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Revolutionary Urbanism:
The Struggle for the Streets of a City

Carmen Rojas

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
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Committee in charge:
Professor Ananya Roy, Chair
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Professor Richard Walker

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ABSTRACT

Revolutionary Urbanism: The Struggle for the Streets of Caracas

by

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In 1998, Venezuelans elected a radical to be the country's seventy-third president. Elected through the promise of reform and redistribution, Hugo Chavez crafted a new era of Latin American populist discourse, which called for socializing wealth, leading inline with the needs of the nation's poorest people, creating meaningful labor opportunities, and humanizing the country's capital city. His so-called Bolivarian Revolution has been the focus of Latin Americanists, political skeptics, and local radicals around the world. Starting nearly eight years after his first election, this research uses the streets of the city and the stories of street vendors to understand the material impact of this turn in Venezuela.

Through interviews, data collection, and ethnography focused on two neighborhoods in the historic center of the city - Cazco Historico and Sabana Grande- of Caracas, I am able to demonstrate how the Chavez regime is failing in its promise to transform the lives of the urban poor. This research identifies the techniques used by the state to organize people with similar class interests against each other, control the movement of vendors, and most importantly maintain its hold on power.

This study sheds light on the limits of the revolutionary discourse of the regime. By introducing the concept of Revolutionary Urbanism, this research takes the Bolivarian Revolution to the streets and people of the city to show how the primary interest of the regime is to consolidate power, not redistribute wealth. Using the tropes of people's power, dignified work, and humanizing the street, the regime has been successful in its goal.

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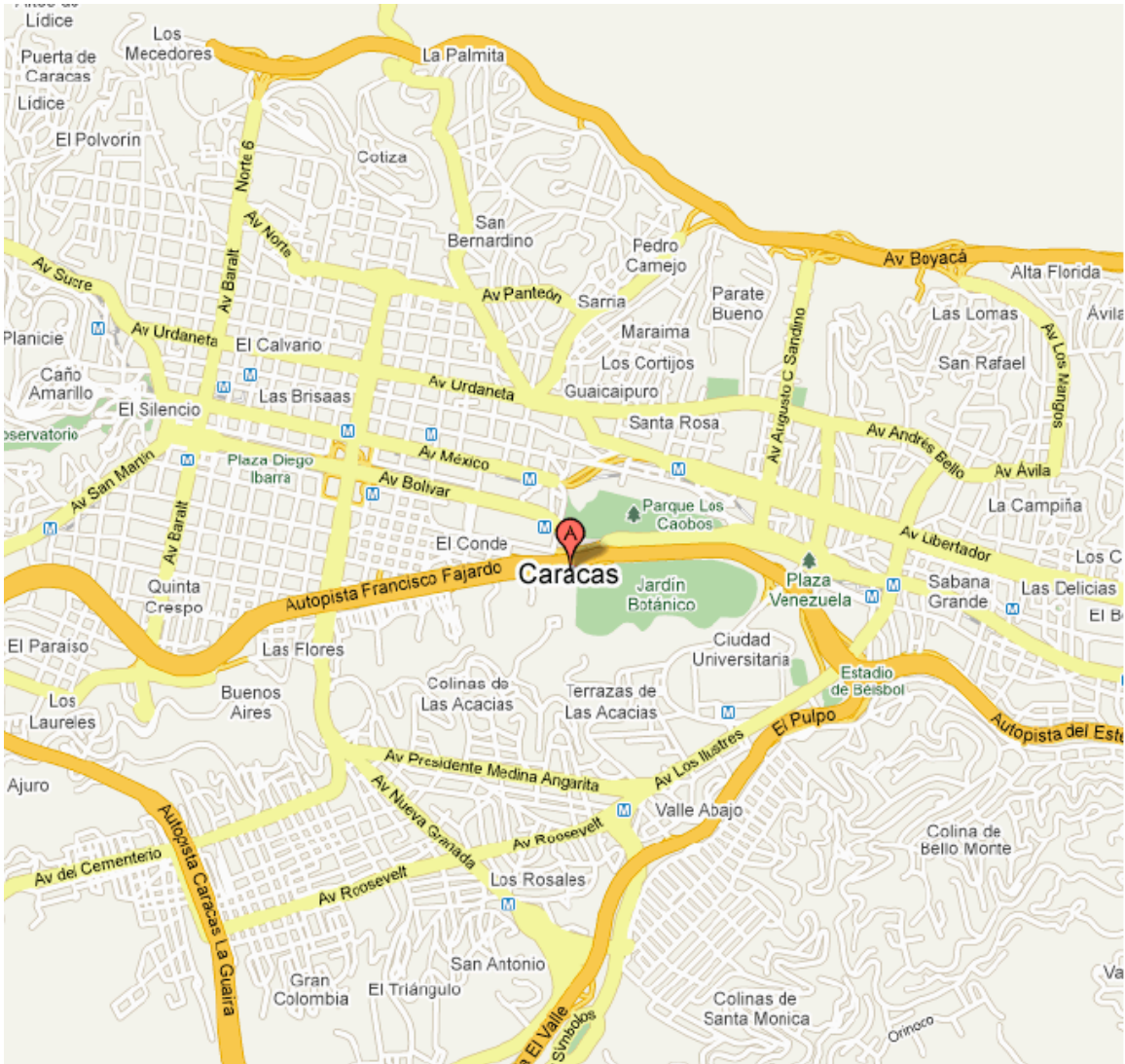
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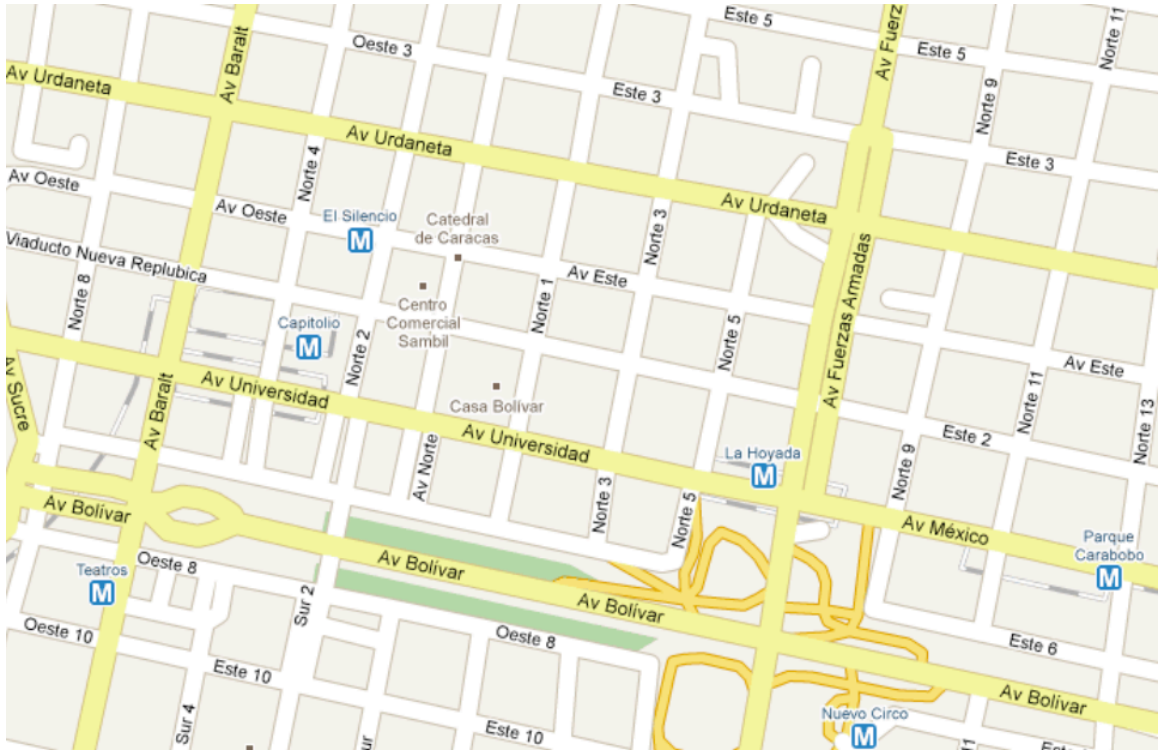
ABBREVIATIONS

CEDICE	Centro de Invetigacion Centro Economico
CENDES	Centro del Estudio del Desarrollo
FUNDACOMUN	Fundacion de Desarrollo Comunitario y Municipal
INE	Instituto Nacional de Estadistica
MVR	Movimiento Quinta RepublicA
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela
SISOV	Sistema Integrado de Indicadores Sociales de Venezuela
UCV	Universidad Central de Venezuela

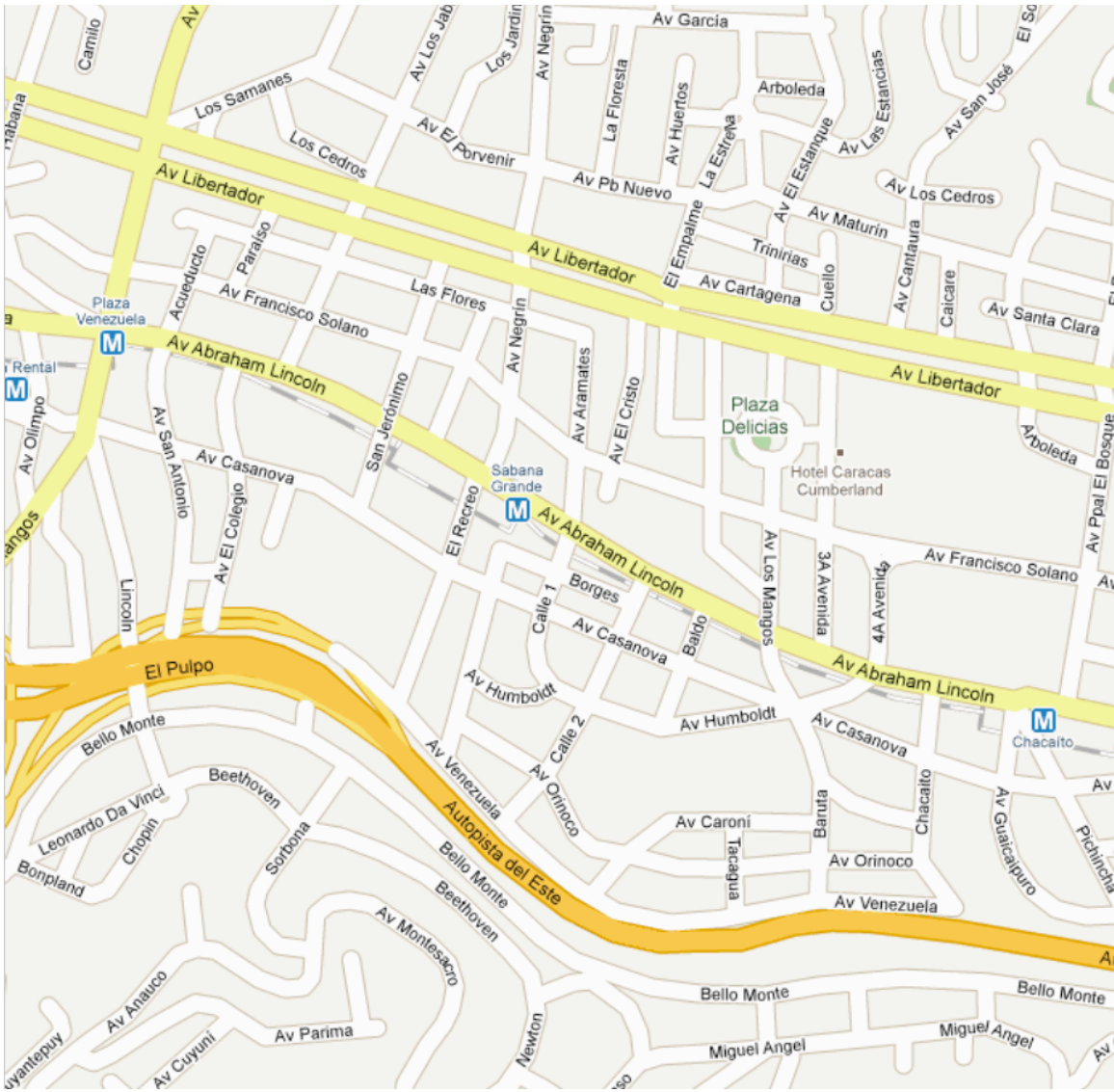
INTRODUCTION
THINGS FALL APART



CENTRAL CARACAS, 2010



LA HOYADA FIELD SITE: SPANS AV FUERZAS ARMADAS TO AV BARALT AND BETWEEN AV UNIVERSIDAD AND AV URDANETA



SABANA GRANDE FIELD SITE: ALONG AV ABRAHAM LINCOLN BETWEEN PLAZA VENEZUELA METRO STATION AND CHACAITO METRO STATION

The right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habit, and to inhabit. (Lefebvre 1968)

...the public space of the modern city has always been a hybrid, and certainly a contradictory, space...in which ideally at least the market meets the anarchy of politics to create an interactive, democratic public (Mitchell 2003).

Between 1998 and 2008, Venezuela experienced a mass transformation of political life, social awareness, and economic norms. This period of change was initiated in 1998 with the election of Hugo Frias Chávez to the presidency of the nation and the inception of his national project to raise public consciousness about the social possibilities and economic opportunities available to everyday people within a socialist model of governance. The goal of this new project was to expose citizens to the flaws of economic neoliberalism, which was a mainstay of public and economic policies since the late 1970s, and move them towards what he called a Bolivarian Revolution.

The traits of the neoliberalism derided by the newly inaugurated president were sweeping the majority of the global south throughout the 1970s and fixing their grip throughout the 1980s and 90s. From the 1970s onward, the Venezuelan government initiated a process of shrinkage, whereby state subsidies in the area of health, education, transportation, and employment were retracted as a result of global economic shifts and structural adjustment policies imposed in return for International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. The social and political impact of dismantling a patronage state that provided for the most basic needs of its citizens was mass unrest. The end result was a very public breakdown of Venezuela's democratic system, in which two parties had controlled the electoral landscape for over fifty years.

