo* clientelism became both aid recipients and site workers display an 'ambivalence about how these allocations are made' (Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson, 2011: 211). Nonetheless, there is some evidence to imply clientelistic behaviour behind the dispersal of these schemes.

Penfold-Becerra argues that Hugo Chávez had realised that, due to economic concerns, the opposition was closing with him in the polls and therefore he decided to launch the Social Missions to regain a degree of popularity (2007: 79). Penfold-Becerra also claims that the Missions are used to 'buy' votes insofar as the valuable services they provide to the poor must be maintained by their continually voting for Chávez (2007: 80). In addition, many of the Missions have been obviously tactical, such as *Misión Identidad*, which ensured that those who were recipients of specific Mission services would vote for him, and were therefore clearly clientelistic:

> As a consequence, clientelism and poverty in Venezuela were interacting closely in the distribution of resources provided by the *misiones*. Indeed, when distributing cash transfers, the Chávez government was able simultaneously to buy votes and to distribute funds to the very poor (Penfold-Becerra, 2007: 80).

In light of the two studies discussed here, it is possible to suggest that the Missions have the potential to be clientelist, and were also used to influence electorally undecided areas of Venezuela to vote for the PSUV. In this way, the Missions are vehicles for popular mobilisation as well as a system of service provision within the dual government system. What transpires when considering these elements is that the CCs are a progression from (and complementary to) the Social Missions efforts to widen participation in Bolivarian project, while also continuing some of the problems that existed in previous participatory initiatives.

The *Consejos Comunales*

The CCs were created in 2005 by the *Ministro del Poder Popular para la Participación y Protección Social* (Ministry for Popular Power for Participation and Social Security, MPS) made legal in Article 30 of the Communal Council Law 2006 (revised in 2009), and were set up to work on three levels: national, regional and municipal. It is thought that there are more than 30,000 CCs in Venezuela today (Wilpert, 2011: 1). Article 2 of the Communal Council Law 2006 states:

> The communal councils, within the constitutional framework of participatory democracy, are instances of participation, coordination and integration between diverse community organizations, social groups and citizens, all of which permit the people organized to directly manage the public policies and projects established. These are intended to respond to the needs and aspirations of communities attempting to construct a society based on equality and social justice. (2006 Ley Organica de los Consejos Comunales).

The law followed a national debate using the social street parliamentarism system; a form of cross-country consultative mechanism intended to influence legislation, before the creation of the CC law in April 2006 and the simultaneous CLPP legal reform (Muhr, 2008: 158).[46] According to Article 2, CCs are designed to promote empowerment and autonomous participation by the people who are involved in them (López Maya and Lander, 2011: 76).

By 2005 CCs were in a more favourable position to become the main participatory vehicle. As discussed, CCs have also acted as a catch-all organisation for several other Venezuelan community and grass-roots groups (such as the CTUs, women's groups and water boards). In many ways they have consolidated the experiences and institutional frameworks of previous participatory initiatives.

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[46] Before the 2006 CC Law, CCs were defined as part of the CLPPs and were not fully autonomous vehicles for *Poder Popular*. However, CLPPs were eventually subsumed by the bureaucratic authority of the Fourth Republic officials who refused to relinquish funds or power for independent projects.

Within eight months of the passing of the CC law (in 2007) there were over 16,000 councils, 12,000 of which had received funding for their initial projects (Lerner, 2007: 1). Of these councils there were 300 established communal banks, which had received US$ 70 million in revenue for micro-loans, with the government pledging to transfer another US$ 4 billion in 2007 (Lerner, 2007: 1). As McCoy argues this is another example of the direct link between the president and the people:

> Direct democracy and mass participation have been encouraged through elections and referenda, enhancing the role of public opinion and creating a direct link from the president to the people while weakening the intermediaries of political parties and interest groups (2004: 288).

Each CC must elect five council members to the Financial Management Committee to oversee resources, five social controllers to audit financial activities and project manager, one *Vocero* (spokesperson) for each of the community committees, and three to oversee the Executive Committee (2006 *Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales*). All of the *Voceros* are equal and their decision-making powers does not stand higher than the Citizens Assembly which is formed from people who attend the CC (2006 *Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales*). There are a variety of work committees that discuss the Community Development Plan, (2006 *Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales*). It is necessary for participants to be at least 15 years old, and at least 30 percent of the voting population of the community the CC represents must be present if decisions are to have legal status (2006 *Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales*). CCs are made up of between 150–400 families in urban councils and between 20 and 40 families in rural districts (*2006 Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales*). As CCs are smaller than previous democratic participatory initiatives, decisions can be made much more quickly.

Voceros are elected representatives to the *Asamblea de Ciudadanos* (which remains sovereign), and are decided by a majority vote in the community. They function as systems of micro-government in self-managed communities that perform decision-making roles, and communicate across class sectors. They are horizontally structured to ensure joint accountability and equality in decision-

making and *Voceros* cannot sit on more than one committee. There are a variety of committees in CCs such as the communal bank and social controller.[47] There is also a committee commissioned by the CC and responsible for registering and hiring local people preferentially for community works. In some cases the CCs have realised exciting and transformative projects which have greatly impacted on their communities. In other cases CCs have helped to inform policy at national conferences, for example on issues such as the 2009 CC Law and the communes, but this seems to have been rather limited.

Finance for projects comes from various state agencies, as well as regional, national and municipal budgets and they must employ members of the community in order to carry out the work.[48] Funding can be obtained from the *Fondo Intergubernamental para la Decentralización* (Intergovernmental Fund for Decentralisation, FIDES) and through the *Ley de Asignaciones Económicas Especiales para los Estados Dervidas de Minas e Hidrocarburos* (Law of Special Economic Assignations for the States Derived from Mines and Hydrocarbons, LAEE), they were to be scrapped in the 2007 referendum on Constitutional Reform (Xiomara, 2010: 301)[49] Government agencies also became much more likely to receive funds in order to support CCs. As Lerner has stated, 'They [CCs] apply for funding directly from Caracas and national agencies determine funding guidelines. Critics have warned that bypassing states and municipalities leads to an all powerful central state' (2007: 1).

A branch of the Ministry of Participation called *Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo del Poder Comunal* (Foundation for the Development and Promotion of Popular Power, FUNDACOMUN) was created to promote the number of CCs and implement the socialist transformation of state institutions. In principle CCs

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[47] The Communal Bank was replaced by a Finance Committee overseen by FUNDACOMUN in the 2009 CC Law amendments.

[48] During my research there was little evidence to suggest this was the case in Mérida. Once the PSUV *Alcaldia* was voted out in November 2008, respondents said they would not approach the new one for money. I received no information that people could, or did, apply to the *Gobernador*. The sense that I got about these funds was that they were highly political, and as the CCs budget was increased representatives of local and state institutions felt they were losing out. This may not have been the case in other parts of Venezuela.

[49] As such these channels did not feature during my research.

are an embodiment of the Bolivarian ideals of the PSUV, which is also evident at a local level in the CCs. Referring to the drive towards protagonist-led development, López Maya argues that

> The CCs have provoked enormous expectations. The president on countless occasions has referred to them as basic nuclei for building a new model of society and state, 'twenty-first century socialism'. In December 2006, he referred to them as the fifth motor of the revolution, 'the explosion of communal power' (López Maya, 2010: 122).

The CCs can be seen as part of the development of Bolivarianism, and operate within an attempt to entrench this ideology. This process can also be viewed as participation in a separate or dual structure to existing local democracies, and as prescribed by the PSUV.

Participation and Dual Government

There are several ways in which people can participate in Venezuelan politics: by volunteering with one of the many Social Missions; attending and becoming active in a local *Asamblea de Ciudadanos*; campaigning in a worker or agricultural union; or being part of a CC committee relevant to individual, community or personal interests. Political participation is enshrined in the 1999 BCRV as stated in Article 62:

> All citizens have the right to freely participate in public affairs, either directly or through the medium of elected representatives. The participation of the people in the formation, execution, and control of public administration is the necessary means for achieving a level of involvement that ensures their full development, both individually and collectively. It is the obligation of the state and the duty of society to facilitate bring about the most favourable conditions for putting these into place.

Participation is also possible in many of the direct democracy initiatives, such as the *referendo revocatorio* (recall referendum), *Parlamentarismo Social de Calle* (Social Street Parliamentarism), Social Production Companies as well as the CCs (Muhr, 2008: 154-163). Social Street Parliamentarism is a mode of public

debate on political issues.[50] In many ways the Social Street Parliamentarism is similar to earlier, discussion-based, *Circúlos Bolivarianos*.

These democratic mechanisms are another example of a direct link between the president and the people, albeit one using some of the same direct democracy mechanisms that exist in liberal democracies. However, few studies have decided exactly who participates, why, and where. Hawkins (2010) analyses the 2007 Americas Barometer survey to gain some insight into these important questions regarding participation in Venezuela. While this provides a snapshot of who participated and why in recent times, it does not answer questions regarding how this creates a new system of dual government. He finds that the participatory initiatives have a high level of participation, especially in the CCs, which draw on involvement of women and the poor (Hawkins, 2010: 60). However, participation tends to be 'highly concentrated among a group of activists' and 'involvement in all [of] the Bolivarian initiatives is strongly associated with affection for Chávez' (Hawkins, 2010: 60).

While the PSUV has created innovative participatory mechanisms, the state continues to maintain control over the CCs. This is done via the process of applying, registering and reporting to local state agencies in order to receive state financial resources. Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egui also argue that Venezuelan participation is closely linked with the state:

> Venezuela's experiments in radical popular governance over the past decade have spawned many government-sponsored participatory programs and institutions in which the state is not the only facilitator of new forms of popular organization, but also a coparticipant (2011: 254).

The PSUV has devised a way to create a dual government in which participation plays an important role, while also acting alongside traditional local democratic institutions: '[t]his structure of "centralized participation" allows CCs to bypass other traditional government institutions and political intermediaries and be in

[50] When in Mérida, I heard some CCs were consulted about the 2009 CC Law in this manner, but I did not witness this myself.

direct contact with (and under the direct supervision of) the President's office' (Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egui, 2011: 255).[51]

Despite the government's intentions, there is little evidence to suggest that the CCs, as a form of micro-government, have substantially influenced central government policy. However, the state's new arrangements and the explosion of popular power meant that CCs were intended to become the *Estado Comunal*:

> His "First Socialist Plan" (Presidencia de la República de Venezuela, 2007) called for the establishment of a new institutional structure aimed at supporting and consolidating popular power ... taken place largely through the expansion of a network of "government sponsored organizations", among which the "consejo comunales" or Communal Councils (CCs) serve as main nodes and have a direct communication with the President's office (Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egui, 2011: 256).

Therefore, the CCs' links with the presidency appears to be mainly top-down, although in theory they should be able to influence central government in the construction of the *Estado Comunal.*

The April Thirteenth Mission put forward ideas and aims for an *Estado Comunal* suggesting that it would replace existing state structures. The *Comunas* featured in the 2007 constitutional reform alongside other laws designed to strengthen the power of the CCs. The idea of the communes involves unifying CCs and working to create bottom-up governance:

> By bringing together four or five communal councils, these would replace the parishes and become the basic cell of a whole new structure of communal power, moving from communal cities to communal zones and so on upwards to a whole national structure of communal power ... it seems clear that any successful development of such communal power would indeed strip away the traditional functions and powers of local and regional administrations (Bruce, 2008: 171).

The *Comunas* require the CCs to function collectively and efficiently in order for them to work towards the creation of the *Estado Comunal.* However, *Comuna* development in the longer term depends on how well individual CCs function,

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[51] See also, Ellner, 2008; López-Maya, 2008, 2009; Smilde, 2009.

how well they can work together, which in turn rests on their relationship with the state.

The CCs can be viewed as co-existing in an uneasy relationship with traditional or existing institutions. Ciccarello-Maher suggests that the Bolivarian process is an attempt to transform the state, but also argues that we need to 'think differently about what such a transformation would *look* like' (in Spronk and Webber, 2011: 238). In this way it is not merely adequate to simply seize control of industry (especially as this is mainly concentrated in the oil sector), but also the mechanics of the state:

> From an economic question, this becomes a question of *power*, and specifically I like to think of this in terms of Lenin's concept of "dual power", of generating an alternative power outside the state capable of transforming and, ultimately, abolishing that state (here, the progression is considerably different from Lenin's formulation ... (Ciccarello-Maher, in Spronk and Webber, 2011: 237-238).

Although the intention is to do away with existing local state structures, this has not happened so far, and has been discussed less since the 2007 Constitutional Reform Referendum defeat in which it was proposed. These processes have ultimately rendered the construction of dual power untenable, but in doing so have created a potentially unstable, alternative dual government structure.

The concept of dual government developed in this work offers an insight into these processes, suggesting that the process is a continual attempt to create a type of Leninist 'dual power' (Lenin, 1964 [1917]: 38-41) by forging alternative forms of power that contradict but also continue the political processes of the Fourth Republic. It also helps conceptualise the co-dependent links between the state, citizens and the CCs as a fundamental aspect of the Bolivarian state.

Coronil also reminds us that state involvement has been like this for some time, reflecting the tutelary bond that still exists between state and society today (1997: 7-9): '[b]y claiming that every Venezuelan citizen had the right to participate in the political system and to benefit from the nation's wealth as part

owners of its subsoil, the opposition in effect depicted Venezuela as a community of citizen-landowners' (Coronil, 2000: 35). Coronil argues that:

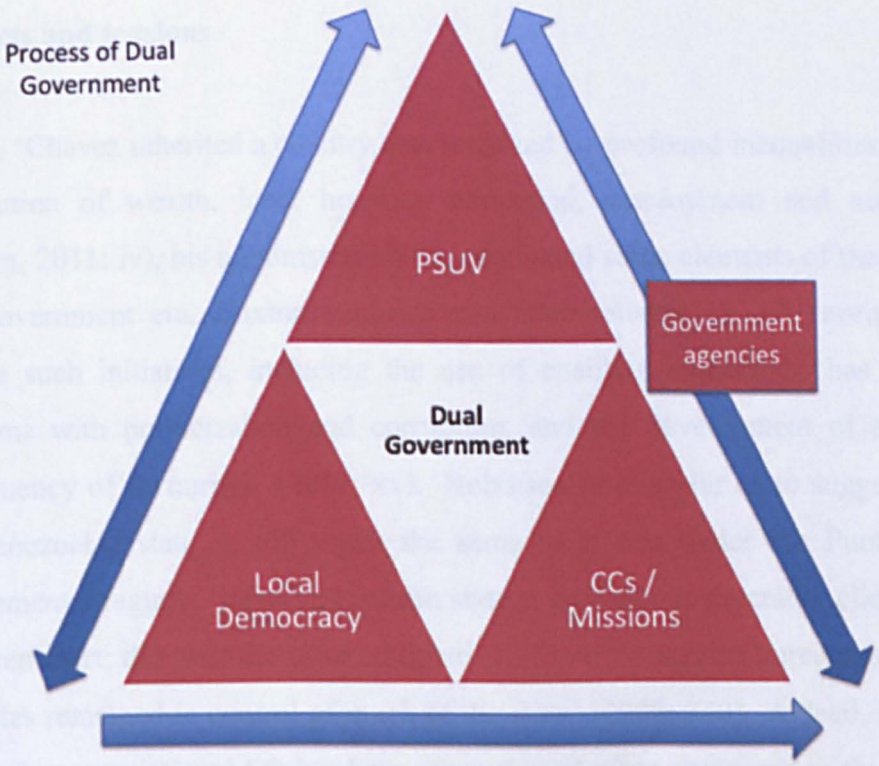
> Chávez has established a direct relationship with the people, without intermediate supporting organizations. His own party the MVR, has functioned as an electoral apparatus rather than as an independent organization capable of generating policies and programs ... [he has] shown little respect for institutions, often "confusing" his critique of "those who occupy institutions with the institutions themselves" (2000: 39).

Chávez and the PSUV control participatory democracy, which is evident in the design and state management of the CCs and construction of dual government. This ambition reflected their distrust of existing state institutions, and a preference for local level decision-making:

> [CCs emerged p]artly as a reaction to the inefficiency of the state bureaucracy, particularly at the municipal level. In his congressional address unveiling a constitutional reform proposal in August 2007, President Hugo Chávez affirmed that he had 'misgivings regarding established local authorities' and had greater faith in the capacity of the people at the local level. He went on to point to the high abstention rates in city and state elections as placing doubt the legitimacy of local officials (Ellner, 2010: 37).

To summarise, the introduction of ubiquitous and modern participatory mechanisms, potentially autonomous of existing local government, were first rolled out in 2005 when the CCs were initially trialled in Caracas and other major Venezuelan cities. Although there were other participatory initiatives pre-2005, most were consolidated in the CCs, which became the desired participatory mechanism of the PSUV. There are various ways in which the post-1998 Venezuelan state has promoted and worked with participatory initiatives, resulting in a number of tensions and stresses. Firstly, issues of clientelism continue to exist in the BCs and Missions, as they can be manipulated to support the existing government and receive favours in return. Secondly, the state has not always been successful in its attempts to resolve some of the problems of marginalised communities through these participatory initiatives.

Figure 1. Dual Government



The Venezuelan government has created a dual government (whilst aiming to construct a *Estado Comunal*) via the CCs, agencies responsible for the development of the *Estado Comunal*, and popular participation, as well as the on-going *Comuna* experiments. Additional forms of local democracy (CCs) exist alongside these, and are largely managed by state agencies. The CCs and Social Missions are supported by government provision of financial resources, consumable goods, services and logistical support for these participatory initiatives, and Social Missions are funded by the PDVSA. The CCs facilitate participation and the Social Missions deliver services such as health, food, jobs, environment, and housing. Although these new institutions are in place, and ready to replace local government, they exist in a kind of limbo – neither replacing local government, nor fundamentally transforming the space of local politics. The coexistence of dual government with prevailing local government structures causes conflict, especially around the distribution of decision-making powers and financial resources from the central state. As such, services that local democracy provide to communities, such as refuse collection, public

transport, housing maintenance and so on, can also become new grounds for conflict or friction.

Conflicts and tensions

Whilst, 'Chávez inherited a country characterized by profound inequalities in the distribution of wealth, land, housing, education, employment and security' (Buxton, 2011: iv), his administration has replicated some elements of the Punto Fijo government era. Buxton suggests that state reliance on oil revenues to finance such initiatives, including the use of enabling authorities, has led to problems with politicization and corruption, and the development of a 'new constituency of favourites' (2011: xx). Robinson goes so far as to suggest that the Venezuelan state is still much the same as it was under the Punto Fijo governmental regime: '[t]he Venezuelan state is corrupt, bureaucratic, clientelist, and even inert; this was the state inherited ... The civil service bureaucracy and old elites remained in control of much of the state' (2008: 340). Indeed, Buxton asserts that associational life has been strengthened when compared to the period of Punto Fijo government, 'as a result of both the government's participatory initiatives and the context of conflict. The legitimacy of political participation, political engagement, and political institutions has been strengthened as well' (2011: xiv). With these perspectives in mind, it is important to note that Goldfrank (2011a: 3) terms the CCs as 'micro-governments', as they operate within the structures of the existing state, which suggests a replication of some of the same problems.

The executive regulates financial provision, via state agencies, which sustains the CCs' dependence on the state. The funding of CC projects is controlled by a central mechanism within the state, creating problems for the future development of the CCs, questioning their autonomy, and problematising their on-going success as participatory democratic mechanism and as an organic system of government. The CCs compete for power and resources with local democracy.[52] As the *Alcaldía* and *Gobernador* have been elected to govern their cities and

[52] As was the case with the CLPPs.

states, they are required by law to fulfil their roles. Areas of operation include public service delivery, e.g. rubbish collection, house maintenance, road repairs and contract management for the provision of services like water and electricity. The existing process can interfere with CCs operating independently of the local state, as communities continue to depend on services that are provided by either the *alcaldía* or state governor, with delivery being affected due to politicised disputes.[53] Therefore, there are issues around CCs that are already evident in earlier participatory initiatives, and which have not been resolved, potentially impacting on the trajectory of dual government.[54]

Recognising the potential lack of cooperation between CCs and local government, the 2007 constitutional reform referendum proposed certain alternative measures. The PSUV planned to bypass existing structures at both state and local levels. The 2007 referendum on constitutional reform suggested that they should be replaced by the CCs, but this did not happen. The future of participation essentially remains in the hands of state:

> [S]teps towards institutionalisation are designed to create viable mechanisms that monitor and guard against ill-conceived projects and misuse of public funds ... But the effort to achieve incorporation on the one hand and, institutionalisation on the other, is a complicated balancing act. Mechanisms and procedures to ensure efficiency cannot be imposed all at once. The massive and ongoing participation of the non-privileged depends on the flexibility and comprehension of those in charge (Ellner, 2010: 38).

Therefore, as long as the PSUV controls the CCs they are ultimately directed by central government. Bruce highlights that the CCs generate certain concerns about their relationship with the state:

> They are not entirely autonomous. They were created and are regulated by law, a law drawn up and passed by 'the old state', even if an old state

[53] For an overview of this in practice, and a discussion of how the lack of service provision can affect communities, see Chapter 5.

[54] Depending on whether or not the *Alcaldía* or *Gobernador* is pro-PSUV can determine whether the power to deliver public services is utilised in a politicised way or not. In the case where pro-PSUV *Alcaldías* and *Gobernadores* exist, they operate in tandem, along the lines of a 'joined-up government' (Bogdanor, 2005). The success or failure of this suggests that if CCs and *Alcaldía* need to work together they may need to do so in the same way that the joined-up governmental approach between institutions suggests.

> inhabited by Chavistas. A second is that the communal councils do not have sovereign decision-making power over 100 per cent of local budgets. In fact, most of them had no control over, and little if any input into, existing public budgets at municipal or state level, much less on the national scale (2008: 185-6).

The state-management of participation has generated criticism, from both pro- and anti- PSUV groups. The PSUV has come under further attack for lacking any debate on this matter, and they also use the CCs' relative success as a means to avoid further debate:

> By avoiding nitty-gritty problems, the Chávista leadership ends up glorifying the community councils and creating the myth that they are a panacea for countless problems, a notion that may be designed to pay electoral dividends. The shortcoming is particularly serious given the government's stated commitment to more than double the programmes funding in 2009 (Ellner, 2010: 38).

As some sees the Missions as clientelist, the CCs could also fall into this trap. There have been several studies that have addressed this and they also attempt to prove that participatory initiatives in Bolivarian Venezuela are either clientelist in nature, or have been used to persuade people to vote for the PSUV (García-Guadilla, 2011; Hawkins & Hansen, 2006; Hawkins, Rosas, Johnson, 2011; Penfold-Becerra, 2007). García-Guadilla states this explicitly:

> [P]opular social organizations are being sponsored by the government under a political model that encourages participation by responding to the demands of the popular sectors. The government has directed technical help and considerable financial resources (provided by high oil revenue) to most of these popular organisations with the hope of obtaining their political support (2011: 86).

The influence of previous participatory initiatives on CCs is another concern. Although the CCs are in many ways a consolidation of earlier participatory initiatives, both in terms of their procedure and institutionalisation, they may still need to compete with new participatory innovations. As has historically been the case with the BCs, CTUs and CLPPs, there is a possibility that the CCs will be subsumed by another, newer, participatory initiative. Once initiatives became outdated in the revolutionary process – such as the BCs and CTUs – another

framework is introduced, often reflecting the state of Bolivarian thinking at that particular time.

Conclusion

Until 1998 Venezuela's democracy had been controlled by elites. This historical experience has been dominated by strong centralising *caudillos*, dictators and presidents who have tried to contain crises through tyranny and later through consensus-based politics. There are certain themes that have repeated themselves: firstly, that Venezuelans have had little say in the development of their polity, and secondly, that the poor have suffered the effects of the prevailing systems of governance. This chapter has outlined the history of Venezuelan democracy and its impact on the general population. Several themes contributed to the decline of the hegemony of the consensus-based, elite-led democracy.

The Venezuelan exceptionalism thesis is especially relevant because this was the elite self-image of what Venezuela political and economic culture looked like, which in reality was not the case, particularly from the late 1970s onwards. Although the dominant parties were largely successful in containing the threat that leftist groups posed, their potential electoral challenge loomed large throughout the period of the Pact. The existing model of democracy was so rigid that the structures set up to contain competition and maintain consensus eventually became a generalised reason for the political crises. The PF parties' inability to respond to a changing electorate was matched by their dismissal of the extreme poverty that had led to the population's gradual polarisation and alienation. Venezuelans' familiarity with 'a share of the wealth' evaporated in the 1970s-1980s, and as the majority became poorer, the state proved incapable of minimising the effects of neoliberal reform or responding to the needs of the poor in response to these changes.

Governments from 1958-1998 also made several political decisions that resulted in the direct suffering of the poor, especially during the implementation of neoliberal reforms and the resulting minimal state. We have seen the various attempts and systems put in place to 'contain' the crises, but such was the decline

in legitimacy of the dominant parties that by the late 1980s they were unable to do so (witness the *Caracazo* and several coup attempts). The response of the state was also symptomatic of a system in decline, as it had lost all legitimate means of communication (or chose to ignore them) with an electorate left battered by neoliberalism and with no available avenue other than protest. This left the parties of the Pact backing reforms proposed by civil society groups, calling for more transparency, thus opening up politics and leading to electoral reforms that were to prove fatal for their future. The development of third parties led to their gradual gaining of political office in several local seats and a new party coming to power in 1994, leaving the dominant parties virtually impotent.

Tensions existed between government and governance and between elites and the poor. These tensions still exist today, but the government is attempting to operate outside of neoliberal ideologies and practices. Given the experience of liberal democracy and the effect of its ideologies on the majority of the Venezuelan population, there was a strong desire for a completely different type of politics. As Chávez had been a key activist in the coup attempts of 1992, he became a popular hero, and stood as the mirror opposite of the parties and representatives of the Pact. His presidential election platform and promises were largely anti-neoliberal. Although several other candidates had promised this in the past, it was his unique message that he would lead without using the damaging policies that had hindered so many Venezuelans.

This chapter has provided a historical and contemporary contextual analysis of participatory democracy within Venezuelan state and dual government institutions. It reflects on how the centralised Venezuelan state can tend toward politicisation of participatory initiatives, which also have the potential to affect the CCs. From the origins of *Chavismo* in 1998 to the present, Bolivarianism and participation have developed alongside each other. Although great advances have been made in terms of participation, problems such as centralised control and politicisation continue to exist in Bolivarian participatory initiatives. These problems have not been resolved as evident in the institutional design of dual government, which has not replaced local government but operates alongside it.

The CCs embody endogenous development and Bolivarianism in several ways. Firstly the process of endogenous development is carried out by the CCs and is promoted and defended by state agencies and micro-financing bodies. CC projects and processes must adhere to the process of endogenous development in order to obtain finance to undertake projects proposed by the citizen assembly (representing popular power). In this way, CCs that are both pro- and anti-PSUV must adhere to these principles if they are to successfully complete projects. Secondly, through the process of setting up a CC and their democratic nature, the discourse around community issues involves all sectors and classes within that geographical community.

The Chávez administration exhibits a consistent desire to create outlets of power that directly provide goods and services for the electorate, institutions that exist in separation from local and state level representative bodies. These institutions would traditionally have coordinated efforts to provide local and state services to the electorate, and still do to a certain extent. However, alongside these liberal representative institutions, Chávez and the PSUV have developed the means to provide support through Social Missions, goods (such as *Mercal*, PDVAL), and services (health, education, transport), thereby devolving a certain amount of power to the community level (CCs, *Comunas*). This creates a system of dual government that much of the electorate (mostly the poor) utilises regularly. As the various initiatives and institutions encourage and depend on citizen participation in their work, the electorate becomes engaged in 'other' forms of politics – aside from the traditional channels of local government. This has caused concern in some mayors' and state governors' offices, and some have refused to relinquish power to the electorate via participatory budgeting and the 'opening up' of local resources, causing conflicts over resources and political control.

This chapter has shown how PSUV-constructed bodies designed to provide goods, services, training, and finance to the people (popular power) have bypassed traditional liberal democratic state structures such as the *alcaldía* and

gobernador.[55] These processes are fraught with those tensions that have been evident in participatory initiatives since the beginning of the Bolivarian project. One of the principle manifestations of this is dual government's effective 'limbo', situated as it is alongside local government, but not replacing it, leading to significant strains and occasional conflict.

It is with these precursors in history in mind that leads us to discuss the developments in participatory democracy theory and relevant Latin American experiments that we now turn to in order to make better sense of the CCs in Venezuela.

[55] They can, and occasionally do, provide funds to CCs.

Chapter 3: State-managed Participation in Venezuela: Politicised Participatory Democracy

The *Consejos Comunales* (Communal Councils, CCs) in Venezuela are an example of state-managed participation. On the one hand, the CCs enable participation in decision-making at a local level, and on the other, they must adhere to Bolivarian principles, such as endogenous development in order to obtain finance to complete community projects. Through participating in decisions on issues that affect them, participant communities become better educated about the political system and about each other's context. The literature on participatory democracy suggests that this is a fundamental goal of participation, and will act to hold government more accountable. However, as the CCs are state-managed in order to further the promotion of Bolivarianism, the PSUV guides participation, thereby politicising the entire project.

Discussing participation within a liberal democracy also provides a salient perspective on the role of such mechanisms in the Bolivarian polity. As participation is said to complement liberal democracy, the CCs should be in a position to contribute in much the same way. However, I question whether regulation allows this an idealised co-existence to be achieved if it is managed by the state especially in light of other participatory initiatives in the region. The UNDP (2004) study on democracy in Latin America set out an 'agenda for the development of democracy' that included proposals:

> To confront the deficits within our democracies we need *democratic power*. That is, the capacity to act effectively when faced with problems in terms of broadening citizenship. This democratic power is impossible to acquire without politics. However, politics needs to be relevant, that is, it must be able to propose ways of addressing issues that are important for society, it must be capable of implementing them with the firm commitment of leaders and citizens, and it must be prepared to sustain them using suitable instruments of collective action, of which political parties are the main, although not the only, type (175-176).

Participatory democracy is seen as a means to achieving greater democracies in Latin America to overcome some of the aforementioned problems facing countries in the region that are rooted in democracies (UNDP 2004). Other recent

participatory examples in Latin America highlight attempts to deliver alternative forms of participation with the assistance of state in order to enrich democracy. Recent examples include Participatory Budgeting which originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil but has since spread around Latin America (including Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina) and internationally whilst participatory initiatives have been experimented with in Chile, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru.[56] Olvera and Panfichi (2008: 28-29) point to the dynamics of participation in Latin America:

> The various experiments that are currently underway in several Latin American countries for more profound and innovative democracy, broadening the field of politics, and constructing citizenship. These experiments change the very idea of democracy. They demonstrate, on different scales and to different degrees, that it is possible to build a new democratic project based on principles which extend and generalize rights, create public spaces that include decision-making power, increase political participation in society, and recognize and make spaces for differences. It is precisely the importance of these experiences that has led to the renovation of debates on democracy.

Recent literature on participatory democracy focuses on specific case studies, examining their institutional design and providing an analytical framework by which to understand the role of the state. These theories are pertinent given the democratic deficiencies in Latin America and the efforts to resolve this by a variety of Leftist governments.[57] This is entirely applicable to Venezuela's CCs. It is evident from other participatory experiments that the state supports rather than manages participation. Therefore the state-society relationship is a crucial focus, and will be thoroughly discussed in this chapter. Of particular importance in this discussion is the space between the participatory initiative and the state. The participatory budgeting experiment in Brazil has allowed people to participate in their municipalities and therefore in the space of the state,

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[56] For examples of participation in: Argentina: Rodgers, 2010; Colombia: Dagnino, Olvera, and Panfichi, 2006; Chile, see Posner, 2004; Guatemala: Speer, 2011; Honduras and Guatemala: Altschuler and Corrales, 2012; Peru: Crabtree and Thomas, 1998; Crabtree, 2000; Burt, 2007; Dagnino, Olvera, and Panfichi, 2006; Mexico: Fox and Aranda, 1996; Fox, 1999; and, Alvarado and Davis, 2004.

[57] For a more detailed discussion on the attempts to improve democracies in Leftist governments see: Edwards, 2010; Cannon and Kirby, 2012; Hellinger, 2011; Weyland, 2010; Prevost, Campos and Vanden, 2012; Goldfrank, 2011; and Panizza, 2005.

Cabannes calls this 'significant area of innovation in democracy and local development' (2004: 27). In contrast, CCs are a new space created by the state, and that is state managed, and therefore CCs have less influence than the Participatory Budgeting example as they operate as part of, and not within, the space occupied by the state. There are several cultural, historical and political reasons for this scenario that will be discussed further in this chapter. Furthermore, the spaces between the state and participatory initiatives will be discussed throughout, based predominately on the experiences of Brazil for it's participatory budgeting experience and Bolivia for its rich history of social movements which will be compared against the CC model.

State-managed participation in Venezuela means that CCs are partly participatory, partly deliberative, in their function, and there is a degree to which the PSUV and the CC system co-operate successfully, which is reflected in the state-society synergy literature. Fung and Olin Wright's concept of deliberative democracy[58] is of particular importance here as it offers an explanation of how participatory initiatives can be understood via their Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) model. This is where citizens become educated through the process of participating, and they outline it in the following terms:

> In deliberative decision-making, participants listen to each other's positions and generate group choices after due consideration. In contemplating and arguing for what the group should do, participants ought to persuade one another by offering reasons that others can accept ... This ideal does not require participants to be altruistic or to converge upon a consensus of value, strategy, or perspective. Real-world deliberations are often characterized by heated conflict, winners, and losers. The important feature of genuine deliberation is that participants find reasons that they can accept in collective actions, not necessarily ones that they completely endorse or find maximally advantageous (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 17).

However, as CCs are state-managed there are questions about the extent to which CCs can be fully participatory, particularly through issues such as conflict with existing forms of local government and apathy. As discussed in Chapter 2, CCs are part of the PSUV's socialist strategy, and as such are a potentially politicising

[58] See also Baiocchi, 2003; Dryzek, 2002.

exercise. The politicised nature of participation in Venezuela is under-represented in the literature, and this chapter contributes to the debate by discussing the specific features of this phenomenon although other participatory examples may be useful in comparative terms.

This discussion is of direct relevance for the CC case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 as it asks how far CCs can be called participatory democracy and is questioned in light of other leftist participatory examples that are attempting to resolve some of the issues laid out in the UNDP 2004 study on Latin American democracy. It is necessary to analyse the extent to which CCs are participatory as defined by various participatory democracy theories, as well as other contemporary examples of state-sponsored participation. CCs can also be understood in light of their position in society and their relationship to the state. Deliberative democracy theory explains the discursive function of CCs and empowered participatory democracy helps to understand their form, projects and relationship to the state. The discussion on state-society synergy suggests that some case studies in the literature demonstrate greater autonomy between participatory initiatives, therefore the state and CCs are characterised as a form of state-managed participation.

Participatory Democracy

The CCs can be located within the literature on participatory democracy in several ways: the involvement of citizens in decision making; highlighting the educational function of participation; and facilitating citizens' local political participation. This also rationalises how CCs can be viewed as participatory based on their functions, but does not adequately explain the role of the government or the extension of the state into participation within local democracies, all of which leads to a mode of politicised participation. Much theory points towards the state acting as an enabler to participation rather than the management of it. In some instances, participation occurs as a result of pressure on the state by civil society or even groups that participate by demanding autonomy of the state in decision making such as the Zapatista's in Mexico, the *Piqueteros* (Unemployed Activists), *Assambleas del Barriales*

(Neighbourhood Assemblies) and *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (Unemployed Workers Movement) in Argentina.[59]

Held suggests that participatory democracy is 'ill defined' (1996: 271-272) and identifies the limitations of such explanatory systems, which is also narrowly defined and based on a few early examples of participation. In order to contextualise the CCs' relationship to the state it is also necessary to understand how far participatory democracy literature can go towards making sense of Venezuelan participatory initiatives.