In response to the reduced state, and in the face of increased poverty and extreme wealth inequality in the petroleum rich nation, Chávez would claim, "you, the Venezuelan people, are not to blame; you and I know who is to blame for what has happened to us; I am going to get rid of these people that are around us, don't doubt it; and what's more, I will solve all of your problems (Hugo Chávez , Public Speech, August 2005)." This, along with hundreds of other claims, spoke to the heart of disaffection felt by the majority of Venezuelans regarding the corruption scandals surrounding their political institutions and their increasing sense of disenfranchisement and dislocation from political power by the late 1990s (Vivas 1999, 72).

The Bolivarian Revolution, as described by the government, is an ambitious three-pronged project that includes participatory citizenship, economic development through mass redistribution, and state expansion to meet the basic needs of the people of Venezuela. Used to identify the current regime with the liberator of Venezuela from Spanish rule, Simon Bolivar, the Bolivarian Revolution is best described as a social

democratic revolution, it calls on government to open up the political institutions of the state to public scrutiny and participation. As an economic development project, its imperative is to redistribute the vast oil revenues collected by the state to those who have historically been denied access to this wealth. It also declared a promised to initiate a number of diversification projects, whereby the government would open other opportunities for economic growth and employment that were not reliant on the petroleum sector. As a project of state expansion, it calls for a shifting of state priorities away from the market and private property and towards the nationalization of resources as a means of evening out the socio-economic terrain. In towns and cities, this part of the project resulted in the creation of neighborhood-level councils, to govern local decision-making, expanded government programs for the provision of healthcare, education, and locally produced food.

Once enacted, however the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela began to adopt features of petro-populism. In Venezuela, petro-populism is the use of growing revenues provided by the nationalized petroleum production and distribution system to extend access to free public education, institute an “oil for doctors” trade with the island of Cuba to provide an extended network of free healthcare to those most in need, and establish neighborhood level councils of governance run by residents to establish development needs and community priorities. Although in its previous forms, the government of Venezuela used petro-wealth to maintain a relatively stable political, social, and economic landscape, this project moved far beyond the past patronage networks. Through its discourse, the state expanded far beyond most citizens’ expectations. The question remained however, would this be enough to address poverty and close the wealth gap faced by Venezuelans?

The years between 1998 and 2008 produced a set of mixed results for this project, not solely the fault of the Chávez government. Since his election, there have been fierce outbursts of opposition and economic crises that resulted in the destabilization of social and political life throughout the country. These economic breaks have hindered the progress of the national government’s project and radically transformed the power dynamics in the country. The two most significant moments of crisis, occurred within the first five years of Chávez ’s regime.

The first crisis was the failed coup of April 12, 2002, which was sponsored by leading opposition political figures and resulted in the brief imprisonment of Chávez and his high-ranking staff and officials. On the morning of the day of the coup, “President Chávez was arrested, his resignation was announced and an interim president, Pedro Carmona, was sworn in with a pledge to conduct elections within a year and a personal promise not to be a candidate. He said he wished only to restore democracy to Venezuela.” As detailed in the work of Sylvia and Danaopoulos published shortly after the coup, Carmona “began by dissolving the legislature, firing the Supreme Court and nullifying, by presidential decree, 49 laws with which he, and presumably the business association he headed (Fedecámaras), disagreed with (Sylvia and Danaopoulos 2003, 73).”

While the US government recognized the transitional government, the streets of Venezuela were overwhelmed by popular protests calling for the return of the popular president.

Less than 48 hours later, however, Chávez was back in the presidential palace. His supporters, the numberless poor of Venezuela rioted, in virtually every city in Venezuela. Also, a significant number of military officers refused to support the coup and threatened armed resistance (Thompson & Ferero, New York Times, 2002).”

The second moment of crisis was the opposition-led oil strike, which took place months after the attempted coup, between December 2002 and February 2003. The strike, which was led by opposition oil workers, as the government pushed to place deeper controls on the industry, resulted in a loss of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 24% (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2007, 1). National opponents of the government paralyzed the country’s economy, as well as put stress on the set of new government institutions, working directly against the campaign promises of the newly-elected president.

The opposition has not been the sole source of chaos under the Chávez regime. Recent claims that the Chávez government illegally funded the presidential elections of Argentina’s Cristina Kirchner, contributed resources to the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (the FARC leftist guerrillas in Colombia), and has led with a Latin American interventionist strategy, where a significant amount of time and money is spent working to elect left candidates within the region have left a cloud of doubt around the government.

Such controversies have occurred alongside an international discussion extolling the success of the regime. From Cornell West to Joseph Stiglitz, there has been resounding support for the regime as it has prioritized making Venezuela’s oil wealth the wealth of all Venezuelans (Rodriguez 2008,4). The argument is that in rearranging the state’s priorities, he has been able to significantly improved living conditions for the people of Venezuela, particularly the poorest segments of the population. Recognizing these successes in expanding service provision in the country, it is important to note that the government has not been able to address its central mandate of redistributing the wealth of the country to its poorest residents (Rodriguez 2010, 49).

In the city of Caracas, where over one-quarter of the national populace lives, the expansion of service provision have been marked by an actual change in the physical landscape, as this political, economic, and social shift occurs on the stage of the city streets. The transformations associated with the Bolivarian Revolution are visible everywhere, from the poorest housing settlements that hang on the hillsides to the

bustling boulevards of the historic heart of the city. They take the shape of capital investment for infrastructural improvements and the use of government buildings for government sponsored art to the transformation of the Caracas Hilton to the Caracas Alba hotel.

The government has made a set of claims over the best use of these sites, as well as argued for citizen's rights to determine the best use of urban public space. It is from these stages that Chávez declares the end of the oligarchy, the end of corruption, and a new moment in Venezuela where *Venezuela es de todos* - Venezuela belongs to everyone.

This dissertation studies one part of this stage, the historic center of Caracas, which spans about two miles. It takes as its subjects the street vendors who operate on the streets of two central neighborhoods, *Sabana Grande* and the *Cazco Historico*. The streets and the street vendors are used to understand the transformation and the material impact of the Bolivarian Revolution on the most economically marginalized Venezuelans: those who work in the informal economy on the streets of the city as vendors. It demonstrates, first, the inability of the government to redistribute wealth, power, or access and because Chávez and his national party the Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) use the idea of the right to the city as the key strategy of this revolutionary shift, this dissertation questions what the right to the city actually means in Venezuela and the way it is employed as a disciplining technique, as opposed to a liberatory measure, on the streets of Caracas.

Second, this study demonstrated the inadequacy of the *right to the city* framework to understand how the Venezuelan state reorganized the city, not to meet the needs of citizens or expand the economic valorization of space, but to expand its own power.

Although the concept of the right to the city emerged in the work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, I will employ Don Mitchell's use of the term, which offers a contemporary understanding of the concept. In *The Right to the City*, Mitchell describes Lefebvre's understanding that the city is a "work in which all citizens participate." Deeply troubled by the reality that urban life and material realities were being produced by the capitalist market and the dominant classes, which formed the bourgeois state, Lefebvre argued that the right to the city "manifests itself in a superior set of rights: right to freedom, right to individualization in socialization, to habit, and to inhabit" (Lefebvre 1996, 173). The right to the city means the right of citizens to participate in the production of city space and activities, which results in the richest form of city life.

As a critical force in neo-Marxist thought, Lefebvre broke away from structural Marxists, who argued that capitalism and capitalist expansion could be understood through a historical framework whereby each phase has a different spatial organization, so that different modes of production produce different types of spaces. For Lefebvre, space is itself a means of production, and the urban economy radically transforms the movement and production of capital. Lefebvre argued that under the capitalist system, space functions as an expression of exchange-value and allows for its expansion and persistent domination. The response to this perverse valuation of urban space and life should be, in

his view, a call for the right to the city, where space cannot be fully owned, the city can serve as a site of encounter, and places cannot be valued within an exchange or commodity system. The right to city represents the right to urban life, defining one's use of space and interaction in the city. The urban revolution is the manifestation of the right to the city.

Throughout this study, I will look at how the Chavez regime applies the concept of the "right to the city" to different groups and for differing ends, and demonstrate the limits of this theoretical device for allowing for citizens to actually determine the best use for city space. Through this process, I will counter the claims of the Bolivarian Revolution to have produced a Lefebvrian "urban revolution". Rather, the Chávez government is pursuing a policy I will call "Revolutionary Urbanism". Revolutionary Urbanism adds nuance to the framework offered by Lefebvre by introducing a political element to the right to the city. As stated above, the Chávez regime has used the discourse of the right to the city to maintain its own hold on political power. Revolutionary Urbanism describes the ways in which the Bolivarian Revolution is enacted on the streets of Caracas to expand the regime's control.

In today's Venezuela, neither the market nor the people are determining the use of the city and public commons rather; it is being established by the state. By means of the concept of Revolutionary Urbanism, I will show how competing groups argue for their right to the city and demonstrate how accessing this right reproduces exploitative relationships as opposed to the utopia of people using the street to generate an urban revolution.

Revolutionary Urbanism adds a level of complexity to the concept of the urban revolution by looking at how a state, which is supposedly transitioning to a socialist economic model, uses the social relations of space as a regulating technique and a means of managing the lives of urban citizens. In Venezuela, the state is currently arguing that street vendors should be removed from urban space in order to return the city streets to the use of everyday people, making explicit claims for the people's right to the city. Without regard to the necessity for vendors to occupy the streets in order to make a living, the Chávez regime argues that street vendors are privatizing city space and that it is the role of the state to return the streets to its rightful owners: urban citizens. The regime is controlling the streets of the city by creating an ideal of urban citizenship. This practice of using revolutionary discourse to impose a neoliberal program is also the case in Ananya Roy's *Gentleman's City: Urban Informality in the Calcutta of New Communism*, in which she describes how "the bourgeois city was reclaimed by leftist radicalism" (Roy 2004, 148).

Revolutionary Urbanism incorporates the work of Michel Foucault on techniques of management and power in order to understand how the seeming benevolent practice of returning city streets to city dwellers has a set of implications for the revolutionary practice of the Chávez regime. This process has resulted in the creation and reinforcement of a set of subjects in the city of Caracas. This creation of an ideal type or subject is central to how a specific regime and state keeps power. In creating this subject,

the state exercises power “to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects” (Foucault 1982, 781).

The state is using the idea of a right to the city as a means of shifting attention away from its failure to redistribute the wealth of the nation. The vendors are the physical markers of this failure. Throughout the world, the more people who occupy city streets in order to make a living (one of which is unstable, unprotected, and subject to thievery) the more one can point to the failure of political and economic structures. In Venezuela, the expansion of the informal economy under Chávez represents a failure of the political project to redistribute the wealth of the nation and the persistence of inequality.

Thus, Revolutionary Urbanism is not the enacting of Lefebvre’s urban revolution; it is, instead, the practices of actors— from the state to the urban dweller— take on and to consolidate power, as well as to continue to support the exclusion, exploitation, and indifference of the city’s poorest citizens. Street vendors are one of these groups, and I will argue that they are key to understanding the material impact of the Chávez regime over the course of the last ten years.

These Mean Streets: The Case for Caracas

For over 400 years Caracas has been the capital city of Venezuela. Francisco Fajardo was the first Spaniard to reach the valley after traveling from the end of the Caribbean island chain just off of the coast in the late 1500s. Although the nickname of “Caracas the horrible” did not come to be popularized until the mid 20th century, the city could easily have had the name or, more appropriately “Caracas the cursed” throughout most of its post-colonial history. It was the site of wars between indigenous tribes and colonial forces, was burned down on numerous occasions by pirates, was the epicenter of three major earthquakes through the early 1800s, and lacked the luster and riches of the neighboring Peruvian and Mexican cities. Throughout all of this, Caracas gradually became the center of national life by virtue of being the site of government, universities, public institutions, and victory over the Spanish in 1810. In the hundred years between independence and the discovery of oil, Caracas grew in fits and starts. The most important figure in this time was three-time president Antonio Guzman Blanco, who ascended to power in the late 1800s.

Guzman Blanco spent a significant amount of time in Paris and brought back to Venezuela a desire to “transform his backward and ravaged country in the image of prosperous societies he had come to know across the sea” (Nava 1965, 528). He was the first of Venezuela’s leaders to use public dollars to beautify the urban landscape. He built boulevards through the central arteries of Caracas, was behind the development of a national opera house and presidential palace, and erected a pantheon for the city’s illustrious dead. The Guzman Blanco period lasted almost 20 years, 1870 to 1887, but his influence can still be felt throughout the city.

The discovery of oil transformed Caracas in size and form. The city grew to meet the demand of rural migrants in search of employment and housing, but the project of building a cohesive and connected urban landscape did not take place until the mid-twentieth century. This period saw the construction of an urban metro system, as well as deeper economic and social connections across the city. The central municipality of El Libertador and the four surrounding municipalities were granted political autonomy until 2000. After this moment, an office of High Mayor was established to take some of the responsibilities of these municipalities and insure coordination and communication across the neighboring municipalities. This office lost most of its power after an opposition candidate took office in 2009.

Today, Caracas is the cultural, historical, and political capital of the country. Although most of the nation's economic wealth is generated outside of the city through petroleum production, the finance sector is concentrated in the metropolitan region. It is the most densely populated part of the country, as well as the principle theatre in which the policies and mandates of the state are enacted.

In an early 2000 speech, Hugo Chávez pointed to the streets of Caracas and described the palpable poverty, the rapid proliferation of the informal economy, and the mass occupation of untitled land by urban residents as 'the result of a political elite and savage capitalism', which divided the oil rich country in two. On one side of the divide, Chávez argued, people moved between Caracas and Miami with the familiarity and freedom of those moving between two neighborhoods and, on the other side of the divide, working families were forced to move through savage streets in search of money and food in order to eke out a meager existence. Although this divide could not be bridged overnight, Chávez set out to establish an intricate network of social service provision, popular political participation, and state subsidies to begin uniting the two Venezuelas (Rodriguez 2010).

It was in this time of change that Chávez implemented constitutional decree 87, which guarantees every individual the right to work. This decree, which was passed as part of a larger constitutional reform, was needed, it was argued, to fill a labor gap until the public or the private sector could create enough jobs for people to make a living and "work in partnership with the state" to build a nation free of capitalist exploitation. The expectation was that until these jobs were created, individual citizens could work in whatever fashion they needed in order to make a living. Shortly after the passage of this constitutional reform, street vendors exploded onto the streets of the city, claiming not only a right to work, but also a right to city space as a location in which this work should take place.

Simultaneously, in this early period, Chávez and his allies made speech after speech in which they pointed to the extreme poverty and perpetual exploitative working conditions of the urban poor to highlight the failed nature of previous governments and the larger

failings of unmanaged capitalism. The bold claim was that the “exploitation of these workers would no longer be tolerated” and that an alternative to this type of labor relation would be created through a social, political, and economic revolution (Chávez 2004). Along with this new terrain of rights, the state shifted its discourse away from the populist rhetoric of the past, whereby the state built and maintained patronage networks, and towards the expansion of people’s rights to directly influence the public policy that shapes their lives. It was thought that the people of Venezuela should be able to determine their own needs, and that the role of the government should be to build institutions that were responsive to those needs. This was the description of “people’s power”.

By using the device of popular power, or people’s power, the Chávez regime sought to “give everyday people the ability to own the actions of the government and the sovereignty to decide their own fates”(Espinoza 2007). Popular power, in Venezuela, is defined as “the tool that everyday citizens can use to drive the policy of the state”(Gómez 2008). Popular power was coupled with the concepts of dignified work and humanizing space. Dignified work was used to reframe the social value ascribed to work and meant that the people’s freedom to “choose” work made it dignified. On the streets of Caracas, the policy towards street vendors where people’s power and dignified work took shape was called the project of humanizing space. Humanizing space pointed to the need to manifest the expansion of social and political rights in the form of a new relationship with the spaces of the city.

This discourse is visible nowhere more than in Caracas, where the state has appropriately renamed the Ministry of Health as the Ministry of Health and Popular Power and graffiti images of Chávez, fist pumped in the air, are found on every block under the heading of “all power to the people”. The linking of labor market realities with political openings and contestations has always been an important part of city life, and street vendors are situated within the contradictions and realities of these openings. In 2006, the population of the metro region of Caracas was estimated to be anywhere between 4 and 4.5 million inhabitants and the number of street vendors was estimated at between 300 and 500 thousand (Fuenmayor 2007, 184). Street vendors represent 7% of the total urban population (Fuenmayor 2007). Concentrated along a handful of boulevards and metro stations of the city, their presence (or lack thereof) is palpable.

At 3am on January 1st, 2008 the municipal government of El Libertador, the historic central district of the city, ordered the city police and the National Guard to remove street vendors from all public spaces and “rescue the public spaces of the city from the plague of the informal economy” (Bernal, Public Speech, 2008). With over half of the urban working age population employed within the informal sector and street vendors representing an overwhelming majority of these people, this impacted the entire urban population. It has been calculated that on one block in the historical center of the city, one could easily find 30-40 stalls over an area covering easily 40 blocks. This is a large number, given people are working these stalls, often as entire families.

The district of El Libertador is also the focus of the nation's governmental institutions, as

well as a stronghold of Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution. The municipal government of Freddy Bernal, a long-time Chávez ally and key member of the PSUV, called on the removal of vendors through the passage of decree 278, which outlaws vending in any public space in the municipality. Vendors were not warned of the sweep but were brutally awakened to stolen merchandise, destroyed containers, and razed stalls.

Street vendors adamantly recall “Chávez's 2000 promise to let us work with dignity until other resettlement locations or alternative employment is made available” (Ali 2008). Along with the legal promise to allow workers in the informal economy to continue their labor until other forms of employment were made available, there were pronouncements of political support, empowerment, and a lasting relationship between vendors and the state.

Over time, vendors began to reinforce their loose organizations by creating co-ops in order to make sure that they could work until the government fulfilled its promise to create alternative employment. This is not the first moment of conflict over space, the meanings of dignified work, humanizing space, or people's power and the legal interpretation of these policies between the state and street vendors.

The state's linking of dignified work, humanizing space, and popular power became visible in late 2006, when vendors were asked to move out of the largest vendor market in Caracas's Sabana Grande. Vendors along this pedestrian corridor negotiated with the municipal and city governments and, eventually, left the street peacefully with the promise that they could create plans for their future relocation and would be able to hold the state accountable for purchasing a new location and developing the property. This spatial manifestation of dignified work meant that vendors from Sabana Grande would eventually be relocated to *centros comerciales* (commercial centers, taking the form of open air markets made up of individual stalls), where they would be able to purchase their own kiosks through a state distributed and managed micro-enterprise loan program.

The break in the state's discourse and promise of the right to work was brought on by its inability to provide vendors either money or employment. Vendors on the street represented the failure of the state to redistribute wealth and to create jobs, and it resulted in an intense backlash against vendors rather than the government. Upon moving out of Sabana Grande, vendors submitted plan after plan for relocation and economic development improvements, with no response from the state. While the state was filing away vendor proposals, officials were busy pointing to the peaceful removal and negotiations as proof that “popular power is alive and well on the streets of Caracas”(Bernal 2007). These promises of direct democracy and dignified work through relocation are the footing that vendors from the historical center of the city are using to push their way back onto the streets. After 14 months and millions of dollars lost, vendors from Sabana Grande have yet to be completely relocated. The vast majority took up stalls or tables throughout the historical center of the city, while another group works out of the parking lot of one of the partially developed commercial centers.

This study documents the tug of war between street vendors and the state in Caracas over

the meaning of rights, the definition of popular power, and the right to occupy city streets over the last ten years. In documenting this battle, I will show the discursive mechanisms used by the state to manage its relationship with street vendors and the urban poor more generally. From “the exploited masses” that require the extensive support and growth of the national government and its institutions to “the plague of the streets” who are overrunning the streets of the city, the shifting attitude towards vendors reveals how Chávez’s failed attempt to redistribute material wealth and his desire to remove the most visible markers of that failure.

Through this exploration I will show how Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution has failed in its objective: redistributing wealth to the poorest people. I will further show how the discourse of the state regarding people’s power, dignified work, and humanizing space has worked against the stated objectives of the government and further marginalized the urban poor.

Finally, I will link Revolutionary Urbanism to the right to the city framework in order to completely understand politics of the street in Venezuela. Specifically, I will add to the theory Foucauldian concepts of discipline, power, and techniques of regulation in order to demonstrate how “the right to the city” discourse is used in Venezuela to consolidate power.

This is the story of two moments in Caracas’ recent history: the “pro-vendor” moment and the “anti-vendor” moment. The pro-vendor moment offers a look into how the government sought to highlight the plight of the urban poor by pointing to the disenfranchisement of street vendors from the formal economy and political institutions. The anti-vendor moment will analyze the government’s strategies for removing vendors in order to hide the state’s failure.

Bringing together the issues of the informal economy, stories of working lives in Caracas, and theoretical debates about the right to the city, I will use the inconsistencies of the Hugo Chávez’s political project to demonstrate three things. First, I will show how the battle for the production of urban space provides an important window on the limits of the Bolivarian Revolution to redistribute economic wealth and political power.

Second, I will describe the ways the government is imposing neoliberal reforms through the pretense of being a left leaning government. This effort is aimed at reconfiguring urban space such that its transformation allows the government to take credit for improving the quality of life of the urban poor without ever doing as much. While the government employs notions of urban citizenship, popular power, dignified work, humanizing space, and the right to the city, its discourse disguises a repressive state machine intent on taking back city streets in order to allow for the political capitalization of urban space. Simultaneously, I will look at how street vendors are re-engaging this discourse particularly: people’s power, dignified work, and humanizing space, as tools for mobilizing against the state and maintaining their right to work in public space.

Last, I will use Henri Lefebvre’s idea of the right to the city to shed light on the particular

nature of the process that is taking place in Caracas under Chavez. I will do this by complicating the idea that citizens have similar understandings of the best social use of urban space and that the state, in the case of Venezuela, is using the streets of the city as a vehicle to increase its own staying power. I will introduce the concept of “Revolutionary Urbanism”. In adding the role of the state as a key force in shaping urban life, which is neither synonymous with society nor economic life, the concept of Revolutionary Urbanism forces us to take a closer look at the techniques used by the state to establish the relationship between citizens and the market in their use of space.

Moving and Meaning in Caracas: Methodology

Over the course of the last 20 years, research on the relationship between economic informality, urban citizenship, and the manifestation of political discourse in Latin American cities has taken four forms. The first form relies primarily on statistical information, which is then used to offer insight into the failings of the state or the market and leads to a set of prescriptive measures that can be taken in order to address the failings. This research method is characterized by superficial quantitative analyses, which focus on the potential economic force of those who are part of an informal labor market. Exemplified by the work of Hernando De Soto (*The Other Path, The Mystery of Capital*), the overarching conclusion is that through the process of government deregulation and limiting government intervention in the market, the capital potential of these people will be realized. This work focuses its efforts on speculating about the actual access to capital available to the urban poor and determining that the people living in poverty in the global south need to activate this capital in order to transform their material condition. It focuses its efforts in between two radically different segments of economic life. On the one hand it looks at individual practices of buying and selling understanding these practices as unharnessed entrepreneurialism. On the other hand it looks at how the state, in various places, is the central reason that the entrepreneurialism is untapped. It focuses on the procedural maze in place making it impossible for the urban poor to move out of poverty.

This work is limited in many ways, but methodologically speaking the reliance on statistical speculation- making claims about behaviors reliant on perceived statistical patterns- attempts to make generalizations across diverse contexts, urban government models, and lived urban experiences. By employing statistics, cost-benefit analysis, and regression-centered studies, this research removes the history of structural economic exclusion faced by the vast majority of Latin America’s urban poor.

The second methodological approach advances the idiom of chaos, which has been a common lens through which Latin American cities have been seen over the last century. Using a mix of statistical and longitudinal data analyses based on surveys and interviews collected by major global institutions, like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), these works try to make larger arguments about Latin American cities (as well as other cities of the Global South), which ultimately characterize the global experience of the urban poor as a lost world. Exemplified by the work of Mike Davis (*Planet of Slums*) these works flatten the experiences of those who live in Latin American cities, fight for their right to a dignified life, and carve out a space

for political and economic rights.

The third methodological approach, which emerges as scholars and public intellectuals attempt to describe the “shift to the left” in Latin America over the last decade, is qualitative and relies primarily on historical and descriptive analysis of the national contexts in Latin America to shed light on changes that are occurring in urban political and social relations. This work is exemplified by Jorge Castaneda’s 2006 article in *Foreign Affairs*, which describes the current political landscape of Latin America as being catalyzed by the national election of Hugo Chávez with a regional domino effect of leftist leaders being elected from Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador. These elections are the result of popular discontent for the neoliberal economic policies that dominated these countries for the previous thirty years.

Although this method differentiates among the national experiences leading up to this current political moment, its romantic gaze on these nations attempts to generalize the post-shift experience. Another common factor in this shift-to-the-left framework is that this new moment is characterized as a populist shift, whereby the openings and changes in political, economic, and social life are the direct result of a “typical populist project”, a key descriptor of Latin American political leaders since the post-colonial period (Seligson 2007, 81). All three of these methodological approaches lend themselves to generalizations that caricature Latin American leaders and citizens.

The fourth body of literature uses the urban experience and landscape as the site in which to understand, engage, and problematize Latin America. In particular, these authors focus on the fragmentation created in cities through processes of uneven development and the impetus of urban planning to deepen their audience’s understanding of the local and national factors impacting the region. The work of Teresa Caldeira in *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* asks critical questions about that how the current moment of urbanization is impacting the process of democratization in Brazil as a case, but makes a larger case about the project in growing cities across the globe. The body of work written by James Holston which ranges from *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia*, *Cities and Citizenship*, and *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* all use the urban landscape to pose questions central to the ideals of citizenship and contestation. In particular, the *Modernist City* asks questions which have been helpful to this research:

- How does the project and craft of building city impact the meaning of citizenship and participation?
- Does a project driven by a leftist government have to grapple with the same social consequences of the liberal project of planning?
- What are the modes of contestation when marginalized people are impacted by these projects?

As an urban planner, these authors have been influential for my understanding of the practice and craft of urban planning and the production of urban space as a deeply political practice with implications that reach far beyond the physical landscape of cities.

The story of Caracas reveals the ways in which the practice of taking back the city, by the way of the state creating participatory mechanisms for identify the “highest and best use of urban space” is a deeply political process and has resulted in creating a vacuum of power for the Chávez regime.

In preparation for research and during my fieldwork in Caracas, I chose to employ an in-depth case study method, which allowed me to focus on the particularities of Caracas in this political moment spanning the summer of 2005 to the fall of 2009. By combining historical documentation, in-depth interviews, and secondary research, this study allows the reader a look into the complicated nature of urban political life in Caracas. Instead of moving across the city, I focused on one municipality, El Libertador, which has the highest concentration of families living in poverty, suffers the highest rate of unemployment and homicide rates, and has historically been a Chávez stronghold. As mentioned in the brief history of the city above, the governance structure of the city is organized into five municipalities, each of which has its own mayor and city council. As the historical center of Caracas, the municipality of El Libertador is home to all of the nation’s policymaking institutions as well as its major public spaces.