Participatory democracy was largely a response to the theoretical and practical limitations of liberal democracy, and the promotion of participation in Venezuela is an extension of this. The relevant literature aims to correct the deficits of liberal democratic theory, such as the minimal inclusion of citizen participation, apart from the context of periodic elections. It can be argued that participatory democracy aims to increase the legitimacy of the liberal democratic system through the inclusion of a wider section of the population in both decision-making and the wider polity. Held sets out the key features of participatory democracy as:

1) Direct participation of citizens in the regulation of the key institutions of society, including the workplace and local community.
2) Reorganization of the party system by making party officials directly accountable to the membership.
3) Operation of 'participatory parties' in a parliamentary or congressional structure.
4) Maintenance of an open institutional system to ensure the possibility of experimentation with political forms (1996: 271).

When applied to the Venezuelan context, these four characteristics offer an insight into how the CCs differ from participatory democracy literature. As they are part of the state, they can only involve themselves in their local community and all from a position of financial and logistical dependence on government

[59] For further discussion on autonomous social movements in Mexico see: Swords, 2007; Rénique, and Poole, 2008; and, Mora, 2007. For Autonomous groups in Argentina see: Chatterton, 2005; Dinerstein, 2003; and, Lievesly, 2009.

agencies.[60] The CCs seem to broadly fit all four of the features, with the exception that they do not participate in the regulation of the state, nor do participatory parties exist. The implementation of participation as a means of developing the political potential of the poor is similar to how participatory democracy literature suggests that people become increasingly involved, deepening their understanding and enabling them to change their communities. The literature also suggests that liberal and participatory democracy work alongside one another, as is the case in Venezuela. In addition to these criteria, Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi set out features of Participatory democracy in relation to the role of the state and how it can share its role as decision-maker:

> Participatory democracy is supposed to contribute to a de-privatization of the state, so that it becomes more permeable to public interests formulated within spaces of societal participation, and therefore less subject to private appropriation of its resources. Therefore, participation is conceived as the sharing of the State's decision-making power on public interest issues, distinguishing itself from a conception of participation that is limited to consulting the population (2008: 32).

The wider suggestion is that the greater involvement of people in politics helps to broaden their scope of influence over the political process, thereby making it more inclusive. Participatory democracy also suggests that participation educates people about political issues and encourages their continuing engagement with relevant issues. By dealing with topics that affect people in their daily lives a greater sense of agency is achieved, thus strengthening citizens' capacity to participate in a meaningful manner.

Much of the twentieth-century literature on participatory democracy dates from the 'new left' of the 1960s. This inspired several theoretical strands: (developmental) republicans drawing from Rousseau, as well as anarchists, libertarians and 'pluralist' Marxists (Held, 1996: 264-267). The new left concurred with Marx's view that people are not born free and equal which, an assumption held by several key liberal democracy theorists (Dahl, 1971; Schumpeter, 1943). The argument proceeded that liberal theory overlooked

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[60] For an analysis of the various worker-management, especially in ALCASA in 2005, and arguments for greater CC involvement in this see Bruce (2008).

social tensions over issues of equality. The rights that the 'new right' assumed to exist must be made available to everyone in order to be truly experienced: 'an assessment of freedom must be made on the basis of liberties that are tangible, and capable of being deployed within the realms of state and civil society' (Held, 2006: 209).

New leftists accepted that there were problems with orthodox Marxist concepts and aimed to bypass the 'rigid juxtaposition of Marxism with Liberalism' in Social Democracy and to accept that 'institutions of direct democracy or self-management cannot simply replace the state; for, as Max Weber predicted, they leave a coordination vacuum readily filled by bureaucracy' (Held, 2006: 211). Venezuela's CCs do not fully replace the state but rather exist alongside and within it as new forms of the state. Whereas participatory budgeting allows participants to engage within Municipalities, it affords them the chance to remain more autonomous.

Between the 1970s and 1990s participatory democracy theory was the opposing ideology to the type of democracy favoured by the 'new right' (Held, 2006: 209). Held summarises participatory democracy theory's perspective on the development of equality in rights as 'An equal right to liberty and self-development' to be achieved through an educated and collective citizenry (1996: 271).

Pateman (1970; 1985) and Macpherson (1977) made some of the most significant advances in the theory and application of participatory democracy, which were principally based on the experiences of workers' participation. These theorists also stand out as having made a contribution to the reformulation of the leftist concept of democracy and freedom (Held, 1996: 264-267). Held summarises participatory democracy as that which:

> [f]osters human development, enhances a sense of political efficacy, reduces a sense of estrangement from power centres, nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of an active and knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking an acute interest in government affairs (1996: 267).

Classic participatory democracy theory, and its later proponents, set out the social justice elements of the theory rather than providing an emphasis on how it might be advanced in relation to, or in conjunction with, the state. Pateman views society and the state as interconnected mechanisms which reinforce the inequalities people suffer (1985: 173). With this in mind, it is clear that the *form* democracy takes is of profound importance. Pateman describes how liberal democracy is deficient and how democratic participation is vital for 'social training':

> The theory of participatory democracy is built round the central assertion that individuals and their institutions cannot be considered in isolation from one another. The existence of representative institutions at national level is not sufficient for democracy; for maximum participation by all the people at that level socialisation, or "social training", for democracy must take place in other spheres in order that the necessary individual attitudes and psychological qualities can be developed. This development takes place through the process of participation itself (1970: 42).

Pateman's statement raises an important question about the CCs: if participation is regulated by the state, and as such can become politicised, can people truly be educated and have control over their lives? The answer to this can be found in how participation benefits people at a local level, but this is limited in scope given the fact that CCs are state-managed.

While the CCs have the potential to develop participation, they do so at a micro-level, within communities, and can be successful. Therefore, although roles are predefined by the central Venezuelan state, it is nevertheless for the good of the communities involved at a local level. Whereas the CCs can achieve many of the benefits associated with participatory democracy, at a macro level CCs are part of the structures designed by the central government, and are affected by the associated issues of problems of government at a local level. Furthermore, they are not actually *in* the space of the state but actually alongside the existing state, and could be termed state appendages.

The effects of participating in politics and society are outlined in participatory democracy literature as benefitting people collectively through the creation of an inclusive process. In this way, the CCs can be seen as providing the space, not

only for local decision-making, but also to educate people about participation and politics. Several participatory democracy writers suggest that by participating in politics, people are educated and stimulated to acquire more political knowledge. Pateman argues that citizens gain experience through participation, and learn more about their polity (1970: 42-43). Almond and Verba (1963) also found a definite link between political participation and citizen's sense of their political effectiveness, especially where more opportunities to participate were available, although this was more apparent at a local rather than national level (Pateman, 1970: 46; 2001: 460).

Mill (1975: 377) understood local political institutions as a training ground for citizens to understand participation, which is indeed the case in the CCs. As the issues that CCs deal with are meaningful to their community, people have a greater sense of agency when dealing with these topics. In this respect participation is self-sustaining and 'the more individuals participate the better able they become to do so' (Pateman, 1970: 42-43). The more links a society has with decision-making processes, particularly through participation, the more aware citizens will be of their power and rights:

> It is only if the individual has the opportunity to participate in decision making and choose representatives in the alternative areas that, under modern conditions, he can hope to have any real control over the course of his life or the development of the environment in which he lives (Pateman, 1970: 110).

Therefore, the space and opportunity to participate in the CCs is vital to cultivate a sense of agency in local communities. However, the state controls these spaces insofar as they are managed by government agencies, which calls into question how far the state actually controls participation and how much this affects the ideals laid out in participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy literature emphasises the benefits of participation in creating an educational sphere, as well as developing inclusion in order to foster more citizen involvement (Kaufman, 1960; Macpherson, 1973; Pateman, 1970). Barber (2001) argues for greater participation because this enables a community to grow. Participating collectively and making decisions creates a stronger sense

of community and this reinforces itself the more people participate. As with other theories of participatory democracy, Barber's hypothesis concurs with the suggested cycle of education, empowerment and benevolence in an ongoing participatory process. When societies do not participate in their own political realities, then democracy ceases to be fully functional:

> Community without participation first breeds unreflected consensus and uniformity, then nourishes coercive conformity, and finally engenders unitary collectivism of a kind that stifles citizenship and the autonomy on which political activity depends. Participation without community breeds mindless enterprise and undirected, competitive interest-mongering. Community without participation merely rationalizes individualism, giving it the aura of democracy (Barber, 2001: 450).

CCs can enable better public understanding of the community's problems as well as enlarging the comprehension of wider national issues, all of which can be achieved through the participatory process. Although the participatory democracy literature offers this evaluation, it does so without discussing the role of the state and whether state-sponsored participatory initiatives are affected or controlled as a result. However, as the UNDP report *Democracy in Latin America* reminds the reader:

> Democracy cannot exist without a state, and Democracy cannot develop without a state that is able to assure citizenship for all. If this condition is not fulfilled, democracy ceases to be a way of organizing power, capable of resolving relationships based on cooperation and conflict. Power slips away, and democracy becomes void of substance (2004: 182).

Participatory democracy discusses the role of participation in a liberal democracy and provides an interesting insight into how CCs might fit into existing structures in Venezuela and how it might complement them. The promotion of greater citizen participation stands as a counter to liberal democratic theory, and is relevant to Venezuela as the state promotes participation in the CCs. Yet they also exist within liberal democracy and alongside liberal institutions. Before this discussion can develop, a brief examination of liberal democracy theory can be used to explain how participatory democracy contributes to liberal democracy's deficits, and also challenges other elements of it.

Schumpeter claims that for democracy to function, all that is required is that enough citizens participate in elections, especially as 'the electoral mass ... is incapable of action other than a stampede' and competition exists only between leaders for the most votes (Schumpeter, 1943: 283). Liberal analyses like Schumpeter's 'classic' political theory of democracy are regarded as insufficient in that they failed to fully grasp the extent to which participation in politics is needed in society. Pateman (2001: 471) assesses the viewpoint of other theorists born of the 'classic' Schumpeterian theory of democracy, including Berelson, Dahl, Sartori and Eckstein, all of whom are confronted with the dilemma of citizen participation:

> Berelson's theory provides us with a clear statement of some of the main arguments of recent work in democratic theory. For example, the argument that a modern theory of democracy must be descriptive in form and focus on the ongoing political system ... From this standpoint, we can also see that high levels of participation and interest are required from a minority of citizens only and, moreover, the apathy and disinterest of the majority play a valuable role in maintaining the system as a whole ... It is therefore, on the other side of the electoral process, in the competition between leaders for the votes of the people, that 'control' depends; the fact that the individual can switch his support from one set of leaders to another ensures that leaders are 'relatively responsible' to non leaders (Pateman, 2001: 471).

As Pateman notes, participation in politics is essentially minimal in most liberal democracies. Indeed, as the UNDP 2004 report on democracy in Latin America suggests:

> Citizens and civil society organisations play a key role in building democracy, keeping an eye on the management of the government, voicing the demands of the people and strengthening the pluralist base that every democracy promotes and needs. They are important actors in a citizens' democracy. Their role is complementary to that of traditional political actors in a democracy. Despite the difficulties and obstacles linked to the acceptance of civil society as an arena for participation and strengthening it, the importance of civil society in spreading democracy throughout Latin America must be clearly recognized (180-181).

Furthermore, liberal democratic theory overlooks the issue that participatory democracy has two important facets, namely educational and psychological ones, while 'apathy and disinterest' are seen as vital in much liberal theory (2001:

471). Furthermore, the Schumpetarian analysis that led to decades of outright dismissal of participatory democracy also produced several liberal theorists that dominated thinking about democracy.

Writers such as Dahl (1971) also defended the limited participation of ordinary citizens, to such an extent that they posited that the democratic state can be ruled unfettered from substantial interference. Citizens, Dahl argued, have the power to elect a leader every four years (or thereabouts) and because candidates will naturally compete, as in capitalist markets, pluralism and competition prevail, thus ensuring the best person is elected. Therefore, participation is so minimal that, as John Dunn explains, 'in no modern state do its members, male or female, decide what is in fact done, or hold their destiny in their own hands. They do not because they cannot' (1992: vi). In Venezuela, the Punto Fijo system of government (1958-1998) had fewer and less widespread participatory initiatives, which precluded people from participating in matters that had a direct impact on their lives.

Macpherson believed that using direct democratic mechanisms within liberal democratic political systems was the best way to achieve change and increase participation. In his terms the essential concern was 'with the prospects of a more participatory system of government for Western liberal-democratic nations. Can liberal-democratic government be made more participatory, and if so how?' (1977: 94). Macpherson's belief in participatory democracy was not that it would encompass all of society, acting as some form of panacea, but rather that it would increase participation for 'a more equitable and humane society [which genuinely] requires a more participatory system' (1977: 94). This was described as a 'real possibility of genuinely participatory parties, and that they could operate through a parliamentary or congressional structure to provide a substantial measure of participatory democracy. This I think is as far as it is now feasible to go by way of a blueprint' (Macpherson, 1977: 114). Although Macpherson was discussing western liberal democracies in his work, there are two points that can be applied to the Venezuelan participatory system. Firstly, that participation can work within liberal democracies and secondly, that in doing so society can function in a more just and equitable manner.

Both Pateman and Macpherson concurred that within liberal democracy participatory mechanisms can work in conjunction with existing institutions. Therefore, participation in the areas of both work and in the community will add value to, or even improve, representative democracy, particularly given the educational benefits of participation (Pateman, 1970: 27). However, as Pateman asserts, not everyone will want to become active, and the problem associated with participatory democracy for Macpherson is how this can be achieved:

> So the problem of participatory democracy on a mass scale seems intractable. It *is* intractable if we simply try to draw mechanical blue-prints of the proposed political system without paying attention to the changes in society, and in people's consciousness of themselves, which a little thought will show must precede or accompany the attainment of anything like participatory democracy. I want to suggest now that the central problem is not how a participatory democracy would operate but how we could move towards it (1977: 98).

In the case of the CCs, not everyone would want to participate, but as the system of participation covers the areas of goods and service provision, there are multiple ways in which people might participate or engage. If CCs wish to obtain project finance they must fulfil government agency requirements, which are linked to endogenous development, the policy vehicle chosen, to implement the central government's Bolivarian transformative project. If people choose not to do participate, they might prefer to work within existing local government structures, consciously selecting alternatives to either existing or new systems of provision at a local level.

As there were few empirical examples of participatory democracy in action in the 1970s, Pateman and Macpherson were unable to answer several key concerns about how to implement participatory democracy. They suggested that it could work within and even strengthen liberal democracy, but did not offer prescriptive models. Where this literature is useful is in the principles it sets out for the development of participatory democracy in society alongside, or within, liberal democracy, as in the case in Venezuela. Furthermore, the CCs do have a larger role to play in offering a political education to many of the participants who decide to become involved. Even in the setting up of a CC, citizens will learn

more about their communities, given the processes they must go through to establish the council. The CCs do not fulfil the criteria of interconnectedness, as participation is limited to the immediate geographical span of their community, although this can be substantial in and of itself. At present, the CCs do not reflect maximum participation but rather a marked increase in the level of participation at a local level. However, CCs are also coordinated by a dominant and controlling state bureaucracy (Pearson, 2010).

Although CCs reflect the urge of the PSUV to develop and institutionalise participation in Venezuela, it has not been comprehensively detailed as to how it should operate alongside the liberal institutions or mechanisms of representative democracy, or what the effects of politicised participation might be. As the PSUV intends to entrench Bolivarianism and Socialism of the twenty-first century, it manages participation to achieve this end. Buxton argues that there are concerns that participation in Venezuela is lacking a governmental direction in terms of how it works institutionally:

> The administration has yet to articulate a comprehensive vision of its participatory model or elucidate how this will work alongside or in place of existing institutional mechanisms such as the National Assembly, ministries, and state governors (2011: xvi-xvii).

The lack of explanation might be because of the ongoing entrenchment of Bolivarianism, with the belief that the PSUV must set up the necessary conditions for the *Estado Comunal* to be realised at some stage in the future, although it remains to be seen if this is the case.

However, as participatory democracy reflects the *practice* of participation in action, as well as informing the emerging literature on these issues, twentieth-century scholarship scarcely explained participation in different political settings. Earlier participatory democracy literature also failed to resolve key issues about the role of the state, other than foreseeing the fact that participation would not do away with liberal institutions (Pateman, 1970). Contemporary literature can be seen as more relevant in understanding the role of the state in the Venezuelan

CCs. As Gaventa explains, the 1990s and the end of the Cold War saw a reinvigoration of many theories of participatory democracy:

> Driven by a variety of concerns – from a desire by the state for gaining greater legitimacy, to a re-assessment of the role of expertise in public policy, to the rise of participatory processes in planning and policy making to demands from social movements for greater power – during the decade of the 1990s an important shift occurred in the democracy debate from one of concern of democratic *government*, to the concern for democratic *governance*, which involved new forms of interaction between state, market and society (2006: 12).

Therefore, the relationship between the state, market and society are fundamentally important to how participation is delivered. Whether it is initiated by civil society or by the state is covered in more empirical studies of participation, especially those dating from the last decade. In general, the participatory democracy literature does not pay enough attention to the relationship between state and participation, how participation can become politicised, or how participatory democracy can be applied in practice. Some analyses, such as Macpherson's, can be viewed today as less relevant as they are not grounded in empirical experience, which is essential in evaluating practice. How participation exists within liberal institutions, or how they might operate together, is not fully elucidated in the literature, and can be located more thoroughly in the contemporary, empirically based participatory literature. CCs can certainly be termed participatory, although the role of the state, the politicisation of participation, and the place of participation within liberal institutions is left unclear by much of the literature. In light of this, more recent case-study focused theories that reflect participatory experiments can provide greater insight into these issues.

Deliberative democracy and Empowered Participatory Governance

The empowered participatory governance model (henceforth EPG) defines participation in practice, and explains how it can operate within liberal institutions (or in some cases, replicate them). EPG has been extrapolated from the design and participatory experiences of four separate 'experiments'. These are: the neighbourhood governance councils in Chicago; habitat conservation

planning under the US Endangered Species Act; the participatory budget of Porto Alegre, Brazil; and Panchayat reforms in West Bengal Kerela, India (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 3).[61] One of the motivations for doing this was because of the failure of contemporary liberal democracy and the state to stimulate the actions necessary for 'deepening democracy':

> "[D]emocracy" as a way of organizing the state has come to be narrowly identified with territorially based competitive elections of political leadership for legislative and executive offices. Yet, increasingly, this mechanism of political representation seems ineffective in accomplishing the central ideals of democratic politics: facilitating active political involvement of the citizenry, forging political consensus through dialogue, devising and implementing public policies that ground a productive economy and healthy society, and, in more radical egalitarian versions of the democratic ideal, assuring that all citizens benefit from the nation's wealth (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 3).

The EPG model is an essential addition to the literature on participatory democracy and more recent case studies on participation, because it draws on the successes and potential failings of contemporary examples.[62] It also focuses more on the necessary institutional design of participatory experiments, providing a blueprint for these as well as criteria with which to assess how well they perform. In the case of the CCs, EPG provides a framework which can be critically applied to understand how the institutional design of the CCs is state-managed, and how it can be understood when matched against other examples of participation. Indeed, as Baiocchi suggests, 'The model of empowered participatory governance offers a set of institutional designs intended to solve many of the problems of both command-and-control institutions and inefficient New Left proposals' (2003: 67). EPG also animates a level of political learning among participants as it 'encourage[s] the development of political wisdom in the ordinary citizens by grounding competency upon everyday, situated experiences rather than simply data mediated through popular press, television, or "book learning"' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 28). This is certainly a feature applicable to the CC model as even the anti-PSUV CCs in Venezuela are

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[61] As Participatory Budgeting features so prominently in the debate on Participatory Democracy, greater attention is placed on this below.

[62] For a more general discussion on participation see Coehlo and von Liers, 2010; Craig and Marjory, 1995; Midgely, Hall, Hardiman, and Narine, 1986; Pearce, 2010.

involved in this process. EPG describes a system of deliberative decision-making that, if successful, could create 'efficient, redistributive, and fair decision-making' (2003: 67).

EPG suggests that there can be a direct democratic influence in decision-making, one which, through participation, creates more room for the 'educative sphere' in several areas of society (Pateman, 1970). The CC example can undoubtedly be applied to the EPG model in that they have spaces for a fairer system of bottom-up deliberation as a mode of inclusive community development. CCs are also connected to new state agencies and they are empowered to make decisions in the local arena. The CCs are not fully deliberative however, as are largely influenced by state-management processes in order to obtain finance and influence from powerful leaders and participants. On the whole, EPG successfully explains the aims, design features and relationship to the state, in the process towards 'coordinated decentralization'. However, the process of participation in Venezuela is politicised along pro- and anti-PSUV lines, and the state-managed CCs are less autonomous than the case studies used in EPG, so may not achieve the same 'radical' aims of deliberative democracy that Fung and Olin Wright suggest.

Although the discussion of the EPG model can sufficiently explain the process of governance and institutional design of the CCs, a critical approach is applied in order to address how it is also insufficient. This approach suggests that modifications could be applied to the understanding of EPG in order for it to be used effectively to understand CCs and participation in Venezuela. As mentioned previously, tensions around the politicisation of participation in Venezuela are a constant feature of participating in the CCs given how they are organised. In order to understand contemporary examples of participation as identified by the EPG model, as well as to identify similar features and characteristics to the CCs, attention is placed on deliberative democracy as a common central feature.

Rodgers extrapolates a form of participation based on the Participatory Budgeting experiences called 'empowered deliberative democracy,' based on EPG:

> [It is] an institutional model of participatory governance that is based on a deliberative as opposed to a representational democratic framework ... enhances citizen participation in governance by devolving the exercise of authority through a process of bottom-up public deliberation, which seeks to arrive at a consensual construction of a 'common-good' ... that aims to foster fairer, more inclusive, and more efficient decision making in society through processes of joint planning and problem solving, involving ordinary citizens, and in doing so inherently make them better citizens and enhance the quality of their life and government (2010: 3).

Rodgers, following Evans (2004), identifies three problems that must be overcome to achieve a sustainable deliberative democracy: firstly, they must be socially self-sustaining in that participation must be ongoing (2004: 38). Secondly, they must be able to overcome the 'political economy problem' (2004: 38). Finally, the growth problem must be resolved in order to avoid economic inefficiency or ultimately 'reduce real income growth to an extent that outweighs their intrinsic benefits' (2004: 38). Rodgers suggests that the political economy problem can be approached in two ways: endogenously and exogenously (2010: 5). The endogenous view focuses on the way in which power relations between those participating play out in the deliberative process. Heller's work states the importance of having political and state support:

> Grassroots democratic impulses in Kerela and Porto Alegre were given life and successfully scaled up only because they were underwritten and were given state support. Breaking through the logjam of political and bureaucratic interests opposed to decentralization required the political initiative of a pragmatic party and the instrumentalities of a pilot agency that could successfully circumvent traditional powerbrokers and build direct political ties with local forces (2001: 158).

Therefore, accepting that the state and society can work in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship in order to construct an *Estado Comunal* (communal state) it is essential to see how this is laid out in practice in EPG. As the authors note, a relationship between the state and participants is essential: 'Unlike New Left political models in which concerns for liberation leads to demands for

autonomous decentralization, empowered participatory governance suggests new forms of *coordinated* decentralization' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 21). Chatterton defines autonomy as 'the desire for freedom, for self organisation and mutual aid. The desire for autonomy, then, comes from a rejection of a political system tied to the needs of business and political elites' (2005: 545). Using this definition, the political participation of the CCs is not autonomous, whereas much of the examples in the EPG model do enjoy greater space between them and the management of the state. Unfortunately, however, EPG does not take into account how participation can become politicised, as in Venezuela. Furthermore, the EPG model also neglects the nature of the state's centralised power, which helps to shape the processes of CC participation at a local level in Venezuela. CCs are more than being part of a "coordinated decentralization", rather they are an example of managed participation which is different to the examples in EPG. The CCs have a minimal distance between them and the state as opposed to EPG examples.

The EPG model is significant as it can provide insight into other issues, including the reformulation of the Venezuelan state under Chávez and the PSUV. This is particularly important as a response to the failings of the PF and in order to make the state more democratic. The authors set out the three essential aspects of the model as: '(1) a focus on specific, tangible problems, (2) involvement of ordinary people affected by these problems and officials close to them, and (3) the deliberative development of solutions to these problems' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 15). These are also the principle functional aspects of the CCs and must be carried out for them to succeed in maintaining participation and for obtaining project finance. The CCs operate in a coordinated decentralisation overseen by the PSUV, a process which also remains state-managed due to its control over each CC's access to project finance and limited exposure to creating changes to politics. EPG fails to address how far the state coordinates decentralisation. In the EPG model case studies in question, they are state supported, and as such receive funds as a means of synergy. However, in the CCs each project must be approved by relevant state agencies and are scrutinised by them, and can be seen as state-managed participatory initiatives.

There are three 'institutional design features' that are important in the EPG schema to 'stabilize and deepen the practice of these basic principles':

> (1) The devolution of public decision authority to empowered local units, (2) the creation of formal linkages of responsibility, resource distribution, and communication that connect these units to each other and to superordinate, centralized authorities, (3) the use and generation of new state institutions to support and guide these decentred problem-solving efforts ... background conditions [are] necessary for these institutional designs to contribute to the realization of democratic values (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 16).

In the first instance, power should be devolved to 'local action units' that are 'charged with devising and implementing solutions and held accountable to performance criteria' and should be 'endowed with substantial public authority' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 20). In this way, the CCs are empowered by law to become local decision-making bodies, but in the example of the case studies they can work collectively on some issues, not all, perhaps due to funding restrictions. Secondly, according to the EPG model, local units and participatory initiatives are linked in 'accountability and communication' with other organisations, such as 'superordinate bodies,' that are able to 'reinforce the quality of local democratic deliberation and problem-solving in a variety of ways' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 21). The CCs can work together on some projects, especially with other existing organisations such as Missions and social schemes like subsidised markets.

In Venezuela, social controllers are empowered by the CC Law (both 2006 and 2009) to report corruption or mismanagement, and modifications to the 2009 CC Law made *Voceros* more accountable for the management of funds in an attempt to halt this (Ellner, 2011: 429). Finally, the third institutional design feature is the 'generation of new state institutions', because EPG 'experiments' can 'colonize state power and transform governance institutions [to] seek to influence state outcomes through outside pressure [and] remake official institutions' along EPG principles (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 22). The PSUV have put in place several state agencies responsible for the delivery, management and provision for CCs, such as *Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo del Poder Comunal* (Foundation for the Promotion and Development of Communal

Power, FUNDACOMUNAL). These institutions are charged with project finance, and applications are made to them for this. In the case of Venezuelan CCs projects can only go ahead if they are successful in obtaining finance, which amounts to more state-management than CCs being able to transform governance institutions or remake official institutions as the authors suggest.

In order to use the EPG schema to understand Venezuelan CC practice, as well as its relationship with the state, we must ask: do both models hope to achieve similarly radical aims? Fung and Olin Wright argue that EPG is radical in an unusual, yet innovative fashion:

> These experiments are *less* "radical" than most varieties of self-help in that their central activity is not "fighting the power". But they are *more* radical in that they have larger reform scopes, are authorized by state or corporate bodies to make substantial decisions, and, most crucially, try to change the central procedures of power rather than merely attempting occasionally to shift the vector of its exercise ... These experiments reconstitute decision processes within state institutions (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 22).

The EPG approach therefore purports to change the system of governance from within (liberal democratic institutions), and the same can be said for the rhetoric regarding CCs and *Poder Popular* (popular power) in Venezuela. However, the CCs do not challenge the 'central procedures of power', rather they are guided by them and are restricted by their institutional design. The EPG model also suggests that 'administrative bureaucracies charged with solving these problems are restructured into deliberative groups' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 22). Although agencies have been set up to oversee the CCs, they are centralised and not deliberative bodies, although CCs do work together and also alongside other participatory initiatives. Therefore, the CC process can be understood as operating within a model similar to EPG, but in a more state-managed fashion.

There are institutional objectives of the EPG model that 'advance three especially important qualities of state action: its effectiveness, equity, and broadly participatory character' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 24). The authors suggest that the EPG model is effective as it 'allows multiple strategies,

techniques, and priorities to be pursued simultaneously in order more rapidly to discover and diffuse those that prove themselves to be most effective' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 25). In terms of equity, it is proposed that this is advanced by the involvement of the poor who are normally excluded from the process and has 'broad consensus' as a result of deliberation (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 26). As EPG requires 'sustained and meaningful participation', 'popular engagement' is a 'central productive resource' (Fung and Olin Wright 2003: 27). The CCs require on-going participation and are aimed primarily at helping the poor, but they are less effective in simultaneously utilising 'multiple strategies, techniques and priorities' unless these are set out by government agencies, resulting in a low level of dynamic problem solving, and deliberative decision-making. The involvement of the Venezuelan state in its effectiveness is less straightforward than the EPG model suggests it might be in the case studies it draws upon.

As a result of the institutional design of the CCs and EPG model, neither operates without flaws. Fung and Olin Wright question EPG, and in doing so offer an analysis that can be applied to the CC model. Three analytical questions are asked of the EPG model to discover if: 'the experiments in fact yield the benefits that we have attributed to deliberative democracy, and whether these advantages must be purchased at some unspecified price' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 29). The questions ask: to what extent experiments 'conform to the theoretical model'; what flaws this might have and, what its 'scope' might be; and whether it is limited to 'the few idiosyncratic cases that we have laid out, or are the principles and design features more broadly applicable?' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 29). The CCs largely fulfil the EPG model, but the flaws and idiosyncrasies are also significant. This is especially important in the case of the CCs, as state-management is still a major influencing factor as to the quality of participatory democracy in Venezuela.

In order to assess how the EPG model functions effectively, Fung and Olin Wright set out six critical questions that reflect the success in implementing the model:

1. How genuinely *deliberative* are the actual decision-making processes?

2. How effectively are decisions translated into action?
3. To what extent are the deliberative bodies able to effectively monitor the implementation of their decisions?
4. To what extent do these reforms incorporate recombinant measures that coordinate the actions of local units and diffuse innovations among them?
5. To what extent do the deliberative processes constitute "schools for democracy"?
6. Are the actual outcomes of the entire process more desirable than those of prior institutional arrangements?

(Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 30-32).

In application to the Venezuelan example, each of these criteria is an essential framework with which to understand the efficacy of the CCs. When combined, these points, as a framework, question the quality of participatory democracy as an outcome of the process' deliberation and educational potential. In Chapters 4 and 5, more empirical evidence will be applied to these questions to provide a more holistic answer.

Finally the authors set out six concerns about their model, several of which can be applied to the CC experiences:

1. The democratic character of processes and outcomes may be vulnerable to serious problems of power and domination inside deliberative arenas by powerful factions or elites.
2. External actors and institutional contexts may impose severe limitations on the scope of deliberative decision and action. In particular, powerful participants may engage in "forum-shopping" strategies in which they utilize deliberative institutions only when it suits them.
3. These special-purpose political institutions may fall prey to rent seeking and capture by well-informed or interested parties.
4. The devolutionary elements of EPG may balkanize the polity and political decision-making.
5. Empowered participation may demand unrealistically high levels of popular commitment, especially in contemporary climates of civic and political disengagement.
6. Finally, these experiments may enjoy initial successes but may be difficult to sustain over the long term.

(Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 35).

This list of concerns provides a thorough and comprehensive collection of questions about participatory democracy, based on experience. As a result of these findings it is clear that participatory experiments are susceptible to shortcomings in several areas that must be applied to empirical research on

participatory experiments. Firstly, the processes and institutional design of participatory experiments are essential features of the success of CCs, and the quality of participatory outcomes depends on power relations both within the CC and outside of it.

Furthermore, 'even if deliberative norms prevail, and diverse participants cooperate to develop and implement fair collective actions, the powerful (or the weak) may turn to measures outside of these new democratic institutions to defend and advance their interests' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 35). As opposition mayors in Venezuela can hold the modes of governance to account by not providing public services, opposition forces can also resist participatory initiatives:

> Aside from the possibility of defection, parties constituted outside of these deliberative bodies may not recognize their authority and resist their decisions. Driven by understandable jealousies, we might expect officials firmly ensconced in pre-existing power structures – elected politicians, senior bureaucrats, those controlling traditional interest groups – to use their substantial authority and resources to overrule unfavourable deliberative decisions (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 35-36).

This is a reflection of the problems associated with the politicisation of the CCs in Venezuela. One set of elites dominates another, as the PSUV and the PF parties have done. A central criticism of the EPG model is that if the powerful (or weak) do not have their interests met, they may look elsewhere to do so, termed 'Forum Shopping and External Power' by Fung and Olin Wright (2003: 35). Nonetheless, Abers suggests self-interest might 'initiate' deliberation, as participants must stand to gain from their participation (2003: 205). Therefore, participation needs to be maintained in order to for enough people to attend CCs.

The high expectations of the EPG model on citizens may reduce the number of participants: 'it may be that citizens in contemporary capitalist societies are generally too consumed with private life to put forth the time, energy, and commitment that the deliberative experiments require' (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 38). In the case of CCs in Venezuela, maintaining participation is a key element fundamental to their success.

In sum, the CC model fits with the principles of the EPG model, but some modifications are required given the political context which controls participatory experiments such as the CCs. When taking into account the centralisation of the CC project, there is some suggestion that it has a political objective other than the strengthening, or deepening of democracy. In context the CCs are an integral part of the construction of 'dual government'. Although the process of participation in CCs is similar to the EPG model, it does not fully fit because of this politicisation and also given the separate nature of participation in Venezuela. Although CCs can be set up and used by anyone regardless of political stance, they may be seen as political vehicles, with specific emphasis on helping the poor. Furthermore, many parts of the opposition in Venezuela have opposed the CCs, arguing against their presumed intention to replace the local liberal democratic institutions.

One area of distinct difference between the models is that EPG suggests (as part of their 'institutional design features') that communication links should exist between participatory experiments, as well as to a superordinate body (FUNDACOMUNAL) (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 21). Although CCs do communicate with one another, the political and financial nature of the CCs means that they may act (or feel as though they must) in competition in order to obtain resources. Where this is not the case, communication networks may instead become politicised, consisting of pro- or anti-PSUV CCs. The nature of state-society relationships is fundamental to the efficacy of the participatory experiments and the concerns expressed by Fung and Olin Wright as a result of the EPG cases can be attributed to the CCs. Reviewing how much 'synergy' there is between the state and CCs should provide a clearer view of how far they are participatory or state-managed. In the next section greater attention will be placed on the experiences of participatory budgeting in Brazil. Furthermore, the fervent political culture and demands society has historically made on governments of Andean countries such as Bolivia provides a pertinent juxtaposition to that of Venezuela, and the effects and implications of this are discussed.

State-society synergy

The space between state and society is a key way of understanding how far participatory democracy is nurtured or allowed to develop, as has been discussed throughout this chapter. Specific attention is placed here on the interactions in that space, no matter how wide or narrow. Much of the participatory democracy literature already discussed suggests that participatory and liberal democracy can operate in conjunction, if not necessarily complimentary to each other. Other bodies of literature, discussed later in this chapter, are based on experiences of participation that suggest it can be invigorated and even promoted by the state. The question remains then, where does participation play out in Venezuela? Is the state held to account as several autonomous movements have attempted to do elsewhere in Latin America, or is the state creating spaces of managed participation that exist outside of local, municipal and national politics? Thus far, it seems that – in contradiction to the literature of participatory democracy and EPG – that CCs are state appendages that operate in spaces of participation in a managed way in order to decide how state redistribution should be deployed in local areas. Therefore, CCs can be seen as a form of state-society synergy but one that favours the state and is not completely mutually exclusive, especially when compared to Participatory Budgeting, or when a country has a strong history of working to hold government to account, as Bolivia does. Furthermore, Venezuela does not share the same rural tradition as other Andean countries have, largely due to industrialisation after oil was discovered and exploited to become the main industry.

Evans claims that cooperation between the state and society can produce constructive results for participatory initiatives: '"state-society synergy" can be a catalyst for development. Norms of cooperation and networks of civic engagement among ordinary citizens can be promoted by public agencies and used for development ends' (1996: 178). There are a variety of conditions that are essential to this type of delivery, according to Evans. Governments must supply citizens with inputs that people cannot provide themselves, while the community provide knowledge, experience and time (Evans, 1996: 204). These 'complementaries' provide a potential basis for synergy, which must be realised

through an institutional basis in order to be able to exploit them (Evans, 1996: 204). This mixture of state and society input into development is evident in some ways in the CCs, as the state provides financial and logistic resources (via state agencies) and communities carry out deliberation and project work. In this, Evans suggests that the state should be regarded as an ally to developing communities. However, in the case of the CCs, we need to try to understand who stands to gain more, participants or the state, as participants gain vital resources through participation, but the state might have been able to provide this without them.

According to Evans, in pursuing the process of synergy, activists should not maintain a view that 'the state is the enemy' as it is not an unobtainable achievement, even in the Third World (Evans, 1996: 205). However, the state stands to gain much more than the local knowledge that Evans suggests. As in the case of the CCs, they are closely tied to government and its ideological bases and, as a result, power may be utilised to the advantage of the PSUV. Issues of abuses of power, and apathy in participation can be counteracted by the state, if they are involved with the intention to eradicate problems such as clientelism, according to Abers (1998: 533). There are some suggestions, as discussed in Chapter 1, that CCs embody and play a role in the attempt to entrench Bolivarianism and Socialism of the twenty-first century and as such are not free agents calling for autonomy. Nonetheless, the CCs operate within a state-organised system of participation that requires participation to occur in a pre-defined way for project finance to be granted. In some cases the state maintains participation through promotion, investment, and facilitation, but in these there is a greater degree of separation between them, and they may be less politicised than is the case between the CCs and PSUV.

Abers addresses 'state-fostered civic organizing' in her work on participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil arguing that:

> The Porto Alegre policy has combined a substantial amount of government investment in social programs with a successful state-sponsored effort at capacitating civic groups to control that investment

> and, in doing so, to dramatically improve their quality of life (1998: 511-512).

Thus, the local government helps to facilitate and promote participation in the participatory budgeting processes. Abers sets out how the local government organises for 'state sponsored' process of civic organising to occur. The state must be genuinely open and responsive to the demands of participants who must in turn learn to trust the state's responsiveness, which takes time, as underlined by a 'demonstration effect' and also providing incentives for 'previously unmobilized groups' to begin to organise their communities (Abers, 1998: 531). Abers goes on to explain how 'the role that state actors can play in helping those with little previous experience to begin to organize collectively' (1998: 512) is imperative to the success of the participatory budgeting, and that state support is beneficial to the process, especially in mobilising and combating clientelism. Abers also suggests that state institutions can activate participation within communities that lack experience (1998: 513). This contrasts with dominant opinions on state-sponsored participation: 'The picture presented here of state-sponsored civic organising sharply contrasts prevailing perceptions that government spending and proactive policy making are only likely to discourage collective action' (Abers, 1998: 533). From this study, it is evident that the state can provide support for participatory experiments, as it successfully does in participatory budgeting.[63] The key difference is that the state allows participants to decide how money is spent, whereas in Venezuela communities must apply for project finance.

The literature on associationalism (Abers, 1998) suggests a separation of the state and society in participatory processes, but in the case of Venezuela, the two are fused. In addition, Heller argues that state and social movements can actually work in fusion in order to achieve greater democracy:

> Engaged and sustained state-society negotiations in which conflict is carefully accommodated, creates new associational incentives and spaces, it allows for a continuous and dynamic process of institutional learning, it promotes deliberation and informed compromise over zero-sum interest

[63] For more detail on how participatory budgeting can contribute to the deepening of democracy see: Lerner, 2008 and, Schugurensky, 2008.

> bargaining, it helps promote innovative solutions to the classic tensions between representation and participation, and it bridges the knowledge and authority gap between technocratic and rural involvement (2001: 158).

This fusion in Venezuela is a result of the government's mediation of the CCs, in that they must adhere to the state's regulations. Other empirically-based studies of participation (Evans, 1996; Fox, 1996; Lam, 1996; Ostrom, 1996) contain work on 'how such state-fostered civic empowerment can occur', and posit:

> In all of these cases, both the close ties that developed between government officials and citizens and the fact that the state policies explicitly encouraged civic organizing led not only to strengthening civic groups but also to a growing political capacity of those organizations to pressure for government accountability and effective policy (Abers, 1998: 514).

These studies were often more separate from the control of the government than is the case with the CCs. Therefore, the space between the state and society is clearly defined as the state is working to become more accountable to citizens by opening up avenues within the state for them to participate in. This cluster of literature – although useful in the appreciation of structural and institutional issues – suggests that participatory initiatives can influence the state, or work alongside or inside it (in Municipalities), and ultimately that the two parts are separate: 'The provision and production of many public goods and services involve the joint effort of government officials and citizen-users' (Lam, 1996: 1039). Although close ties exist between these participatory initiatives, they are still separate from the state, and the suggestion is that coproduction is evident in the relationship: 'Coproduction is a process through which inputs from individuals who are not "in" the same organization are transformed into goods and services' (Ostrom, 1996: 1073).

The assessment in Abers' work on participatory budgeting is that it 'sharply contrasts [with] prevailing perceptions that government spending and proactive policy making are only likely to discourage collective action' (1998: 533). This is also the case in the CCs; where the PSUV has promoted them they have spread exponentially, which in turn contributes to their politicisation. While the PSUV

may be vying for increased political influence via greater participation in the CCs, this may not be completely negative, as both the state and participants stand to gain:

> As always with state-sponsored participatory processes, the actions of the government were influenced by the need to generate political support for the PT. But since the administration sought to do so in part by gaining allies in poor neighborhoods and in part, as mentioned earlier, by building a more general reputation for "democratic" governing, the administration's interests largely coincided with those of neighbourhood organizations: both sought a transparent process through which neighborhoods could obtain access to government infrastructure and services (Abers, 1998: 534).

Although Abers emphasises governments' role as a positive influence on participation in society, her understanding suggests the administration's need to perform an 'external agent' role with a large part to play in mobilising support for participatory budgeting, including the eradication of clientelism (Abers, 1998: 533), is not necessarily applicable to Venezuela. In Venezuela the central state, via their agencies, do not *participate* in the process as PT officials did, but rather the PSUV *mediates* the process. In the case of participatory budgeting, this was to work towards combating clientelism, whilst the CCs can be seen as managing the direction of participation in order to promote a Bolivarian agenda.

In the case of participation in Venezuela, the state has not responded to the demands of the people per se, but has attempted to resolve the issues of *Puntofijismo* governments (see also the 2004 UNDP report on Latin American democracy) through its own form of managed participatory democracy. In this, Venezuelan's have entrusted the President to make changes on their behalf, more so that through citizen pressure. The desire to be autonomous from the government in order to hold it to account is much less in Venezuela, than say movements like the Argentinian *Assambleas Barriales* that had an 'initial massive participation, their practice of direct democracy still refuses to succumb to traditional political identifications and structures or even create a new one' (Dinerstein, 2003: 187-188). Nonetheless, participatory budgeting in Brazil was also the result of a struggle, and eventually the state enabled this to come into operation.

As Gaventa argues, developments in the literature reflect 'deepening democratic engagement through the participation of citizens in the processes of governance *with* the state' (2006: 15). Indeed, as von Liers (2007: 226-227) explains and based on her comparison of South African AIDS/HIV Treatment Action Campaign and the Landless People's Movement, the state must instil participation. If the state does not take this action, participatory initiatives can fail, especially if the electorate is not historically accustomed to having spaces in which to participate in politics. Heller's work emphasises the importance of having political and state support:

> Grassroots democratic impulses in Kerela and Porto Alegre were given life and successfully scaled up only because they were underwritten and were given state support. Breaking through the logjam of political and bureaucratic interests opposed to decentralization required the political initiative of a pragmatic party and the instrumentalities of a pilot agency that could successfully circumvent traditional powerbrokers and build direct political ties with local forces (2001: 158).

The state in Venezuela has created a participatory space, which it manages. Although both state and society stand to gain, this 'synergy' favours the state more (especially in terms of political gains). The PSUV can be viewed as working partly in a more state-managed system of state-society 'synergy', and central involvement in delivering and managing participation can work towards benefitting CCs. CCs can also benefit the PSUV by mobilising and implementing changes that can only be carried out according to the principles of Bolivarianism. Some consultation between the CCs and the central state has occurred through Social Street Parliamentarianism and by surveying local opinions, but this is not common. In other examples of participation mentioned here, either participants are 'invited' to participate in the state, or they demand it. Ackerman states that 'instead of trying to influence policy from the outside or only at the local community level, the citizens of Porto Alegre are invited inside the government apparatus itself' (2003: 451). Coproduction does not exist in Venezuela as it does in Brazil. The state has not responded to the demands of the people, but has reflected an understanding of their needs by providing managed spaces of participation in which communities can obtain money to redevelop

communities. Ultimately, however, state-management of the CCs results in PSUV maintained control of participation, furthering their politicisation.

State-managed participation

Gaventa argues that 'democracy building is an on-going process of struggle and contestation rather than the adoption of a standard institutional design' (2006: 3). In this way, we can address the 'standard institutional design' of CCs in Venezuela, which can be classed as 'an on-going process of struggle and contestation' as participation has been reconfigured in several ways since its inclusion in the 1999 BRCV. However in its current form, the issue facing the 'process of struggle and contestation' is that participation spaces are being constructed by the state for its citizens, as opposed to citizens struggling against the state, as previously discussed. Nonetheless, dominant perspectives on democracy often emerge: 'Even as alternative conceptions and practices emerge, there is a danger that one blueprint will simply substitute for another' (Gaventa, 2006: 21), and this has been the case in Venezuela.

In Venezuela, mainstream participation is not the fruit of autonomous social movements. Rather, it is the state that is the owner of participation. As the state has an important role to play in the mobilisation and organisation of participation, it can also be seen as the owner of it too:

> It is, after all, the state that is often the object of mobilization and that remains the guarantor of rights; and state-provided participatory spaces, such as many of those analysed here, not only provide venues for civil society engagement but can actively stimulate the creation of new political collectivities (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 7).[64]

The state is also the lead protagonist 'in creating the conditions for empowering the citizens.' (López Maya, 2010: 106). In the case of the CCs this role can be highly political, while also being mutually beneficial. López Maya discusses this theme more generally:

[64] See also Baiocchi, 2001.

> They [CCs] are the result of orientations proportioned by the national government, which simultaneously seek to promote various different though interrelated objectives: to improve the efficiency of the public administration, to consolidate the hegemony achieved by the new Bolivarian actors and to contribute to the construction of a model of society conceived of as an alternative to capitalism (2010: 100).

In light of these arguments it becomes evident that the CCs form part of a process to consolidate hegemony and help create an alternative society, as well providing more effective public administration. All of these aspects form part of the strategy to create Bolivarianism in Venezuela and the CCs are the participatory element that exists alongside local democracy. The forms and institutions of representative democracy are maintained in Venezuela but the participatory initiatives reflect a commitment to 'apply different mechanisms for participation in all the ambits of the state, with a view to transforming the profoundly unequal power' in Venezuelan society (López Maya, 2010: 106). Nonetheless, the institutions of participation often reflect the aims of the 'owners' of those spaces:

> As "invited spaces", the institutions of the participatory sphere are framed by those who create them, and infused with power relations and cultures of interaction carried into them from other spaces (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 11).

Given this issue, CCs can be seen as being 'framed' by and 'infused' with the desire politically and altruistically of the Venezuelan governing party. Cornwall highlights an interesting point associated with participants' politicisation that can be used to comprehend the CCs: 'Affiliation to other societally produced means of organizing collective interests, whether mass-based popular movements or formal political parties, are never simply left at the door when people come to deliberate ...' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2010: 16). The CCs are state-managed participatory initiatives that are part of that state and are 'tied to and dependent on the presidency' in the following legal-judiciary framework:

> The law determines how they are to be created, how they should function, how decisions are to be taken, and requires, for access to public funds, that they be registered with the Local Presidential Commission for Popular Power, which depends on the central government and whose members are appointed by the president of the republic himself (Articles

> 20 and 31). The law created a National Fund for the Councils as an autonomous organisation without legal status, with an executive council appointed by the president, in order to finance "community, social and productive" projects (Lopez Maya, 2010: 122).

In this way, the CCs are intended to be a branch of the government that is constructed separately in order to liberalise democratic institutions at a local level like the *alcaldía* and *gobernador*: 'the CCs are an attempt to transcend the type of political representation typical of the liberal democratic model.' (López Maya, 2010: 124). Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egui similarly argue that Venezuelan participation is closely linked with the state:

> Venezuela's experiments in radical popular governance over the past decade have spawned many government-sponsored participatory programmes and institutions in which the state is not the only facilitator of new forms of popular organization, but also a coparticipant (2011: 254).

Therefore, we can see that the state has a more active role in participation than in other cases mentioned here.[65] In addition, Ellner writes that CCs can be viewed as politically associated with the state in a way that avoid liberal checks and balances:

> ... the social programmes have a political content and play a political role, thus violating the separation of powers and divorce between the public and private spheres that are the basic principles of liberal democracy. The Chávez government utilises social programmes to mobilise along political lines ... (2011: 432)

The state owns the process and has control over the CCs as modes of participation. Therefore, the politicisation of the process may mean that participants have greater influence in CCs meetings and agenda if they are politically aligned with the PSUV, as they are the agents of change.

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[65] For examples of participation that is more autonomous from the state see: Baiocchi, 2001; Novy and Leubolt, 2005; and Nylen, 2003 for Brazil. See Heller, 2001; Kurien, 2008; Reynolds and Harinal, 2006, for cases in Kerela, India. See Dinerstein, 2003 for Argentina; Mattner, 2004, for an example in Vietnam; Posner, 2004, for Chilean participation and Montambeault, 2011, for a perspective on Mexican participation.

The political implication of dual government is that it occurs alongside existing local democracy institutions: '[t]his structure of "centralized participation" allows CCs to bypass other traditional government institutions and political intermediaries and be in direct contact with (and under the direct supervision of) the President's office' (Fuentes-Bautista and Gil-Egui 2011: 255).[66] Although participatory democracy is set out as supplementary or complementary to liberal democracy (Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970), in the case of the CCs, there could be antagonisms between them and existing state. This is potential a volatile position for the CCs to exist within as they are not part of local, national or regional governments, rather they are additional to them.

It is necessary to locate how CCs in Venezuela can challenge power at a local and national level: 'put simply, to be meaningful, participatory processes must engage with and change political power' (Gaventa, 2006: 23). However, in the case of Venezuelan CCs, which were initially intended to replace existing local democracy institutions, and move towards the construction of an *Estado Comunal* (as desired by the PSUV), their scope to challenge political power is limited. Gaventa also argues that 'power relations' must be analysed: 'to guard against co-optation of new mechanisms of participatory governance by entrenched interests of the status quo' (2004: 39). Here Gaventa identifies the need to protect the mechanisms of participation from co-optation, which is partly how CCs have been implemented. Questions remain about why the PSUV have defended participation and spent so much time and resources on the CCs. Cornwall and Coelho consider similar issues facing state involvement in participation:

> What is it that motivates state officials to participate and to follow through decisions arrived at in these spaces? What makes bureaucrats amenable to what can end up being long and convoluted deliberative processes, rather than resorting to quicker and more authoritarian decision-making processes? What incentives motivate them to invest in creating a more enabling environment and act in the interests of poorer and more marginalized citizens? And what do *they* get out of participating in the participatory sphere? (2007: 19).

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[66] Also see Ellner, 2008; López-Maya, 2008, 2009; and, Smilde, 2009.

The commitment of politicians and the state is of key consideration in participation, for there may be political issues such as their desire to have greater influence or gain more information from the electorate (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 19). It may be beneficial for politicians, as they 'adopt the mantle of participation to give themselves distinctive public identities as champions for the cause of open and accountable government' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 19). Nonetheless, state support both logistically, and financially, are imperative for the success of participatory initiatives, but for constructive state engagement to exist there must be a redressing of disciplinary tendencies, otherwise 'participatory arenas may simply reinforce relations of power patterned by experiences in other institutional spaces' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007: 20-21).

At worst, over-institutionalisation results in 'a loss of social energy as seeping bureaucratization kills off spontaneity and creativity, leaving such an institution a pale shell of its former self' (Cornwall and Coehlo, 2007: 21). This chapter is concerned with participatory initiatives that are *part* of the state, rather than institutionalised or autonomous initiatives. It is worth considering how much spontaneity and creativity' can actually remain, and if it presents a threat to the politicisation of CCs, or whether politicisation has led to the destructive, seeping bureaucratisation that Cornwall and Coelho discuss.

Although state involvement and facilitation of participation is not always a negative experience for participants (Abers, 1998; Evans, 1996), it must be considered as a separate case from those mentioned in the majority of the literature because, as López Maya suggests, the CCs are part of the state. It is also worth considering potential implications on the politicised dual government model, as separate to participatory democracy. Participation is required in order for dual government to function, especially as this is how the state provides logistical and financial resources to the organised communities. Because of the politicisation of participation, and its close ties with the state, not all Venezuelans will find the CCs appealing and this may prove a source of conflict between pro- and anti-PSUV sectors in society and in local government.

The complications of the CC experience are evident in other ways, especially as they operate as part of a limited process due to several elements (including their diminutive size), which would likely preclude them from effecting changes on society, let alone on the national political sphere (López Maya, 2010: 124). The institutional design of the CCs, such as isolation from municipal and federal authorities and dependency on the presidency, as well as the unclear relationship with intermediate organisations, can all undermine the quality of democracy they create (López Maya, 2010: 124). The unique political environment that results from the participatory process of the CCs is under-represented in the literature, specifically in empirically grounded research.

As the CCs are undoubtedly widespread participatory movements according to the broad ideals of participatory democracy, and fulfil most of the criteria of the EPG but are also closely managed and heavily politicised, we need to fuse various perspectives. As state-society synergy can be beneficial in practice it also needs to be conducted for the good of all, and to be available to all. Although CCs are open to everyone, and are often employed by the opposition, they are mainly utilised by those who support the PSUV, and are inevitably seen as vehicles for that party. Therefore, we might classify CCs as state-managed participatory micro-governments that operate as part of a dual government system, which is intended to provide the rapid supply of goods, services and financial provision to the local organised community.

Some lessons from Latin America's participatory initiatives

Having reviewed the literature regarding participatory democracy and the role of the state, attention must now turn to other attempts to implement greater participation, in order to understand how unique Venezuelan state-managed CCs are. The UNDP report on Latin American democracy called for greater democracy so that it:

> ... goes beyond this narrow definition of democracy to assert that the horizon for democracy should be extended. This process entails not only perfecting existing institutional political mechanisms and ensuring efficient implementation of civil rights for all citizens, but also effectively

> broadening social citizenship. The discussion focuses on how to advance towards an integral form of citizenship, which must have politics at its heart – the way in which the citizen, and more specifically the community of citizens, can participate in important decision-making (2004: 194-195).

Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi (2008: 32) state: 'In Latin America, this formulation for deepening democracy through the extension of participation – which is meant to make the State more truly public so that it can ensure citizenship rights – has its most elaborate expression in Brazil.' Participatory budgeting came about as a result of an organised civil society joining together and then the state listening to them (Dagnino, Olvera, and Panfichi 2008: 32).[67] The main differences have been discussed throughout this thesis, but it is worth noting that participatory budgeting 'represents one of the most effective schemes of state-society collaboration for accountability in the developing world' (Ackerman, 2003: 451). Furthermore, the success of participatory budgeting is that participants do not depend on finance and achieve this by 'replacing the power of money with the power of voice' (Ackerman, 2003: 451). Of particular relevance is the way in which participatory budgeting came into existence with the support of the state: 'PB is a social innovation that emerged from an intertwined process involving the state and civil society' (Novy and Leubolt, 2005: 2013). This is particularly different from Venezuela, where the state sets up and manages the CCs. The reason Brazil has such a constructive relationship with the state (and indeed distance between it and participatory initiatives) is perhaps due to the struggles against the state historically: 'In the fight against military dictatorship, popular movements entered the public stage as new actors. During democratisation, they fostered a socially innovative relationship with the state' (Novy and Leubolt, 2005: 2023-2024).[68] As Venezuela has more or less consistently had a form of democracy since 1958, there were no struggles against military dictatorships, or resulting pro-democracy civil society groups. As guerrillas found it difficult to win widespread support in Venezuela during the 1960s and 1970s, the state more or less consistently governed until 1998, when discontent grew with neoliberalism, corruption and lack of participatory spaces,

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[67] For more detail on Participatory Budgeting in Brazil see also: Wampler, 2008; Baiocchi, 2001, 2003; de Sousas Santos, 2005.

[68] See also: Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi, 2006.

which Chávez had proposed that he would rectify if elected. Bolivia also has a strong history of struggle against the state and it has a Left that draws upon two key strengths. First, is Bolivia's constitutionalism in that: 'Bolivia has seen its constitution repeatedly revised to adapt its institutions to new social and political realities' (Crabtree, 2009: 92).[69] Second, Bolivia has a 'powerful tradition [of] popular mobilization within a state whose authority and capacity to resist or absorb dissent has, historically been limited. This is a history of rebellion and protest against the constituted order...' (Crabtree, 2009: 93). Venezuela does not have this, which goes some way to explain why citizens have often looked to presidents to lead change on their behalf. Furthermore, the case of Bolivia is indeed exceptional by contrast:

> Bolivia represents a rather different panorama to other countries in the region, especially in the way in which social movements emerged as a defining factor in politics, in many ways replacing the traditional parties. The force of ethnic politics in Bolivia, in particular, has few parallels elsewhere in the region. Bolivia is also somewhat exceptional in terms of its political traditions and how these validate the politics of mobilization, exploiting areas here the state is weak or non-existent (Crabtree, 2009: 107).

In addition, Bolivia is making great strides in implementing participatory innovations in the country, especially since the election of Morales, in terms of:

> ... institutional creation[s] for local civic participation...in local associations such as School Councils, neighbourhood councils, and local oversight committees is legally mandated. This requirement evenly affects communities across the country, regardless of their size or level of development (Davies and Falleti, 2012: 2).

In addition to the efforts of President Morales, the rich history of popular organisation and mobilization in Bolivia, is also common to Ecuador and other Andean countries, especially in rural zones, which accounts in some ways for the recent popularity of participatory developments. Goldfrank points out that

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[69] For further discussion on Bolivia's history of resistance, social movements, and new forms of participation see: Spronk and Webber, 2007; Crabtree and Whitehead, 2008; Altman and Lalander, 2003; Rockefeller, 2007; Gott, 1970; Blackburn, 2000; Lazar, 2004 and 2008; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005; Anria, 2010; and, Kohl, 2003.

Ecuador and Bolivia's left turn promoted a change in both countries constitutions, whilst:

> [Bolivia] suggests an even stronger and wider role for citizen participation in everything from public planning, education, healthcare, and the environment to the movement of state owned business. Article 321.II seems to suggest that PB-like institutions will continue to be required in Bolivia (2011a: 262-263).

Participation in Ecuador and Bolivia (and to some extent, Paraguay) is characterised by a degree of 'uncertainty', however: 'In all three countries, the president faces strong opposition from previously entrenched elites who opposed modifying the constitution and multiplying the spaces for participation' (Goldfrank, 2011a: 262-263). Therefore, right wing opposition to participation is also evident in these countries as it has been in Venezuela. The suggestion is that given the history of mobilisation in these countries that the state is using participatory mechanisms like Participatory Budgeting for people to participate within, which is quite different to state managed participation.

Another nation that has implemented something similar to the CCs is Nicaragua and with its Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) which were created by the state by presidential decree.[70] The CPCs are also similar in their outlook to CCs:

> When creating the Communication and Citizenship Council, with his wife Rosario Murillo as the coordinator, Ortega claimed his objective was to establish civilian advisors "in territories, districts, regions, neighborhoods, municipalities, departments, and autonomous regions, in order to create a citizen's democracy by means of a direct democracy." A month later, Mrs. Murillo was named one of the political secretaries of the FSLN tasked with creating CPCs in every territory' (Chamorro, Jarquin and Bendeña, 2009: 4).

However CPCs have also attracted similar critical responses as CCs have done, albeit from within a different political context:

> Compared to Venezuela's Communal Councils, the Citizen Power Councils seem to be much less successful in attracting participants, more directly linked to the ruling party, and more controversial, as they were

[70] For more detail on participation in Nicaragua, see: Dye, 2004; and, Bay, 2011.

> held up in court for nearly a year before being authorized. Even advocates of participation view them as clientelist...the Citizen Power Councils are unlikely to help pacify Nicaraguan politics or help the government improve its democratic qualifications or popularity (Goldfrank, 2011a: 264).

The FSLN, Ortega and his wife, ordered that all recently elected candidates to make their Municipalities 'subordinate to [the] local CPC' (Chamorro, Jarquin and Bendeña, 2009: 4) in much the same way that Venezuela is creating and influencing the trajectory of the *Estado Comunal*, and they can therefore be seen as having similar state-managed objectives.

In Uruguay, participatory budgeting has made good progress alongside other participatory initiatives and has, in general terms, favoured the development of democracy as evidenced by their wide acceptance (Goldfrank, 2011: 12-14). However, Participatory Budgeting is somewhat flagging in recent times:

> The current era is characterized by two paradoxes of participation. On the one hand, the Latin American Left's most famous local government innovation, Participatory Budgeting, has been taken up by parties across the political spectrum as well as by international development organizations intent on encouraging PB throughout the region and the globe. On the other hand, for the most part, the Left's national government have *not* adopted Participatory Budgeting either as a model for national participatory initiatives or as a requirement for municipal governments (Goldfrank, 2011a: 265).

Dagnino, Olvera and Panchini offer a perspective on some of the inefficiencies of Participatory Budgeting as:

> ... it is limited to a small part of public budgets and the processes have not always led to the transformation of the overall political culture and practice. It created a popular participatory democratic that coexists with forms of "normal politics", that is, clientelism and neoliberal public policies (2006: 37-38).

In summary, the majority of participatory examples discussed in this section reinforce the importance that the space between society and state is an essential feature of participatory democracy. Furthermore, the fact that citizens elsewhere fought for deeper democracy resulted in greater autonomy, whereas in Venezuela

this has not historically been the case. Venezuela does not have the same working class and rural and Highland tradition that exists places like Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil, especially because the development of the oil economy led many away from the countryside and towards the northern parts of the country. The resulting case of the CCs can be termed state-managed participatory democracy for these reasons.

Conclusion

The CCs are a PSUV participatory initiative constructed to work towards the development of the *Estado Comunal*, and can be seen as politicised prioritisation of support for the poor and their wider endogenous development strategy. However, at the local level, CCs provide excellent facilities to deliberate and learn about politics. This is enabled by the support of the state through a state-society synergy of sorts. Citizens are better equipped to participate more widely in the polity and understand national and local politics more skilfully as a result of their participation.

The CCs are state-managed and politicised, which creates tensions within the spaces of existing local government, and together with their existence alongside liberal institutions as a form of dual government, but they have not replaced existing institutions in local politics. The CCs are providing participatory spaces that have had mixed results, which vary according to location, identification with the principles of endogenous development and need. Because CCs are state-managed projects within the wider intention to construct an alternative state, they complement liberal democracy to a certain extent, as they offer more opportunities to participate and benefit, with the limitation that participation is often restricted to small areas. Therefore, state-managed participation can be understood as partly participatory, partly deliberative and contains certain amounts of state-society synergy.

The CCs' potential to reform the system of government is limited by a state-managed institutional design that reinforces their dependency on the state rather than their liberation from it. This creates conflicts at the local level between this

dual government and local government, as both are responsible for providing community services. Because of the politicised nature of participation, some people are repelled from participating in the CCs or even defeated by the system which manages them. Because of the broad development of participation and the training it provides, CCs are a positive change for communities, especially where they have been successful in challenging problems and improving the local quality of life.

Participatory democracy as discussed in the literature in this chapter as well as in the UNDP 2004 report is seen as a means of achieving an enhanced and more beneficial form of democracy. Participatory innovations around Latin America offer a clearer perspective on the relationship of the state to participatory initiatives. Especially important is the case of participatory budgeting in Brazil which provides an example of state-society synergy and facilitation of participation in municipalities. The CCs appear to have a degree of discursive space to enable them to be termed deliberative, and they provide an educative function for them to be called participatory democracy examples. However, the degree to which the CCs are autonomous of the state might limit this aspect. EPG does go some way in categorising CCs, but they have less influence over their political environments than the cases discussed. Furthermore, recent empirical examples of participatory democracy fail to recognise that potential politicisation of participation is of grave importance for such studies, as in Venezuela CCs are part of the construction of the *Estado Comunal* in which participation has a part to play.

Evidence of both scenarios can be found in the preceding case studies and suggest that mixed results in CCs are due to politicisation, dual government and institutional design. This chapter has provided a greater insight into the participatory nature of CCs, as well as their position within and alongside the state, according to participatory democracy literature. In conclusion, the various theoretical and empirical examples in this chapter describe a distance between the state and the participating society that benefits participation in practice. We now turn to a discussion of these themes in practical terms in the following empirical chapters.

Chapter 4: The process of dual government, Communal Councils and local communities

The *Consejo Comunal* (Communal Council, CC) identified as the main case study in this work is called BV, and was situated in an established part of the city of Mérida. BV was an interesting example of a middle class community that wanted to experiment in working to create changes at a local level by utilising a system of participation and attempting to implement government funded development projects. Within this system there are a variety of different ways that communities react to the CC process, both within their own area and also with the state agencies responsible for the implementation and finance of CCs. In the case of BV, this was a process fraught with problems compounded by an inability to secure finance for certain proposed projects.

In another example of a CC in a more deprived area of Mérida, identified in this chapter as TH, the CC followed the government criteria and ideological discourse perfectly, and was rewarded accordingly. In stark contrast to BV, TH achieved a comprehensive portfolio of completed projects that included house building programmes and working towards eliminating social problems. What makes TH so interesting is that it was previously in need of social housing, and became an example of how CC members can collaborate successfully. TH was more pro-PSUV than BV, and as such the CC participation process reflected that. Interestingly, BV had completed all of the necessary legal, and elections had been held with great enthusiasm, with much of the population supporting the principle of participation. Once the community began to develop opinions about the political nature of the CCs concerns began to emerge about the process, which in turn impacted the CC's development. The use of two CCs in my research illustrates their mixed results in Mérida, which also highlights the tensions within the process of dual government. This focus in this chapter on CCs in Mérida suggests that they operate with mixed and inconsistent results, which is attributable to their institutional design, internal politics and the politicised nature of participation in more affluent, and less pro-PSUV CCs such as BV.

This chapter provides an analysis of the institutional design and criteria that BV followed to become legal and begin operating as a CC. Following on from this there is a discussion based on three problems that BV experienced in obtaining project finance and in maintaining attendance at meetings, which can be categorised as: participation, local governance, and ideology. These three themes explain why the CC had trouble obtaining finance and in successfully completing projects, and later ceased to function.

The CCs and the state

The types of project that CCs around Mérida have successfully completed have included small-scale examples like roofing and the provision of sports facilities, to larger projects such as constructing social housing and getting people involved in discussion groups. Ellner more generally argues that CCs have made an impact in terms of advancing Bolivarianism when compared to earlier participatory initiatives:

> For the Chávistas, the "revolutionary process" consists of people gaining control of their lives in the areas where they live, more so than in the workplace (as Communists, Trotskyists and other hard-liners advocate). This emphasis is reflected in the fact that the community councils have received far more attention and resources than the worker-management schemes ever did (2010: 38).

The CCs have had an impact into how communities develop, interact and operate within government policy. Although there are several interesting developments in Venezuelan CCs, existing tensions can obstruct the extent to which services can be provided to the poor. One of the largest concerns is the CCs' dependence on state financial provision. This is problematic in the same manner as their lack of autonomy from central government, because CCs are ultimately centrally managed by the PSUV. Secondly, due to a lack of substantial and continued involvement in national politics, the CCs have a diminished capacity to influence the creation of the *Estado Comunal* democracy intended to replace local government:

> The community councils are not in a position to supplant municipal government. At this point, they are undertaking work only on priority

> projects, a far cry from taking on the myriad of functions of municipal government. Applied to the community councils, the Rousseau-inspired utopian ideal of direct democracy displacing representative institutions – a vision sometimes embraced by Chávistas is highly misleading (Ellner, 2010: 37).

As Ellner notes, autonomy is some way away as CCs continue to depend on government expertise and support in project building (2010: 38). The intention, according to the PSUV, is that once the CCs have created solid foundations in the community, they will be sufficiently ready to achieve autonomy. As López-Maya suggests:

> In the Constitutional Reform Proposal in August 2007, they were incorporated into the constitution itself (Article 70) and formed the basis for a reorganisation of the territorial structure. The proposal was rejected by the electorate in December 2007, and this conception of the CCs and of the new 'geometry of power' was relegated to limbo in 2008 (2010: 122-123).

Although the CCs were touted as a replacement for the existing structures of local government, they have not, and the dual government that would have replaced these institutions simply exists alongside it, and often in direct conflict with it. The CCs were supposed to develop away from the PSUV in the *Estado Comunal* as part of the Constitutional Reform Proposal in 2007, but as this was defeated, they have not done so. As a result, the CCs exist as part of the central state extension into local politics. As Ellner suggests:

> The transfer of decision-making authority and resources to the community level has sometimes produced tensions between the community councils and the municipal and state governments mainly controlled by *Chavistas*. Governors and mayors attempt to assume credit for the completion of projects undertaken by the community councils by putting up billboards announcing them as accomplishments of their government (2009: 6).

CCs are state-managed participatory initiatives and form part of the construction of Socialism of the twenty-first century, which means participation is open to politicisation. When amalgamated into *Comunas*, CCs were intended to replace local democracy to create the *Estado Comunal*, and can therefore be seen an extension of the government's transformational political agenda. Although the

2007 Constitutional Reform referendum was defeated, thereby stalling plans to create the *Estado Comunal* (with CCs as prominent features), *Comunas* are opening up around Venezuela. The Socialism of the twenty-first century agenda is still being developed in many ways, often utilising the CCs through measures such as the *Economia Popular*, and the dual government that provides goods and services to local communities.