Over the course of fieldwork, I conducted nearly one hundred in-depth interviews with street vendors, city officials, municipal leaders, members of the opposition, and activists engaged in efforts to reclaim city space for public use. I conducted non-participant observation where I spent days with vendors in key sites within the municipality and sat in on public meetings where vendors presented proposals to municipal and city officials for alternative locations and organizational structures for their labor. I participated in and documented the largest street vendor protests in the city and photographed and wrote ethnographies on hunger strikes and other organized opposition strategies. I documented press conferences where public officials derided the presence of vendors, followed rallies of urban residents organized by the state in opposition to the street vendors, and sat in on political strategy sessions with government officials where they developed plans for vendor removal. I interviewed residents throughout the city in order to get a sense of how battles over public space changed over the course of the last ten years.

In order to support these ethnographic methods, I collected demographic, unemployment, and poverty statistics, and gathered research produced for the national government on programs and social service spending meant to serve the urban poor. This part of my research, the collection of quantitative data, is important, for the skeleton of information it offers, but more so because of the competing statistics offered to understand employment, poverty, and the informal economy in Caracas. Even in cases where the same question was being asked, government data, university data, and independent data varied widely. In my extensive conversations with government officials and researchers, I often found a lack of depth in their access to quantitative data. I found that collaboration across these groups almost never occurred as a result of the political divide in Venezuela, which splits those who are in support of the current political regime from those who criticize it, from both the left and right of the political spectrum.

I encountered a number of barriers to collecting governmental data. Although census information is hypothetically available on the national government's website, the site is often down and data unavailable. The data that I collected usually did not independently shed light on the case of street vending in Caracas, but when coupled with ethnographies and interviews the data could be used to create a richer picture of the battle for the streets of Caracas.

I would like to use this opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities of conducting fieldwork in Caracas during this period. In Teresa Caldeira's introduction to *City of Walls: Crime, Citizenship, and Segregation in Sao Paulo*, she offers an important discussion about the position of the researcher in conducting research, writing findings, and offering perspective to the multiple realities in a field site. In describing the challenges of imposing a set of Euro-American norms on non-Euro-American field sites, she likens the work of the Anthropologists from these institutions to Marco Polo, "They describe the foreign cities they visited to people who have never been there, without talking about their own societies and cultures... they frequently make invisible the comparisons to their own cultures, the constant hidden references to which the unknown culture can be described as different" (Caldeira 2001, 7). I came back to this chapter on a number of occasions while in Caracas and during the writing of this dissertation. I was drawn particularly to the role of intellectuals in cities of the global south, their relationship with the state and citizens, and the purpose of their research. While some scholars attempt to differentiate between their day-to-day life experiences and their experiences in the field, this was an impossible task for me.

In the summer of 2005, I started a preliminary research looking into the urban impact of political change in Venezuela. After spending the two previous years working on a master's project, which explored the social impacts of World Bank investments in urban infrastructure in Bogotá, Colombia, I decided to shift my focus into an under-researched, timely, and emerging terrain of urban political life. Although I loved Bogotá, I felt that its story was too similar to the stories of urban development in other Latin American cities: the World Bank intervenes in the development of urban infrastructure as well as in political decision making and produces a set of urban social conditions that result in displacement, disconnection, and disaffection, all under the veneer of an urban fabric that is booming with the development of infrastructure and privatized spaces. From what I knew of Caracas, the developing socialist revolution coupled with palpable conditions of urban poverty and a discourse of popular power and redistributing oil wealth, offered a new terrain in which to explore city life in Latin America.

I started fieldwork in the summer of 2005, working with an anthropologist interested in writing a paper pointing to the positive impacts that new community-based health clinics were having on citizenship and inclusion in the emerging state. He made it clear from the beginning that, although he did not live in Venezuela and was not impacted in any way by the government's policies, he was a government sympathizer and was interested in conducting research that would point to the positive aspects of the government. I conducted interviews in three neighborhoods in the city and worked closely with an

amazing team of graduate students to move through the project while grappling with the reality that Venezuela's socialist revolution was unfolding in a conflict-ridden and highly contradictory terrain.

I moved downtown and upon my arrival realized that the nickname "Caracas, the Horrible" fit the city in ways that I never imagined possible. The nickname was popularized in the 1980s by the work of Luis Buitrago, one of Venezuela's leading scholars, when he interviewed eleven of Caracas' leading academics, urban planners, and architects, who commonly describe the city as "chaotic, ungovernable, indomitable... and horrible" (Goldfrank 2004, 138). The humid winter streets smelled of waste and garbage collection was inconsistent at best; with national oil prices at a little over 30 cents a gallon, the streets were overrun with cars with little room for pedestrian use, crime was palpable with a murder rate at just under 100 people on an average weekend, and certain parts of the city, the most populated and poorest, had the feeling of something waiting to fall apart or burst at the seams.

Where the title of "Caracas the Horrible" became a misnomer was in the city's social and political life. Old ladies filled school grounds in the evenings to take *baileterapia*, or dance therapy classes, and would extol the government's ability to make a space for them, a space in which they were no longer invisible or just waiting to die. People who existed at the margins of political life urged me to understand that now Venezuela belongs to everyone, as the popular state slogan goes.

Early on, I was confronted by the Venezuelan norms of academic life, which hold to the primacy of research as "civic responsibility". As the daughter of Latin American immigrants, one of whom is Venezuelan, I kept running up against the expectations of Venezuelan academics, political figures, and pundits that I use my dissertation to make a set of political claims for or against the government and "take responsibility" for the findings of my research by using them to influence political life. These expectations were also apparent in my relationship the US embassy as a Fulbright fellow.

In all honesty, I should begin by saying that my work in Venezuela represented a symbolic return home. I expected to "know" about social, cultural, and urban life because of my father's claims to Venezuela. In reality, the trip was an awakening to what I began referring to as my "Americaness" and the ways in which the race, class, ethnic, and gender norms I grew up with in the Bay Area were a deep part of who I was and would inform the lens through which I would conduct research in Venezuela. In a number of my interactions with *Caraqueños*, I found myself defending my distance and silence as an outsider in Venezuela. On many occasions, the voyeuristic nature of conducting research as taught in the US academy was overwhelming, as I felt the need to take positions about a larger political climate that would affect those I worked with and my research, but not my own life.

All this to say that the story I am telling is one from the perspective of a working class

woman of color trained in the US academy about social, political, and economic life in Caracas. Along with my deep belief that street vendors offer important insights into the political project in Venezuela, I am clear that my attraction to those working in the informal economy is the result of growing up visiting my aunt and uncle who sold clothes in a market in the port town of La Guaira and the stories of my father's life on the Caribbean island of Margarita selling fish in order to make a living. This is not an indictment of the Chávez government in its entirety or a proclamation about the future of Venezuela and Caracas. I did my best to document the ways *Caraqueños* experienced their city and the transformations of their political institutions and economic life.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into four chapters, which together offer a glimpse into current labor, urban, and political conditions and the ways in which these three elements can be used to understand redistributive policies and their limits in Caracas. The first chapter offers an in-depth look into my case by exploring the history of research on social and economic relations in Caracas. By looking to the projects of garnering vendor support, producing urban space, and ultimately removing vendors from the streets of the municipality of El Libertador, I will lay out the practice of Revolutionary Urbanism as the most appropriate term with which to understand urban political and economic life in Caracas under Chávez.

The second chapter uses interviews and ethnographic research into the lives of street vendors to outline the techniques the government uses to manage the production of urban space and political life in El Libertador. The chapter focuses on the ways in which Chávez and his urban political machine reclaim city streets as a means of redefining the urban citizenship and the right to the city.

Chapter three outlines how the state produces a spectacle of popular power as well as how the notion is used as a legitimizing force behind the project of humanizing space. I will end this chapter by looking to the ways in which street vendors are recalibrating the idea of popular power as a tool to reclaim their right to occupy city space as a means of employment.

Chapter Four sets up the main urban planning debate: how do urban governments and citizens negotiate the right to the city versus the right to work? In this chapter, I will argue that although vendors are fighting for their right to occupy urban space, the greater debate on the streets of Caracas has to do with the right to good jobs. In this chapter, I will lay out the historical context for this conflict by pointing to two major battlegrounds in El Libertador: Sabana Grande and the Cazco Historico.

The final chapter argues that these urban endeavors have resulted in a political backlash against Chávez and his political project. It lays out the most recent battle for the streets of Caracas by offering a look at how municipal and city elections are being used by vendors and opposition candidates to employ the language of “popular power” and “the right to the city” against the regime. I will conclude by offering a description of how vendors are organizing as part of a larger left opposition to Chávez's Bolivarian

Revolution.

CHAPTER I:
REVOLUTIONARY URBANISM

For them we represent garbage, crime, disturbance... When they talk about us they talk as if we are not human, as if we want to be here... as if we don't do this work to feed our kids or eat every night (Johana Interview, 2007).

More and more the spaces of the modern city are being produced for us rather than by us (Mitchell 2003, 18).

Starting in 2006, the fight for the right to the city in Caracas brought two contenders into the ring. In one corner was the state, with its ability to establish laws and reward and punish citizens. In the other corner, bursting in numbers over the ropes, stood street vendors from the historic center of the city, with sheer numbers, newly found power, and discourse of a popular revolution. It is in this year that a marked shift in urban policy occurred whereby vendors cease to be the centerpiece of the struggle for equality and popular power in Venezuela and become the target of police harassment, government organized rallies, and public debate. This chapter will move through the trajectory of theoretical and material shifts that allowed this to happen.

First, it will lay out the theoretical framework for understanding this shift. By adding to the assumptions of Lefebvre in his argument for the urban revolution, a more apt concept for understanding the social and economic dynamics in Caracas, Venezuela will emerge: Revolutionary Urbanism. In the section, I will outline the research gap this dissertation fills by offering an outline of existing research on Venezuela and Caracas.

Next, I will lay out the historic context in which the battle emerged. By narrating the ways in which street vending shifted from being the ideal location for revolutionary actors to being the site of counterrevolutionary struggle as understood by the national government. It was within this shift that the streets of Caracas opened up to a contestation between the right to work and the right to occupy urban space. In the final section, I will outline the case studies that are the primary sites of this research

IMAGINARY CARACAS: STUDIES OF THE VENEZUELAN CITY

Euro-American academics studying Venezuela have traditionally been focused with the politics of petroleum, the nature of democracy, and the emergence of social movements during the imposition of structural adjustment policies during the late 1980's. By sowing the oil, or using the ground rent provided by petroleum extraction and production to underwrite government expenditures, the Venezuelan dictators and kleptocratic parties have been able to manage the Venezuelan people by establishing deep patronage networks.

Venezuela has also been the terrain on which political scientists in the US and Europe can point to the "regional exception" when it came to processes of democratization. Focusing on the nature of political institutions, their relationship to petroleum markets, and the handful of leaders that frame the debates on citizen participation and the venues for engaging in "democracy", writings tend to flatten the lived experience of

Venezuelans. This sort of work dominates English language studies of the country. Although such research has proven to be deeply flawed in its assumptions of institutional competence and minimum requirements of political participation, it is not the focus of the present work. Rather than posit an abstract theoretical framework for democracy, this study begins with a description of the political shifts that created an opening for Hugo Chávez to emerge as the nation's 74th president, which I will briefly present here to provide the appropriate historical context for the rest of the dissertation.

Twentieth-century Venezuelan leadership can be classified in three categories: the dictators, the pact-makers, and the outliers. From 1908 through 1935, Venezuela was under the control of Juan Vicente Gomez, a dictator who was able to consolidate state power by acquiring a new role as "national landlord" to the rents provided by petroleum extraction (Coronil 1997, 76). After his death, a number of his generals attempted to assume power as interim caretakers of the presidency, but students who organized a protest against the Gomez regime in 1928 surfaced as the popularly supported leaders of the state.

Through the ten years of dictatorships post-Gomez, the students known as the "Group of 28" were able to capitalize on internal tensions among military leaders to consolidate popular support, establish political parties, and prepare to remove the military from power. By 1945, the mobilizations for democracy paid off and allowed for a civil coup d'état ushering in Venezuela's first civilian government of the century. In the three years between 1946 and 1948, four elections were held in Venezuela, won by Acción Democrática (AD) one of three parties organized by the Group of 28. The other two parties established by the group were COPEI (The Christian Conservative Party) and the Communist Party of Venezuela (Ewell 1984, 98). During these three years of civilian governance, known as the *trienio*, governments were popularly elected, assumed power, and pushed the limits of the previous dictatorial military rule. This popular opening triggered military resistance that ushered in another period of dictatorial rule.

Between 1952 and 1958, Marcos Perez Jimenez ruled the country under the harshest dictatorship in the region. Along with closing the openings provided by Gomez's death, he pushed for the modernization of Caracas through mass infrastructure development. This was the first time since the late 1800s that the city became an important reflection of the nation.

After failing to complete the project of modernization and rousing mass discontent by displacing huge segments of the urban population and inadvertently organizing the urban poor by concentrating them in superblock housing, Jimenez was pushed out of power and the guise of democracy returned in the form of the Pact of Punto Fijo. The intention of the pact was to allow for reconciliation between the state and its citizens, as well as to create the foundation for democratization. The main political parties that were legally sanctioned during the signing on the Pact of Punto Fijo were AD, COPEI, and URD (Democratic Republican Union), but excluded the PCV (Communist Party of Venezuela).

Fernando Coronil describes the Pact thus:

By means of pacts and agreements, the major representatives of the democratic parties sought to avoid what leaders regarded as the two major dangers facing democracy: the return to military rule, widely regarded as the “homicidal path,” and the recurrence of sectarian party politics...the “suicidal path.” They decided to join efforts to secure a harmonious transition to a democratic regime by means of a free electoral contest, but one without absolute losers. All the parties (except the Communist Party), it was agreed, would have a share of power and of its responsibilities and benefits, regardless of which party won. The private sector would have significant participation in the government and voice in policy making (Coronil 1997, 217).

The power-sharing pact is often pointed to as producing the most stable democracy in the region. Soon, the URD was out and between 1959 and 1994 Venezuela was ruled solely by AD and COPEI. Cooling the tempers of the military and the private sector, the parties were able to grow the Venezuelan economy and contain social discontent by, literally and figuratively, oiling the wheels of patronage. Throughout this period there were expressions of discontent, primarily by the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (the Communist Party) and radical left organizing groups, but none shook the pact.