Internal Organisation of BV CC

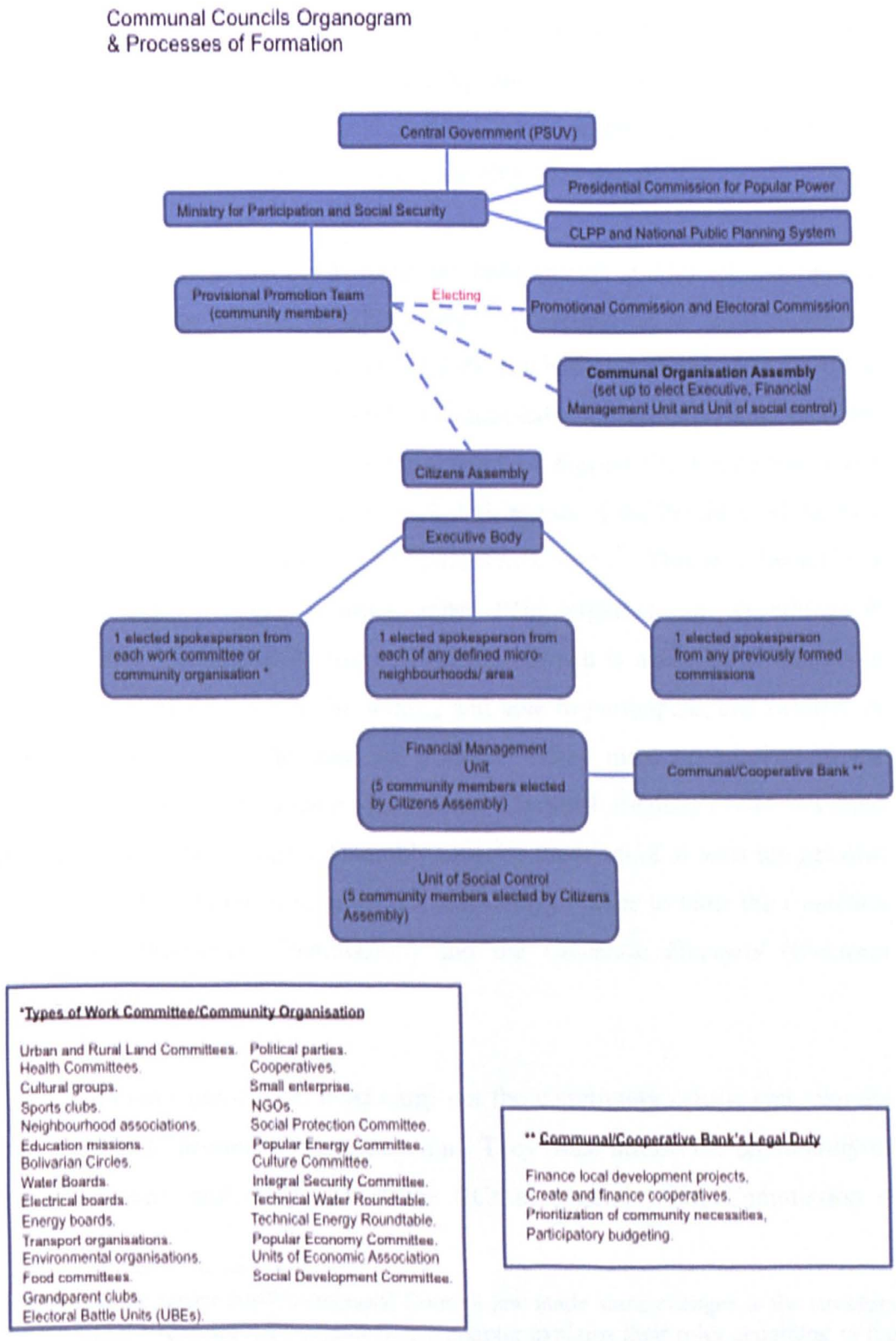

Figure 2. Communal Councils Organogram and Process of Formation (Adapted from: Ley Orgánica de Los Consejos Comunales, 2008 [2006], Gaceta Oficial Nº 39.983).

BV CC was formed in 2007 using the same criteria as every other CC in Venezuela, set out in the *Ley Orgánica de Consejos Comunales* (2006), and as per the above.[71] Advertisements about forming a CC are often displayed across Venezuela in various media formats (see Appendix 2 and 3), as well as on food items in the popular state subsidised market, *Mercal*, in order to promote the CC process. CCs are also set out in the CC Law 2006 (see Fig. 2).

It is important to note that the Ministry for Participation and Social Security (as that ministry was known in 2006) was represented at a local level by FUNDACOMUNAL. Since 2006 the CLPP has had less power over the CCs, and were to be abolished in the 2007 constitutional reform referendum. In order to establish a CC community they must form an *Equipo Electoral Provisional* (Provisional Promotion Team) and check with agents of the Presidential Agency for Popular Power, represented by FUNDACOMUNAL.[72] This is followed by a population census. Communities must then organise an *Asamblea de Ciudadanas y Ciudadanos* (Citizens Assembly) which is made up of all people above the age of fifteen who are willing and able to participate, and resident in that particular zone for at least six months. They must be enrolled in the *Registro Electoral Permanente* (Permanent Electoral Registry), and not hold elected office. The Citizen's Assembly must be made up of at least ten per cent of the population of the zone (over 15 years old) in order to elect the *Comisión Promotora* (Promotion Commission) and the *Comisión Electoral* (Electoral Commission).

The Promotion Commission must carry out the community census and map the area in order to document the population. They must inform the community of the scope, aims and objectives of the CCs in general. The Commission is

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[71] Although the recent 2009 Communal Council law made some changes to the structure of CCs and the relevant roles within it, this chapter explains their roles according to the earlier version of the code, the 2006 law as the BV CC and others were using it at the time of research. I will, however, mention where changes have been made in response to the 2009 law.

[72] This was previously known as *Fundación para la Promoción y Desarrollo de Poder Popular* (Foundation for the Development and Promotion of Popular Power) and was changed to suit the move towards a *Estado Comunal* incorporating the trials and developments of *Comunas* (Communes), collectives of CCs.

obliged to write a history of the community and then create the *Asamblea de Constitutiva Comunitaria* (Constituent Citizens Assembly) within ninety days. An Electoral Commission of five people creates the *Registro Electoral* (Electoral Register) based on the census information and then prepares for elections. After the elections they must count the votes and swear in the winners. Those who form the Electoral Commission cannot become *Vocero/as* and once their tasks are over their roles are dissolved.

Once completed, the Constituent Citizens Assembly is made up of no less than twenty per cent of the people eligible to vote in the community who must be present to elect *Voceros* through a secret ballot, which BV citizens did on November 18, 2007. The *Voceros* represent the three organs of the CC: the Executive; Financial Management; and, Social Controller. Within these roles, work committees are set up to carry out the work plans that the Citizens Assembly decide upon. Once this is completed, the CC is then required to register with FUNDACOMUN in order to have all documents checked and become legally recognised. Below is a diagram that offers a simplified explanation of the complex process of setting up a CC:

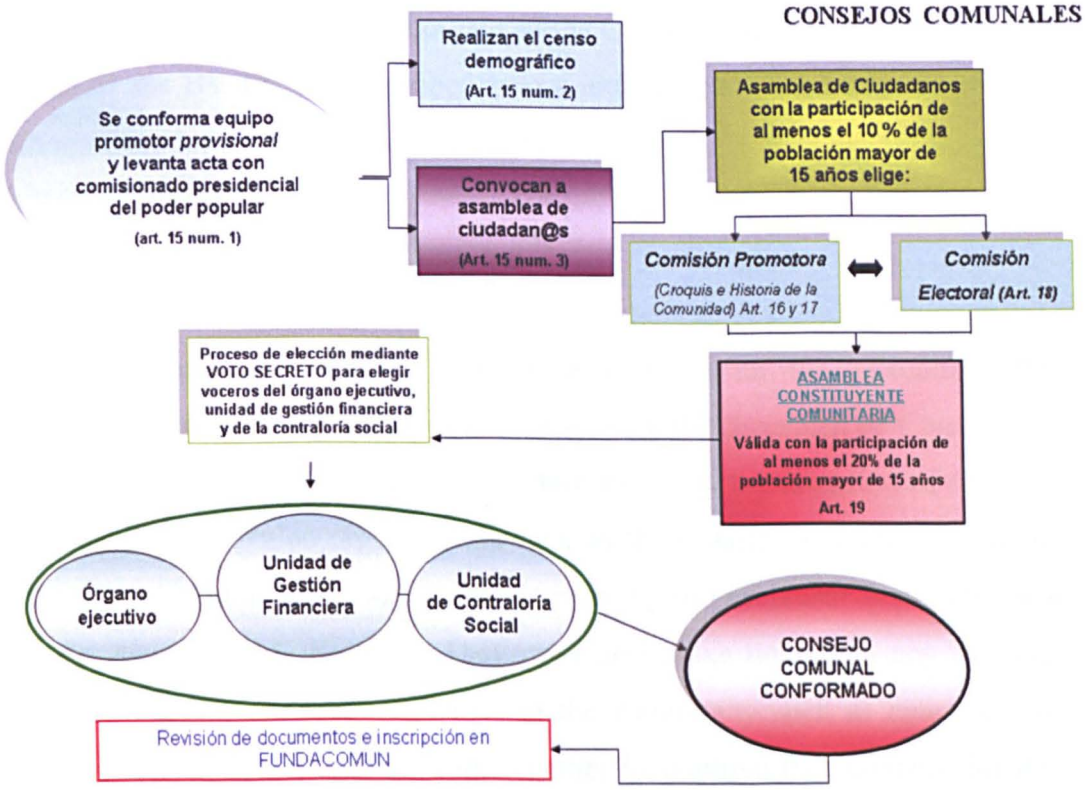

Figure 3: Conformation Process of CCs, (supplied by BV CC *Vocero,* Miguel, December 2008).

BV carried out their census in August 2007, the *Vocero* nominations and electoral campaigns were held in September 2007, and in October 2007 *Vocero* nominees were selected before being voted in during November 2007. During the entire process of constructing the CC in BV, advertisements were strategically positioned around the area (mainly by local entrepreneurs in the community) to inform people that these processes were taking place. *Voceros* are elected for a two-year period and can be re-elected.

There are three organs of the CC: *Órgano Ejecutivo del Consejo Comunal* (the Executive), *Banco Comunal* (Communal Bank), and *Contraloría Social* (Social Controller). Although no member of the CC is paid, *Voceros* and members of committees can have expenses reimbursed (CC Law 2009: Chapter 4, Article 24). In indigenous communities, leaders of CCs can decide on the organs that best suit their culture and norms, and this is protected by the Organic Law of Indigenous Peoples and Communities (RBV, 2006: Article 12). An informational advertisement created for the benefit of the population of BV was

made available by one of the *Voceros* and is used to describe the roles of the various functions of the different organs of the CC (see Appendix 4).[73] The three organs of the BV CC are described below and are elaborated with additional information related to the mechanics of the CC.

Órgano Ejecutivo del Consejo Comunal [74]

The Executive is made up of *Voceros* responsible for the promotion and overseeing of community action plans voted in by the *Asamblea de Ciudadano*. The Executive also work with, and help to coordinate, the inclusion of existing community participation organisations such as the *Comités de Tierras Urbanas* (Urban Land Committees), *Mesas Técnicas de Aguas* (Technical Water Boards) and the *Asociación de Vecinos*. They must also make links with any existing *economía popular* (popular economy) in the community such as *cooperativas* (cooperatives) and they should work together to improve the economy for the benefit of the community by creating or working with existing relevant committees. Social groups, including those relating to women', sports, grandparents, health, culture and media, must also be linked to work groups according to the collective development of the community.

The Executive must carry out the decisions of the Citizens Assembly and develop the Community Development Plan (for BV's plan, see below), the work plans, and help to coordinate the volunteers. As part of this function, it is the Executive's role to promote the *intercambio* (exchange), and transfer of services and skills amongst members of the community for work to be successful.[75] This is one of the principle ways *Desarrollo Endógeno* occurs at a local level from day to day, according to the document *Desarrollo Endógeno: Desde adentro, desde la Venezuela profunda* (Endogenous Development: From within, from the

[73] Where information is lacking it has been obtained from the Communal Council Laws 2006 and 2009 and Brito, 2008.
[74] Titled the Executive Committee in the 2009 CC Law. There are three *Vocero/as* elected to oversee this.
[75] The term *intercambio* was used to explain working within resources, and has also been used to describe endogenous development.

heart of Venezuela,).[76] As a socioeconomic model based on the satisfaction of basic needs, participation, and community development, this represents an attempt to link the local level to a national and international (i.e. regional) platform. It is also intended as a means to expand and deepen democracy in Venezuela and ALBA states.

The Executive must promote *Parlamentarismo de Calle*, a grassroots discussion-based process, as part of their responsibilities, although this was not apparent during my research in BV. This legislature has the right to use prompt the Executive to initiate actions and place items on the CC's agenda, a right enshrined in the constitution. The Executive's role is to manage participation in the local economic process, public enterprises, and to assist in the recovery of struggling businesses.[77] Although I never witnessed this in my research, more active CCs promoted community business through their council. This absence could have been attributed to some of the difficulties BV had in obtaining project finance.

***Banco Comunal*[78]**

The Communal Bank is collectively owned by the community and is publicly accountable. It can also belong to several CCs and acts as a financial intermediary within the community, and providing social assistance through investment and credit. In most circumstances, the bank is cooperatively-based, but in BV they opened their account at a private bank – Banfoandes – as it was already located in their community. The Communal Bank organ of the CC has five elected *Voceros* and was governed by the *Cooperativa de Financiamiento de Ahorro y Crédito* (Financial Credit and Saving Cooperative). It administers the funds received, generated or collected, and must also aid the local *economía popular* through budgeting for the Community Development Plan. The

[76] MinCi, 2008: 4.
[77] Both the 2006 and 2009 CC Laws suggest that this function is to promote the *económia popular*, including cooperatives and other communal, socialist enterprises.
[78] The Communal Council law of 2009 replaced this with a Financial Management Committee in the CCs that oversees finance that comes from government agencies, some *Alcaldías*, and from micro finance projects granted by FONDEMI.

Communal Bank must promote the building of cooperatives, and a neighbouring CC to BV opened up a *panaderia comunal* (community cooperative bakery). BV had hoped to open a *Mercal*, which was unsuccessful due to problems with obtaining appropriate project finance.

While the Communal Bank must promote, participatory budgeting in the community according to the prioritisation of needs in that area, in my experience this was not carried out. It must also help to strengthen local economy and promote the creation and development of the *Núcleos de Desarrollo Endógeno* (Nuclei of Endogenous Development, NUDEs) and other *economía popular* outlets, such as cooperatives. During my research these roles were not mentioned in the BV CC, and when probed or discussed among members of the community in Citizens Assembly meetings, common answers simply stated the lack of finance they had received. There were some brief discussions about supporting the development of or building a *Mercal* in the community. *Voceros* appeared aware of how BV needed finance for ongoing projects to survive.

Contraloría Social[79]

According to the 2006 CC Law, the Social Controller Unit (SCU) oversees the activities of the BV CC. If the SCU deems activities in any part of the CC to fall outside of the law, they must intervene accordingly, either by holding its members to account or reporting them to the relevant authorities. The SCU is particularly concerned with the receipt and administration of finance. In BV, it was made up of five *Voceros* according to the CC legal requirements, but in reality there was only one active *Vocero* in this role and, on the whole they were largely inactive. The unit must also carry out the social auditing and monitoring of projects and public investments conducted by municipal, state and national government.

[79] The Social Controller Unit as defined by the 2009 CC Law audits the financial activity and project management of a CC and its Finance Management Committee.

Work or Project Committees

The Work or Project Committees can be made up of a mixture of *Voceros* and members of the Citizens Assembly, but membership tends to be based around the skills required by specific projects. This reflects the idea of community improvement from within, which is based on using and nurturing local people's skills. In line with the requirements of the Community Development Plan, these committees oversee that work areas are established and work together with existing groups that have shared interests, such as the *Mesas Técnicas de Aguas*. The Executive, Communal Bank and Social Controller Unit must hold coordination meetings and evaluation sessions at least once a month.

Typical projects carried out by working committees in CCs around Mérida focused on housing and services such as water treatment and roads. As elsewhere in Venezuela, these are 'the areas most neglected during the uncontrolled urbanisation of previous decades' (Muhr, 2008: 160). For example, only one million homes were built during the Fourth Republic's entirety even though the poor had built three million themselves (Reinoso et al., 2003: 66, quoted in Muhr, 2008: 160).

In BV CC, project development appeared to be less urgent than in some of the poorer parishes in Mérida, such as the TH CC. Nonetheless, the proposed BV CC work committees included those devoted to health; education; urban and rural land; housing and habitat; protection and social equality; *economía popular*. In addition, other committees were responsible for culture, security, media and information; recreation and sports; food, water technology; energy and gas; and services. These had potential *Voceros* to oversee them, but as funds were not obtained, they did not follow through.

One of the first things CCs do is to prioritise the needs of the community and use this information, obtained via a vote in the Citizens Assembly, to create a Community Development Plan. BV had a plan ready in early 2008 that included ten named *Voceros*. At the time of research only seven remained in the CC and more were planning to leave it. Successful projects at BV CC conducted during

the time of the research included a community Christmas Party and a Day of the Children event. There were also some successful collaborations with PDVAL to put on farmers markets, where people were also able to get vaccinations by medical providers. Most of the projects that the CC had planned did not come about due to lack of project funding arriving by the time the CC ceased.

Community Development Plan

The BV Community Development Plan listed eight problems that existed within the community, and proposed eight solutions. The plan was voted on, in accordance with the Communal Councils Law 2006 (as discussed in the following section) and with specifications made by the Citizens Assembly. It was to be carried out on their behalf by the relevant *Voceros* of various work committees. The plan was viewed by the *Voceros* as preliminary, as after it was voted in, there was a great deal of contention about which issues were most important, and the projects were deemed to be pilots. The issues followed by the solutions of the Community Development Plan are as follows in Table 2:

1) Roads and public spaces are overused and in an inadequate state. Resolution: Humanisation of the roads and public spaces.
2) Poor lighting in the streets and problems with the voltage system. Resolution: To improve lighting.
3) Complete failure of comprehensive security for neighbours. Resolution: Total comprehensive security CCTV and communal police.
4) Frequent failure of drinking water supply. Resolution: Distribute secure drinking water (not part of a *Mesas Técnicas de Aguas* as in *barrios* elsewhere).
5) Have a form of micro-financial support from a pool of income. Resolution: socio-productive project called 'White Line Appliances'
6) Need for neighbours to get a loan to solve short term needs Resolution: Loans for a year for 4% of the community.
7) Need to get a warranty to sell low-cost medication to community. Resolution: Create a community low-cost pharmacy, a *Botica Popular*
8) Need to help guarantee public health for the community Resolution: Set up logistical support for a future 24-hour ambulance service for BV.

Table 2: Community Development Plan

According to a 2008 BV CC advertisement of the proposal (see Appendix 4), the objectives of CCs are as follows: (1) to promote and contribute to the

organization and formation of civic education which is integral to the communities development; (2) to propose a Community Development Plan to prioritise, map out and solve the most sensitive problems of the community; (3) to promote and offer advice to citizens when creating and resourcing for projects that are beneficial to the community; (4) analyse the human and material resources of the community, as well as the financial intermediation of funds generated, obtained or allocated; (5) to exercise the role of social auditor in all CC activities; (6) nominate *Voceros* for the executive organs; and (7) organise work committees supported by existing community organisations and voluntary social groups. These were discussed in Citizens Assembly meetings in late 2008, but were not mentioned in later phases, especially as attendance was so low.

BV CC meetings

A book of minutes recorded the attendance and discussions of each meeting that was open to the public, i.e. the Citizens Assembly meetings. These were normally held weekly but at an inconsistent time, with meetings often abandoned without notice. The secretary of the CC, the headmaster (called *El Profe*) of the *colegio* filled out the weekly forms. The forms recorded citizens' attendance and *Voceros* (who are all legally required to be present, which was never the case), the time and date of the meeting, and the week's agenda for discussion (listed one to six), which never exceed thirty minutes each. The book has a further six sections to document the topics of discussion, and proposed resolutions as agreed by those attending. The last section of the minute book recorded names, signatures and *cedula* (identity card) numbers of those who attended. The book appeared to be a legal requirement, although it was inconsistently compiled, depending on which *Vocero* was in charge of the meetings.

What is striking about the book is the registration of those both in favour and against motions in meetings. It is rather curious as to why this data was needed, and indeed what was done with it. It was also apparent that there were never more than six *Voceros* attending meetings simultaneously during early meetings, and the largest Citizens Assembly meeting was due to a discussion about the distribution of free nutrition in the community. The most consistently attending

Vocero was *El Profe*, who was also secretary, as well as the local entrepreneur, Miguel.

When they took place meetings were often an informal 'drop in and out' affair. Many people from the community would walk in mid-way through debates, discussions or presentations and often interrupt them with their observations, opinions or thoughts about the topic in hand, or about a completely unrelated matter. At the start of the research project, around 20 participants would be present, but this declined to around two to three at the end. The majority of the attendees in the early stages were *Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela* (Bolivarian University of Venezuela, UBV) students, and later on there were only a handful of *Voceros* and a few residents who would drop in occasionally. Meetings could often be chaotic and for a large part discussions would overlap. *Voceros* often spoke for a long time and people could lose interest. In the second period of research (June–October 2009), the meetings were much more subdued as attendance and morale was so low.[80]

There were fractures within the community about politics and even though the main *Vocero* emphasised continuously that the CC was not a space for politics but for the greater good of the community, discussions inevitably reverted to the current political climate. Some of the UBV students would challenge *Voceros* as to why politics as a topic of conversation was avoided. Most people who attended the meetings were from the UBV and, according to Miguel, they gained credits for attending and getting involved in the CCs, but this claim was not substantiated.[81] The students were fervently pro-PSUV and wanted the meetings to follow a strict political agenda. Early meetings' discussions reflected the desire to discuss how the CCs fitted in with the wider movement of Bolivarianism and this clashed somewhat with the agenda the *Voceros* appeared to be following. One such meeting began with students making collective statements in support of other more pro-PSUV CCs and criticising the approach of the *Voceros* and questioning their motives. The *Voceros'* agenda clashed with

[80] There is a more in-depth discussion of the leadership role of *Voceros*, in BV particularly, in Chapter 5.
[81] See also Ellner, 2010 who also states this.

the students because they wanted to prioritise community issues, which could also be because they were contra-PSUV and did want to appear to be adhering to PSUV development strategies. However, this does suggest a certain distrust between the two parts, pro and anti. Thus, the nature of participation for both sides meant different things, for the Pro-PSUV students, participation was part of the wider Bolivarian process, whilst for the non- or anti-PSUV members it was about community development by and for the community. The latter also had a certain amount of distrust of the fact CCs were a PSUV initiative, as discussed below. Conflicts grew so great that the students withdrew from the BV CC.

It was unclear as to whether the UBV students held a caucus before meetings but they did follow the PSUV rhetoric closely. The discussions reflected a common line in so far as perspectives on popular participation formed an important element of Bolivarianism. As was often the case, activists were exceptionally well versed in the law and their rights under the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution. Many pro-PSUV people who I encountered had this in-depth knowledge, and saw participation as key to empowerment, which was often associated with the state. When the UBV students called for a discussion of this kind, they would do so from the basis of this knowledge. This stance would reflect the dominant discourse of Bolivarianism that was common among those in favour of the process.

Meetings began to have noticeably fewer participants (particularly evident during later phases of research), and became much quieter as a result. They took on a more *ad hoc* air, becoming less structured and timings were no longer as important. As a result, only a few select participants would attend, most of who were *Voceros*. Attendees would drop in and out of the *Colegio* as if checking on a sick, dying relative, tentatively loitering for a few minutes before disappearing again as if unable to endure any more. The quorum of participants required to make decisions is 30% of the community above the age of 15, and 20% in the second vote.[82]

[82] In the 2006 law, this was 20%, and a single vote. The 2009 law changed this to two votes.

Other issues discussed in meetings were national and local political issues, and meetings would often open with these, as people in BV were very interested in them. The November 2008 election of Mérida's *Alcalde* provided rich ground for heated debates and discussion, as did the ousting of the Honduran President in 2009. CCs are a PSUV-designed vehicle after all, and many of the attendees were in favour of Bolivarianism.

This was part of a range of wider problems that faced BV. Although problems continued in BV, other CCs in Mérida were successful gained project finance with impressive results, building social housing, etc.

The *Banco de la Mujer* and the CCs

The *Banco de la Mujer* has satellite offices around Venezuela and provides micro-finance for women in poverty on both an individual and group basis (even if some men are involved), and by 2006 50,000 grants had been made (López, 2006: i). Raby asserts that micro-credit is:

> ... a means of providing credit to those who would never normally qualify for bank loans, although not in itself revolutionary, by eliminating the requirement for collateral, it calls into question the normal logic of capital, and has been of enormous benefit to many poor (especially women). The Venezuelan Women's Development Bank has taken the concept further: not only does it require no collateral but it only makes loans on a collective basis, to groups of women who present community projects. The Women's Bank has already had a major impact, making thousands of loans which have transformed the lives (and raised the political consciousness) of tens of thousands of women in poor communities (2006: 180).

It appears that the *Banco de la Mujer* provides an important incentive for women to participate in the CCs. The bank has similar Bolivarian ideals to FUDACOMUN and FONDEMI, such as the desire to provide assistance to promote community development as part of the national project of endogenous development and the creation of a socialist economy. Another aim of the bank is to reinforce solidarity by funding socio-productive activity in groups of women. This is in order to help groups of women work together to escape poverty, to develop their communities and provide examples of the *economía popular*, such

as cooperatives. Activities might include artisan crafts, hand-made products, and clothes.

The *Banco de la Mujer* has the authority to link up with the women of different CCs in order to ascertain the main issues facing them and to identity factors that contribute to their (potential) lack of community development. The *Banco de la Mujer* sees CCs as representing the community above any other forms. The next stage is for the bank to create a diagnosis of the communities' needs and to work out to what extent they can finance the project. Alongside this, the *Banco de la Mujer* evaluates and then approves proposals, and applications are made individually. Credit is often easily obtainable and there are only a few specific requirements. Applicants and recipients must not have a fixed income, nor may they be civil servants, as set out in the Micro-Finance Law.

The *Banco de la Mujer* was also set up to tackle inequality between men and women in Venezuelan society. According to a spokeswoman of the *Banco de la Mujer* interviewed in Mérida large steps have been taken towards equality for women in Venezuela:

> It cannot be said that we have arrived at equality but that yes, we are in a struggle to get there. We have made good progress. Already we have a Ministry for women and gender equality and we are trying continually to educate our users about the issue of feminism and the rights of women. We passed an excellent law against violence called 'the organic law enabling women to live a life free from violence' which is another of the achievements of the revolution, a law which opens many doors and provides for many rights. We are still in the process of doing this, still we do not have political participation in Mayor's Office, government and legislation but we are working towards this and still have much to do. However, we see, for example, that in the Comunal Councils, which represents popular power, participation of women is much higher that even that of men. Participation in a CC is 60% women and 40% men and we see that in political life women are involved because it is women, above all single mothers, who, in the most meaningful way, experience economic as well as social needs and the full impact of capitalist society.[83]

[83] Interview #11, 7 July 2009.

The progressive approach of the government towards women in Venezuela is one of the fundamental assets of the Bolivarian process. The *Banco de la Mujer* is one of the principal institutions that defend women's rights and it also works to promote the laws that help to take women away from dependence on a rigorously patriarchal society. While it is true that patriarchy is a common feature of politics in Venezuela, CCs are (on the whole) attempting to avoid this. As an average of sixty per cent of the membership of the BV CC citizens assembly meetings were apparently women (according to Miguel)[84] their views, feelings and opinions should have been represented and developed within the CC itself. This would concur with the understanding of the level of participation in CCs in Mérida, as the *Banco de la Mujer* worker interviewed in this research suggested.[85] In my research, women formed a large part of the citizen's assembly meetings, and would at first seem to confirm this assertion, but as the numbers of participants dwindled during the course of research, this was not the case. However, research carried out into women's participation in Venezuela explains that they have increasingly been participating in politics, but within a male dominated framework (Fernandes, 2007: 97). As participation began to dwindle, I did not witness any projects being funded by the *Banco de la Mujer* in BV but I did see that women participated more, when they did it was in meetings and as part of the Christmas Party. Fernandes also notes in her work:

> One problem was that the majority of my interviews were with men. As movement leaders, politicians, and bureaucrats, men had more practice in answering standard interview questions than women, who often held back during interviews. Yet women constituted the majority of social movement participants (2010: 30-31).

In TH women made up more of the participation and education groups than men, as was evident by the amount of workshops that I saw on the roster of events at that CC. However, as Fernandes (2007: 122) notes:

> The space of the barrio, as the location of community organizing, is generally more conducive to the participation of women and their developing political awareness than Chavista organizations, which tend to

[84] Interview #2, 9 December 2008.
[85] Interview #11, 7 July 2009.

> operate in a machoistic manner...But even in the community, men still tend to occupy leadership roles.

Women in BV were meant to occupy the role of *Vocera* in many cases, but at the time of the research I only witnessed this on two occasions, and the CC was most certainly male dominated at the *Vocero* level, if only discursively. In TH, the first time I made contact I was introduced to the woman secretary of the CC who led us through the logistics, proudly and thoroughly, detailing how women participated.

TH CC

In order to provide a contrast with the BV CC, attention will now turn to another, rather different, and distinctively active CC in a poorer part of Mérida, called TH. The TH CC offers contrasts to the BV CC, as the community there was well organised, enjoyed continuing success in receiving project finance and were pro-PSUV. The TH CC can also offer greater insight into how other CCs in Mérida functioned, as well as emphasising the mixed results of CCs in Mérida.[86] This section illustrates the possibilities of successful participation in dual government, by the winning of project finance funds, thus offering an interesting point of comparison with the experiences of BV.

The TH CC successfully completed the requirement to establish a council in their *barrio* community in 2007. Thirty-three *Voceros* were elected to a variety of work committees by the Citizens Assembly of 276 families. Their successful development of a social housing project in their own *barrio* is an example of endogenous development in Mérida. The community joined together to create eight blocks of flats for the community involving the use of the skills of everyone there. The CC also gained funding to create a wall around the perimeter of the flats and for education projects. The residents developed action plans in order to set up a CC (which they did in just four months), with the aim of establishing safer and more secure housing. Once the housing was built, the

[86] The discussion developed here is minimal however, as access to research in the TH CC was limited, in comparison to the access enjoyed at BV. Therefore, this information is seen as supplementary.

residents lived together in the twelve blocks of apartments, maintaining a sense of collectivism within the community that had previously existed in the *barrio*. As a result the CC appeared to have a good understanding of problems and issues within the community.

The CC has programmes devoted to women's and feminist groups, health, education about Bolivarianism, as well as general educational groups, all of which have remained active. This reflects the opinion of the main *Vocero* that without organisation there is nothing. The TH *Vocero* also believed that the CCs as the only way to resolve issues:

> There are still communities that do not have a communal council, however we continue to support, sponsor and encourage people to defend what a structure like a communal council represents, as I said at the start, it's like a transfer of power for the first time in many years in our country. The people, through all of the policies generated by President Chavez, now we have this participation and I see the communal councils as the only peaceful way for us to have the option of power and thus define the solution to our problems, not only define but enact solutions to our communal problems, our problems with our neighbours.[87]

The CC was proactively trying to develop their *Parlamentarismo de Calle* group to enact more debate. During my research this focused on what they thought should be included in the new CC law (2009). There was agreement that the existing law had several problems, reflecting a deep engagement with the process. The community group viewed the CC process as an innovative and evolving movement, but because the law was young there were many changes that needed to be made. The TH CC had developed the area surrounding the local housing to build fencing, gardens, and sports areas, and in the future a childcare centre and hydro-pump for fresh water were planned, all of which have been financed by different agencies. The CC has remained sensitive to the needs of the community by having many different meetings at various times in the week to enable those who work, or who are tied down with housework, to attend.

Transparency was a major concern for CC participants, as corruption was seen as a serious issue and much discussed. The *Voceros* filmed, photographed and

[87] Interview #10, TH CC *Vocero*, 31 October 2008.

documented most decisions and actions they took in the Work Committees, according to the main *Vocero*. During my research, I witnessed members of the community dropping into *Voceros'* apartments to look over parts of the CC archive, such as election results, old and current projects, which they made readily available for any visitor.[88] The CC was clearly proud of its achievements and highly active.

The most striking feature of TH CC's success was the collective energy generated by their completion of numerous projects. This was combined with the CC's self-belief in the tangible transformations created through organisation and government support (i.e. government agencies and *Misiones*), which ensured that TH was particularly active. The provision they received, in the main, did not come from local state institutions (such as the *alcaldía* and *gobernador*) and can viewed as an example of the tensions within dual government, which is explained further in the following section.

Tensions in the CC process in BV

Many interviewees in BV held a negative impression of their CC for reasons than other than their opposition to the PSUV. There were some respondents who felt that the 'leaders' were corrupt, or were engaged in some form of corruption. Although there are not meant to be any specific leaders in the constitutional structure of CCs, the CC's *Vocero* can often be viewed as the leader. Also, in any community group factors such as charisma and connections are an unavoidable feature.

There was a sense of corruption in some interviews such as when I asked one respondent whether they thought *Voceros* had more power:

> Because they have done what they have done, I mean. No matter what other people say even [X] who belongs to or used to belong, I don't know if [X] quit, the consejo comunal, [X] wrote letters of advice, to do

[88] Unfortunately, the information was not available to me, apparently because I was not a member.

> something ... of the community, really honest, I read them and they [the *Voceros*] pay no attention to that advice.[89]

On the whole, interviewees were not at all opposed to the CCs in general as many respondents were in favour of organised community action and participatory democracy. The issues that can potentially limit the process, such as disorganisation and possible corruption, were at the core of why people were not keen on BV CC. On particular issues, such as the Venezuelan government, respondents were negative, without much (if any) critical reasoning to explain why, and this tone was reflected in my research when asked about the CC's progress:

> Badly because... well, the President... well, I've never been Chavista, but he's always done the wrong thing... for me he's been wrong ... indeed, I have relatives outside Venezuela, I have relatives in the US and most of my family has left... I haven't left because I have two daughters and it's been a bit difficult for me to get a passport, but I've been thinking about the future, if this carries on this way, if it keeps going wrong I'll leave the country.[90]

Naturally, the CCs were seen by some, but certainly not all, as acting as a vehicle for increased government influence over the locality, especially as a way to attract more votes

> ... but another aim or purpose of the Community Councils which is included in the government's social programmes is to get more votes or more popular support, and that must be one of the main aims, right?[91]

Very few were totally opposed to CCs and participation, and if respondents were it was because they saw them as communist vehicles, but one particular respondent suggested that the CCs followed the Cuban model of *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, CDRs) too closely

> And to many people they give money, to others they don't, so in plain Spanish it's a shambles, and it's just a clone of the Cuban CDIs [CDRs].

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[89] Interview #20, I, Member of BV community, 25 July 2009.
[90] Interview #26, Je, Member of BV Community, 6 August 2009.
[91] Interview #31, Ma, Member of BV Community, 7 August 2009.

> So, you have a lot more; you come from a much more developed country, a capitalist country, and what works in this world is private enterprise, capital, nothing else works, it's just utopian. Utopian, that's the word. I could be like a Communist because I live from a wage, I have no capital; that's what I live on. But a country that wants to progress needs private enterprise.[92]

In light of this, the respondent highlights the desire for private enterprise as a means of development, although he later claimed he was not opposed to the PSUV and that the CC could function well, for the good of the community. In order to understand these findings more thoroughly, the following section describes three themes that framed the CC process in BV: low participation; institutional design of CCs in Mérida; and their political affiliation. This analysis is complemented by a discussion into how the TH CC exhibited similar or contrasting experiences.

Low Participation

Out of the thirty people I interviewed, eight replied that they did not wish to fully complete an interview, as they had not participated in BV CC for several reasons.[93] One of the most shocking of these reasons, especially considering the low participation in BC CC's Citizens Assembly meetings, was that a small number of respondents had never heard of the CC and did not want to be interviewed. Equally noteworthy was the fact that most of these particular respondents could not find the time to attend because of work or family commitments:

> I'm tied up with my everyday life and my work and really, when there's a meeting I think about it, but the next day I remember there was a meeting and I didn't plan for it. There were a few meetings I attended. When they called elections of the *Voceros* I did go. I voted and I had a chat with the community leaders. But I haven't got enough information to say if it's working well or badly.[94]

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[92] Interview #34, Ml, Member of BV Community, 12 August 2009.

[93] As discussed in the methodology section of this dissertation, these people are not named in the list of interviews (Appendix 1).

[94] Interview #36, SF, Member of BV Community, 13 August 2009.

Some went as far as to question why meetings were not held at more varied times in order for more people to be able to attend, and one respondent in particular pointed out that the CC was deterring him due to its being political:

> Yes, with more time, and they must communicate with the whole community and not just with people of... one or another political position... but with the entire community, not with this or that group but with everyone.[95]

It must be stressed that alongside many of these factors apathy must be taken into account as a determining factor as to why people may not attend meetings, a factor people might have chosen not to mention.

People in BV had been involved with the election of the *Voceros* and the Census at the start. Some respondents said that they were extremely hopeful and waited for a long time in anticipation of change (especially in terms of gaining project finance), but they evidently eventually gave up. Many of the interviewees felt that the CC was inactive and could not complete what it had promised to do, and as a result, people did not attend the Citizens Assembly meetings. When members of BV saw neighbouring CCs become more active and obtaining finance for projects, it appeared to me that they began to seriously question the leadership of their CC. When the community's immediate CC was seen as inactive they felt this reflected the inefficiency of the government, thus reinforcing some of the negative attitudes held about CCs and participation.

When interviewees responded positively about what BV CC had achieved they cited the Christmas party, a vaccination project, and the Mother's Day event. As one person responded to a question about what could attract them to participate, these were the potential means of motivation to attend the CC in the future:

> There could be something, because the ones who are now in charge sometimes carry out activities which motivate me. Events for Christmas, or Mother's Day, and that's why I do feel like participating.[96]

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[95] Interview #31, Ma, Member of BV Community, 7 August 2009.
[96] Interview #18, SV, Member of BV Community, 25 July 2009.

The only party that I witnessed was the Christmas Party, as I was not in Mérida during the Children's or Mother's Day events. At the Christmas party the BV community donated drinks, local businesses supplied meat, others cooked it, and local musicians provided entertainment. The amount of participants was astounding, and many of those who participated appeared positive about the party, and Miguel talked enthusiastically about the CC. These events also seemed to be publicity-oriented affairs in order to appeal to the community and to encourage them to attend meetings. One interviewee was of the opinion that participation would enable the community to better respond to people's needs by working as a micro-government even though he was fearful about what happened in Cuba

> The Community Councils, their philosophy is good. It's good because it's a small government which is going to look after a community; in other words, theoretically it's very good; what happens is that – well I don't have to tell you – that's what happened in Cuba.[97]

There was indeed a desire for community-led dialogue and assistance on the part of some members of BV. The *Voceros* of BV worked hard to try to attract participation in this way, but it had little lasting effect. The attendance levels in BV CC dropped drastically over the course of the research. This could be because of a variety of factors, especially where people do not feel they are being as useful as they might be:

> Individuals' capacities to deliberate, and make public decisions, atrophy when left unused, and participation in these experiments exercises those capacities more intensely than conventional democratic channels (Fung and Olin Wright, 2003: 27).

Initially, meetings were attended by around 20 participants of the Citizens Assembly, as well as by several *Voceros*. Members would drift in and out of meetings, held at a local *colegio*, and would also interrupt the official procedure in order to voice their opinions and use these interruptions to make sure they

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[97] Interview #34, Ml, Member of BV Community, 12 August 2009.

were heard. The impression was that this happened to challenge the fact that the *Voceros* might dominate meetings with their own agendas, had people not spoken up and interrupted them. These interruptions created tensions between the Citizens Assembly and the *Voceros*, as the meetings' agendas became a critical focus for all of the people present. Low attendance in BV reflected the withdrawal of several UBV students, as well as several other factors. These can be categorised as: barriers to attendance; no desire to attend; political reasons; and organisation of the CC. It was for these reasons that most of the proposed projects were never achieved, and may also provide an insight as to why the CC eventually closed down.

The barriers to participation in BV's CC are typical of those facing participants of any CC in Mérida, including TH. Women were actively involved in the CCs and managed to work with the CC alongside their other responsibilities. Men would attend the CCs, but some complained of having to work. Some older members of the community found their lack of mobility to be a problem, as they could not get to meetings. A resolution to deal with this was bought into discussion at a BV CC Citizens Assembly meeting, when people made themselves and their vehicles available to collect older people from their homes and bring them to the meetings. In the case of TH, meetings were held at several times over the course of the week to ensure more people had numerous opportunities to attend, but no similar provision was put in place in BV.

The BV CC seemed to have a lack of presence within the community as many members were unaware that there was indeed a CC. As apathy in BV was high throughout the life of their CC, the opposite was seen in the highly active TH CC and in other local and rural councils. Having followed up on some of these CCs, apathy had eventually become a problem and maintaining peoples' participation was an on-going and difficult task.

There were underlying political factors as to why many people in the BV community did not want to attend the CC. This was not the case in TH, where the CC was also a space to help promote the PSUV. A CC close to BV had a healthy mixture of pro and anti-PSUV members, which had worked fairly well.

In BV, however, some of the people in the community had said that they saw the CCs as vehicle of state oppression, similar to that seen in Cuba. Other political reasons were that participants felt that the CCs were quite simply initiatives of the PSUV and therefore linked to Chávez, who was disliked by several people in the community.

The final reason for the lack of participation in BV was the organisation of the council. Meetings would often be changed at short notice, and only the *Voceros* seemed to be aware of this, perhaps assuming that they would be the only attendees. In my experience, meetings would sometimes not held when scheduled and people would wait outside the *colegio* for up to an hour before abandoning hope. I myself once waited for nearly two hours before *El Profe* opened up the meeting. There were times when I would go to Miguel's local business to ask about meetings and he would assure me they were on, and he and *El Profe* would talk for a long time about why no one attended. Meetings were conducted like this for the last few weeks of research and gave me the impression that they were being held purely to appear functional. There may well have been respondents who had tried to attend but found that meetings were not on, and felt that they would not go back as a result. As some people found attending meetings difficult, the fact that they were not on as scheduled would be a particularly dissuading experience.

In stark contrast, the *Vocero* of the TH CC saw different viewpoints and perspectives as a serious issue. He had hoped (and had achieved some success) to reach out to other communities to encourage participation, from both pro and contra-government individuals, through the use of education programmes:

> Yes, it's because of the communal council that communal councils nowadays form part of the participation in our country, I would do the following: sensitize the majority of the community, about the people of the community through talks, through workshops ... to ... to acquaint them with the law of the comunal councils, of how important the comunal councils are for us. Then I, a part of a communal council would continue to support, true, I would continue to motivate everybody else so that they adopt ... adopt ... this form of participation as a ... as a way of obtaining benefits for our communities, which would involve people making

> available a little of their time which they dedicate to working in organisations like the comunal councils.[98]

This type of proactive outreach to other communities, and within TH itself, is one of the dynamic factors that explain their comparatively high level of functioning. Although BV had tried to get people to participate, their approach to doing so was not that far-reaching and internal organisational issues hampered these minimal efforts.

However, an important observation during research was the fact that, on the whole, any criticism expressed of the PSUV or the Bolivarian Revolution was taken to mean that the person was an *escuálido* (wretched or contemptible, thereby anti-PSUV). The lack of critical discourse led people to fear talking about the process of the revolution and thus dynamism and creativity at a local level was often silenced and replaced by arguments about political attitudes. Although the main *Vocero* of the BV CC, Miguel, had attempted to avoid political discourse within the CC, he alienated members of the UBV and indirectly made the CC political. This also helped to further discourage potential members from attending Citizens Assembly meetings – often expressed with the response that they saw the CCs as non-functioning, a reflection, they thought, of the failure of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela.

Participation decreased in BV's CC from the start of my research to the point that by the end the *Vocero*, Miguel, had decided to end his activities in the CC, and I was made aware that BV CC was not re-registered in 2009-2010, as the new law required them to do. An additional factor was the inevitability that some members would act in their own self-interest which, according to Abers (2003: 205), might increase debate within the community but which in this instance appeared not to be the case. There were reports during the research that some members had obtained funds to repair parts of their house and had not used the money as it was intended, offering little reason as to what they had spent the money on, and all without any repercussions.[99]

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[98] Interview #10, TH CC *Vocero*, 27 July 2009.
[99] Interview #6, F, *Vocero*, 17 July 2009.

As an adequate number of members must be present for a CC to operate properly, BV had little option than to try to get more participants, and once Miguel had felt this had been exhausted he said he would leave, and later the CC ceased to function. The processes in place to manage a CC were problematic for the BV CC, and this was a factor as to why they eventually closed down. Other factors rested on the actual processes of participation within the council, which can be ascribed to the institutional design of the CCs themselves.

The institutional design of CCs in Mérida

The governance structure of CCs is similar in some ways to a representative democracy, as it elects *Voceros* who, although they have no more voting or decision-making power than any member of the Citizens Assembly, do have organisational and charismatic power. In short, the position of power a person in a community has can flow over into the elected position of *Vocero*, as was evident in the case of BV's CC, with both the main and deputy *Voceros* often dominating the direction of the CC, mainly because they were the only attendees towards the end of the research. As meetings were held in the deputy *Voceros* school, this meant there was a certain amount of ownership over how meetings were carried out and, it could be argued, a degree of assertion of his position within the community, even if a slight one. People who are charismatic also have the possibility to use this to their advantage when trying to gain influence over other members. In the case of the CCs *Voceros* can stay in office for two years and be re-elected, which indicates the possibility to stay in position for a considerable period of time.

As much of the BV CC work was shared between *El Profe* and Miguel, there was an ad-hoc, informal nature to decision-making. Because of low attendance and a fairly apathetic community the *Voceros* were able to coordinate the CC as they saw fit. Apart from voting in acts, which required 30 per cent of the population to be present, the *Voceros* did organise a PDVAL market (*Petroleós de Venezuela Alimentación*, Venezuelan Petroleum Food Project, a mobile subsidised farmers' stall) (See Photograph 3 below).

Photograph 3: Setting up the PDVAL Market (Adam Gill).

As mentioned, they also arranged a Christmas community party at the *colegio*, as well as a celebration for *El diá de los Niños* (children's day). These activities drew a large section of the community and many participated in the events. Miguel had used these occasions as opportunities to corral support for forthcoming Citizens Assembly meetings, but this had little lasting impact on participating numbers. These events did prove to have created an impressive amount of social cohesion that if channelled into the CC activities themselves would have propelled BV to greater achievements.

One of the most important organisational factors and processes of governance in BV's CC was the lack of success in obtaining any form of finance for projects

and micro-finance initiatives. Although some *Voceros* felt they were discriminated against, the projects might not have been within the funding criteria that FUNDACOMUNAL set out, such as the need for demonstrable collective community benefits. It could also be argued that the projects that the Citizens Assembly had decided on (potentially heavily led by the *Voceros*) were more beneficial to individuals and not concerned with endogenous development, a crucial FUNDACOMUNAL requirement and other financial or micro-loan agencies. In comparison, TH projects were planned and executed strictly according to the criteria set out by government agencies like FUNDACOMUNAL. Their projects were designed to maximise the exchange of skills within the community and to develop projects for the collective benefit. Projects were planned and executed with transparency and documented throughout, which also maximised the potential to obtain finance for projects.

Photograph 4: Mural of Chávez pictured next to sign outside FUNDACOMUNAL Office (Adam Gill).

Because of the lack of funding in BV people felt that as there were no resources, the *Voceros* must either be embezzling funds or that the CC was poorly organised. This could be explained by the respect those in the community felt towards the *Asociaciones de Vecinos* that existed during the Fourth Republic. Certain members of the community had said that it was the fault of *Voceros* that the CC was unable to obtain funds and one respondent stated that: 'They should work for the people and not for politics. They should work with the people, not with just one person. When you work with the people, things work out'.[100]

[100] Interview #21, O, Member of the BV Community, 6 August 2009.

The TH CC on the other hand seemed to have had in place systems of exchange and a history of working together, perhaps because of their living conditions in the *barrio* and their shared experiences before permanent housing was built. Their approach appeared to be in accordance with the expectations of the agencies responsible for funding projects, and as requirements were met funding was granted to the TH CC several times. BV never developed beyond the Community Development Plan stage and the *Voceros* expected people to attend Citizens Assembly meetings without advertising these. This became another obstacle for the CC.

Citizens did not always blame the *Voceros* however. The blame was often placed on the community collectively, or on the structure of the CCs, thus indirectly blaming the government, and some people saw the CC project as an ongoing and long-term project that was new, and that problems were to be expected:

> It's a matter of bringing people together, explaining things to them, educating them; it's a process...Those changes don't happen overnight. This is a process, and we aren't trained to work as a community.[101]

Some respondents trusted that things would work out in BV, and felt positive about the process. When I asked the question about how a respondent viewed the CC they had an answer that illuminated the variety of opinion in BV:

> Well, that question is really very interesting. From my very personal point of view, they are quite positive. First of all because they make you focus, they give you an idea of the physical reality of the area, of just what's going on, of its characteristics, of just what kind of population lives there in a socio-economic and cultural sense, and what they can do for the neighbourhood. Sometimes if we are suddenly in need of something, well there may be a doctor, or an engineer, or a lawyer, and that person may be able to lend you a hand in preparing a document or something... now we really know... and we have everyone that lives in the area on record.[102]

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[101] Interview #37, P, Member of BV Community, 13 August 2009.
[102] Interview #35, D, Member of BV Community, 13 August 2009.

Although TH is a highly functional CC, the process leading to eventual success in obtaining finance and organising projects in BV was clear, and it was obvious that it would take much longer. Success in BV could be measured by the ability to create an ongoing and open discourse and at least a token effort community to change the issues facing them, which at its basic level is more pragmatic than the previous, but a more elite individualist system. That being said, for a variety of reasons funding was not obtained and projects stagnated without being completed, leading to the eventual breakdown of the BV CC.

At the end of the research period, the principle *Vocero* Miguel informally explained that he was motivated to help create the CC in order to organise and develop the living standards of the community. Miguel led the CC for two years but the major obstacle, he admitted, was the lack of finance for the delivery of Citizen Assembly projects.[103] The proposed projects dealt with health, drinking water and security issues:

> We have presented projects for health, drinking water, the improved appearance and distribution of roads, and a pilot project, as part of the security plan, based on street lighting, an alarm system such as in Mexico and Argentina. It was a project that was well received by past and present city halls. In addition, the Health Project the BV Outpatient Clinic, which is open from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. and which relieves the congestion in the Los Andes Hospital.[104]

The projects were refused by FUNDACOMUNAL, who, according to Miguel, came to visit the community on six occasions to ask people if it was really what they desired and required them to sign forms to confirm these decisions.[105] This de-motivated many members of BV from participating in the CC as they saw the visits as PSUV interference in their community. After being denied funds from FUNDACOMUNAL, the *Vocero* of the CC approached FONDEMI for a micro-credit loan for a community entrepreneur project. FONDEMI explained that the loan should be for the good of the whole community, and according to Miguel, explained that they must be pro-PSUV to get funds in his view.[106] Whether

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[103] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[104] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[105] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[106] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.

Miguel actually had this feedback is unknown. It may have been a misunderstanding of endogenous development as opposed to the nature of entrepreneurial capitalism, although this is also uncertain. Nonetheless, FONDEMI were willing to grant the loan on the condition that the finance organs of the CC took responsibility for the funds, as per the CC Law.[107] Miguel disagreed, exclaiming that citizens should each have a guarantee.[108] Miguel also attended a meeting with an unknown organisation about this and they responded by calling him a '*piti-yanqui*[109] and a capitalist'.[110] Miguel eventually felt that the CCs were, in his view, a vehicle for strengthening the political influence of the PSUV in local politics:

> I noticed how the government strengthened the CC as a political arm and it so happens that this worked at first but that now there are many CC which have been renewed that have crushed those of the government and brought about that anyone belonging to the party and who is a representative of a CC is a link to the CC and its resources. Now I see it clearly, if you don't belong to my party – you are not my friend. In the meeting with the Secretary the people booed us and everybody knew we were not from the party because we weren't dressed in red, we weren't wearing a red cap, we waited until the end of the meeting, they were nervous, not us.[111]

As Miguel felt ill-treated and defeated by not having gained finance, he had decided to give up his role as *Vocero*, and his unhappiness with the CC process was evident:

> It's unfortunate what is happening, because the CC figure could be very interesting as the community government, but what they want is to have just one party because that's what they told us there, and on that basis I know that it's best not to hurry but I think I have no need to bear really uncomfortable situations that could get worse because one really doesn't know how these people will react. The experience robbed me of my motivation to keep working, there's no going back; they don't believe in dialogue, integration, only in themselves and nobody else. In September I will call for an audit and hand it to the CC so that the community decides what to do. There's no sense being there if they're not going to

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[107] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[108] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[109] Little Yankee/pro-USA capitalist, largely identified with being counter-revolutionary in Venezuela.
[110] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.
[111] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.

> give you resources. It's frustrating because you couldn't see a project here.[112]

BV's interactions with government agencies and officials were largely problematic for several reasons. Firstly, the attempt to remain apolitical might have led agency officials to believe they were contra-PSUV, and not adhering to the principles of endogenous development. According to the government agency officials I interviewed (see Chapter 5), it seems that BV being a largely opposition sector would not preclude them from obtaining finance. What is problematic is when CCs try to obtain finance from agencies but the projects presented are not based on the principles of Bolivarianism, endogenous development, and participation. If the projects do not benefit the immediate and (hopefully) extended community, they are not likely to be funded. It appears that because this is the government's approach that Miguel and many of the citizens of BV felt this was one group (i.e. pro-government) of people against another (contra-government), as can so often be the case in Venezuelan politics. The problems BV had with obtaining finance were due to the government agencies responsible trying to ensure that projects adhere to certain Bolivarian principles, with a priority on improving the lives of the poor.

Political affiliation of the CCs

The ideology and politics of the PSUV pervades the CCs in that they are set up to implement participatory democracy, to aid in the construction of the *Estado Comunal*, and deploy *poder popular*.[113] Indeed there are clear political aspects to the CCs:

> Politics and the state are very much at the center of the community council phenomenon. Council leaders often find themselves on both sides of the line separating civil society and political activism. Thus, for instance, council meetings sometimes devote time to discussing electoral strategy and logistics (Ellner, 2009b: 13).

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[112] Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.

[113] In the 2009 CC Law, CCs are defined as part of the construction of the socialist state: '... en la construcción del nuevo modelo de sociedad socialista de igualdad, equidad y justicia social' (Artículo 2).

These processes are state-designed and CCs fit into this explicitly. Although the CCs are not officially designed to mobilise support for the PSUV, there have been examples of this, as was evident in several CCs in Mérida where meetings were held to support the election of PSUV candidates. There are many different approaches that CCs take when adhering to the necessary ideology and protocol of endogenous development. In the case of TH, there was a synergy between the way in which the community approached their CC and the requirements of the various government agencies responsible for financing and overseeing the CCs and their projects. This was not the same in BV. During an informal interview towards the end of the research period, Miguel stated that during the early days of the CC, that it seemed to be more than a simple *Chavista* vehicle to him, and that he believed it could be an apolitical vehicle, placing the community before politics, which is, by its nature, a political decision itself.

This was especially important to Miguel, as most of the BV population were not pro-PSUV and there appeared to be a great deal of compromise needed to avoid any affiliation between the government and the CC.[114] A large sector of the community in BV were opposed to the Bolivarian trajectory of the PSUV and the effect it was having in their communities:

> I think every consejo comunal sucks and in Venezuela now, there's a spoiled issue that...I mean people who can...I mean the consejos comunales, they are with the hand with the government and the government is with Chávez, so people who goes there, they don't have to be *Chávistas*, but they want to... To get more of the government, so that's the interest of each people, most of the people who gets in a job that regards to the government. They just want money, they just want power and they just want houses and money.[115]

[114] Interestingly, much of the marketing that the government created for the CCs on how to set them up was structured to reinforce this aspect over any politically associated ones. Adverts often made no mention of either the PSUV or President Chávez (see Appendix 3 for an example of an advertisement in a health magazine).
[115] Interview #20, I, Member of BV community, 25 July 2009.

In some ways, these respondents were both opposed to, and revealed a certain amount of fear of, the unknown direction the PSUV were going.[116] Some of the interviewees, and especially *Vocero* Miguel, on reflection, felt that it was imperative to keep politics aside from the CCs, especially in light of past corrupt activities. In my experience political discourse among members of the community was regarded as negative behaviour given the extreme polarisation of opinion. There was concern about the inability to resolve issues around security in the streets as well as the issue of rising inflation and a lack of discussion about such issues within the cabinet:

> We cannot force people to think like the President or the governor because we all have the freedom to think, live and be part of our country. And, if we all listen to each other's views, we can all work together, we can help Venezuela, regardless of being with or against the President.[117]

This respondent wanted politicians to have a more critical approach to government, especially given the fact that so many things do not work in Venezuela. It is a curious perspective to hope that politics would be kept out of participation in such a politically polarised society. An interesting observation was that some people in BV actually believed that the CCs could act as a separate institution to the government.

Another intriguing dynamic that emerged out of the interviews was that as BV harboured a high number of business owners, often living above their businesses, there was significant concern about security. Several of the residents who were interviewed felt that security in BV was the most important issue facing them at that time

> I think [the area] is bad, that's to say there's no security and there's a lot of crime. That's what I can see; so we ought to try to make the area much better in every respect. I think that's what a Community Council is for.[118]

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[116] This unknown direction can also be seen as a new type or system of popular participatory politics, and the establishment of a local level management to implement a new political system.

[117] Interview #42, R, 21 July 2009.

[118] Interview #22, E, Member of BV Community, 6 August 2009.

Indeed, one of the projects of the Community Development Plan was to install a CCTV system and to employ a private security firm to patrol the sector, or to increase the police presence. Closely linked to this was the desire to obtain finance or micro-credits, as outlined in the Community Development Plan objectives.

Some of the respondents had a highly sophisticated understanding of their local political environment, especially concerning their communities resentment towards participation and the lack of faith in activism which appeared to disappoint one particular respondent:

> No, really the Community Councils... if they paid a bit more attention to them and if they did a bit more to avoid politics, they would be a complete success. If first of all people get to know each other within the group, and if we know your problems and you know ours, then it's really interesting and we can overcome distrust between human beings.[119]

Another interviewee suggested that there is a lack of civic consciousness in communities in Venezuela: 'In general I believe people have no sense of civic responsibility regarding the city and the community; and I have to include myself among them.'[120] If people in BV had little history of interaction within the community, then experiments with participation in the form of the CC would inevitably prove difficult. The respondent also stated that he felt participatory democracy was the most advanced form in the world: 'the most...modern form of democracy'.[121] If this experience is contrasted with the people living in the *barrios* where lived experience is much less privileged, and where space is shared more collectively and people cannot always lock themselves behind gates to protect private property, the transition to collective participation in BV must have been much more difficult.

Another illuminating response was from a person associated with a *Vocero* that disclosed information they had about possible corrupt behaviour by some of the

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[119] Interview #35, D, Member of BV community, 13 August 2009.
[120] Interview #24, H, Member of BV community, 6 August 2009.
[121] Interview #24, H, Member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

other *Voceros*.[122] The respondent felt that *Voceros* (with the two most active in mind) had more power than the Citizens Assembly and, as a result, the respondent did not attend the meetings as s/he felt their voice would be lost amongst such powerful people. In their opinion the CC does not work because people become easily corrupted by money and there is too self-interest within the system by people to get what they can. Often, the respondent claimed, people pretend to be pro-Chávez to get cash and other benefits. Another important disclosure was made about these opinions:

> Once, my [associate] also told me that in a meeting in the *consejo comunal* people from the government came, they were asking for more money, I don't know what for, I also know they just want the *policias vigilancia* [cops] to look for the people on the streets to change the insecurity and I don't know if it was for that, they were asking for more money. So the government sent people from the government to see what they want for the money, what they want the money for and if they were *chavistas* or not and when they saw there was people who were not *chavista*, they started to *adoctrinar* [indoctrinate] the people who were against the government and if they became *chavistas*, they would have the money, if not, they won't.[123]

If the claim was true, then participatory democracy in BV must have been flawed. However, no other interviewees or *Voceros* who were interviewed had mentioned anything about this, and it is therefore treated as an illuminating opinion that suggests a degree of suspicion in the community about participating in the CCs. What was clear was that the perspective about corruption in the PSUV was commonplace among most of the anti-PSUV population. A regular suspicion that I encountered was that people felt uneasy about the political changes underfoot. This was especially the case concerning participatory governance and the implementation of endogenous development, and that they must have come about subversively, against the will of the people, as why would people want to share wealth and work collectively?

The BV Community Development Plan projects, and the approach of the proposed Work Committees and Work Groups, seemed to work collectively but not in the way FUNDACOMUNAL required, therefore funding was not granted

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[122] Interview #20, I, Member of BV community, 25 July 2009.
[123] Interview #20, I, Member of BV community, 25 July 2009.

to BV's projects. The claim made by the relative of the *Vocero* may be emblematic of the fear of endogenous development and the government that the opposition promotes. FUNDACOMUNAL have specific guidelines as to what they will fund, which on the whole are projects that benefit everyone in the community, utilising local skills; both pro or contra-government CCs can obtain this finance according to these criteria. BV's CC attempted to obtain finance to pay for some projects to reinforce business activities (and their protection), thereby strengthening individualistic interactions in the community and benefiting some people, but not all. There is a strong possibility that if FUNDACOMUN were to receive information about moneymaking or potential corruption in the CC, finance would undoubtedly be withheld.

The business or security-centric Community Development Plan desired by some members of the community would be unlikely to gain finance from FUNDACOMUNAL or any other government agencies, as it was less to do with endogenous development, and the community was not as poor as other CCs.

An example of the preference given to certain strands of development occurred when one respondent wished that Chávez cited the USA and UK as potential models rather than the example of Cuba as discussed earlier.[124] The opinion of this well-respected citizen was that if government [agencies] were not willing to give funds to their projects, then the community should put their own money into their own projects, like during the Christmas and Day or the Childrens' parties

> On children's day for example they have an event, local businesses participate, for example here in BV they did something on children's day and local businesses made financial contributions and it was very nice, so these are positive things.[125]

This approach involved local businesses, of which there were many in BV, collaborating to get funds from elsewhere. Although the exact intention of his plan was unclear, what transpired was that he felt that linking up businesses was a better approach than working with government agencies. While this may

[124] Interview #34, Ml, member of BV community, 12 August 2009.
[125] Interview #34, Ml, member of BV community, 12 August 2009.

appear to be a rejection of the government's CC and endogenous development projects, it is quite the contrary.

In order for businesses to open and share capital with their neighbours, while also democratically deciding on where funds should be spent, they must fulfil many of the PSUV endogenous development ideals and function much more like a CC than they first thought. It seems, in retrospect, that if there were more education about the real intentions of the CC project and how best to make it work for all of the members of the community, such confusions could be dispelled. There is also resentment concerning the polarisation of politics and political debate, and people in BV seemed to avoid any potentially obvious political vehicles, as in this case of the CC. This perspective is even more interesting given the fact that most respondents were impressed by the efforts and successful projects of CCs around Mérida and Venezuela more generally.

One citizen believed that people in BV were interacting much more – whether pro- or contra-PSUV – and that they were starting to believe more in participation: 'Most of us are businessmen [in BV] and that at least we are in contact and we are looking for the solution to some problems, for me that is progress'.[126] The city made people individuals which is not conducive to endogenous development, and working long hours each day away from home does not make people want to get involved in community politics, or they do not have the time or energy to do so, she said

> Precisely because the city makes you close in on yourself, to be more individualistic and not to work together, for that reason the capitalist system makes you... people who work for a wage have an eight or twelve hour day, so outside the home people scarcely have time to get involved in community work. That makes it more difficult.[127]

In the respondent's opinion, poorer and rural citizens were more used to community (which is one of the core elements of endogenous development, according to the government) – it could be in this case that if they are not, they

[126] Interview #37,P, Member of BV community, 13 August 2009.
[127] Interview #37, P, Member of BV community, 13 August 2009.

are less likely to, or at best will find it harder to succeed as 'rural people work for nature, with tradition, in the community'.[128] When asked about participatory democracy she said:

> I think it's the most advanced system that we have reached as human beings, to which we have been able to get to now as human beings and we are still building it, that is, it is not a finished idea, it's something we are building precisely because we're not used to participating, that is the problem with participation, it's a serious problem ... which we are dealing with through the work of community councils. We're not used to participating and the system ... doesn't ...doesn't allow us to participate, because of time or reasons of ideology, belief, many things.[129]

CCs, the respondent felt, were the only 'fight' that was meaningful and valid in her community. This was a rare sentiment in BV interviews. In general, the denizens of BV were in favour of communities working together to achieve a certain level of development projects. Some citizens in BV believed in the COPEI project of *Asociaciones de Vecinos*, One of the local business owners in the BV community explained to me how he favoured the priority he was afforded previously (as a more financially comfortable member of the community, no doubt), in the *Asociacion de Vecinos* that were the predominant expression of community organisation in the 1980s and 1990s, although some still exist today:

> The problem is before with the *Asociacion de Vecinos* is that the power was always with one person. If you wanted to have permission to build or make a business you must get permission from all of the people around to do this kind of business. You need about 30 signatures of the neighbours – about 50% of the people around. With the signatures, you go to the president of the association, then you get the president's permission to go to the Mayor's office for permission. But really, I had a lot of permission without having to talk to my neighbours. I have done this twice and I have ten different businesses, maybe because the people knew me or something like. But you know this worked. The difference was that you didn't have the feeling at that time that you need to surrender or submit to them. It was an important thing to bring money to the community. You had a feeling you had a voice [in the association]. Now, the feeling is that if you are not in the CC – you have nothing to say.[130]

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[128] Interview #37, P, Member of BV community, 13 August 2009.
[129] Interview #37, P, Member of BV community, 13 August 2009.
[130] Interview #42, R, 21 July 2009.

This interview highlights the prominent position enjoyed by some members of the community before the CC system, and also suggests these privileges had been reduced. The fact that previously rules could be bent, as a favour between 'clients' and friends, suggests a system of benefits that might not have been made available to everyone. The suggestion that the business owner felt that he had a voice before because he brought money to the community, undoubtedly a necessary and worthy action, suggests that power lay with those who controlled the flow of capital. When asked about how the CCs have begun to change society, the businessman responded that he felt that society had altered to suit the approaches of the CC, more than they reflected traditional relationships in the community:

> The *Voceros* have the power and you always must be reverent to them. I have the feeling that this is even maybe a bit scary. I talked to my wife and she says you better say hello every time you see them in the street, or else they won't let us do anything on the house. There is a feeling in the people, I feel it. I feel that the people has less (I don't know how to say this because I don't want to sound arrogant) – but you feel something negative, I'm not sure what, you feel bad because you have more money than they do. My father has a farm, almost 400 hectares, and it was always respect to the owner of the farm. Always seen as a positive person because he brings money and work to the area. Now you get the feeling you shouldn't have what you have.[131]

The respondent highlights a definite marked change in social relationships between those who were traditionally privileged and respected, to the transfer of power to people who may have been excluded. This fear, the respondent felt, was linked to the changes occurring in CCs in Mérida that enabled people to have control over some of their own power locally. Because the new political system favoured development within communities, rather than family ties, hierarchies and elite privileges, have proved challenging to those who previously assumed these are the basis for local interactions.

It is unsurprising that the respondent felt alarmed at the new relationships or the alterations in society given the fact that the CCs have made it possible for more people to become agents of change and activists in their own processes of local

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[131] Interview #42, R, 21 July 2009.

decision-making. It is indeed an unusual situation for developing countries to offer, or even allow, the majority of people access to decision-making powers. The emergence in the last twelve years of poor people exercising the power to mobilize and use state resources to develop their own community for the good of those living in the area is quite opposite to traditional Venezuelan state-citizen relationships, and an undoubtedly strange concept for many.

Some of the respondents who had similar opinions to the business owner imagined that they might move away from Venezuela, to Costa Rica for example, and had started to prepare their exit. The business owner offered an illuminating perspective on those who felt indignant about Bolivarianism and President Chávez in the context of wider Venezuelan national opinion.

As traditional positions of privilege are being questioned and challenged via new forms of local government, so too were the interactions between people in society. Political discourse was not just something that people with power talked about. Rather, people on the street, at home, in cafes and bakeries, all discussed these topics. To be able to run a CC smoothly there needed to be a sense of a politically aware community that wanted to develop its political consciousness.

What was immediately clear upon visiting Mérida was how well citizens understood the laws of the CCs, CLPPs and even the electoral process. Many people even discussed the laws in public, which often happened in Citizens Assembly meetings in the CCs. Those individuals, particularly those supporting the PSUV, felt that to understand the laws and constitution is to have more power than ever before. Important aspects of the constitution are written on packets of rice and sugar in the *Mercal* for people to read, so that the movement towards popular power is kept in the public consciousness and that power should no longer be held privately in local communities.[132]

Although laws are not always put into practice, and economic and political elites still undoubtedly exist at both a local and national level, political awareness is

[132] See Appendix 2. Excerpts focus especially on popular power.

being developed and the government is promoting people's consciousness of their rights. In doing so, citizens who participate in CCs are enabled to make considered and thought-out changes in their communities, and political discourse is far more inclusive, as the CC process necessitates. This culminates in a system of provision from central government to the local level, or dual government.

CCs and Dual Government in Mérida

This section identifies the processes of participation within state-managed CCs, as well as within the wider political system in Mérida. By positioning the experiences of both the BV and TH CCs in this way, the processes of dual government become clearer, as well as highlighting associated problems. Dual government is ineffective if project finance is not obtained by CCs. It is effective where CCs adhere to Bolivarian principles, such as ED, that underpin government agencies' requirements for funding. In this way, CCs are working within the principles the PSUV are promoting.

The reason the TH community participated in the CC process was to develop the community collectively, which can also be located in the Bolivarian notion of human rights: based on progressive principles, human rights are characterised as inalienable, indivisible and interdependent (Article 19) (Lander, 2008: 80-81), as enshrined in Articles 19-31 of BCRV 1999:

> Not only civil rights, such as the freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation are included, but so are social human rights, such as the right to employment, housing, and health care ... A further innovation of the new constitution is the inclusion of international treaties as having equal standing with the constitution, meaning they must be enforced in the same way (Wilpert, 2007: 32).

As the 1999 constitution is often viewed as one of the most progressive in the world, it is unsurprising that CCs engaged with its content. The notion of a distinct reflection and defence of human rights in BCRV was offered as one of the major motivations for the TH CC according to the *Vocero*:

> we belong there for the same social participation because what moves us is humanism, what moves us is the wish to help others. We are ... you know ... detached from whatever arises from...from...that is we are completely detached from our action to come ... that you are selfish, that what you want is resources, to charge; we do it with our own free will and because we want to help our neighbours and those near to us. For that reason our communal council is..for that ... we included in what is humanism the wish to help others which is to say that it's part of being human the wish to help each other.[133]

This response reveals how TH followed the government's ideological cues, and also displays a genuine desire for people in the CC to help, which could also be interpreted as a belief in the PSUV's political platform, as accepted and implemented by the TH CC. TH may have been conscious of acting in this way and wittingly adopted this approach for what they thought was right for the council. This offers a valuable insight into how the central government has been successful in implementing its desired ideological discourse in the CCs.

That the TH CC was able to build houses, which helped them to move away from the *barrio* and the associated problems of living there, also helps to explain why they supported the governing party. The state had provided a great deal to the TH community, but not only through the CC, according to the *Vocero* of the communal council:

> It makes sense that when there's no organisation, there's no ... there's no way of achieving ... benefits for the community. Nowadays, after the creation of the communal council there's a health centre ... a health centre which above all else is concerned with rehabilitation, through the Barrio Adentro misión here in the community. In education there's a university settlement through the Sucre misión, the Bolivarian University of Venezuela; it's a settlement that...works within on of the public institutions ... a secondary school in the community here. With regard to the ... well, about education ... with regard to housing we continue working on ... because housing ... linked to the Petrocasa, with ... well, in areas of the community that they want to build, they have their land and they want to build their housing. So they make the ... are set up so that they can get the resources and build their housing.[134]

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[133] Interview #10, TH CC *Vocero*, 27 July 2009.
[134] Interview #10, TH CC *Vocero*, 27 July 2009.