Things changed dramatically in the 1980s. The riots that occurred across the country on February 27, 1989 called *El Sacudón* or *El Caracazo* were the largest popular expression of discontent against the state ever experienced in Venezuela. *El Caracazo* was the popular reaction to the imposition of structural adjustment policies earlier in the decade. These protests were very marked in the country’s major cities.

Margarita Lopez-Maya, Venezuela’s leading scholar on popular protest, describes the riots as follows:

After *El Sacudón* or *El Caracazo*, the popular protest that exploded in Caracas and a significant part of the country’s urban landscape on the 27th of February 1989, protest has transformed into one of the most characteristic aspects of daily life in the Venezuelan capital. Since the mid-1980s, and as a result of these protests, we *Caraqueños* have had to adjust our routine of life to the hundreds of protests that every year take place in the center or in some other place in the city. Other principle and secondary cities have also been affected by this same phenomenon. But, maybe the more notorious than the actual increase in protests themselves, this change has resulted in the transformation of forms and naturalness of protest. The collective-action of

Venezuelans has become more confrontational and violent than in the past (Lopez-Maya 1999, 5).

Scholars of *El Caracazo* and of popular protest in Venezuela, point to this moment as the national break where the veil of democracy, which had often shielded the government from mass popular protest, was removed and where citizens of the country made public their awareness of its failings. Keeping in mind that Venezuela had been home to a number of guerilla movements since the 1960s, this moment catapulted them out of the fringe and onto the national stage. It also began to germinate discontent within the military, which is where Hugo Chávez was at this time. *El Caracazo* is key to understanding the political and economic shifts that occurred to produce the informal economy and street vending.

Although there is a vast literature on *El Caracazo*, there is a limited amount of information on the Caracas' social and economic life prior or after this moment. In the Venezuelan academy, publications on the city of Caracas and on urban life more generally is dominated by architects, social anthropologists, and urban economists, who rely heavily on historic material to describe these experiences. Within a field site of numbers, maps, and literary narratives, these scholars often exist at extreme distances from their subjects. In cases where their research is contemporary, the researcher's contact is limited with those who make up the majority of *Caraqueños* who are poor, live and work in areas of the city where violence has exploded over the last ten years, and are overwhelmingly in support of the Chávez government.

During the period in which I conducted fieldwork, I was confronted on more than one occasion by university professors and researchers who couldn't believe that street vendors would actually talk to me or that I was spending the majority of my time in the historic center of the city. Beyond the political battle for the streets of Caracas and the desire to demonstrate the contradictions within a right to the city framing, this research will contribute to existing work on Venezuela by providing a space to hear the voices of people who live in its largest city, moving and working along the city's streets.

The limited research available on street vending in Caracas relies heavily on quantitative data and interviews with public officials or other academics. When interviews are conducted, they tend to focus on public officials and urban activists fighting to remove vendors in order to "reclaim their right to city space". This research tends to exaggerate the political and economic influence of street vendors and homogenize the experience of street vending in Caracas. It also lacks in-depth understanding of who vendors are, why they occupy city streets in order to make a living, and how they relate to the political institutions that manage their existence. Again, the work that has been most informative is that which has set out to understand *El Caracazo* as it is closely linked to the mass increase in street vendors.

The contextual work on social movements in Venezuela coupled with research on urban informality throughout the global south provides a better understanding of the importance of street vendors and street vending as a site where one can situate "informality firmly

within the larger politics of populist mobilizations, state power, and economic dependency” (AlSayyad & Roy 2004, 3). Although street vendors are often at the forefront of urban economic conflicts in Caracas, it should be stated that their fight is to meet their most basic needs and not to challenge or transform power dynamics.

This being understood, there are those who argue that the process whereby street vendors increase their presence and their tenacity to continue to occupy the streets of the city can best be described as “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary”.

Asef Bayat describes this encroachment as:

The life-long struggles of the floating social cultures- the migrants, refugees, unemployed, squatters, street vendors, street children, and other marginalized groups- whose growth has been accelerated by the process of economic globalization...all of them tend to challenge the notions of order, modern city, and urban governance espoused by Third World political elites (Bayat 2006, 188).

Although the history is correct and what might be called “the quiet encroachment of street vendors on to the streets of Caracas” is clearly connected to the deepening of relationships between the state and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), their presence is that of a site of last resort. Throughout most of the 20th century, street vending was minimal and often associated with hippie-artisans who occupied the main social boulevard in the city, Sabana Grande. Only in the 1980s, were the central arteries of the city overrun by people selling goods purchased en masse and resold to people walking through the city center. Unlike most Latin American cities, street vending is a fairly recent phenomenon in Caracas, emerging in its current form in the late 1980s and booming thereafter. Prior to the imposition of structural adjustment policies, which led to mass divestment from public sector services and the shrinking of state employment sources, one might encounter artisans selling their goods on small blankets a few at a time or in makeshift kiosks. There is a marked relationship between the emergence of street vendors and the shrinking of state services, infrastructure, and systems of patronage in the 1980s.

The package of structural adjustment policies negotiated between AD presidents Carlos Andres Perez and the IMF started off with a 30% hike in fuel prices and led to a domino effect of increasing prices of transportation and basic goods (Hellinger 2004, 31). Although many scholars point to the re-entrance of Perez (this was his second presidency) as ushering in a dark decade for Venezuela, it was actually the run-up to the presidential campaign in the context of plummeting oil prices and increased public sector spending that led to Perez’s deal with the IMF. Between 1982 and 1988, the price of petroleum fell to less than 40% of its 1982 peak value, external debt was well over \$30 billions dollars, and artificial price controls led to “hoarding, wide-spread shortages, and increased black market activities” (Robert 2003, 257). By the time Perez was re-elected in 1989, the national economic stage was set for the retraction of the state. As was the case throughout Latin America, the imposition of a structural adjustment package

(popularly known as *el paquete* or the package) resulted in deteriorating living standards and widening inequality, but outside of *El Caracazo* and a number of small-scale organizing groups and guerilla groups, social reaction was kept in check by the Venezuelan armed forces.

As a result of this social silencing, Venezuelans, pointing to the conflicts in other Latin American countries and to the longer history of structural adjustment policies elsewhere, understood street vendors to be overwhelmingly foreign-born and closely associated with immigration from Colombia and Peru. In interviews with people living in the historic center of Caracas, this perception had not changed much and often had an added twist, depending on who was being interviewed. One person’s Colombian *guerillero* was another person’s right-wing Colombian paramilitary member.

Although Caracas is often described in fearful tones and colored in shady hues, street vendors were not always pointed to as the key perpetrators of urban problems. When I asked an older vendor about how long vending had existed as an option of employment, she answered by describing that “in Sabana Grande it was a hippy job... they were people like artists that would spend Saturdays and Sundays on a blanket talking with their friends and selling the things they made to the people walking by’, but it wasn’t until after the Caracazo that the situation changed” (Margarita 2007). As described above, this shift dramatically impacted the economic possibilities of Venezuelans and, I would argue, closed many doors to employment, leaving the street as the only option. This is clearly demonstrated in the chart below:

**I. Estimates of Street Vending Population,
Caracas, Venezuela 1988-2002
Source: Garcia 2006**

Year	Number of Vendors
1988	12,000
1996	29,000
2000	20,000
2001	48,000
2002	74,000

A number of Venezuelan scholars link the boom in street vending to the following legal and economic conditions:

- An economic recession, which caused inflation and reduced household purchasing power,
- The absence of a legal framework to protect property rights, which reduced private sector investment,
- Increased unemployment,
- A large and inefficient bureaucracy constructed around the petroleum

- sector that has created obstacles to operating small businesses, and
- Venezuela labor legislation that has made the country's workers among the most expensive in the region, which in turn provides incentives for employers to hire informally (Zanoni 2005, Garcia 2006, Roever 2006).

Although the general trends hold true, these scholars fail to explicitly point to the impact of structural adjustment policies of the 1980s on the growth of the informal economy. The imposition of this package of economic, political, and social reforms led to a marked transformation of state-market-citizen relationship so that the state was less apt to maintain its patronage network, which served the purpose of maintaining a middle-class for 50 years. The break-up of this patronage system resulted in mass unemployment and within years the streets of Caracas became inundated with street vendors. Today, it is estimated that over 50% of the urban labor force makes a living in the informal sector and over 500,000 people work as street vendors (Brillembourg, 2005)

There are two moments in which the increase in vendors is significant. The first, or what would be best described as the emergence period, occurs in 1989 after the *Caracazo*. Lopez-Maya describes this period as "...reminiscent of popular uprisings in some Latin American cities in the past and also of the notorious food riots experienced by European societies during the centuries of transition to modernity: barricades, burnings, stoning, the occupation of streets and premises, looting with booty sometimes shared out, sometimes not" (Lopez-Maya 2003, 118).

It was during a time of international popular protest and discontent against the sweeping imposition of neoliberal reforms throughout the global south, that Carlos Andres Perez, a prominent member of the AD party, ran for a second presidential term on an anti-reform, anti-IMF platform, assuring Venezuelans that they would not have to worry about the austerity measures being imposed by governments throughout the region. But soon after his election all of this would change. As a result of the financial crisis facing the country, he imposed the harshest austerity measures and cuts in public spending that Venezuela has ever seen. One commentator described the cause and effect as follows:

Suddenly, the cheap gas that Venezuelans had regarded as a right of citizenship skyrocketed. Food staples climbed as high as 600%. In a spontaneous popular uprising against this sudden reversal, known as the *Caracazo*, the until-then passive poor descended from the barrios that can be seen rising up the hillsides from the end of any street in downtown Caracas (Collins 2003, 371).

The link between the *Caracazo* and the emergence of street vendors is significant. In interview after interview, vendors, politicians, and everyday people pointed to this time as the first occupation of city streets for street vending. In direct reaction to the cut of state subsidies for basic services and products and the slashing of major sectors of public employment and the organizing rights historically afforded these workers, hundreds and then thousands of people looked to street vending as a replacement form of employment

The second period of mass increase of street vendors occurred between 2000 and 2001. Throughout the three years following his first election in 1998, Hugo Chávez made a number of public declarations highlighting his support of street vendors and placed the right to make a living as a centerpiece of the new constitution. This was part of his package of political reform. In making the argument that vendors have a right to occupy city space, so long as the state and private sector are not able to provide enough jobs, Chávez used the presence of vendors as one example of the ways in which previous governments failed to redistribute the wealth of the nation to all Venezuelans. These public declarations of support of the right to work helped encourage the influx of vendors onto the city's streets.

In a 2001 speech Chávez made to commemorate his failed coup in 1992, he recognized the emerging conflict between street vendors and city government officials and powerfully articulated the “resistance of the poor to marginalization” and how this resistance “complicates governance”(Hellinger 2001, 15). As Daniel Hellinger, one of the leading political scientists to write about Venezuela in the United States, notes:

He repeated his promise never to send the security forces to assault them, “*el soberano*”(the sovereign), evoking a contrast with bitter memories of the repression of the Caracazo. Yet he also praised the mayor of Caracas (Freddy Bernal) and asked the *buhoneros* (colloquialism for street vendor) to be patient as he tried to resolve the differences between the vendors and residents of a neighborhood in which a market for the vendors was to be located. He told the vendors, who had been evicted peacefully from the popular Sabana Grande pedestrian avenue with the promise of relocation to the market, to have patience. Their problems, said the president, rooted in the failures of *puntofijismo* and cannot be rectified overnight (Hellinger 2001, 15).

These speeches, which proclaimed his support of street vendors along with the newly adopted constitutional guarantee of the “right to work,” became the tipping point. Again, in interview after interview people, particularly residents of the center of the city would argue that it was in this time that vendors moved onto the streets en mass. “It’s like he called them and told them to stay until he could do something else, but he never did anything to find them work or get them money. He kept making promises and they kept coming to the streets and now the streets that were ours belong entirely to them” (Jorge 2007). This period saw an increase in the number of vendors from 20,000 to 74,000 throughout the entire city, most of whom were concentrated in the historic center.

Over time the government’s positions on the right to work, the right to the city, and the presence of street vendors on city streets began to shift. By early 2003, the municipal government was faced with ever-increasing numbers of vendors along with other forms

of informality. Of the over 2 million residents of the municipality, an overwhelming majority live in unplanned barrios, and although there has been increase in the process of land titling, the majority of these neighborhoods have little to no access to basic infrastructure, like water or roads. These infrastructural conditions were coupled with an explosive increase in urban violence that grew parallel to the social and political transformations Venezuelans experienced from the mid-1980s onward. In the first ten years of social unrest, between 1986 and 1997, Venezuela's homicide rate increase by 226%. In Caracas during this period, homicides increased by 478% (Fey 2005, 131). In 2002, 2,436 people were murdered in the city, equal to the number of people who were killed in the rest of the country (Briceño-Leon 2007, 81).

By 2004, the national government was faced with the contradiction of offering services and subsidies while actual income redistribution and employment access remained limited. The promise of economic diversification in non-petroleum based industry, occurred at such small scale that the vast majority of people, and particularly urban people, had little opportunity for economic advancement. The plan of allowing street vendors to remain until the government or private sector was able to provide enough employment needed to be scrapped, and vendors were instead offered the opportunity to relocate to small-scale commercial centers where they would have access to micro-loans in order to buy a kiosk and continue selling their goods. The discursive shift was one from the right to the work to the right to the city, with the removal of vendors for the public good.

Counter Cases: Cuzco Historico and Sabana Grande

Operationally speaking, the practice of this discursive shift occurred in two different cases in two radically different ways. The first site is one of the largest informal markets in the city of Caracas, which spreads over a mile along the colonial corridor called Cuzco Historico, or the historic shell or center. Spanning between two metro stations in the middle of the city, on Avenida Universidad between Avenida Fuerzas Armadas and Avenida Baralt, this market is completely informal and poses the greatest threat to the urban government, as it is a physical marker of the state's inability to formalize workers and to address issues of urban economic redistribution. By occupying the historic center of the city, this site, literally and figuratively, rubs directly against the institutions of the government: vendors have erected stalls directly in front of the Ministry for the Popular Economy and the National Theatre, and directly across the street from the National Palace. The number of vendors and sheer concentration of vendors in this neighborhood is remarkable. In a count of vendors in the summer of 2006, it was found that 48 of the 65 blocks of the neighborhood were occupied by vendors (CEDICE, El Nacional, July, 30, 2006).

This market has been the site of great repression as the national police arrived at random times to “clean-up” the streets by removing stalls, destroying merchandise, and harassing vendors. That said, the random sweeps, as opposed to a complete removal, allowed vendors to return intermittently to the site until 2008. This also meant that vendors could rely on this section of the city as a “fall back” location. While vendors negotiated with government officials for *centros comerciales* in other parts of the city, they could still keep a small hustle in the historic center. “Until today, we knew that we could come here, work a full day, and feed our kids at night... now we have nothing, not a place, not our merchandise, and since we are both the mother and father of our families, no food for our babies” (Umbelina 2008).

On January 3, 2008, municipal mayor Freddy Bernal, with the public support of Chávez, passed Municipal Decree 278, which barred street vendors from occupying any space in the historic heart of the municipality to sell their goods. The municipal government was offered an opening to forcibly remove vendors because their political support was no longer needed, after the final national referendum to reconstitute Venezuela’s constitution had failed one month earlier.

At 6 am on January 3rd, I received a call from Federico, one of my vendor contacts from the center of the city. He owns a stall where both he and his eldest son sell cell phone covers, cords, and batteries. He is also one of the lead organizers of vendors in this neighborhood and a prominent advocate for the creation of replacement locations for vendors to sell their goods. In his early 50s, Federico looks 10 years older with his weathered skin and stained mouth and teeth from smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. He is a high school graduate and his son has a technical degree in computer repair, but after he was “retired” from a job as the security guard of a private bank, a neighbor suggested he work as a street vendor until he “figures out what he’s going to do”. That was in 1995.

Federico continues to work as a street vendor because he has not been able to find a job that pays him as much as he makes as a vendor. When I asked him about the possibility of participating in a government program, popularly known as *misiones* or missions, established to provide advanced training and educational opportunities to poor Venezuelans, he along with many other vendors, emphasized that they “aren’t worth anything” because there are no real jobs connected to what people are learning and the subsidies are inconsistent and do not cover the cost of basic goods. He always points to his son, who arrives at 5 am most mornings to set up their stall and merchandise, as an example of the incomplete training policies.

His voice that morning was urgent and rushed, as he told me how the police and government officials came in the early morning hours, tore down all of the stalls, and

took away all of the containers that vendors use to keep their goods. By the time I arrived downtown the usual bustle of the city, where ladies are pulling thermoses full of sweet black coffee up and down the main street and vendors are setting up tables, hanging up clothes along racks, or organizing their goods underneath tarps, was nowhere to be found. In its place, I found mini-police stations, with two armed police under a tarp, on every corner across the expanse of downtown Caracas, there to “discourage vendors from returning to the streets of downtown” (Deputy Vargas 2008). The unexpected removal of street vendors from this site and the lack of replacement locations or employment opportunities resulted in weeks of clashes, negotiations, counter clashes, and a set of promises by city officials to create replacement locations for the removed vendors. The following section will outline these events in greater detail.

On the morning of Saturday, January 5th, displaced vendors took to the streets of the city “claiming their right to work on the streets because there is no place else to work” (Marisol 2008). Massive containers of garbage were set on fire in the “rescued” sites and vendors threatened *guarimbas* or violent blockades of key areas of the city, reminiscent of *El Caracazo*, unless the government of Freddy Bernal met with vendors and revoked Decree 278. In response to vendor's protests and threats, the municipal government organized a series of roundtables to establish a “dialogue with vendors” in order to “reach a solution that will work for all of the parties impacted by the relocation” (Wilfredo Zambrano 2008). Performing these dialogues in the public’s eye was an important aspect of the removal because of the sheer number of vendors. The city could not hide this process or make the problem disappear because of the visibility of vendors, as well as the fact that most of the working poor, a strong electoral base for Chávez, are connected to someone who works in the informal economy.

At the time of removal there were an estimated 7,000 vendors in the center of the city alone (El Universal 2007/Vendor Census La Candelaria). There are an estimated 500,000 street vendors throughout the metropolitan area of Caracas, which includes four municipalities and El Libertador with a total population estimated at 5.5 million people (CEDICE 2007). Women represent 58% of street vendors and two-thirds of vendors are between the ages of 15 and 39 in the historic center (García 2006). The government-initiated dialogues were organized by neighborhood in which vendors worked and performed on the stage of the municipal theatre. The dialogues ran up to three hours per area and the key purpose of these meetings “was to have street vendors comment on the process of removal and propose alternatives” (Zambrano 2008).

As one vendor commented after the full round of dialogues occurred:

On the first day all of the officials were there except the mayor and Wilfred Zambrano [president of the corporation of municipal services], the second day there were only 4 of

the 6 officials, the fourth day there were 3 of the six officials, and by the last day it was the secretary and some *gente cualquiera* [literally nobodies] from the communal councils and a city secretary taking notes.

From the outset of the process of removing vendors from the Cazco Historico, there was a palpable tension between the government's project to shift power to the citizens in the form of "popular power" and the desire of vendors to take that power into their own hands and enforce constitutional laws, which explicitly outlined their right to work on the streets of the city. Although I will provide a deeper analysis of popular power in the following chapter, it is important to note how these dialogues demonstrated the limits of the discourse. First, as public officials pointed to the "people" to establish responsibility and "take initiative for their future, it was made clear that "the people" had no political or economic capital to actually influence the institutions that determine their well-being. In this case, vendors did not have the agency or know-how to enforce the constitution.

Second, those who fit the category of "the people" changed constantly. Initially, the discussion of vending was centered on access to dignified work, so that vendors were examples of "the people" who has historically been denied the right to good work. Today the government, both nationally and municipally, focuses less on work and more on access to public spaces. "Compatriots are not allowed to walk in a dignified way on the sidewalks, so this removal is what the people want" (Juan Pablo Torres Delgado, El Libertador Ombudsman).

On the morning of January 15th, one of the tenets of popular power, the right of the people to protest and make claims against the state, was put to the test when vendors declared a peaceful protest against Decree 278 and the municipal government. Vendors in grey t-shirts, to show that they were organized by neither the PSUV (who usually wear red shirts) nor its opposition (who usually wear black shirts), took to the streets in the early morning to show their sheer numbers and ask that they be allowed to work until an alternative to the streets was made available. As one vendor remarked, "I am both the mother and the father of my house and work on the streets to feed the four mouths I have to feed. My kids and their stomachs will not be filled with promises and dialogues" (Yanadir 2008).

Halfway through their protest route they encountered a wall of municipal police, national guardsman, and other security forces who would not allow them to "exercise their rights to protest or meet with political officials"(Maracucho 2008). In what felt like exaggerated waves of militarized bodies, the security forces lined up in order to protect the public from the potential violence of the vendors who were "out of control political actors" according to Freddy Bernal in that morning's headlines (El Universal, January 15,

2008). In all public discussions prior to the march, vendors and city officials agreed that this would be the day that removed vendors would submit a relocation plan to municipal officials, which would offer an alternative to selling their goods on the streets. After trying to figure out which “popular” government entity the proposal would be submitted to and how vendors might move through the mass of security, only two vendors were allowed to pass the police barricades and, in an unceremonious response, the defenders of “people's power” took the document produced over hours of unpaid work and turned their backs to the vendors.

That proposal, like the millions of others they asked for was *engavetada* (placed in a drawer) and we keep waiting for a response. We've done everything they asked and all I want to know is 'where are our centros? Freddy Bernal stole that money and kicked us off the streets because nothing was being done with the government's money. He didn't have any other choice (Yanice 2008).

In the days after the cleanup, every level of government publicly announced its support for the decree. Associating vendors with increases in urban violence, coordinated drug mafias and cartels, and the piles of garbage strewn throughout Caracas, political officials called this a turning point in the fight to “humanize Caracas”(Bernal 2008).

The counter-case to the removal of vendors from the Cazco Historico was the removal of vendors from Sabana Grande. This market spanned the boulevard Sabana Grande and was the largest informal market in the city until it became a site of urban intervention and transformation. Sabana Grande was developed as a pedestrian commercial corridor with small clothing stores, cafes, and repair shops in the ground floors of high-rise apartments.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, Sabana Grande was the place to see and be seen in Caracas, as families and couples spent their weekends and evenings sitting in the outdoor cafes and window-shopping along the street. As was the case with other parts of the city, the emergence of street vendors occurred alongside the imposition of the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s. By 2005, the boulevard, its sidewalks, and open spaces were filled with vendors. By the time the Chávez government chose it as a test site for the formalization of vendors, it was the largest vending area in the country. The formalization of these vendors was necessary as part of the political project to clean-up the city. This was a strange clean-up project, since in the wake of vendor removal there were still mounds of uncollected garbage on the city streets, gutters and sewers throughout the city center were open to urban waste, and the river that crosses the city was filled with floating plastic bottles, diapers, and cans.

The PSUV urban government pulled together a plan whereby the city government would use an unoccupied piece of city property and build a mini commercial center filled with kiosks where vendors could move if they qualified for a micro-loan that would function as the mortgage for a kiosk that a vendor might eventually own. After publicizing this agreement that vendors would be able to access a relocation site within a couple of years, the street vendors of Sabana Grande were completely removed through a process of organization and mobilization on behalf of city government officials and vendor's union leaders in early 2005.

By late summer 2008, a fraction of the promised commercial centers had actually been developed. These *centro comerciales* are located far from the city center, where the foot traffic is minimal. City officials opened the sites to a lottery system claiming that all vendors would not be able to be relocated. They hand-picked a few of the vendor leaders, who began a public campaign against the practice of vending, became leader of communal councils, or found themselves as paid political appointees of the government. The last official census of vendors concluded that there were an average of three thousand vendors selling on Sabana Grande every day prior to their removal, yet their replacement sites only provided enough space for five hundred vendors (plus additional spaces allotted to vendors with disabilities). As the original vendors make claims via the morass of official channels that have been established "as their voice", the mayor is calling this the reclaiming of "privatized space".

These two cases of removal came into contact with each other soon after the protest of vendors from the Cazco Historico, described earlier. On January 15, 2008, the municipal and high mayoral offices organized a counter protest against vendors. These public officials, who were extolled as heroes for removing vendors, representatives from the communal councils from the historic center of the city who were called upon by government officials to participate along with a random group of representatives from government-sponsored missions, government-funded media, and government-supported public service programs. I will go into this counter-protest in greater detail in the next chapter, but it is important to offer some preliminary points. In interview after interview with protest attendees, it was clear that "the city" was used to describe those who were organizing the protest, it meant the city government. In addition while most *Caraqueños* were happy to be rid of the vendors, they were clear that the government promise to provide employment opportunities for low and moderate income Venezuelans had not been fulfilled.

As I walked through the flurry of Venezuelan flags and perfectly-produced protest placards, I finally understood that vendors had become the counter-point to the project of Revolutionary Urbanism. When newspapers ran headlines calling for the protest against street vendors, they were closely followed with articles outlining the city government's relationship with vendors over the course of 8 years. In one article, the mayor of the

municipality of El Libertador, Fredy Bernal, “confessed that he permitted vendors to stay in Sabana Grande as a political strategy...emphasizing that he awaited the appropriate political moment to eliminate the vendors” (*El Universal* 2008).

REVOLUTIONARY URBANISM

These competing narratives of a battle for public space are important elements for theorizing urban revolution. The streets of Caracas are a symbolic space where the state has tried to impose an urban revolution by “giving back the streets of the city to the people of the city” and where street vendors have tried to make claims to their rights to occupy city space. There are many problems inherent in these claims to a “right to the city”. Neither street vendors nor the state effectively understands the meaning of an urban revolution. Both are meaning to capitalize on urban space though by different means. Neither street vendors nor the state understands the limits of its approach through a framework of popular power, and both- one through imposition and the other by reproducing exploitative relationships- end up parodying market-based measures.

Instead of an urban revolution, the particular nature of what is occurring in Caracas is best understood as Revolutionary Urbanism. The state is using the language of the right to the city and of revolution not as a means of capitalizing on space or as a means of allowing citizens to determine the best use of city streets, but as a way to consolidate its control and concentrate its power. The key aspects of the theorization of the process of the urban revolution are:

- Owners of the means of production dominate the production and experience of urban space.
- The right to the city prioritizes use-value, or the ways in which the collective populace uses space, over exchange-value, which is the use, production, and experience of space for profit.
- The right to the city is juxtaposed against the right to property.

In Caracas, the theoretical framing of the right to the city is not used by the state to meet any of the above ends. Instead, it is used as device to expand the power of the regime. As this framing is enacted through populist systems of service provision and in the larger context of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, it has added an interesting layer to the urban experience in Venezuela. This is where the process of Revolutionary Urbanism is most visible: by connecting the right to the city with the Bolivarian Revolution the valuation of city space is controlled by the regime in order to expand and deepen its presence and power. As a practice it looks like:

- Owners of the means of production dominate the production and experience of urban space.
- The right to the city prioritizes use-value, or the ways in which the collective populace uses space, over exchange-value, which is the use, production, and experience of space for profit for the end of consolidating political power.
- The right to the city is not about a right, but rather about how the regime in power can establish norms of resistance that make it impossible for the people to create an alternative. The regime has established both the norm and the alternative.