During the period of research in Mérida, there was a newly elected COPEI *alcaldía* replacing the PSUV one. Although the previous PSUV *alcaldía* was headed by Carlos León, nicknamed *el gordito*, I heard some people comment that he represented what could be considered an out-dated Fourth Republic approach to his role.[135] Apparently much of the work that León carried out was based around enterprise, such as the building of new shopping centres rather than the building of much needed bridges and roads.[136] The *Gobernador*, Marcos Díaz Orellana, also a member of the PSUV party, was in place during the entirety of the research.

Lester Rodríguez Herrera was the Rector (Vice Chancellor) of the *Universidad de Los Andes* (University of the Andes) before being elected to the position of *alcaldía* for COPEI in November 2008. There were a variety of criticisms of him in Mérida's CCs, which is an example, according to the PSUV construction of Bolivarianism, of why the CC Law was modified in 2009 to protect the process from interference by elected local government. This progression seems to help CCs operate as a separate entity from local government institutions.

During my research, members of other CCs around Mérida said that they saw themselves as separate to, and opposed to, the *alcaldía*. Others felt that he could serve as an obstacle to gaining finance for their respective CCs. Many felt that the *alcalde* was likely to take public resources rather than share the wealth. Indeed, relatively few *alcaldías* have relinquished the full range of power to the CCs.[137] A political scientist in Mérida, commented that, the new *alcaldía* was attempting to reduce the power of local CCs:

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[135] This can literally mean 'little fatty', so called by some people because of his physical appearance and due to his supposedly greedy political nature, although this remains unconfirmed.

[136] These public works evidently took place and there was no evidence that this was prioritised over the building of roads and so on, although this opinion was an example of several conversations that I had heard in public places.

[137] One notable figure who went against the trend was Julio Chávez, *Alcalde* of Carora (no relation to the president). Furthermore, most *Alcaldias* may have been understandably fearful of losing their positions within local state democracy to the CCs and may have been unwilling to transfer power down to CCs because of this.

> Each CC has the possibility to elect a rep to the central system. The mayor wants to [and he is from the opposition, from COPEI] have a general election to elect these. I think he is playing politics and apparently he is actually against the law that exists at the present moment. You would think that people would follow that [the CC law] but I think he is trying to usurp in a way or go over the top of it and say he is more democratic with his way of doing it because there is going to be a general election. I could be wrong on that but that is my feeling ...[138]

The *Alcaldia* had reacted strongly to the reconfiguration of power at the local level in the CCs and was involved in a variety of public and private disagreements with CC advocates and members (see the discussion in Chapter 5).

CCs operate with direct links to central government and financial support is also given to government agencies who grant funds and resources to the CCs according to strict ideological criteria. As the CCs have no other means of procuring finance or resources other than through government agencies or *Misiones*, they are entirely dependent on them.[139] Although moves to ignite the *Económia Popular* (usually cooperatives using microfinance from FONDEMI) have been made, the majority (including both BV and TH) have to apply to government agencies for funding. If no finance is obtained, then the CC collapses, as was the case in BV. Although participation is promoted, it is done within a specific framework defined and regulated by the central state. What is clear at this stage is that participation is carefully managed, mainly because CCs are dependent on state resources, but also because of the strict rules that must be adhered to in order to obtain resources.

Conclusion

BV offers an illuminating insight into a middle class CC that set up, and attempted to manage, and execute local projects for their community with great initial enthusiasm. During the course of its existence several tensions arose, based on three inter-related issues: participation; local governance; and ideology.

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[138] Interview #45, B, 12 July 2009.

[139] Direct funding from government agencies has increasingly become the norm since the 2009 CC Law.

Although the first two elements occurred within the BV CC, the ideological impulse is promoted by the PSUV and was experienced at the local level via state agencies and the political perspectives of some members and activists.

These inter-related themes were ultimately the reason why BV CC ceased to function. The discussion of TH CC has complemented the study of BV, and the two perspectives offer additional insights into the operation of CCs in Mérida. TH offered a more positive perspective of an innovative CC that overcame obstacles and was inclusive in its approach to specific projects and their delivery. Questions remain over issues of politicisation and the imposition of firm ideological criteria via the government agencies that finance and support CC projects and their finance. Because CCs are centrally managed, within the state's system termed dual government in this work, with its promotion of endogenous development and Bolivarian ideology, there is little room for critical discussion within CCs, other than occasional social street parliamentarism. CCs often act according to given state ideologies in order to obtain finance, and if they do not, they may not receive any at all. This system creates a dependency on the resources delivered by the state via those agencies that act as intermediaries between central and local government. As CCs have not currently developed independent funding mechanisms to support projects, they are still largely reliant on the government. Moves have been made to develop micro-finance initiatives for communities, and although the *Económia Popular* has emerged, the majority of CCs still continue to be dependent on financial support delivered via state agencies.

CCs allow room for influential personalities and charismatic characters who in being so, circumvent the law that attempts to prevent *Voceros* from acting as leaders. BV CC was largely informal in nature and in the way it operated, and this led to a lack of consultation between leaders and the Citizens Assembly, as there were hardly any active Citizens Assembly members towards the end of my research. Furthermore, the political discourse and development of a CC, such as is the case with BV, may not suit all participants like the UBV students who decided to leave. Naturally, active members of the community became leaders because of their social influence and pragmatism. There are parallels between

this system and representative democracy, and some of the tensions are carried over into this system of participatory democracy. The understanding was that women constituted the main participants in CCs, but as Fernandes (2010: 202) states, participation in the main tends to be male dominated. These findings are perhaps typical of other CCs in Venezuela.

This reluctance which could also be interpreted as *alcaldías* and *gobernadores'* unwillingness to transfer power to CCs, has led to the central government's promotion of agencies and *Misiones* to provide goods and service to those citizens who most need them. If local state institutions decide to operate independent of federal policies that promote Bolivarianism and participation, they may cease to exist as the proposed (and trialled) *Comunas* develop to become working systems of government from below. While the CCs are still relatively new, changes to the Law in 2009 have attempted to sidestep some of these problems, especially in relation to financial management.

CCs represent a positive step towards empowering citizens to assume decision-making roles within their own communities. Some of the results witnessed during research were impressive and had a beneficial impact on their localities. The provision of social housing, clean drinking water and sewage works, education projects and sports groups, as well as cheaper food markets, were all subsidised by the state. The downside is that it is a tightly controlled system that allows little room for expression and enforces the promotion of certain political ideologies. If the *Comunas* are to work alongside several CCs at once, then agency must surely rest with those at the local level, a difficult system to create given the nature of the state bodies and the current 'leaders' of the CCs. Attention in Chapter 5 is placed more on these themes.

Chapter 5: *Voceros* and government agencies – the process of governance at the upper local level

This chapter addresses the reality of the *Consejos Comunales* (Communal Councils, CCs), in both BV and TH, as introduced in Chapter 4. Particular emphasis is placed on their mixed results in motivating citizens to attend meetings, participate, and in obtaining project finance, which can be attributed to a variety of factors. Because of unresolved tensions in the institutional design of CCs and their ambiguous position in local politics conflict occurs around several key areas. These include the involvement of government agencies; the CCs internal hierarchy; and the need to apply for project finance. I also identify three broader issues which include power, managed participation, and, institutional design. These areas of conflict are directly related to the process of politicisation.

This chapter analyses the *Voceros*, the state agencies and local government in relation to the CCs as participatory decision-making bodies at the grassroots, detailing all levels of the process of dual government in Mérida. These conflicts revolving around power, managed participation and institutional design, echo findings in other research.[140] In the first instance, carrot and stick policies used by the old *alcalde* (mayor) as well as the muttered whispers of suggested corruption that existed in the BV CC. In the latter, there were suggestions of existing, or institutionalised clientelist practices between some CCs and the PSUV. I also discuss clashes between the *alcaldía* and elements of the CCs. Although mild in comparison to national political turbulence in 2002-3, the Mayor of Mérida in 2009, attempted to interferere in the CC process as is evident in the analysis of CCs around Mérida.

The CCs are mediated, financed and guided by government agencies, which require these projects to adhere to, and fulfil, the principles of endogenous development. As shown in Chapter 4, this means that those who require development assistance go through a state-managed process as a necessary

[140] See, for example, Ellner, 2011; Smilde and Hellinger, 2011; Fernandes, 2010; Lopez Maya, 2010, 2011; and, a quantitative study conducted by Hawkins, 2010.

precondition to obtaining vital resources and finance. The government ultimately controls the purse strings. As a result, the dual government process is not fully practical, and the lack of cooperation between government institutions and tensions with local government, further affects the development programme that the CCs were designed to promote.

Government Agencies

My research focused on government agencies responsible for overseeing and financing the CCs.[141] The agencies in Mérida included: FONDEMI; *Banco de la Mujer* (Women's Bank, BANMUJER); FUNDACOMUN; and, the *Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social* (Ministry of Popular Power for the Communes and Social Security since 2009), located in the State *Gobernador* Office.[142]

An important agency that was not interviewed was the *Servicio Autónomo Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales* (Autonomous National Fund for Communal Councils, SAFONACC). One of the main functions of SAFONACC is to oversee all of the financial transactions of the CCs in connection with FUNDACOMUN. SAFONACC was established in 2006 and manages resources for the development of CC projects, ensuring that money is spent in accordance with the Bolivarian agenda. An important fund for endogenous development is the *Fondo para el Desarrollo Endógeno* (FONENDÓGENO, Endogenous Development Fund) which is described as follows on its official website:

> FONENDOGENO is the entity that channels, in an organised and coherent manner, a series of resources destined for the endogenous development of the country, also being the National Public Administration organism that assumes the stewardship and implementation of government policies aimed at developing the plans, preparing and coordinating endogenous development projects with the

[141] Semi-structured interviews and observational research was conducted with the main agencies in Mérida responsible for the growing number of CCs that were forming in the city. Research also included state agencies whose aim it was to provide a service (both financial and logistical) to communities, which as a result also acted as part of the provision extended to CCs.

[142] Known as the Ministry for Popular Participation and Social Security during the period of research.

> misión to run at the national level. For the formation of plans and projects, the Endogenous Development Fund will be forced to promote inter-agency coordination mechanisms with other local public authorities that have included in their plans, endogenous development projects, thus adding to all possible levels of the state the implementation and support of the endogenous development model.[143]

Various government agencies can cooperate to promote endogenous development and help deliver services. Another important omission is the *alcaldía* in Mérida, which was unable to accommodate any interviews for the research, but its position is represented here by a selection of newspaper articles analysed below.

FUNDACOMUN

The *Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social* created FUNDACOMUN as the agency to oversee the growth of CCs and to help them develop into legal bodies of citizen-led decision-making organisations. Once CCs have fulfilled the legal criteria, they then register with FUNDACOMUN. A director of FUNDACOMUN in Mérida explained the aim of CCs in Venezuela:

> The CC are an example of participation, coordination and integration between the different community organisations, social groups, citizens that allow the people to organise and directly practice the role of public policy so as to achieve a more equal society, and social justice on the road to socialism.[144]

Once CCs have set out their priorities in the *Plan Comunitario de Desarrollo Integral* (Integrated Community Development Plan), they can then present proposals to FUNDACOMUN. FUNDACOMUN could fund up to 120,000 *Bolivares Fuertes* (BsF.) per project and if it exceeded this amount, CCs had to approach other institutions, such as the *alcaldía* (although in Mérida, this could be highly politicised, as discussed below), or other financing agencies that work with CCs and/or communities.[145]

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[143] http://www.fonendogeno.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=31, accessed 27 May, 2011.

[144] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.

[145] *Comunas* however, were at this time still in a 'pilot' stage in Mérida with a few CCs joining together to tackle issues collectively, particularly supporting CCs which have not

According to the *Director de Proyectos* (Director of Projects) at FUNDACOMUN, each CC had an equal opportunity of gaining finance as long as the community was organised, the CC was legal, and the projects were for 'the collective benefit of the community' while also ensuring that social justice were improved.[146] Successful examples of projects that FUNDACOMUN funded include those based on community development and for the benefit of all, incorporating:

> Socio-productive social projects (those that provide a service to the community or that generate employment), given that one of the principal problems of the community is unemployment, and infrastructure projects, communal infrastructure. The essence of all projects is that the benefits are collective, that all the community benefits from the project, for example, if you build a road in the community the benefits are for all everybody has the right to use the road, a sports field, an aqueduct, is collective benefit. In this way you cannot give out small loans to private persons because that would be a benefit for that person and not collective benefit. The government has another means for obtaining small loans but here we only deal with community projects.[147]

This quote demonstrates that projects must be about community development and collective benefits rather than for profiting individuals or the community. Micro-finance is seen by FUNDACOMUN as a separate institution in Venezuela, as will be discussed in the section on FONDEMI. FUNDACOMUN operates separate to the *alcaldía*, but is partly governed by SAFONACC. Although FUNDACOMUN does support small businesses if they are in some way linked to a CC's community, this can happen only if it will generate employment in the sector to which it belongs. The types of projects FUNDACOMUN worked with and supported included 'social projects, socio-productive projects and – since one of the main needs of the community is employment – infrastructure projects, community infrastructure'.[148]

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been as successful as their potential would suggest. *Comunas* could apply to FUNDACOMUN in Mérida for more than the 120,000 as there is a greater collective benefit according to the Director of Projects at FUNDACOMUN. The *Comunas* were being piloted around Venezuela because the law was due to be formalised, especially of interest is about how they will exist alongside local government institutions, if at all.

[146] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.

[147] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.

[148] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.

When asked if there were contentious relations with the then new anti-government *alcaldía*, the Director responded that there were not because they operated separately from each other: 'There are no problems because they work for one side and we work for the other and we don't mix'.[149] This is a further example of the central government's attempt to directly support local communities and society via its own agencies, and also represents an attempt to place distance between itself and potentially troublesome local state institutions.

An area of major concern for FUNDACOMUN at the time was housing. Within the agency there used to be a *gabinete de vivienda* (housing office), which would 'coordinate the repair or building of homes according to the local community's priority'.[150] This was replaced by other agencies established to offer this service, such as PETROCASA, which has helped provide finance for housing projects in Venezuela using oil revenues.[151] The *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees) operated alongside the CCs to work towards making illegal squats permanently legal. Housing was also of major concern for a daily column called *Comunidad* in *La Frontera* (Mérida's newspaper), even though CCs had already applied for project finance.

Support for project suggestions was readily available for *Voceros* who might encounter difficulties with FUNDACOMUN's application process. The Director offered the example of spokespeople that had problems with infrastructure proposals and they were directed by FUNDACOMUN to other agencies where trained technicians could offer specific advice on preparing project outlines. FUNDACOMUN operates guidelines from central government about what is to be funded and for what purpose, although priority is placed on the needs of the poor. The guidelines are for the development of communities, as implemented by and for the people living within them. Where FUNDACOMUN could not fund projects there were other agencies available to give loans or microfinance.

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[149] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.
[150] Interview #13, 19 August 2009.
[151] PETROCASA was a project managed by state owned petro-chemical company PequiVen: *La Corporación Petroquimica de Venezuela* who build houses partly out of PVC.

FONDEMI

FONDEMI was set up in order to provide micro-credit to communities, cooperatives and other groups working for social justice, community development and in particular the CCs and *Comunas*. The principle is that finance can help CCs, *Comunas* and communities develop *Empresas de Propiedad Social Directa* (Direct Social Enterprises) which do not use middlemen (who are often associated with corruption and elite privilege), but instead use only the skills and workforce within their neighbourhood, potentially extending into the wider community. These enterprises are often available to CCs, who are in an excellent position to apply for microfinance as they already function as organised bodies. FONDEMI also funded several trial *Comunas* in Mérida. It does not provide finance to individual applicants because the aim of the agency is to develop communities who most need financial support, particularly those who want to develop socialist economic enterprises (see *Banco de la Mujer*). One such case near BV CC was a cooperative bakery where members of the community were employed, with the intention to expand and hire more people around Mérida.

There are several factors determining if a community or CC is successful in obtaining finance from FONDEMI. These include: levels of community organisation; productivity; agricultural opportunity; the degree of impoverishment and 'all communities will be seen, but those with fewer opportunities are prioritised'.[152] Funding is allocated month by month, and FONDEMI were providing 'technical and socio-political training according to the views and needs of the CC'.[153] According to the agency spokesperson projects and enterprises should contribute to society and cultivate citizen participation:

> There is an agenda in which there should be a social contribution, participation of the people and an understanding of a government under a national policy, so as to strengthen the revolutionary ethic of the country

[152] Interview #12, 20 August 2009.
[153] Interview #12, 20 August 2009.

> and all the issues within the national Simon Bolivar Project. The *Proyecto Nacional Simón Bolívar* (national Simón Bolívar project) involves education and raising awareness of the issues of humanism and endogenous development according to the spokesperson.[154]

Finance is available on a month-by-month basis for CCs, and they work alongside the *Contraloría Social*, a member of the Executive (a spokesperson), and five members of the Citizens Assembly, who are invited in order to see how work progresses. There must be a minimum of 51 per cent of the community present to vote in the decision to establish an *Empresa de Propiedad Social Directa*, according to FONDEMI, and this helps to stimulate community awareness of the project and that a majority agrees to it. The *Empresa de Propiedad Social Directa* is then given between 60,000 and 180,000 BsF according to their project's needs. FONDEMI's office in Mérida works with 122 communal banks and over 200 CCs. Training and support provided the CCs, *Comunas*, or the community before, during, and after completion (pre-financing, funding, post-funding), which also helps them to work with suppliers. Guidelines are set out in a small volume (See Appendix 5) which includes the *Ley para el Desarrollo y Fomento de la Economía Popular* (*Leyes Habilitantes*, Presidential Enabling Laws).

FONDEMI embodies the Venezuelan move to develop a socialist economy or organised *economía popular* (popular economy), which is intended to create employment and spread wealth, in this case through micro-finance, and all funded by the state. The central government views itself as integral to the ongoing development of the *economía popular*, offering technical and financial support. There have been other agencies created with this in mind, such as those aimed at women (see *Banmujer*), all in order to target specific groups enmeshed in poverty.

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[154] Interview #12, 20 August 2009.

BANMUJER

President Chávez founded the *Banco de la Mujer* (Women's Development Bank of Venezuela) in 2001, and appointed Nora Castañeda as the first president. It is based on the promotion of Article 88 of the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution, which recognises housework as an economic activity and grants housewives social security. As Lievesley and Ludlam describe, rights for women since Chávez's election have greater legal recognition:

> The gender rights in Venezuela's Bolivarian constitution, including the definition of homemakers as productive and entitled to social security, the *Banmujer* (Women's Bank), *Misión Madres del Barrio* (Mothers of the Slums Mission), and other microdevelopment projects for and by women, and recently the creation of a Ministry for Women's Issues, are very significant initiatives. But it will take time to discover how fundamentally they disturb existing structures of discrimination and disadvantage (2009: 14).

Although from this perspective women may have more first-hand experience and a deeper understanding of economic and social needs, they also face difficulties around work-life pressures that prevent them from participating in the Bolivarian process. This results in less participation in the CC and the loss of potential finance from the *Banco de la Mujer.* The Mérida branch received applications from mothers who have children with special needs, and who require constant support. These applications were prioritized to enable the women to earn a living working from home, especially as:

> Women have a better sense of both economic and social need, and the full impact of a capitalist society – especially single mothers...it is difficult for Women with financial pressures to leave the home to get money, especially when she has a lot of work to do.[155]

In the majority of cases, micro-finance was allocated for small businesses and community groups. As part of the development of a socialist economy the *Banco de la Mujer* provided credit for family businesses, restaurants, agricultural producers, and all with the aim of developing the Bolivarian system of *intercambio* (exchange or working within an area's resources, part of

[155] Interview #11, 7 July 2009.

endogenous development). The Bank helped to provide and secure spaces for open-air markets, fairs, and exhibitions where products can be sold. The aim, according to the spokeswoman, is to link up with *Las Brigadas Socialistas* (Socialist Brigades):

> We try to push for a productive system that is driven without a boss – where sellers and producers are the boss. Now we are trying to develop a system of exchange linking up to the Brigades of Socialism to organise women producers according to their needs or systems of exchange for their products – so that they are in control of the market.[156]

The Brigades help to organise women producers in order to maintain and exert control over the means of production and exchange in their communities, although working without a boss directly they may depend on the state to carry this out. These developments are an example of the emergence of a different approach to development and state provision in line with the idea of dual-government, but there were also frictions with the local and state government.

The spokeswoman for the bank explained that the *alcaldía* refused to work with them. In fact, according to the spokeswoman, the *alcaldía* actively sought to destabilize the process:

> The Mayor's Office is counter revolutionary, not only because it is against the process but also because it is a Mayor's Office that has always financed state destabilization. This Mayor was rector of Los Andes University and out of the University's resources came protests, all sorts of "guarimbas", a flood of them, that could have destabilized the state and that were funded by him and which nowadays, as far as the town hall is concerned, serve the same purpose. It is always a political game that seeks to destabilize and which opposes what we are building, so it's impossible to have a relationship with him because we're building something that he seeks to destroy.[157]

The bank maintains an active working relationship with other mayors (the *Alcaldías Revolucionarias*) of various municipalities in Mérida state. In the November 2008 *alcaldía* elections, the Mérida city municipality, Libertador, was won by an opposition candidate. Nonetheless, difficulties with the *alcaldía* of

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[156] Interview #11, 7 July 2009.
[157] Interview #11, 7 July 2009.

Mérida seemed to do little to hamper the progress of the bank as finance for the *Banco de la Mujer* was provided from government ministries and the state governor's office was PSUV controlled and therefore supportive.

Mérida State *Gobernador* Office for Participation

Interviews were conducted in the Mérida State *Gobernador* Office for Popular Participation, responsible for all of the twenty-three municipalities within the jurisdiction. The office was responsible for coordinating the *Estado Comunal*, as well as the CCs and *Comunas*. In order to carry out the national project of *Poder Popular*, the government office linked up to all of the municipal *alcaldía* (out of twenty-three, five are held by opposition parties) and upwards to the *Ministerio de Poder Popular para las Comunas* and central government. The office works from micro to macro because: 'In this way the community is trained to assume the power they should have.'[158] When asked how the CCs had changed relationships in communities and how this might have been beneficial, a spokesperson for the Office responded:

> Yes, of course, because it forces people to train, people who can't read or write have been educated and trained in accounting, housing, infrastructure and health issues. Any person is entitled to ask for the accounts on how money is being spent, to ask for the accounts of the Communal Bank, as the law says.[159]

The CCs then helped to transform the lives of some people, and from being unable to write, their skills were enhanced, allowing them to be fully trained in a profession, and making them suitable for employment. People's development was of fundamental importance for the growth of *Poder Popular*. Each individual was seen as a responsible being and required to participate in the flowering of his or her own community, according to the spokesperson. The spokesperson explained that it was the citizens' responsibility to resolve issues in the community through the CCs, which educated people to organise, as before the PSUV's intervention there was disorder. She also added that the purpose of

[158] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.
[159] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.

the revolutionary process was the development of humanism and not to treat people as objects.

There can be difficulties with the process of implementing national policy due to the opposition of certain *alcaldías*. If a *gobernador* wishes to work in accordance with the national policy of *Poder Popular* and an *alcaldía* wishes to oppose it, in practical terms there are two different systems of government. According to the official spokesperson: 'The Town Council is not favourably inclined towards the national Government but the State Governor is, and this produces two different systems'.[160] The two different 'systems' or approaches symbolise the dual government concept, as in Mérida one form of politics exists alongside another, i.e. the *alcaldía*. However the central state can bypass the municipality by setting up agencies that operate separate from, but parallel to, existing institutions.

There are a handful of *Comunas* being trialled in Mérida state but as there was no law to make them legal before the *Ley Orgánica de las Comunas* (Organic law of the Communes 2010), they were formed from a collection of CCs in a few areas, which linked up to work on issues in towns and villages. The spokesperson explained that the development of the *Comunas*, and participation within them, was intended to strengthen popular participation:

> The mission of the Citizen's Participation Directorate is to strengthen the communal power (of the communities) of what is the Communes' future project under construction, the Communes – the union of various Communal Councils and to further the sustainable development of the population.[161]

According to the government spokesperson, the then forthcoming *Comunas* (the prospective date was 2010) would replace existing state institutions, and there is a desire for this in some parts of Venezuela already:

> With the Territorial Reorganization Project and the Communes project we will rearrange the state politically in geographical and border terms, because there are states that share common needs but belong to different

[160] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.
[161] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.

> states and have different policies. With the Commune those territories will join and form a single state based on their needs. The Commune is a project based on an ideal future and will replace the town halls – for this reason he wants to transfer power from the institutions to organized groups.[162]

The spokesperson was adamant that this is a Venezuelan form of socialism, not a reproduction of Cuban, Russian or Chinese forms of government, as it strives to include all people, and is based on the needs of all those who were previously excluded:

> It is based on our own needs, which takes into account the human being, the welfare of all, the process of integration of all people who have been excluded from the system and we will build it all. The trio is party, state and people. The three working together.[163]

The coordination of humanism, interaction, community-led development and collaboration are part of the principles of Bolivarianism in Venezuela. This suggests that the party and state control two out of three of these issues. These ideals are also shared by FUNDACOMUN, BANMUJER, FONDEMI and the other institutions responsible for the CCs. Government agencies have a greater degree of constitutional autonomy and separation from federal government policy, but not in accordance with centralised policy. As local government still controls, delivers, and coordinates public works, and has a budget for building and redeveloping housing, they still need to work in collaboration. The development of the *Comunas* may consolidate *Poder Popular*, but beyond the local, the *alcaldía* may have much less (or even no) power over the CCs and local government public works in the future, but this remains to be seen.

As there are a variety of approaches to politics in both pro- and anti-PSUV CCs, so too has there been differing levels of responses from state agencies when applying for finance. What is clear from the data obtained from interviewees working with the agencies, is that there is a defined approach as to what CCs should propose when applying to them for financial support, namely the facilitation of community development and *Poder Popular*. If an application for

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[162] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.
[163] Interview #40, 9 September 2009.

project finance falls outside these criteria, then applications will undoubtedly be rejected, as was the case in BV. It is interesting to note how differently the BV and TH CCs responded to the criteria set out by the state agencies, as seen through the eyes of their respective *Voceros*.

Voceros

The experience of the *Voceros* in Mérida has been a crucial factor in the case studies. Interviews were conducted with all of the (remaining) *Voceros* in BV CC and also with the main *Vocero* and secretary of TH CC. For the purpose of comparison, this section allows both case studies to be complimented by further discussions of TH's *Voceros*, as BV and TH were so diametrically opposed in both ideology and in terms of approach to their respective roles.

The position of *Vocero* in a CC appeared to be fraught with tensions at many levels. In the interviews conducted in the community in BV, respondents would either admire *Voceros* for the work they did, or they distrusted them. In some cases, respondents felt a mixture of both. The reason for this could be that corruption at all levels of politics in Venezuela has been prolific (Buxton, 2001), and there have been few successful attempts to combat it.

The community saw the *Voceros* as leaders. When assuming the role of a *Vocero* people are taking on the responsibility for the delivery and functioning of the CC's working committees, overseeing finance, acting as secretary or chair, and planning meetings and agendas. Their role, albeit as part of a team with other *Voceros*, is one that shapes the trajectory of the CC's activities. Although the Citizens Assembly must suggest, vote for, and ratify decisions, the *Voceros* can manage how this will take place and in what manner, all by setting agendas and using their status or charisma to potentially influence the process. That is not to suggest that *Voceros* cannot be recalled or ousted from their roles, as they are subject to rules and only hold their position for two years to ensure that others have the chance to fulfil the role, with an opportunity to be re-elected.

Based on my research in BV, the chair and secretary largely shaped the way the CC functioned as time progressed, particularly as they were among the few remaining active participants, and instigated setting it up. *Voceros* can use their position in a given community in order to gain office and also maintain it in order to stay there. Because the CC is a form of representative democracy via the voting mechanism used for the election of *Voceros*, concerns and tensions are evident in the structure in the same way a political party might experience. Power in this case can be defined as the potential to influence decisions, especially if a degree of personal charisma is added to the mix and the potential for abusing power can open up.

Vocero corruption as a serious impact on attendance at Citizen Assembly meetings was only vaguely suggested in interviews with members of the BV community. In contrast, TH was keen to avoid any suspicion of corruption and kept a record of every act, decision, or suggestion. The Secretary was extremely efficient in ensuring that these things were recorded and stored in both hard and electronic formats. I was witness to a neighbour interrupting our interview to ask to see an archived document, which the secretary quickly located. The chair *Vocero* also took photographs and videos of CC projects being carried out, in order to ensure transparency for the Citizens Assembly and for FUNDACOMUN, which he showed me when I met him.

In BV, Miguel was frustrated that the CC law (2006) was not as all encompassing as he had hoped it could have been. He believed that a CC should put community issues before politics. What was striking was the effort to separate politics from the activities of the council, which was an inevitable feature of the CC project in general, especially when viewed in terms of BV's highly polarised political opinions. Such a stance caused ruptures within the Citizens Assembly during earlier phases of the research, and was especially important during the disagreement with the UBV students.

Miguel had claimed when I first met him that there were twenty-five spokespeople, of whom five belong to the financial body, five to the social controller, and fifteen to the executive. Perhaps, in retrospect he had hoped to

achieve this, or was working towards it, as this was later called into question. This number of *Voceros* was apparently not the case when it came to interviewing them, as he later claimed there were only nine in total. It was clear towards the end that some people had resigned as *Voceros* acting for various projects during the research period. The reason so many people had left the CC was because of the lack projects funding, according to several *Voceros*. Miguel felt that BV was being denied money for projects by FUNDACOMUN due to political discrimination, as they were not a pro-government CC (although neither were they entirely anti), but he remained in favour of the attempt to create non-political community development during meetings. I noticed Miguel intervene if meetings became too political, and actually stating that they should focus on community interests over politics. Miguel blamed the government for being too ideological in its legislation and the 1999 constitution, but was in favour (in principle) of working together in the community. According to Miguel, the decision made by FUNDACOMUN not to fund BV was an abuse of power.

Having informally attended a meeting at a Neighbouring CC I noticed that they did not seem to have had as many difficulties in getting finance for their projects, but found it just as difficult to establish themselves due to the amount of bureaucracy involved. At that stage, Miguel remained optimistic that the situation would become resolved through hard work, but stated that he feared potential confrontation. Several *Voceros* also felt worried about the nature of confrontation between agencies and the community. Most *Voceros* were not present at any of the meetings, and felt they were not required to attend because the working committee they headed up was not functioning yet. *Voceros* also began to lose interest in, and lack motivation for, the CC process in BV.

Another *Vocero*, M, was a business colleague of Miguel's, and part of the working group for lighting and security (according to the Provisional Community Development Plan). M suggested that the CCs were inadequately defined and set out in the CC Law, and he also noted the impact this had in motivating people to attend whilst he also felt that the community was too selfish to give back through participation:

> It [the CC Law] needs to be clarified, to be defined. For me it's in the process of formation. In reality there's still a long way to go... and the community is sometimes quite selfish, very selfish. Two concepts are in play, the political and the social...[164]

In practice, the respondent himself had attended just two or three meetings during the time of the research, and only for around twenty to thirty minutes, reflecting the difficulties he had previously highlighted. On reflection, his main concerns therefore revolved around the need to keep the CC apolitical in order to avoid confrontation during the decision-making process, a factor that became problematic for BV's CC.

Other *Voceros* shared the view that the funding agencies were reluctant to relinquish money for projects because they favoured pro-PSUV and poorer communities. One *Vocero* felt that the process of chasing agencies, who also struggle with the bureaucracy involved, was counter-productive as it was often a long and fruitless pursuit

> It seems that we are trying to fix things that people do not want fixed. People do not really care about issues that affect one another – who cares about light [in the street]? I will just drive instead, forgetting about those who walk by foot. We need to tackle these things collectively – not just ten people who want to make a change – but we barely get ten people for a meeting ... The reason the communal council is falling apart is the lack of participation, it is about attending regularly, not just sometimes.[165]

This is an example of many responses *Voceros* gave regarding the future of the CC, and how they felt let down by the community and those agencies responsible for funding. Because of the inaction of most *Voceros*, many in the community felt the spokespeople were lazy and ineffective as leaders, a sentiment noticed both by the *Voceros* themselves. To make matters worse, many *Voceros* had lost faith in the CC process as a result of BV's largely apathetic and unsupportive community. It also provides insight into why apathy about the CC in the community was so extensive.

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[164] Interview #41, 23 July 2009.
[165] Interview #8, 23 July 2009.

As discussed, one of the reasons for inactivity identified by spokespeople was the individualistic nature of the community.[166] They had acknowledged that in pro-PSUV areas of Mérida and Venezuela there was a higher level of participation within communities, although they were viewed as having more support from government agencies. In contrast, the *Voceros* of TH CC felt that their community was more likely to participate given the fact that they had experience of organising in the *barrio* before their houses were built as was informally suggested when I first met them. There was a clear identification by the BV *Voceros* that in order for CCs to work successfully, individualism is counter-productive and communities must be integrated and have solidarity for them to succeed – a sentiment reflected in the Bolivarian approach.

M gave some explanations for the potential successes and failures of CCs. Firstly, as identified above, the reason BV's CC was failing was that there was a lack of community interaction – people did not understand the nature of community participation or solidarity. Likewise, another member of the BV community felt that there was a lack of a sense of civic unity in BV

> Well, I mean, a united community, there is unity in the community, what happens is that, I mean there isn't... no, there isn't a strong organisation to solve community problems; that's to say it is united but it isn't a strong unity in the sense that... Well, we all know each other, we know who's who in the community, but when problems arise, no, no, I don't know... there isn't real unity to solve them.[167]

For CCs to flourish, M claimed that it was more likely for larger northern Venezuelan cities like Valencia and Caracas to get financial assistance, as they are closer to the locus of power and were more needy, although he cited no direct evidence to support this:

> There are a lot of intermediaries before you can get to the source of funds, I think you have to go through many levels to get there; on the other hand those who are in the centre, in cities like Caracas, Valencia or Maracay are inside the circle of power, both political and economic. You see, I

[166] Also partly suggested in Interview #8, 23 July 2009.
[167] Interview #31, Ma, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

> think they are closer, they have more contacts, there's a bigger population and a greater need.[168]

On reflection, the BV CC was not as in need, or as poor, as the TH CC and may have not been prioritised by the funding agencies. If BV's projects were not adhering to endogenous development principles, they would have had even less chance to be financed.

Although BV CC fulfilled all of the legal criteria, problems ensued with the successful running of the council. This was especially the case according to one respondent:

> Yes, they do... Yes, they work, but the problem is that things are not well organised, you know? And that efficiency... but in fact, it can work well, even... the Community Council is fundamental for the development of... the area so as to satisfy people's needs.

According to Miguel, BV CC came up against a variety of difficulties.[169] The most obvious to me was that the CC was treated with a fairly large amount of distrust even before it was made legal. The fact that the CC was originally a PSUV concept also discouraged some of the community from participating in the process immediately. Others appeared (including the *Voceros*) to view the CC as an opportunity to have the ability to influence matters affecting their community, through a discourse devoted to local issues (like business) before community matters. Those who motivated some of the community to participate in the setting up and election of the CC, mainly did so on the basis that it would be an apolitical vehicle for change. This proved to be a contentious decision, as it alienated those who were pro-PSUV and hindered the potential to work with the rest of the community in order to explain the true meaning of endogenous development. That level of understanding was central to the planning of projects and ultimately became crucial to the lack of success in obtaining finance for projects. One citizen's apathy was clearly linked to the distinct lack of finance from agencies: 'Because the financial resources are not handed down, they just

[168] Interview #8, 23 July 2009.
[169] Interview #3, Miguel, 14 January 2009.

aren't'.[170] These issues became intolerable for the spokespeople, many of whom had lost faith and decided to give up on the CC. Not only were other neighbouring CCs able to obtain finance and complete some projects, the spokespeople of the BV CC had alienated members of their community and for various reasons failed to establish the CC to obtain project finance.