Urban Informality

The processes of informalizing urban life are not unique to Venezuela, but share a set of common factors that can help one understand this process in a more complete fashion (Roy & AlSayyad 2004). Nor is the process of informalization a new process, but the current moment of urban informality gives us a look into the new imperatives of the state and the market. These new imperatives are closely tied to the global movement towards “globalization and liberalization”(Roy and AlSayyad 2004, 5). Urban informality is an “organizing urban logic”, which “operates within the constant negotiability of value and the unmapping of space” and is simultaneously highly differentiated between types of ‘informal accumulation and politics” (Roy and AlSayyad 2004, 5).

Calcutta, for example bears an uncanny resemblance to the case of Caracas and the comparison offers a number of lessons (Roy 2004). Calcutta has a government whose discourse is strongly socialist, yet initiates a process of cleaning up the city by removing petty traders from city streets. Hawkers were previously organized by the government and became an imaginary political force with their power lying mostly within the parameters of state operation and their ability to “negotiate” with political figures. As the state realizes the need to take back the city streets from vendors, the “bourgeois city was reclaimed through the politics of leftist radicalism”(Roy 2005, 148). This urban conflict rolled out simultaneously with a peri-urban conflict over settlement sites for urban squatters. In Calcutta, “New Communism is a moment of great spatial creativity, with the regime moving the poor around, forging developmental alliances, and in many ways replicating capitalism’s own breathless imperative for greenfield sites” (Roy 2004, 155). The story of Calcutta, and its commonalities with Caracas, demonstrates how theories of urban informality allow scholars from across the world to make connections about the vulnerabilities created by capitalism, the role of the state in managing those vulnerabilities, and the reactions and strategies of the urban poor in these process. This street view and understanding of urban informality, coupled with theories of structural power focusing on the market and the state, allow us to understand how the Chávez government is able to make promises of people’s power while kicking vendors off the streets.

Urban informality in Caracas assumes similar characteristics to informality in Calcutta. The leftist regime creates the language of resistance and engagement and moves people around the city under the revolutionary imperative of returning the city to the people. The main difference is that instead of engaging in this process for the sake of replicating market valuation of urban space, it does so to consolidate power. Although there is no doubt that the government in Calcutta was moving from a place of similar interest, in Caracas the alternatives to street vendors are empty streets, little pedestrian movement in commercial corridors, and no real attempt to improve the façade of these environments.

Using Neo-Marxism on the People

Marxists have been concerned with the structure by which owners of the means of production are able to accumulate wealth. The location of this process is the market and at times the state. The spatial turn in the study of capital accumulation occurs in the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Neil Smith. Instead of shifting their focus, neo-Marxists add a geographic layer to the understanding of capital accumulation, economic crisis, and dispossession. Neo-Marxists understand that the “temporal rhythms of capital investment, accumulation and logic are matched by a geographical logic of economic investment and decline”(Johnston 2000, 487). Essentially, as a crisis of capitalism occurs within financial markets, a shift occurs to invest heavily or focus on the production of space. Cities are central to this logic.

Marxists argue that history has different phases and that each phase has a different geography. Neo-Marxists argue that space drives the modes of economic production and that the urban economy is central to the ways we experience the world around us. Just as traditional Marxists call for a revolution driven by the proletariat or the working masses taking control of the means of production, neo-Marxists call for an urban revolution where space is no longer a commodity whose value and use is determined by market forces, but where collectives of people determine the best use of that space (Harvey 2008). Now we see the state in Venezuela making the case for an urban revolution whereby urban citizens reclaim their right to the city and determine non-market values of city space. Yet this revolutionary slogan is used to remove street vendors. Chávez is teetering on a fine line: he uses the discourse of neo-Marxists to justify the removal of street vendors, yet has not addressed the central issue of Marxism concerned with wealth accumulation and dispossession. He uses the “right to the city” to conceal his inability to meet his constitutional decree of the right to work.

This is where the work of Foucault, as used by Roy, is critical for understanding how the state uses language of “inclusion and participation” and “the right to the city” as a technique to manage citizens, create an environment of self-governing, and expand its control. In *Civic Governmentality: The Politics of Inclusion in Beirut and Mumbai*, Roy examines the production of the “inclusive city”: a city which governed by inclusion and

people's participation, yet whose material reality reflects deep inequality and indifference. Governmentality is the assemblage of power constituted by government, sovereignty, and discipline. It is how these concepts are embodied through institutions and individuals to create norms in behavior, interaction, and engagement. Civic governmentality is understood to be the "spatialized regime that functions through particular mentalities or rationalities" (Roy 2008). She argues that the regimes of civic governmentality exist not only in the state nor solely in the communities, but rather they permeate across urban institutions and reinforce their boundaries, definitions, and modes of operation. The result on the people is that:

Within regimes of civic governmentality, the urban subject is simultaneously empowered and self-disciplined, civil and mobilized, displaced and compensated. Such contradictions constitute the politics of inclusion and indicate the ways in which urban struggles involve much more than "inside" and "outside" geographies. There is a great deal to be learned about power and authority by studying how subjects and spaces come to be "inside" the project of citizenship (Roy 2008).

In Venezuela, civic governmentality takes the shape of the state extending itself into communities as an agent defining the parameters of community organizing, radical citizenship, and participatory democracy. The result is that as the state extols its projects of a "right to the city", expanding People's Power, "humanizing the streets," and dignified work, community institutions reinforce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within these projects and creates parallel projects creating self-governed citizens. The citizen that is produced is "simultaneously the disciplined subject and the willful subject, the empowered subject and the obedient subject, the desiring subject and the altruistic subject" (Roy 2008).

The practices of Revolutionary Urbanism are situated squarely between the work of Roy and Lefebvre. In his introduction to the 2003 printing of Henri Lefebvre's *The Urban Revolution*, Neil Smith writes:

For Lefebvre...space holds the promise of liberation: liberation from the tyranny of time apart from anything else, but also from social repression and exploitation, from self-imprisoning categories—liberation into desire. Space is radically open for Lefebvre; he refuses precisely the closure of space that so dominated western thinking and in some circles continues to do so. (Lefebvre 2003, xiii)

What happens when the space of the city is less the site of urban revolution and more the

product of Revolutionary Urbanism? As the government begins to imagine what Venezuelan cities should look like, what claims do vendors have to produce urban space? What if the “right to produce space” results in the continued capitalist exploitation of the urban poor as they view the street as one of the very few places left for employment? How does the regime’s usage of this framework and language produce a specific kind of citizen? What are the implications for those who are understood to be on the outside of these citizenship norms?

The theoretical argument that the production, use, and management of urban space should be determined by its use-value, or the value ascribed to the city by urban citizens versus private market forces, attempts to create fixed parameters around each of these valuations without taking into account the reality that each of these can have influence over the other. The case of Caracas is often confused as an example of the urban revolution as scholars point to the citizen-based mandates to occupy public space for art performances or for public education campaigns, but these cases are deeply embedded in a larger political project of Revolutionary Urbanism.

Revolutionary Urbanism can be described as the project of the state to perform the spectacle of revolution on the street of the city. In reality, this project of Revolutionary Urbanism employs a set of neoliberal policies of clean-up, adjustment, and displacement in order to continue valuing urban space through a revolutionary aesthetic. By removing vendors the regime can claim a revolutionary victory. Similar to the cases of vendor removal in cities like New York, homeless removal in San Francisco, California, or squatter removal in Calcutta, the imperative of the state is to use the space of the city to demonstrate a specific level of development.

The problem with the project of development, which relies on a single trajectory of economic growth, is that it cannot be achieved without underdevelopment. The case of street vending in Caracas is a perfect example of this process. Initially, the government needed the political support of vendors. It pointed to vendors as remnants of the failures of the previous political project in Venezuela with the hopes of using them in the future as examples of successes of the revolution. Yet after few economic successes and little programs in socializing the national economy over the course of 8 years, the Chávez government found the continued presence of vendors to be an embarrassing sign of its inability to realize its primary mandate of redistributing the wealth of the nation to those who most needed it. As vendors continue to occupy the streets of the city, in some of the most vulnerable economic conditions and precarious physical locations, the government has failed in meeting its goal. This is the dilemma of street vending in Caracas.

The rapid transformation of vendors from the heroic urban poor who suffered under the hand of neoliberal reforms in the 1970s and 80s to the economic and social plague that was privatizing urban space and restricting its use by “everyday citizens” is the result of the state’s failure. The project of Revolutionary Urbanism is one that exposes the limits of Chávez’s urban revolution by shedding light on the ways competing social, economic, and political forces are connected and how it can be used to perpetuate the social relations that neo-Marxists scholars are writing against. In the remaining chapters of this

dissertation, I will describe the mechanisms used by the government to legitimize the removal of vendors in order to “clean up” the city and develop urban space in the city of Caracas for the market forces it claims to be working against.

In the following chapter, I will offer an analysis of people’s power, the discursive and policy device used by the government to legitimize its actions. I will continue the narrative of street vending began in this chapter by looking at what happens after vendor removal. I will then look at the results of the government’s conflicting norms and policies by laying out the clashes on the street that ensued and how they have understood by street vendors, the mainstream opposition media, and government officials.

CHAPTER II:
PEOPLE'S POWER

Beyond the difficulties associated with Latin America's vanishing horizon of infinite promises, it is necessary to pay attention to the multiplicity of the region's trajectories and paradoxes. In many of these countries, the emergence of possibilism reveals itself as having multiple forms, but it often exhibits a singular populist habit (Santiso 2006, 183).

In this chapter, I explore how the state employs the language of people's power as a strategy to manage its conflict with street vendors. This will be coupled with a look into how the local and national governments have juxtaposed those who participate in the state's service and political missions against those who work in the informal economy. By using people who participate in missions on the frontlines of anti-vendor protests and vendor removal, the state has effectively organized people with similar class interests against each other. This act of pitting people with common class interests against each other is a common feature of traditional nature of populism of the content. Yet, as Santiso notes in *Latin America's Political Economy of the Possible*, the shift to the left has particular manifestations in each particular country. In Venezuela, petro-populism has emerged as the order of the day.

Populism

Many scholars use the concept of populism to explain a common form of political leadership in Latin America, specifically a type of leadership that draws people to support leaders through the use of rhetorical style. Carlos de la Torre describes populism as "a style of political mobilization based on strong rhetorical appeals to the people and crowd action on behalf of a leader...Populist rhetoric radicalizes the emotional element of common to all political discourses" (de la Torre 2000, 4). He offers a rich understanding of populist moments in the region. His research moves beyond studying "a phase of Latin America or nationalist redistributive state policies, or a form of political discourse" he instead studied "the relationship between leaders and followers and the specific forms of political incorporation in contemporary Latin America" (de la Torre 2000, 8). He argues that the main legacy of *populist seduction* in Latin America has been to "create a style of political mobilization and a rhetoric that link the state and civil society through mechanisms that do not correspond to the rule of law or respect for liberal democratic procedures" (de la Torre 2000, 10).

This is clearly the case in Venezuela. In Venezuela, populism has historically been a system of state patronage where employment and services are given to individuals dependent on their ability to turn out votes or provide popular support for a particular political agenda. The only difference today is that this patronage runs through state sponsored missions that are controlled by community leaders.

Additionally, Laclau argues that populism has no geographic or temporal boundaries, rather that its features are seen across differing political moments, places, and actors. His work offers an analysis of existing literature on populism and the formation of popular and mass identity. In his reading, populism should be understood “not as a type of organization or ideology to be compared to other types such as liberalism, conservatism, communism, or socialism, but as a *dimension of political culture* which can be present in movements of quite different ideological sign” (Laclau 2005, 15), making populism a useful and important descriptor for the appeal of leaders in democracies as well as under authoritarian regimes. This is manifested in extra-governmental systems that provide benefits upon popular support for political imperatives. As such, populism is not “just a sociological concept, but rather an actual experience of people who have defined and do define their collective identities through populist participation” (de la Torre 2000, 4).

The city is a critical place for understanding the current manifestation of populism in Latin America. With the globalization of capital and rapid urbanization, cities are microcosms of national conflicts as concentrations of people with critical needs try to balance a relationship with states seeking to maintain its power. This has resulted in a new type of populism marked by the connection and interaction between the “city and the grassroots” (Castells 1983, 175). This particular manifestation of urban populism is prolifically described in Manuel Castells’ *The City and the Grassroots* as “the process of establishing political legitimacy on the basis of popular mobilization supported by and aimed at the delivery of land, housing, and public services” (Castells 175). The political economy of Caracas adds yet another layer to this urban populism. That of petro-populism.

Petro-populism, in the case of Venezuela, is best described as the targeted use of petroleum revenues to reinforce a national identity, being, and clientelistic network. “Clientelism is understood as one of the central elements of the populist appeal” (Auyero 2000, 20). Since the early 20th century, petroleum has greased the wheels of political institutions and leaders have leveraged these resources to buttress their power. One example of petro-populism in the time of Chávez is the way that state services and grant organizing are only available to people who organize within state sanctioned cooperatives or local organizing machines such as missions or communal councils. This system of clientelistic redistribution is not able to transform the extreme wealth inequality of Venezuela nor can it mitigate the social and economic challenges faced by Caracas’ urban poor. It does little to transform the macro-economic context in which Venezuelans exist or address issues of employment and inflation. It actually perpetuates continued disparities, as the rich continue to build wealth from the petroleum economy and auxiliary industries such as banking while the poor have less and less access to wealth. As Christian Parenti notes in his widely-read article on the topic:

...Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution... has deepened and politicized a pre-existing tradition of Venezuelan populism. Despite Chávez's often radical discourse, the government has not engaged in mass expropriations of private fortunes, even agricultural ones, nor plowed huge sums into new

collectively owned forms of production (Parenti 2005, 1).