The low turn-out of citizens also had a major impact, both in terms of morale and the maintenance of a constant attendance at Citizens Assembly meetings (essential for decisions to be legal), which also affecting the likelihood of them obtaining finance as they appeared largely inactive. One member of the BV community had stated how impressed they were with the CCs in principle, but felt let down with how projects were being poorly carried out:

> It's positive because it gives people the power to solve certain very specific community problems, which no politician manages to solve because of national or state-level issues. However, for me it's important that projects like that should be, should really be implemented; I've seen some, but it's not being done as it should, in other words, it's not being carried out completely although the idea is a good one.[171]

There seemed to be few instances of community cohesion and centres of community activity in BV, but this did develop during the process of building and maintaining the CC. I witnessed discussions between members of the community and *Voceros* in the street, the *panaderia* and shops. According to the interviews with members of the community mentioned in the dissertation, and in my own experience, the issue of the CC meetings and *fiestas* (parties) had provided a platform for discussion in the community such as in the following respondent elucidated: 'Well, we have carried out activities, a festival in December and another one for Mother's Day, and they were successful, quite a lot of people from the community attended'.[172]

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[170] Interview #32 Al, member of BV community, 8 August 2009.
[171] Interview #31, Ma, member of the BV community, 7 August 2009.
[172] Interview #32, Al, member of the BV community, 8 August 2009.

BV also had a shared vision for the community to become more interactive and co-dependent, sharing skills and helping each other, according to several responses from *Voceros* and members of the community:

> The Community Councils are very important, many of them have achieved a lot for their communities, regardless of ideology. Everyone is invited for the benefit of the community, right?[173]

This had come about as the spokespeople had sold the idea of the CC as a separate, non-political entity for the good of the community. Perhaps those respondents who believed that more promotion of the CC was needed – offering suggestions for more education and advertising – was because it had not offered enough for citizens to feel like attending. If the CC were better organised, some claimed, they would attend Citizens Assembly meetings, and if the Provisional Development Plan were less business-centric, then agencies such as FUNDACOMUN would undoubtedly be more likely to fund projects.

It seemed as though endogenous development and exchanges in the community were beginning to become more commonplace. Although less energetic than in poorer (and apparently in rural locations) areas in Mérida, such as the TH CC, the process had opened up the potential for participatory democracy to become the basis of BV's community development. The BV CC had issues with maintaining or even mobilising citizens enough to even have people vote for projects, which was combined with the proposed projects not adhering to the relevant criteria for funding. This was in contrast to a majority of respondents believing in the principle of community participation in order to resolve collective issues. The issue of opposition to the PSUV added to the slowing down of the processes of change.

Newspaper articles on communities in Mérida

This section analyses newspaper extracts collected in Mérida relevant to communities (and often CCs) that were not supported by either dual government or existing local government. These illustrate the argument that tensions exist

[173] Interview #28, G, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

between participants and *Voceros* of the CCs, and government agencies. The *Comunidad* section of *La Frontera* newspaper, which is available across Mérida state, provided an insight into the mentality of people who had not benefitted directly from the CCs or who had been failed by local government. In most cases, these articles reported on rural living conditions for people who were below the poverty line and on their suffering as a result. People would be recorded as complaining that local authorities had 'forgotten' about them and that as a consequence they were struggling. Many of the communities stated that they had tried to contact their *alcaldía* and the state *gobernador*, but had had no response. Other articles reported that where communities had set up CCs successfully, they had not received the resources that were vital to carry out essential works. As a result, many articles in the *Comunidad* section would locate responsibility on the lack of joined-up government, as the blame was often shifted from agency to *alcaldía* to *gobernador* and on to central government and the President. The articles often served as an insight into how inconsistent development was in Mérida State as many communities were living in abject poverty. Although often sensationalised and opinionated, the articles still offered a valuable perspective on the plight of communities that had not received help from existing local government outlets or through agencies linked to CCs and endogenous development.

In many of the articles, only the *Voceros* of the CC in the community would be interviewed. This highlights the acceptance of the organised community hierarchy that exists within CCs in Mérida. In this way, *Voceros* were seen to be the people who best knew the problems that the population confronted. This approach suggested that by August 2009 the CCs had been accepted as the natural vehicle for community organisation, as opposed to *Asociaciones de Vecinos* or CLPPs that the *alcaldía* of Mérida had attempted to introduce.

That most communities had actually set up a CC is a point worth reflecting on. When the CCs in Mérida were founded, support for doing so had been fairly widespread, and certainly enough for many rural and urban CCs to be legalised. The question remains, however, as to why CCs were encouraged to organise but had experienced such difficulty in obtaining project finance. Naturally, as the

articles were sensationalist by nature, they appeared to cover only the stories that were shocking, confrontational, and antagonistic to existing and new forms of governance and power. They also sought to highlight the inadequacies of the system of governance without underlining where they had worked well.

The articles are important in their efforts to emphasise the grey area between the state, the city and the structures in place to govern them. In one such example, López (18 July 2009) stressed the inadequate response of local and state government to issues of poverty in 'Government programmes don't reach San Isidro'. Another article by López (6 August 2009) 'Decay and neglect have taken hold in Camino Viejo' it highlighted the case of 36 families living in extreme poverty which the government had failed to respond to effectively.[174] The communities mentioned that they did not benefit from endogenous development or CC organisation or representation. Rural communities around Mérida state were fraught with such concerns and lived in poverty, yet they had appealed for help and assistance through both new and existing channels of governance, which had gone unanswered. The stories served to highlight the circumstances of local governance around Mérida, demonstrating that without the support and cooperation of services and logistical agents under the jurisdiction of local government and central government agencies, people would suffer and CCs be rendered inoperable. Without this cooperation, CCs could not carry out vital public works in their communities. Another concern is raised in identifying these complications, namely the fact that the CCs are entirely dependent on receiving resources and support to be able to operate at all. Without finance, the CCs obviously cannot function, thus adversely affecting grassroots participation and impeding their potential to obtain funding in the future.

It appears that the individual cases in each of the articles about communities around Mérida state can be condensed into the harsh truth that, on the one hand, endogenous development and financial resources do not reach all areas (including organised, official CCs) in the state, and on the other hand, that CCs were unable to fulfil their role without capital flows and cooperation. There are

[174] 'Decline and neglect set in Camino Viejo'.

three aspects which CCs depend upon: firstly, logistical and financial support from government agencies; second, support from service providers that local government are responsible for; and finally, the joined-up delivery of the first two aspects in order to assist the CCs in fulfilling their role in achieving constitutional basic living conditions.

Having addressed the perspectives of government agencies, state government officials and *Voceros* of the CCs, tensions in the process of governance at the local level (through the CCs) can be summarised as three aforementioned themes: power; managed participation and institutional design; and politicisation.

Power

Communication between the various state agencies, the *alcaldía* and *gobernador* and the services they are responsible for delivering, is a key factor in defining some of the tensions that exist in governing through the CCs in Mérida. As CCs depend on both of these elements of government, communication must flow between them so that each CC knows where they stand, how their applications for project finance are progressing, and so on. As the Mérida *alcaldía* changed from PSUV to COPEI, previous plans to improve the living and housing conditions of poor parts of the city had been shelved. As the CC approached government agencies with no response, the previous *alcalde* Carlos León (PSUV) promised to redevelop their community (as this was close to the municipal elections it could have been to attract votes). According to López:

> More than nine years have passed and still the people's government has not fulfilled the promise to relocate families elsewhere and provide them with a home in good condition, Contreras continued, and to date nothing has been accomplished. Application forms for housing exist in the municipality of Libertador municipality, for the relocation of people in housing projects to be developed by the agency, said the appointed worker in Barrio Escondido, but hopes have vanished and no one knows what happened to this housing initiative set up by former Mayor Carlos León (7 August 2009).

Léster Rodríguez, the COPEI *alcalde*, was involved in a controversy surrounding the development and elections of the CLPPs (*La Frontera,* 21 July

2009, p. 7a). He was accused of redirecting resources from the CC process towards the CLPPs which sparked protests outside the *alcaldía* (Bahoque, 22 July 2009, p. 1 & 6a), and led to an investigation into the legality of the elections for the *Voceros* of the CLPPs, which it was claimed were unfair and illegal (Sandoval, 29 July 2009, p. 2).

On 30 July 2009 *La Frontera* ran two stories about the alleged misconduct and illegality of the CLPP elections, the first, 'The Attorney General's office received documents nullifying the CLPP elections' detailed allegations that the president of the *Ministerio Público* (State Attorney General's Office) received information and documents denouncing the irregularities of the elections (Sandoval, 30 July 2009). The second story, 'Newly-elected CLPPML councillors are waiting to be sworn in', that the elected CLPP *Voceros* awaited inauguration and claimed they were subject to violence in the form of threats and sabotage by PSUV members stopping people from voting ('members of the PSUV and of the Tupamaro movement, headed by former mayor Carlos León') (*La Frontera*, 30 July 2009). On the one hand, the local Public Ministry had decided to take the case to the *Tribunal Supremo de Justicia* (Supreme Justice Tribunal, TSJ) in order to evaluate the evidence vis á vis irregularities in the election process for the CLPP *Voceros* (González, 4 August 2009). On the other hand, even if the elections did not adhere appropriately to the legal framework as set out by the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (National Electoral Council, CNE), they should not have been subjected to violence, as violence is always completely unacceptable, if this actually occurred. It could also be the case that *Voceros* were attempting to use the opportunity as a means of influencing public opinion in their favour before the judgement of the TSJ. There is, according to the article, 'The TSJ will take a decision today on the annulment of the CLPPP elections', a need to follow the law that the CNE sets out, and which the *alcaldía* had failed to do:

> But the mayor seems not to want to remember that the Local Council Law on Public Policy Planning states that the responsibility to call for elections falls on the community and is not within his jurisdiction. (González, 4 August 2009).

The TSJ decided to declare the elections of the CLPPP *Voceros* null and void, and wait for the then forthcoming *Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales* 2009 (Organic Law of Electoral Procedures 2009) to determine how new elections should be carried out (González, 4 August 2009). Some CC members interpreted the situation as an attempt by the municipality to stop or slow down the process of the democratisation (of the CCs) in Mérida city. Evidently the *alcaldía* wanted to either promote an alternative to the CCs or at least have more control over how the CCs operated and obtained finance.

These two stories highlight how polarised local politics can become as a result of dual government operating alongside local government, while not actually replacing it. The desire to promote an alternative arrangement for the CCs can be seen as a reflection that it actively opposes dual government. This could have been an effort to slow down how finance was to reach CCs or to fund another system with more links to the *alcaldía* in the form of the CLPPs.

Power clashes are also evident in the BV CC, as communication irreversibly broke down between several government agencies and its *Voceros*. The *Voceros* were frustrated at the lack of response and they accused government agencies of political bias. In the case of TH's CC, communication was effective and well maintained with government agencies, as well as within the CC itself. Examples of the excellent communication in place in the TH CC included the posters advertising events, meetings and projects, something that was minimal in BV.[175] One potential factor as to why BV CC decided to close down may well be because their communication was not as frequent, widespread or informative.

In a similar example, a *Vocera* of a CC in Los Azules (Mérida state), explained to the local newspaper that she had approached local government for assistance with housing conditions but had not received a response:

[175] See Appendix 4 for an example of a BV advert, the only one that I saw – although emails, and text messages were apparently sent to the community to let them know about the meetings.

> Carmen Guillen, communal council spokeswoman, said that the argument has been clearly put to the municipal authorities without yet achieving a satisfactory response. (Lopéz, Merida: La Frontera, 18 August 2009).

In many cases, the *alcaldía* and the *gobernador* would apparently respond with statements agreeing that issues such as housing, public services and investment must be addressed, but as the ongoing campaign of the prolific *Comunidad* sections suggest, these were merely statements and not words of action.

Because some CCs felt so strongly about the lack of financial provision and poverty in their community, they protested as they felt this was all that they could do not having had responses from agencies, local and state government, according to López in *La Frontera*:

> The only mechanism that communities have to make the respective authorities listen to their proposals and community problems is that its inhabitants take action and take to the streets to let them know how they feel and win solutions to the myriad calamities that afflict them, expressed the spokespersons of the communal council in this sector (19 August 2009).

Power relations often revolve around those who are in charge of either branches of the dual government or the existing local democracy. Clashes would occur between the dual government process and *alcaldía*, as evident in the above articles. Some CCs would be without any provision from either the dual government or local authorities, and this can be attributed to problems with the CCs institutional design, and the risks of their politicisation.

Politicised participation

The institutional design of the CCs reflects the desire of the government to mange participation while implementing socialism, as evident in the interviews with government agencies. Although national policy is in place to promote the expansion of *Poder Popular*, the policy has yet to be effective enough for many CCs to carry out these functions. In certain areas, particularly small rural communities, vital public works are still lacking, regardless of the application by CCs to get them completed and this is highlighted frequently in *La Frontera*. As

CCs requests have gone unanswered, according to López in *La Frontera* (18 August 2009), people's constitutional rights are being ignored and government policy is not being implemented effectively:

> The housing deficit, that the country has suffered for so many years, is each day becoming more acute, more so in the absence of an aggressive policy by the government of president Chávez to provide dignified housing for people with low-income, as is established by our Constitution.

The examples from Mérida show that CCs are politicised because they are dependent on resources that are provided via government agencies that require project proposals to observe the principles of endogenous development and Bolivarianism. Politicisation affects the democratising potential of CCs and prevents some people from participating. In the case of the BV CC, conflicts occur because of differences in political opinion. The clash between the *alcaldía* and what can be termed dual government is also a result of power struggles and politicisation. CCs are dependent on the joined-up government of both local government and central government agencies operating on behalf of the PSUV, for resources, and logistical and financial support. As CCs are an initiative of the government, they are also mediated by central government agencies in cities.

In Mérida city, the COPEI *alcalde* was elected in November 2008, replacing the PSUV *alcalde* Carlos León. As discussed, there were accusations among different political circles, including PSUV ones that León operated by using public works as incentives to attract votes. Indeed, just days before the election León held a public event to give laptop computers to high-achieving students in a public square with a great deal of media attention and photo opportunities. Some pro-PSUV people questioned his priorities as he favoured building shopping malls rather than houses whilst in office, which could potentially be to appease members of the opposition so they might also vote for him and that 'Socialism means to Léon that now the South can live unsustainably, like the North' in that his ideas represented 'mass consumption'.[176] Furthermore, this respondent stated that the issues with *alcaldes* was widespread: 'what is rare is a true, deep transfer

[176] Interview #47, JS, 31 October 2008.

of power from the Mayor and the State Government to the CCs'.[177] Although these were the opinions of those I met, I encountered little evidence to either support or refute these claims. These developments do however open up another problem that faces the CCs in Mérida: clientelism.[178]

As the link between the Venezuelan executive and the new parts of the dual government at a local level are closer than in the traditional relationship, there is an increased potential for clientelism to occur in the process. Levitsky and Roberts (2011: 181) suggest that CCs do have elements of clientelism: 'the fact that the government minister in charge of the CCs urged them to campaign in favour of ending term limits in early 2009 underscored the potential relevance of the charges of clientelism and lack of pluralism'. Ellner argues that:

> Given the aggressiveness of the opposition and much of the anti-Chavista middle class, clientelism is an understandable government response. Loyalty becomes an imperative. But clientelism does much to undermine state-efficiency in that competence often becomes a secondary consideration (in Spronk & Webber, 2011: 266).

However, Hawkins, Rosas, and Johnson (2011: 211) see the situation differently: 'Rather than characterize Chavismo as either programmatic or clientelistic, we place it in a third category of charismatic-populist'. Mainwaring suggests that this is what legitimises:

> In clientelistic polities, most citizens do not believe in parties on the basis of conviction, but rather adhere to them for instrumental reasons, often for immediate material gain. But support on the basis of material favors is not legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy is created on the basis of perceptions that government responds to citizens' desires, that democracy is ultimately government of the people (1999: 177).

As a result, people feel the government is responsive to their needs,[179] but elements (or actual practices of) clientelism do appear. This does not fully

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[177] Interview #47, JS, 31 October 2008.

[178] For further, in-depth analyses of clientelism see Mainwaring, 1999; Taylor-Robinson, 2010; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; García-Guadilla and Pérez, 2002; Ayuero, 2001; Hawkins, 2010; Martinez, Fox, and Farrell, 2010.

[179] In the most recent (2011) survey carried out by Chilean NGO LatinoBarometer found Venezuelans rated their democracy third, under Costa Rica and Uruguay (Correo Del

explain the clientelist system in Venezuela, which includes the links the president enjoys with his dedicated followers, the paternalistic policies employed, clientelist trade-offs, as well as his persona as an international statesman, or even national magical figure.[180]

From another angle, Lazar sees clientelism as 'a set of strategies through which citizens attempt to make politics, and politicians, more representative and responsive', based on her study of a neighbourhood in El Alto, Bolivia (2004: 228). Lazar argues that clientelism is not as negative as many would argue, as it is a question of context:

> It can be argued that in some ways clientelism makes politics more representative than delegative electoral democracies envisioned by liberal citizenship theory ... Dismissing personalistic and clientelistic politics as simply dysfunctional and anti-democratic does not do justice to the complexity of people's experiences of democracy. Furthermore, analysing clientelism as nothing more than the antithesis of citizenship highlights a view of citizenship based more upon the abstract rhetoric of liberal political theory than concrete and affective practices (2004: 240-241).

Burgwal (1995) discusses collective clientelism, based on research in Quito, where squatters would cooperate together to use the process of getting closer to politicians as a means of survival. In the Venezuelan context, there are nuanced perspectives as to how the relationship between the state and the participating people functions, such as how Venezuelans renegotiate their autonomy and position vis-á-vis the state.

Schiller, citing Auyero's (1999: 297) perspective on political clientelism, views it as positioned within 'hierarchical relationships through which impoverished "clients" exchange their political loyalty for political, economic or cultural resources from elite "patrons" who are usually politicians' (2011: 104). Schiller questions the usefulness of this version of clientelism by asking instead whether

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Orinoco, November 6, 2001, accessed at: http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/6609, 20 April, 2012)

[180] In the instance of 'Magic', Coronil, 1997 provides an excellent explanation of how Venezuelan presidents almost become the embodiment of the power of the oil state itself.

this model 'makes [it] impossible to identify and assess the political practice of state making that takes place among grass roots media activists every day' (2011: 105). This opens up an interesting avenue as to how far the CCs are able to do this given the fact that they are restricted by a state-managed participatory space:

> In Venezuela, grassroots movements and the state are intimately intertwined. It is necessary not only to move beyond the assumption that the state is the repressive headquarters of power, but also to refocus our vision to see grassroots efforts ... Viewing traditional clientelist bonds as the simple exchange of political loyalty for resources or favors precludes an examination of not only the work and skill it takes to negotiate social networks but also the ways in which barrio-based actors might re-imagine and recreate the state through these very networks. This case provides insight into how the boundary between state and society can be strategically used to generate resources of power (Schiller, 2011: 128-129).

Schiller addresses these nuances in her study of Catia TVe, a community television station in Caracas, which are not strictly applicable in the case of the CCs. The CCs are state-managed participatory initiatives designed to facilitate participation. There are of course examples where CCs have held government to account[181], or where revolutionary *alcaldías* have handed over much of their power to CCs,[182] but they do have a strict set of guidelines to follow if they are to become legal bodies and receive valuable project finance, which is essential to the lasting success of a CC. The connections between the CCs and the state are many, and they are managed and financed by the state, leaving the scope for clientelist practices to develop, which is not to suggest that clientelism is completely negative, or unnecessary, if poor people require support, and politicians require votes.

State managed participation and dependency

Government policy on participation is a state-managed approach which entails overseeing how CCs function, this creating a system of dependency, especially based on their need to constantly obtain project finance from relevant agencies.

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[181] Bruce (2008) provides an account of a resilient CC that successfully challenged agencies and bureaucracy to achieve projects.

[182] Such as Julio Chávez, in Carora state, see Hartling, 2007.

This is largely because participation is politicised, especially as CCs play a role in the construction of socialism. Without finance, CCs cannot function, as in the case of BV. Closely linked to this is the fact that communities also require the assistance of public services from the *alcaldía*, both of which were evident in newspaper reports. If CCs are without support from either channel, they are limited to a deliberative role in communities. Dependency is evident in the fact that financial provision for CC projects and for government agencies is generated by the central state. The central government obtains finance predominantly from the extraction of natural resources, mainly oil, and then selling it on the international market. Additional parts of the dual governance process – missions, *Mercal*, PDVAL and other government subsidies – also rely on provision from central government.

In some ways the delivery of basic needs to communities by government agencies through the CCs or via local or state government is a constitutional right. López argues in her articles in *Comunidad* in *La Frontera* that these rights had been overlooked in parts of Mérida state, even though CCs had tried to turn their situation around by applying for financial resources. An example of such issues is described in an article on residents living in Lomo de los Vientos:

> Like dry leaves blown by the wind, so again the hopes of the inhabitants of Loma de las Vientas and Piedra del Tigre – villages located in the former Choma-Merida highway – to have decent and safe housing and guaranteed basic services, rights established in the constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and of which they have been deprived for several decades now (29 July 2009).

Although finance is required for CCs to perform local projects for the community, they must receive finance from state agencies and, at the same time, support from local government institutions. More recently, the issuing and control of finance has been more heavily policed because of the newer 2009 Law, to the extent that *Voceros* are being deterred from carrying out projects for fear of being accused of corruption (Ellner, 2011a: 2).

This system has a great impact on communities where financial resources are provided to CCs and also where PSUV *alcaldes* have been in power, such as

Carlos León in Mérida. In this dual government model, goods, services and finance can reach communities, via the CC, more rapidly and more directly as the community sets out what is required. When *alcaldes* such as Lestér Rodríguez get into office, they could well be less interested in cooperating, especially as many of the initiatives are made by the PSUV and are associated with their Bolivarian policy and ideology. As we have seen, this could have a profound effect on CCs such as BV and TH, because although the former was mainly anti-PSUV, the agencies would not fund their projects on the basis that they were not founded in endogenous development. Meanwhile, TH could suffer because the new *Alcaldia* might not be as cooperative in delivering public services.

The relationship between the role of state bureaucracy and the PSUV on a national as well as a local level has had an impact on Bolivarianism and also on participatory democracy. Chávez inherited a state bureaucracy that contained many people who supported PF parties. He has since created alternative channels, as detailed throughout this dissertation – as well as new state institutions – to counter current or future opposition. This was much to the displeasure of the opposition:

> ... the strategy of prioritizing parallel structures (such as schools and hospitals), and their eventual displacement of traditional ones, would invite protests from members of both the upper and middle classes who feared the loss of privilege (Ellner, 2008a: 15).

When faced with organised opposition in a local state, as seen in Mérida, the progress of delivering Bolivarianism is impinged when compared to having a pro-PSUV mayor or state governor. Therefore, the creation of the dual government system can be seen as an attempt to counter the potential for PSUV and state bureaucracy overlap that goes against implementing Bolivarianism.

In the state agencies that promote and enable participation through financing CCs and monitoring projects, a new state bureaucracy has been created. Where the new forms and the old converge, problems arise, such as in the provision of goods and services. However, as new state agencies are under the direct

governance of the PSUV, they act as enablers of Bolivarianism which is an attempt to defeat defiance by opposition sympathisers. The creation of a single socialist party, the PSUV, can also be regarded as an attempt to enrich the state's capacity to deliver Bolivarianism by unifying the various left parties in Venezuela. However, it appears that the key to its sustainability is to involve civil society more generally:

> Concerns raised about the clientelism, personalism, and concentrated executive authority in Venezuela might best be addressed by imagining alternative ways to institutionalize a democratic relationship between the state and civil society, one that enhances popular, democratic governance by permitting social movements and groups to participate actively and collaborate with the bureaucracy and elected officials. To put it in the parlance of the Bolivarian Constitution of 1999, this institutionalized relationship should provide for a "protagonastic" role for social movements and groups. Chávez clearly regards the spread of Communal Councils and the establishment of the PSUV as steps towards institutionalizing such a protagonistic role for civil society, but both of these Chavista innovations remain in gestation. Reacting to the highly co-optive system of Puntofijismo and the general distrust of political parties in Venezuela, the young PSUV began formulating statutes and ideological principles to further the process of institutionalizing such a relationship (Hellinger, 2011: 341).

In this sense, state capacity remains more strongly centralised than in other states with leftist governments, such as Brazil, and new state agencies continue to support government initiatives separate to traditional local democracy and existing state bureaucracy. This is also because the PSUV has strengthened alternative channels of provision to those who participate in (and receive goods and services from) the dual government via those new state agencies that manage participation. This opposes directly the elite systems that operated under Puntofijismo, which had support from the state bureaucracy and still partly in operation in Venezuela today. Although there can be issues of bureaucratic bottlenecks and slow progress in Venezuela, the central government (the PSUV) are creating a dual system to overcome this. How sustainable this is remains to be seen, especially when considering how top down it can be:

> ...Bolivarian revolutionaries need to pay attention to the ways in which culture is very resistant to change. More specifically, Venezuelan cultural tendencies towards patronage and preferences for strong leaders stand in

> direct contradiction with efforts to establish a participatory democratic revolution. In other words, for the Bolivarian project to succeed, it has to be conscious of these tendencies and must find ways of overcoming them. Originally, part of Chávez's objective was precisely to eradicate what he thought "Fourth Republic" patronage systems. While Chávez did manage to introduce constitutional changes that were intended to undermine Fourth Republic patronage systems, many of his supporters and officials within the government simultaneously went about re-establishing their own patronage systems (Wilpert, 2007: 197).

Therefore, the role of the PSUV, which enables dual government, must consider a new means of delivery or collaboration with civil society in order to entrench Bolivarianism in Venezuela, especially in terms of participatory democracy. However, the ability of CCs to develop without dependency on state-management remains limited as power continues to rest ultimately within the PSUV.

As long as BV depended on state agencies and local government, they were unable to proceed beyond designing projects, which also further affected participation and was a factor determining the future of that CC. The institutional design means that, while they are widely participatory, they are also state-managed, resulting in several areas of conflict with existing local democracy, such as the tensions between CCs and government agencies, and even internally.

Conclusion

The extent to which CCs were able to participate and carry out community projects was mixed. A variety of factors contributed to the conflicts created within BV and between their CC and government agencies, largely revolving around the politicisation of the process of participation and the institutional design of the CCs. The clashes associated with dual government revolve around power, institutional design and state-managed participation. CCs are monitored, evaluated and finance is largely granted from the various state agencies. In the dual government process, goods, services and financial resources should be given to CCs via these agencies.

Agencies have a very clearly defined role in providing financial and logistical support for the CCs. Where they were able to help, communities were rewarded with much-needed development. This type of assistance has not reached all parts of Mérida, including BV. Poorer CCs have been prioritised for financial resources over wealthier communities and there is still an uncertainty as to why not all CCs are able to obtain such resources. In the articles in *La Frontera* it is clear that the state agencies, local and state government have not dealt with all poor, rural communities in an efficacious manner, even though the community is organised around a legal CC.

Communication, policy and financial resources are therefore at the core of the tensions facing CCs in Mérida. As the CCs are supposed to be separate from existing state structures, the *alcaldía* of Mérida apparently attempted to influence the matter so that it could – to a certain extent – control financing. If state agencies do not assist CCs in poor communities, they are practically redundant institutions. In the case of BV, the *Voceros* felt discriminated against because they were not entirely pro-PSUV. BV did not receive any assistance from state agencies but public services from local government were not affected. Ultimately, the BV case showed tensions existing at all levels: between the community, *Voceros*, and local government, all affecting their future development.

As discussed previously, the role of the state in participation both facilitates and creates a dependent relationship between involvement in the CCs and PSUV. This is largely the case as the PSUV has created alternative structures to increase its ability to manage the development and entrenchment of an alternative system, Bolivarianism, and through participatory initiatives such as CCs. How far participation and the role of the state interact in this process can be understood in both theoretical and empirical terms and we now turn to a discussion of these themes in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation is an investigation of the *Consejo Comunales* (Communal Councils, CCs) based on historical, theoretical and empirical discussions, which suggest that a number of issues have influenced the process of participation. These issues have been clearly significant in the example of two case study CCs in Mérida, Venezuela, which identify the interaction between local democracy and state agencies.

The topic discussed here is also an example of the trajectory of the Bolivarian Revolution, its relationship to participatory democracy and, in part, *Chavismo*, and Socialism of the twenty-first century in Venezuela. Both President Hugo Chávez and the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV) have implemented several participatory initiatives since assuming office in 1998, culminating in the ongoing development of the *Estado Comunal* in which CCs constitute the main bodies of participation across Venezuela. The dissertation has also looked at how participation is shaped, guided, and constructed by the PSUV-governed central state.

My central research question has been to ask if state-managed participation affects the CC process at a local level, and whether the process was politicised. Furthermore, I intended to understand how a radical transformative project of Bolivarianism, and the creation of *Estado Comunal* was carried out in a largely opposition to PSUV area. In order to do this, I traced the history of Venezuelan democracy through the Pact of *Punto Fijo* (1958-1998), *Chavismo*, as well as Venezuelan participatory initiatives since 1998. In addition I developed a theoretical framework based on participatory democracy literature that suggests that participation in Venezuela is state-managed. I then applied the key theoretical issues derived from the literature to my empirical case studies.

This dissertation argues that participation has the potential to come into conflict with the interests of local democracy. CCs have had mixed results because of their institutional design, their degree of adherence to Bolivarianism, as well as their relationships with government agencies. This central line of enquiry has

been guided by several research questions. I questioned how participants and people in communities engaged with CCs and discovered that not everyone wanted to be involved, especially as they were designed and state managed by the PSUV and the government. This led me to discuss how state-managed participation manifested itself in the CCs. I analysed the processes and trajectory of Bolivarianism and *Chavismo* as part of Chapter 2 to discover how the state has promoted and facilitated participation since 1998. These participatory initiatives harbour traces of undue influence and clientelism, and there is a danger that CCs might also do the same. As the CCs acted as a "catch all" participatory initiative, they became the main vehicle for participation from 2006. Given that the PSUV-led Socialism of the twenty-first century agenda tasked CCs with replacing local democracy and older institutions, I examined whether there were tensions between them and the structures of local democracy. In researching this I discovered that CCs and other Bolivarian initiatives exist separate to local democracy, but had not yet replaced them as intended. I termed this 'dual government' as they existed alongside each other. This discovery also led me to the understanding that CCs are state-managed.

On reflection, the CCs offer an interesting perspective on the participatory democracy debate, as a great deal of the literature views participation as (at least partly if not fully) separate from the state. In addition, CCs operate along the lines of state-managed guidelines, readily enforceable because project finance must be applied for. Therefore, it was clear that the PSUV-led central state was responsible for the development of the CCs. My final question reflected on whether the PSUV-led central state was managing CCs to ensure their efficacy. This question asked how state agencies funded the CCs and how PSUV principles such as endogenous development operated.

These questions have led to several key findings that underpin the dissertation's central argument, and which have been complemented by the methodology adopted for the research project, as described below. These research questions have set out an evaluative account of CCs in Mérida that suggested results are mixed largely because they are politicised, and that state management of

participation stands to benefit the PSUV in the construction of Bolivarianism before participants, as it is the CCs that are dependent on the state for resources.

Methodology

The empirical work in this dissertation reflected on the CCs' practical operation within the processes and relationships inherent in participation in Venezuela, and based on field work observations and interviews. My empirical analysis of BV in Chapters 4 and 5 has illustrated several dimensions of the process of participation and are discussed in detail below. I observed that there are variations in the way communities interact with government agencies, and that some CCs have completed successful projects while others had not. Ultimately, my analysis revealed the need to adhere to a Bolivarian endogenous development framework in order to obtain project finance.

The dissertation's empirical research examined the processes of participation through an observational lens, in order to discover how people used the CC spaces to further their communities' interests, also asking how central state-sponsored initiatives interacted with state agencies and with local government. For the most part this work was conducted in a middle-class, newly formed, CC. In order to understand the relationship of the CC within the existing structures of participation, interviews were conducted with government agencies and a state governor's office official.

I immersed myself in the culture and politics of the BV community, and the city of Mérida in general, which was complemented by additional observations on other CCs' meetings and events, and some interviews were carried out with members of TH CC. TH provided an entirely different perspective, as theirs was an energetic and pro-active council that was celebratory in atmosphere, not least because they had succeeded in building social housing.

Limitations of research

The limitations of the research are evident given the CCs relatively recent emergence and the fact that an in-depth case study meant that much of my research focussed on only one CC. Because of the limitations of case-study research, this dissertation's results are dominated by examples of the CCs I interacted with, which may not necessarily reflect how similar issues are played out in other CCs. Interviews were fewer than had been intended perhaps because of the gatekeeper of the research or perhaps due to my 'outsider' status, but as the research began to focus on state-management of participation, findings were drawn that could be applied to all CCs, as they all operate under the same state managed participatory framework. Although some time was spent with neighbouring and pro-PSUV CCs, this was brief and, as a result, comparison with the data obtained from BV and TH's CCs was circumscribed.

In addition, given my outsider status, not all avenues of research were open to my investigation; of particular note is the lack of access to institutions such as the *Alcaldia* and *Servicio Autónomo Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales* (Autonomous National Fund for Communal Councils, SAFONACC). On certain occasions some topics were kept secret from me, some documents were unavailable, or people declined to be interviewed. Given that I respected this dimension of the case-study approach, I would simply comply with the wishes of the participants, collecting data only when and where it was appropriate to do so. The empirical insights provided by my research into BV's CC have implications for the conclusions I have drawn about participation in Venezuela. Given the fact that the CC was ultimately unsuccessful these results may appear imbalanced and positing an overly critical analysis.[183]

I was also aware that other CCs with different levels of success operated both in the immediate location, and around the rest of the city. It was my intention to visit as many other CCs as possible in order to have a more complete picture of the participatory initiatives in Mérida. I witnessed a range of activities from

[183] In a recent discussion with an activist in the neighboring community, the BV CC did not meet the requirements necessary for the re-registration under the 2009 CC Law.

cultural exchanges and markets, to sports groups and children's events. The CCs in Mérida appeared to celebrate their communities, and relished the opportunity to host events. Throughout the city, I witnessed a variety of different meeting spaces that discussed several different topics at different stages of developing or fulfilling community projects.

One of the most obvious results of this research was the desire by several key activists to work within the designated application framework to win project finance. Often, but not always, these members were pro-PSUV, reflecting the dynamism of many of the parties' activists, but also the politicisation of the process, which was also evident in BV and elsewhere. This could act as a deterrent to some people's participation. Although many of my findings may be exclusive to the BV case study, some key findings such as the idea of state managed participation are applicable to other CCs.

Since I carried out research in 2009, the CCs have linked together in some cases to create *Comunas*[184] and socialist cities. Moreover, President Chávez has empowered CCs in Falcón State to build 3,487 houses[185] and CCs have worked together to build houses through PETROCASA in the first 'Socialist City', just outside Caracas.[186] Some CCs are also working together in socialist enterprises, such as the packing company in Carabobo state that works with some 130 CCs.[187] Although these are positive developments, they still demonstrate that participation is managed by the PSUV, and autonomous social movements are almost unheard of. This might be because they do not exist, or they are not recognised, as they do not fit into the state-managed process or its understanding of participation. However, as the construction of Socialism of the twenty-first century is ongoing, it could be that the politicisation debate is also reflected in these areas.

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[184] Ron, 2011.
[185] Boothroyd, 2011.
[186] Correo del Orinoco, 2 September, 2011.
[187] Pearson, 2012.

Theoretical contribution

The interdisciplinary nature of an area studies dissertation has led to a fruitful fusion of the literature on political science, history, and social scientific methodological insights. All of these proved crucial in developing the Venezuelan case studies especially in opening up avenues of enquiry in relation to key themes in the literature regarding participatory democracy and comparative examples from around Latin America. These set out details of how people participated and their relationship with the state in doing so. This aspect is not widely discussed in relation to participation in Venezuela, so this dissertation provides a relatively unique point of analysis.

Much of the literature on Venezuela emphasises either support for, or contradiction of, the policies of President Chávez and his rhetoric. A weakness of this literature is that it avoids examining the question of whether participation forms *part* of the state, and even fewer cases studies based on the CCs have been presented. Therefore there is a danger of becoming partisan in regard to either one side or the other when reviewing the literature on Venezuela. There are few empirical studies of Bolivarianism in communities which enable the reader to understand how it plays out at the local level in different circumstances. Because of this, an empirical case study-based dissertation can be seen as advancing the literature on participation in Venezuela and offers a perspective on how CCs in Mérida operate, both locally and within a wider political context.

As the dissertation focuses on how CCs operate as part of the state, I discuss the literature on participatory democracy, state-society synergy and deliberation from an innovative perspective. By looking at the state as extending itself into local communities through the CCs, I reassess the literature in terms of the roles of the state, participants and CCs' positioning within liberal democracy. Furthermore, the debate in Chapter 3 focuses precisely on the space between society and the state as a point of reference for participation, and how state managed it is in Venezuela when compared to other regional participatory examples.

This dissertation's contribution to the literature on participatory democracy is evident in several ways. First, is the assertion that the processes of participation will benefit liberal democracy is questionable in the case of Venezuela. The CCs are an undoubtedly positive force as they provide an educational function and space within which to participate, but they have less of a role in holding government to account. While CCs seem to address some of the shortcomings of liberal democracy, such as opening up spaces in which to participate, within the state itself the areas CCs can participate in are limited, as they are heavily state-managed. However, this inflection on classic participatory democracy is an essential one, as it opens up the debate to understanding the role of the state in participation and on how participatory initiatives, such as the CCs, can be limited in their contribution to liberal democracy. In addition, this discussion highlights how the role of the state can differ according to each case, which is especially evident in more recent cases of participation in Latin America, as this dissertation suggests. In the case of literature on Participatory Budgeting in Brazil, there is a demonstration of the state facilitating the inclusion of participation within the state municipality, in contrast to the spaces that the CCs operate within. There is also some discussion about the culture of countries that have a history of mobilising the poor peoples in countries such as Bolivia, which also provides a contrast with Venezuela's history of mobilising behind leaders and presidents rather than for the collective poor.

The Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) model provides a more contemporary perspective on participation in that it emphasises both the benefits of deliberation in participatory initiatives and, as with participatory democracy theory, highlights the importance of an educational dimension. This is a strong aspect of the CCs in Venezuela, because it is a requirement to be able to function effectively. However, as the examples of participation that the EPG model discusses are more autonomous from their governments, it also offers a greater understanding of the role of the state, and by contrast illuminates how CCs are state-managed by comparison. While more powerful leaders can emerge and influence CCs, they are also shaped by state-managed processes as they are less autonomous than other examples of participation in different contexts.

The discussion of the literature on state-society synergy developed in this dissertation also advances contemporary understanding of CCs as it explains how both they and the PSUV can work in parallel or mutually. The CCs are able to perform tasks for the PSUV such as mobilising and implementing elements of Socialism of the twenty-first century. The PSUV funds, facilitates and supports CCs via state agencies, as well as promoting their establishment. The party therefore stands to gain a great deal more than the participants as they control the means and space which participation operates within. Furthermore, in this relationship the PSUV is in control, providing a basis for the argument that participation is politicised.

In sum, the literature explores CCs' position within the state, and this dissertation concludes that it can be termed state-managed. As the CCs are an initiative of the PSUV, the state is also their overseer, especially as they perform a particular function in the implementation of Socialism of the twenty-first century. The CCs are part of a transformative agenda attempting to alter the state given the vision of Bolivarianism. Some of the literature on Venezuelan participation suggests that it is possible that the CCs' capacity to potentially challenge this relationship dynamic is limited. State-managed participation in the councils is therefore partly-participatory, with deliberative functions and a state-society synergy that favours the PSUV, as they manage the process, thus limiting their genuinely participatory nature and politicisation. As the discussion below argues, state-management of participation in the process of dual government can lead to conflict with existing local democracy.

The literature regarding participation does not sufficiently account for the politicisation or state-management of the CCs, as I addressed in Chapters 4 and 5. This dissertation adds to this literature by discussing how politicisation manifests itself or how state management occurs, and providing evidence of the specific aspects of this process in the context of the CCs. Although some participatory case studies have emphasised a greater autonomy from the state through participation, the role of participation in liberal institutions is generally not sufficiently discussed. This dissertation also develops the literature by arguing that CCs can only have a limited influence over the interests of the state.

It is to a discussion of these themes in relation to the empirical findings in the dissertation that we now turn, prompting a discussion of shortcomings and implications for the ongoing participatory process in the final section of this conclusion.

Findings

Overall, the CCs are an exciting innovation in participation as they are well supported logistically, attract an impressive amount of state finance, and are widely mobilised, but they have not developed without obvious tensions, both internally and in relation to governing institutions. Furthermore, of key importance to these findings is how state agencies influence this trajectory, as outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 demonstrated how the *Punto Fijo* governments (1958-1998) centralised power, favoured party discipline over popular consensus, and displayed poor economic judgement. Until 1998 Venezuela was controlled by elites of the *Punto Fijo* system of government. Although the period 1958-1998 was termed a democracy or a case of 'Venezuelan Exceptionalism' as it didn't slip into military dictatorship, there were serious impacts on the lives of the poor. Several factors contributed to the demise of *Puntofijismo* but especially important was economic mismanagement and the exclusion of the left and poor from politics, which contributed to a growth in civil society organisations that campaigned to open up local elections to third parties. These factors contributed to a decline in support for the dominant parties and clearly inspired innovations in participatory democracy. Those who had previously been excluded desired a greater involvement in politics, and the failure of *Punto Fijo* democracy paved the way for reform, with Hugo Chávez readily prepared to fill the political vacuum. In addition, his reformist agenda was informed and shaped by the inadequacies of the *Punto Fijo* governments. Chávez represented a break with the neoliberal policies of the *Punto Fijo* parties and was elected in 1998.

Chapter 2 also explored how participation has developed according to *Chavismo*, Bolivarianism and, later, Socialism of the twenty-first century. It also suggests

that Chávez became more radical as his tenure developed, largely as a response to external pressures and events (Buxton, 2009: 58). President Chávez has consistently promoted both participation and the development of the poor, although largely as separate mechanisms from existing bureaucracy and institutions. My analysis of the history of the Venezuelan state, *Puntofijismo* and the development of *Chavismo* in Chapter 2 highlighted several salient aspects of Venezuelan politics and its impact on participatory democracy. Since 1998 the President has used dual channels of development and this is evident in several participatory initiatives, such as the CCs, in that they are linked with the President and not local government, as described in theory in Chapter 3, and in context, in Chapters 4 and 5.

As Mayors' Offices have not fully handed power to the CCs in most cases, there exists a dual government, whereby the CCs operate in the same space as local government but does not replace it causing conflicts and tensions. In actual fact, there are tensions between local government and CCs rather than complimenting each other in a liberal democracy, as Macpherson (1977) suggested could be the case. Dual government is the term used in this work to describe the direct provision of goods, services and finance to CCs in Venezuela, as described in Chapters 4 and 5. Support is provided by the state through the Social Missions, goods are subsidised through operations like the *Mercal* and services such as health and education are delivered in the Social Missions whilst some deliberative and participatory power is devolved to the CCs. There is tension in this process as the CCs operate in the local political sphere already inhabited by existing local democracies and are not replacing them.

CCs are partly a form of participatory democracy, as detailed in the literature, as they enable discourse and education as EPG suggests and was evident, and is a necessary feature for CCs to function as set out by state agencies. However, CCs do not challenge 'central procedures of power' (Fung and Olin Wright: 2003: 22), rather they are guided by them and there is less involvement in the state than is suggested in the EPG model. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the measure of how participatory an initiative is, can be understood by the space between state and participatory initiatives.

As the evidence in Chapters 4 and 5 suggested, CCs are a reflection of the PSUV's intention to entrench their political power while sidelining the traditional Fourth Republic institutions that are often occupied by bureaucrats and opposition figures, who have the potential to disrupt the process of Bolivarianism. The dissertation has underlined how the state employs the CCs as a mechanism to govern locally-organised communities outside of traditional liberal representative local institutions. As the PSUV has not resolved the tensions between its extension into the local political arena (in the CCs), and existing liberal institutions, conflicts could either sabotage or prevent CCs from becoming the *Estado Comunal*, potentially providing an inadequate basis for the construction of *Comunas*.

The analysis in Chapter 4 of how a middle class, largely PSUV-opposed community set up and operated a CC in Mérida, highlighted several issues regarding participation. There were several tensions in the community evident during the process of participation, particularly given that the CCs were a PSUV initiative, the idea of which many were opposed to. This was unfortunate as many in the community were in favour of participating, although some suggested it would be favourable to do from a self-interested perspective. There was also a strong desire to conduct the CC outside of politics by both *Voceros* and members of the community, and to focus on the good of the community. For some, this was not enough, as either they were still PSUV vehicle, or, for those such as the UBV students, they were not political enough. Politics was not as much of an issue in the TH CC, which provided an example of a CC who was successful in achieving project finance. As the CC was pro-PSUV, it focused on fulfilling the government agency criteria and was able to carry out projects. Therefore, as the two cases show, it is essential that CCs fulfil the criteria of Endogenous Development as part of Bolivarianism in order to obtain finance. Finance is also necessary for the success of the CCs, and in the case of BV meant that people did not attend meetings and the CC eventually closed down.

There is a strong degree of politicisation in the CCs, an issue that is under-represented in the literature on participatory democracy. Evidence presented in

this dissertation suggests that this can prevent participants from attending CCs and politicisation may decrease some CCs' chance of funding. CCs are a PSUV participatory initiative that is constructed to work towards the development of the *Estado Comunal.* Politicisation is also evident in that CCs are prioritised for Endogenous Developments as well as poorer CCs. In the case of BV, the UBV students left because the CC was not discussing political issues enough.

As Chapters 2, 4 and 5 also pointed out, CCs appear to operate as an extension of the state, acting as 'micro-governments' (Goldfrank, 2011a: 263). This illustrates the manifest political tensions between CCs and local democratic government. These spaces of conflict represent a development beyond the traditional channels of dispute between the PSUV and local government, illustrating the (unresolved) tensions between traditional institutions and new state-participatory democracy at a local level. I have also argued that, because of these unresolved tensions, some organised communities stand to lose out, and this can be exacerbated as conflicts of interest permeate the struggle for power within both the CCs and between them and government agencies.

CCs can be viewed as acting in synergy with the PSUV but the party stands to gain more. In the case of BV CC they didn't obtain funds, as they did not fulfil state agencies requirements. The CCs ability to influence government is also limited by their state managed institutional design, which in turn encourages dependency. The CCs are also dependent on government agencies to fund them and are therefore reliant on government. This aspect increases the politicised aspect of CCs that was discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

My empirical analysis of government agencies in Chapter 5 highlighted that they monitor and assign resources to CCs that have fulfilled the requirements as detailed by the PSUV. Many of these requirements are reasonable in that they ask that projects are for the good of the entire community and other requirements are that CCs fulfil the ideological requirements of the PSUV. This caused some concerns for *Vocero* Miguel of the BV CC, who felt discriminated against by agencies as he was not Pro-PSUV and assumed that the CC was unsuccessful because of this lack of project finance. Other *Voceros* thought that the

community was selfish, whilst other members of the BV community felt that the community was inexperienced. People were not against participation however, but they were opposed to politicisation or even potential corruption within CCs.

The newspaper articles detailing the plight of various organised CCs in different communities around Mérida, discussed in Chapter 5, suggested that state agency resources were not helping all CCs. Furthermore, these communities were not obtaining services or support from local or state government. This suggests that the institutional design of the CCs and the state agencies responsible for them has not always provided for even pro-PSUV organised CCs. State management precludes everyone involved from benefitting from participation, as is suggested in participatory democracy literature, given that the state stands to gain more. As participation is carried out in the confines of PSUV designed and managed systems, this is exacerbated. The state is sometimes so poorly organised that even fulfilling PSUV requirements does not guarantee support for CCs. There is a chance that if the system were less prescribed, these issues may be less debilitating for participants, as described in the EPG model.

Dual government is the system resulting from the attempt by the PSUV to bypass existing political and bureaucratic obstacles, such as opposition to the process, but which also creates tensions with existing local government, as it has not replaced it, but rather exists alongside it. As the power ultimately rests with the PSUV, the system is strongly centralised and the resulting participation can be called state managed participation, meaning that the state facilitates – but also owns – participation and that CCs are 'tied to and dependent on presidency' (Lopez Maya, 2010: 122).

In light of the literature on participatory democracy the state in Venezuela manages participation rather than acting as a facilitator of participation, as is the case in Participatory Budgeting in Brazil and other Latin American countries. Citizens in other Latin American countries have fought for government accountability and participatory democracy but there is a different history of this in Venezuela. In other cases, participation is initiated by popular demands, a desire for autonomy, or to hold government to account. In this way, Participatory Budgeting in Brazil also came about due to state support (Novy and

Leubolt, 2005: 2013). Furthermore, Bolivia is an example of a country with a strong history of popular mobilization (Crabtree, 2009: 92). These examples stand out as reasons why state management of CCs can occur, especially given the desire of a party to entrench their political system. Participatory Budgeting has allowed people to participate in municipalities, i.e. the state, whereas CCs are a space created by the state and are state managed. Therefore, CCs have less influence over politics and the PSUV as they operate as part of the state and not within the space occupied by the state.

The PSUV do not participate in politics in the same way as the PT have in Brazil, but instead develop it towards entrenching Bolivarianism. In Venezuela, the PSUV hasn't responded to the demands of citizens calling for greater participation *per se*, rather the party has attempted to resolve the inadequacies of *Punto Fijo* governments of the past through Bolivarianism, which includes CCs. In this process, Venezuelans have entrusted Chávez to act on their behalf to do so. There are several shortcomings of the political and participatory process in Venezuela which are discussed in the conclusion to this chapter.

Shortcomings and implications for the ongoing political process

As the participatory process is tied to (or "owned" by) the PSUV, it is therefore politicised and this has been noticeably lacking in any theory on participation and the state. As a result there are two clear implications: firstly, that opposition members might not attend (although on occasion they have set up CCs) because of the councils' links with the PSUV; and secondly, that in order to obtain finance, CCs must adhere to ED policies, thereby making participation a political affair. CCs are also evidently part of the PSUV plan to implement both Bolivarianism and the construction of Socialism of the twenty-first century. Within this process the CCs were intended to replace local government by forming *Comunas*, which has not happened to date. Furthermore, the institutional design of the CCs can create conflict between participants and the *Voceros* (who can be viewed as the leaders), as was the case in BV. The CCs can successfully develop community project proposals, but the poor are prioritised, and all schemes must meet the criteria of ED, as Chapters 4 and 5

demonstrate as a conflict in communities with an opposition majority. The tensions in the process of dual government and participation identified in this dissertation can be summarised by the argument that the institutional design of the model is inadequate, as not all CCs have benefitted, and that the process, as mentioned before, is politicised. Most importantly for the continued development of participation, the potential risk is that CCs are co-opted by the PSUV state as a result of state-managed participation. Maintaining levels of participation is one of the most important factors to the success of participatory initiatives, as was suggested in Chapter 3. BV also missed out on obtaining project finance because of their relationship with government agencies, or because they did not adhere to the stated criteria.

The empirical insights developed in my research also illustrate how some CCs can be left without goods, services, or resources due to the failure of both dual and local government to provide them. Based on an examination of the functions and relationships fostered by dual government, Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that CCs' effectiveness in obtaining project finance and implementing change depends on their relationship with, and adherence to government agencies. As was the case in BV, there was a feeling that they were denied funding because they were not a pro-PSUV CC, and they also felt discriminated against. The degree of the community's poverty is often reflected in the needs that are outlined in the Community Development Plan, which is a contributing factor to whether the CC is prioritised or not. However, as was evident in the discussion on newspaper extracts in Chapter 5, funds do not reach all CCs, even those most in need.

However my research was not conducted in a political vacuum, and I was aware of different perspectives on what politicisation meant to some people, and what it meant in practice. Although I did not research the Bolivarian state per se, I did notice signs of how it manifested itself at a local level, and was aware of national developments towards Socialism of the twenty-first century. Indeed, as some academics have noted, the politicisation of participation in Venezuela is a necessary condition, as Bolivarianism is a transformative system that favours the poor, and aims to transfer power to them, especially through participatory

mechanisms. As already mentioned, the construction of the *Estado Comunal* and Socialism of the twenty-first century is a key political goal.[188] Álvarez (2010: 170) has suggested the following observation:

> The working people, formerly excluded and today made visible and championed by the Revolution, needs State power to defeat the opposition and resistance of the exploiters and their allies; but this task has to be in the hands of the people organised in Communal Councils, Communes, Factory Councils and in the Military Reserve as new organisational forms which can take over the power previously imprisoned in the conventional structures of the old bourgeois State.[189]

The struggle to change the system of government and create Bolivarianism in Venezuela is truly an impressive challenge. The PSUV have created alternative state managed participatory initiatives that enable communities to participate in an attempt to change their local environments, whilst learning more about politics in doing so. The CCs have achieved great results, as detailed in the TH CC Case in Chapters 4 and 5. However, not all CCs have achieved as much and issues with politicisation and tensions in the space of the dual government prevail.

Undoubtedly, *Chavismo* will endure for some time, not least because it is such an attractive alternative to the PF system that was in place before 1998, and to the opposition candidate platform in Venezuela. People will continue to participate to develop their communities and gain project finance if they adhere to the state managed process, as this is essential to their development. Venezuela does not have the history of mobilising the working class and poor, as other Latin American countries do, for example Bolivia. Instead, Venezuela has a history of putting faith in

presidents who are bankrolled by oil revenues and promise to magically transform the state (Coronil, 1997) on behalf of the people.

I undertook this research to grasp the workings of an attempt to implement a radical transformative participatory society aimed primarily at poor Venezuelans in a largely opposition middle class community. In doing so, I identify that the

[188] See Álvarez, 2010 and Zambrano, 2008.
[189] Translated from original Spanish text.

distance between the state and society determines the level of participation and that with less space, in the case of state management, there is a greater limit placed on the potential of participation, especially when compared to PB and EPG. In short, by facilitating, managing and creating a separate space for people to participate in, the PSUV have created state managed participation, whereby people can obtain resources if successful, but do not have the chance to challenge local or national politics as is the intention of participatory politics in other countries or as stated in the literature on participatory democracy.

Appendix 1: List of Interviews

Interview #1, Miguel, *Vocero*, 31 October 2008.

Interview #2, Miguel, *Vocero*, 9 December 2008.

Interview #3, Miguel, *Vocero*, 14 January 2009.

Interview #4, Miguel, *Vocero*, 12 August 2009.

Interview #5, *El Prof*, *Vocero*, 17 July 2009.

Interview #6, F, *Vocero*, 17 July 2009.

Interview #7, L, *Vocero*, 23 July 2009.

Interview #8, A, *Vocero*, 23 July 2009.

Interview #9, P, *Vocero*, 23 July 2009.

Interview #10, TH CC *Vocero*, 27 July 2009.

Interview #11, BANMUJER spokesperson, 7 July 2009.

Interview #12, FONDEMI spokesperson, 20 August 2009.

Interview #13, FUNDACOMUNAL spokesperson, 19 August 2009.

Interview #14, Anon 1, member of BV community, 23 July 2009.

Interview #14.2, Anon 2, member of BV community, 23 July 2009.

Interview #15, Anon 3, member of BV community, 24 July 2009.

Interview #15.2, Anon 4, member of BV community, 23 July 2009.

Interview #16, Anon 5, member of BV community, 24 July 2009.

Interview #16.2, Anon 6, member of BV community, 23 July 2009.

Interview #17, Anon 7, member of BV community, 24 July 2009.

Interview #17.2, Anon 8, member of BV community, 23 July 2009.

Interview #18, SV, member of BV community, 25 July 2009.

Interview #19, V, member of BV community, 25 July 2009.

Interview #20, I, member of BV community, 25 July 2009.

Interview #21, O, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #22, E, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #23, M, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #24, H, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #25, J, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #26, Je, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #27, Newspaper seller, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

Interview #28, G, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

Interview #29, Gz, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

Interview #30, Mo, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

Interview #31, Ma, member of BV community, 7 August 2009.

Interview #32, Al, member of BV community, 8 August 2009.

Interview #33, As, member of BV community, 8 August 2009.

Interview #34, Ml, member of BV community, 12 August 2009.

Interview #35, D, member of BV community, 13 August 2009.

Interview #36, SF, member of BV community, 13 August 2009.

Interview #37, P, member of BV community, 13 August 2009.

Interview #38, Js, member of BV community, 13 August 2009.

Interview #39, Fa, member of BV community, 6 August 2009.

Interview #40, Spokesperson of Mérida Governors Office for Participation, 9 September 2009.

Interview #41, M, *Vocero,* 23 July 2009.

Interview #42, R, 21 July 2009.

Interview #43, T, 4 July 2009.

Interview #44, I, 5 July 2009.

Interview #45, B, 12 July 2009.

Interview #46, History teacher, 16 July 2009.

Interview #47, JS, 31 October 2008.

Appendix 2: Rice Packet with BCRV Constitution

Appendix 3:

¡Explosión del PODER COMUNAL!

1 Equipo promotor provisional para la elección de la Comisión Electoral y la Comisión Promotora

El **Equipo Promotor Provisional** tendrá como función organizar la elección de la Comisión Promotora y la Comisión Electoral de la siguiente forma:

- El equipo promotor estará integrado por ciudadanos y ciudadanas de la comunidad que asuman esta iniciativa, dejando constancia escrita en el acta que se levante a tal fin.
- Organizará y coordinará la realización del censo demográfico de la comunidad.

Convocará a una Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas en un lapso no mayor de treinta (30) días a partir de su conformación, que elegirá la **Comisión Promotora** y la **Comisión Electoral** con la participación mínima del diez por ciento (10%) de la población mayor de quince (15) años de la comunidad respectiva.

2 Elección de la Comisión Electoral y la Comisión Promotora en Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas

La **Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas** es la instancia primaria para el ejercicio del poder, la participación y el protagonismo popular, cuyas decisiones son de carácter vinculante para el Consejo Comunal respectivo.

Comisión electoral

Es la instancia encargada de organizar y conducir el proceso de elección de los voceros y las voceras y demás integrantes de los órganos del Consejo Comunal, y estará integrada por cinco habitantes de la comunidad, quienes serán electos en la Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas.

Tareas:

- Elaborar el registro electoral, conforme a lo establecido en la ley y su reglamento.
- Hacer del conocimiento de la comunidad todo lo relativo a la elección de los voceros y las voceras y demás integrantes de los órganos del **Consejo Comunal**.
- Elaborar el material electoral necesario.
- Escrutar y totalizar los votos.
- Proclamar y juramentar a los voceros o voceras, y demás integrantes de los órganos del **Consejo Comunal** electo.
- Levantar un acta del proceso de elección y sus resultados.

Quienes integran la Comisión Electoral no podrán postularse a los órganos del Consejo Comunal.
Una vez cumplidas dichas tareas, la Comisión Electoral cesa sus funciones.

Comisión Promotora

Es la instancia encargada de convocar, conducir y organizar la **Asamblea Constituyente Comunitaria**, integrada por un número variable de miembros quienes serán electos en Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas.

Gobierno **Bolivariano** de Venezuela

Ministerio del Poder Popular para la **Participación y Desarrollo Social**

¡RUGE EL 5º MOTOR!

¡stos son los 4 pasos necesarios conformar un Consejo Comunal!

Tareas:

- Difundir entre los habitantes la comunidad el alcance, ob- y fines de los **Consejos Co- unales.**
- Elaborar un croquis del área ográfica de la comunidad.
- Organizar y coordinar la lización del censo demográfico ocioeconómico comunitario.
- Recabar la información de historia de la comunidad.
- Convocar la Asamblea nstituyente Comunitaria en un so no mayor de noventa (90) s, contados a partir de su nstitución.

3 Realización de la Asamblea Constituyente omunitaria.

a Asamblea Constituyente Comunitaria es la Asam- blea de Ciudadanos y Ciu- danas en la cual se eligen por mera vez los voceros y voce- s, integrantes de los órganos onómicos financieros y de ntrol del **Consejo Comunal,** e almente, son elegidos los in- grantes de los comités trabajo,entre que se ntan:

Comité de Salud. *Comité de Educación.* ***Comité de Tierra Urbana o Rural.*** *Comité de Vivienda y Hábitat.* ***Comité de Protección e Igualdad Social.*** *Comité de Economía Popular.* ***Comité de Cultura.*** *Comité de Seguridad Integral.* ***Comité de Medios de Comunicación e Información.*** *Comité de Recreación y Deportes.* ***Comité de Alimentación.*** ***Mesa Técnica de Agua.*** ***Mesa Técnica de Energía y Gas.*** *Comité de Servicios,* y cualquier otro que el Consejo Comunal considere pertinente.

La Asamblea Constituyente Comunitaria se considera válidamente conformada con la asistencia de al menos veinte por ciento (20%) de los miembros de la comunidad mayores de quince (15) años.

Órgano Ejecutivo

El Órgano Ejecutivo es la instancia del **Consejo Comunal** encargada de promover y articular la participación organizada de los y las integrantes de la comunidad, los grupos sociales y organizaciones comunitarias en los diferentes comités de trabajo. Éste se reunirá a fin de planificar la ejecución de las decisiones de la **Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas,** así como conocer las actividades de cada uno de los comités, y de las áreas de trabajo.

Unidad de Gestión Financiera

La Unidad de Gestión Financiera es un órgano integrado por cinco (5) habitantes de la comunidad, electos por la Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas, que funciona como un ente de ejecución financiera de los **Consejos Comunales** para administrar recursos financieros y no financieros, servir de ente de inversión y crédito, y realizar intermediación financiera con los fondos generados, asignados o captados.
La Unidad de Gestión Financiera se denominará Banco Comunal.

Unidad de Contraloría Social

Es un órgano conformado por cinco (5) habitantes de la comunidad, electos por la Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas para realizar la contraloría social y la fiscalización, control y supervisión del manejo de recursos asignados, recibidos o generados por el **Consejo Comunal,** así como sobre los programas y proyectos de inversión pública presupuestados y ejecutados por el gobierno nacional, regional o municipal.

4 Registro del Consejo Comunal

Los **Consejos Comunales** deberán acudir a las sedes de Fundacomun (MINPADES, Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Participación y Desarrollo Social), distribuidas en todo el país, y entregar los estatutos y el acta constitutiva aprobada por la Asamblea de Ciudadanos y Ciudadanas.■

Venezuela
AHORA ES DE TODOS

Source: *Vecino Saludable* (2008), 16: 50-51.

Appendix 4: BV CC Advert

¡¡¡¡¡¡ ESTIMADO VECINO !!!!!!

Hace unos meses fue conformado en la parroquia A, sector BV un consejo comunal, el cual abarca una gran cantidad de familias; debido a ello varios vecinos solicitaron ante las autoridades competentes la creación de un consejo comunal mas pequeño y que estará delimitado por Av. X y Av. X entre calles X y Y, acera interna del área definida. Esta solicitud fue aprobada. Ya teniendo aprobada la solicitud para conformar el nuevo consejo comunal, se han realizado varias reuniones en las instalaciones del Colegio, habiendo invitado a todos los vecinos del área, mediante volantes y comunicaciones pegadas en varios sitios estratégicos. En estas reuniones como primer paso se eligió la comisión promotora y la electoral con el fin de conformar dicho consejo comunal con la participación mayoritaria de todos los que componemos el área delimitada para este nuevo consejo comunal. En vista de que en estas reuniones han asistido muy pocas personas, en la ultima reunión por decisión unánime, se decidió abrir el periodo de postulaciones para la elección de cargos y conformación definitiva de nuestro Consejo Comunal, finalizando estas postulaciones el día domingo 28/10/2007

Los consejos comunales operan bajo tres grandes órganos: El Ejecutivo, el Económico-financiero y el de control, sus integrantes serán electos en votaciones directas y secretas por la Asamblea de Ciudadanos. Durarán dos (2) años en sus funciones y podrán ser reelectos por un solo período. Su ejercicio es adhonorem.

- ORGANO EJECUTIVO. En nuestro consejo comunal inicialmente conformaremos cuatro (05) Comités de Trabajo. SEGURIDAD INTEGRAL, ECONOMIA POPULAR, SERVICIOS, MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN E INFORMACION, RECREACION Y DEPORTES para estas comisiones se postularon las siguientes personas: SEGURIDAD INTEGRAL (X); ECONOMIA POPULAR (X); SERVICIOS, MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN E INFORMACION (X); RECREACION Y DEPORTES (a la espera de postulaciones mínimo 2)
- UNIDAD DE GESTIÓN FINANCIERA. Ente de ejecución e intermediación financiera. Se denomina Banco Comunal bajo la figura jurídica de Cooperativa de Financiamiento de Ahorro y Crédito integrada por cinco miembros electos por la

Asamblea de Ciudadanos. Postulados para la Coordinación : Miguel, Administración: X, Tesorería: X, Secretaria: X, Vocal: X.

- UNIDAD DE CONTRALORÍA SOCIAL. Ente de fiscalización, control y supervisión del manejo de los recursos asignados, recibidos o generados por el Consejo Comunal; estará compuesto por 5 miembros. (No tenemos hasta ahora postulaciones para esta unidad) PARA CADA UNO DE ESTOS CARGOS DESCRITOS ANTERIORMENTE ESTAN ABIERTAS LAS POSTULACIONES, VECINO, ANIMATE, PARTICIPA

AGENDA PARA LA CONFORMACION DEL CONSEJO COMUNAL

.- Hasta el 28/10/2007 Censo demográfico y Postulaciones. .- Del 29/10 al 09/11/07 Campaña electoral, Elaboración de cuadernos electorales, selección de miembros de mesa y entrenamiento. .- Domingo 11/11/2007 Elecciones para la selección de los diferentes miembros del consejo comunal. Para el logro de este objetivo es necesario la participación y colaboración directa de cada uno de nosotros los vecinos. **VECINO ORGANIZATE; ORGANICEMONOS Y ASI PODREMOS CONTAR CON UNA MEJOR CALIDAD DE VIDA; VECINO NO PERMITAS QUE OTROS TOMEN DECISIONES POR TI, PARTICIPA, TE ESPERAMOS. GRACIAS VECINO, EN LA UNION ESTA LA FUERZA.**

PROXIMA REUNION JUEVES 11/10/2007 a las 7pm en las instalaciones del Colegio.

ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE.

SI DESEAS POSTULARTE A LOS CARGOS PREVISTOS PARA EL FUNCIONAMIENTO DE NUESTRO CONSEJO COMUNAL:

COMITES: SEGURIDAD INTEGRAL, ECONOMIA POPULAR, SERVICIOS, MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN E INFORMACION, RECREACION Y DEPORTES

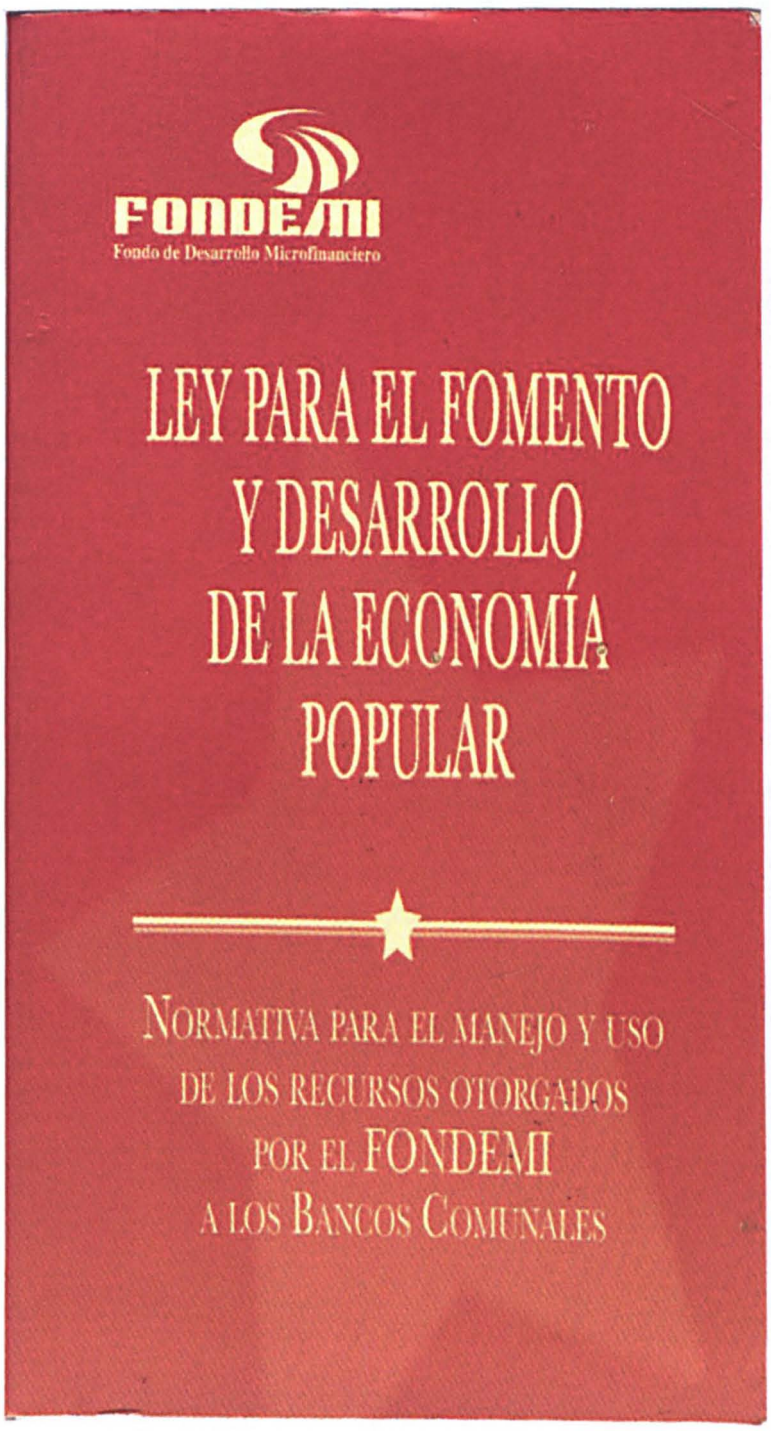
UNIDAD DE GESTIÓN FINANCIERA.
Coordinación, Administración, Tesorería, Secretaria, Vocal

UNIDAD DE CONTRALORÍA SOCIAL. 5 miembros.

ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE ASISTE.

.....PARTICIPA.....

Appendix 5: Ley para el Fomento y Desarrollo de la Economía Popular (FONDEMI)



Appendix 6: Political Map of Venezuela.

Source: Univeristy of Texas Libray, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/venezuela.gif

Source: University of Texas Library, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/venezuela.gif, accessed 15 April 2012.

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