This chapter introduces the Chávez populist machine by looking at the way popular power has legitimized a new system of patronage. This system uses the ambiguity of the law to manage the lives of urban citizens, in this case street vendors. Starting with an overview of how Chávez came to power in Venezuela the discussion goes on to outline the constitutional mechanisms of popular power and the ways the state has used these to initially support vendors and in the current moment as a tool against street vendors. An exploration of the competing camps of popular power that the state has created follows, highlighting how the state has explicitly pitted street vendors against members of state sanctioned missions and communal councils. In particular, this section will document how state forces have mobilized the latter to push vendors off of the street. The chapter closes with a rich description of the spectacles of popular power recounted through the various protests that emerged after the street vendors were removed from the Cuzco Historico market.

On the Scene: Revolution in Venezuela

Hugo Chávez emerged as the central character of Venezuela's current political movement in 1992, as the leader of a failed military coup, organized in the wake of popular upheaval against neoliberalization- *El Caracazo*. As outlined in the previous chapter, during the thirty years prior to this movement, Venezuela was internationally highlighted as a stable democracy and an example of a nation where capitalism's marriage to democratic processes, within what has often been noted as the chaotic third world, was effective. In its early inception, the Pact of Punto Fijo functioned as a stabilizing force, shifting political power from the military to civilian control and creating openings, no matter how small, for civic participation. The history of dictatorships resulted in a fragile social and economic landscape where political leaders attempted to manage social expectations by limiting civic engagement.

Fernando Coronil describes the political pact that resulted in this so-called stable democracy:

...the major representatives of the democratic parties sought to avoid what its leaders regarded as the two major dangers facing democracy: the return to military rule, widely regarded as the 'homicidal path' and the recurrence of sectarian party politics... called the 'suicidal path'... They decided to join efforts to secure a harmonious transition to democratic regime by means of a free electoral contest, but one without absolute losers. All the parties (except the Communist Party), it was agreed, would have a share of power and of its responsibilities and benefits, regardless of which candidate won. The private sector would have significant participation in the government and voice in policy making (Coronil 1997, 217).

The Pact of Punto Fijo emerged in response to a 20th century political landscape mired with caudillos, military dictators, and oil wealth that set Venezuela apart from any other country in the region. In order to maintain civilian control, the major political parties argued that they needed a type of power-sharing agreement in order to be able to come together in moments where threats by military control were imminent. The fragility of civilian rule and the system established to maintain power was central to the emergence of Hugo Chávez. While the members of the Pact worried about military interventions, the fall of the two-party system resulted from international and multinational intervention. To allow for a more complete understanding of the shift from Pact Rule to Chávez rule and the emergence and maintenance of petro-populism as a tool for managing the citizens of Venezuela, a recap of the four periods of nation building and political establishment that preceded the late 20th century is necessary.

The first period spans the first quarter of the 20th century, between 1908 and 1935, when the brutal dictatorial rule of Juan Vicente Gómez resulted in the selling off of newly discovered oil wealth to private corporations from the United States and Europe in order to increase his personal wealth and consolidate his power over the nation. In his book on the political history of Venezuela and its ties to petroleum, Romulo Betancourt describes Gómez as “something more than a local despot, he was the instrument of foreign control of the Venezuelan economy, the ally and servant of powerful outside interests.”

Continuing with this theme, Fernando Coronil writes:

The abrupt transformation of Venezuela from indebted agricultural nation into a wealthy oil exporter took place during General Juan Vicente Gómez’s rule. While Gómez provided the oil companies with what was widely regarded as an exceptionally advantageous investment climate, the oil companies established political and economic conditions that helped consolidate his dictatorial rule and turned him into one of America’s wealthiest men. During this formative period, the Gómez regime and the... oil companies conditioned each other. Together, they defined the social landscape in which Venezuelans began to recognize the elusive presence of oil and to fashion their identity as citizens of an oil nation (Coronil 1997, 68).

His death resulted in the opening of political society and the organization of popular movements against what were identified as the institutional relics of *gomecismo*. It took just over ten years for these popular movements to fully transform into political parties and to create a space for them to shape the institutional landscape of Venezuela. Nevertheless those in control had to shift the political terrain and open up spaces for people’s participation in elections and access to the wealth of the nation. But the openings that resulted were short-lived. After three short years of democratic rule, from 1945 to 1948, in which Romulo Gallegos, Venezuela’s leading social author, public intellectual, and the main leader of the movement to democratize Venezuela, another

dictatorship gripped the nation.

The second period from 1952-1958, was ushered in by the dictatorship of Marco Perez Jimenez, which brought Caracas to the forefront of political life as major investments were made in the infrastructure as well as a major expansion of public space. As Alejandro Velasco writes in a forthcoming book, “When Pérez Jiménez and a cadre of mid-level military officers ended a brief post-war democratic regime in 1948, they came to rule over a rapidly urbanizing country in the midst of an oil boom.” Although the boom in petroleum production occurred some years before, it was under the thumb of Jimenez that there was the first concerted effort to use oil revenue to transform the capital city into a reflection of oil wealth by pouring wealth into the modernization of urban infrastructure. By modernizing the physical landscape of the city, Jimenez produced spectacles of economic development that he argued would be linked to a project of social modernization and development. Theories of spectacle, and in particular spectacle of capital sites of consumption and accumulation, are critical in this area as they shed light on how the project of modernity was not for all those impacted by new forms and functions of development, but as Guy Debord asserts:

The spectacle’s social function is the concrete manufacture of alienation. Economic expansion consists primarily of the expansion of this particular sector of industrial production. The ‘growth’ generated by an economy developing for its own sake can be nothing other than a growth of the very alienation that was at its origin (DeBord 1983, 16).

This rang true for Jimenez’s signature infrastructure project: A housing project composed of 78 fifteen-story super blocks so massive that its units were able to house 12% of Caracas’ 1957 population (D’Imperio 1995, 64). The housing project, which was initially named the 2nd of December after the date on which Perez Jimenez took the control of the country, was thought to be the pillar of his assertion that material achievements should be the centerpiece of any modern government.

It was this pillar that would eventually result in the demise of the dictatorial regime. On January 23, 1958, the people who inhabited the units of the modern housing project organized a mass revolt against the regime, resulting in the ouster of Marcos Perez Jimenez and a new period of democracy. The units were renamed January 23rd in remembrance of this date and would, from this point forward, represent a stronghold of popular left movements as well as the centerpiece of urban hope and anxiety. Hope, because it was home to some of the most progressive social and political activity in the country; anxiety, because it was the greatest concentration of urban poverty, violence, and crime.

In the third period between 1958 and 1998, after the ouster of Perez Jimenez, it became clear that “the demand...for the restoration of constitutional rights was inseparably linked to the right to benefit from the nation’s wealth; political wealth included the economic

entitlement to the nation's collective wealth" (Coronil 1997, 211). The leaders, organizations, and collective political movements that emerged after the end of the first dictatorial period reemerged to facilitate the instatement of these institutional relationships and norms. The two leading political parties, Accion Democratica (AD) & Partido Cristiano Social de Venezuela (COPEI), organized a strategic pact, that allowed each of them to govern while producing the façade of democratic participation by holding elections, building regulatory agencies, and redistributing a part of the country's vast oil wealth. In reality, the country experienced the entrenchment of state patronage networks underwritten by petroleum revenues, which rewarded those who supported the government, and the expansion of state repressive forces like the secret police to manage the opposition by violent means.

Coronil makes an apt allusion to colonial projects, noting that in, "Latin America the aspiration to overcome underdevelopment has often turned into an insidiously tragic means of continuing the conquest and colonization by its own hand, of recognizing itself in other histories, and therefore misrecognizing the history that unfolds in its own land" (Coronil 229, 1997). The pact, which lasted 40 years, would eventually be brought down by the ensuing IMF-directed structural adjustment interrupted the patronage networks of the state and led to political leaders attempting to amass personal wealth and cut "the people" out of the deal. The opening for international intervention and the collapse of the established political system launched the fourth period in Venezuela's political history in 1989.

The decline of the pact-democracy in the 1980s revealed the delicate nature of political power, institutions, and petro-populism. As the state took on more and more international debt and sacrificed its autonomy, it lost its ability to use petroleum rents to maintain the patronage system it had so carefully established over 40 years. This led to the popular revolt of *El Caracazo*. By 1992, the nation was ripe for the change that led to the emergence of Hugo Chávez. The Chávez-led coup failed, but catapulted him to the national political stage as an agent of change.

As part of a regional rebellion against the politics of US and IMF domination, the rise of Chávez is an important chapter in Latin America's shift to the left. In the 1990s left-leaning elected officials emerged throughout most of South and Central America, as a wave against the interventionist strategies of the United States. James Petras comments:

The triumphalist rhetoric emanating from Washington that celebrates the victory of 'free markets and free elections' is premature. There is another reality found in the growing electoral and extraparliamentary opposition demanding participatory democracy and social equality. In Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and elsewhere, new pragmatic Center-Left alliances have emerged to challenge the incumbent neoliberal regimes (Petras 2000, 1).

Chávez is situated squarely in these trends of rejecting US intervention and the

emergence of leaf-leaning leaders in the region and has been a leading figure in the new political terrain in the region. That said, these shifts have often materialized more as populist discourse than real steps to engage citizens in the political process or engage in a proactive strategy of economic redistribution. The case of street vendors and their right to occupy urban space demonstrates this quite clearly.

People's Power as a Constitutional Transformation

Throughout their battles for the streets of the city, the government and street vendors have relied on the concept of People's Power to argue that each has a greater right than the other to determine the best use for city streets. Before 1998, People's Power was a discursive device used by the governing parties to point to the ways that Venezuelan citizens were determining their political fate—even when they weren't. With the ascendance of Hugo Chávez, the discourse of People's Power was transformed into a legally binding relationship and integrated into a new constitution, which was, in its most complete form, a representation of the people's vision for a government of Venezuela. This section details the process of developing a new constitution and outlines the elements that directly impact the lives of street vendors. The purpose of introducing this historical background is to demonstrate how the battle for the streets allows us to capture the essence of a popular discussion in contrast to the market reality of popular power. This is a market reality as political participation results in direct economic gains and returns.

In early 1999, after months of disputes over whether the new regime had the right to transform the existing government structure, Chávez held a national referendum with two questions pertaining to his government's ability to draw up a new constitution. This constitution would be radically different than any other in Venezuela's history. Instead of being written by government insiders or political agents, this constitution would be the product of a popular voice. As in many of the elections held in this period, popular support was overwhelming, with 86% of Venezuelans voting to support the creation of a constitutional assembly whose members would be voted on nationally and whose role it would be to write a constitution that included the rights and responsibilities of all Venezuelans. All in all, "24 members to the assembly were elected nationally, three as representatives of the indigenous population, and the rest, 104, were elected as representatives from their respective states" (Wilpert 2003).

Within six months, the assembly pulled together a document in which the rights of all Venezuelans were delineated, but where the enforcement mechanisms that would ensure that the most vulnerable citizens were protected were unclear at best and completely neglected in the worst cases. Some notable transformations were that international treaties would have the same weight as the national constitution, the CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) definition of gender discrimination was included in the constitution, and that two new governmental responsibilities would be added to the national government: electoral power and people's power.

People's Power is defined in article 184 of the new constitution, which is outlined below:

Open and flexible mechanisms shall be created by law to cause the States and Municipalities to *decentralize and transfer to communities and organized neighborhood groups services the latter manage and demonstrate the ability to provide, promoting: The transfer of services in the areas of health, education, housing, sports, culture, social programs, the environment, maintenance of industrial areas, maintenance and upkeep of urban areas, neighborhood prevention and protective services, construction of works projects and providing of public services.*

To this end, they shall have the power to enter into agreements, whose content shall be guided by the principles of interdependence, coordination, cooperation and shared responsibility. Participation by communities and citizens, through neighborhood associations and nongovernmental organizations, in the formulation of investment proposals for presentation before the state and municipal authorities in charge of preparing the pertinent investment plans, as well as participation in the execution, evaluation and control of works projects, social programs and public services within their jurisdiction.

Participation in economic processes, stimulating manifestations of the social economy, such as cooperatives, saving funds, mutual funds and other forms of association. Participation by workers and communities in the running of public sector business enterprises, through self-management and joint management methods. Creation of community service enterprises, organizations and cooperatives as mechanisms to generate employment and social welfare, providing for their permanent existence through the design of policies whereby these groups are given means of participating. Creation of new decentralized organs at the parish, community, ward and neighborhood levels, with a view to guaranteeing the principle of shared responsibility in the public administration of local and state governments, and developing process of self-management and joint management in the administration and control of state and municipal public services.

Participation by communities in activities to establish closer ties with penal institutions and ties between the latter and the general population. (Venezuelan Constitution,

Article 184)

The production of popular power outside of Chávez's discourse and into an actual lever of the nation's legal apparatus transformed the actions in which peoples and community-organizations could use to engage the social, political, and physical world around them. In theory, the idea was that non-governmental organizations, co-ops, and community-based groups would no longer work in opposition to the government or operating at the behest of the government; rather, they would be independent and self-directing actors and agents within the government. By this constitutional reform, Venezuela experienced a boom in people set to engage the state as legal stakeholders.

Street vendors looked at this as an opportunity to legitimize their working practices by organizing into cooperatives based in specific neighborhoods, but these vehicles for popular power were not as effective as they imagined. Vendors organized co-ops and even pushed for a Ministry of the Popular Economy, but their organizations were never fully sanctioned or supported by the state as formal members of the system of missions and communal councils, which were organized networks of people working together to influence public policy. These co-ops were loose organizations and created leadership structures similar to that of labor unions. By identifying the most outspoken and longer term street vendors each from specific neighborhoods (similar to labor union locals, but at a different scale) the hope was that these co-ops could organize a platform and voice through which their needs could be met. This would have been an actual negotiating arm for street vendors with the state. This was because, as time went on, city government officials who established funding for the missions were vocally opposed to the presence of street vendors. This conflict created by the state between street vendors and members of communal council or missions was made clear in my interviews.

As Maritza, an older resident of the *Candelaria* neighborhood (which sits along one of the vending corridors in the *Cazco Historico*), and a member of the communal council, remarked during a protest in downtown Caracas in early January 2008 opposing the vendors' return to the streets:

They are dirty and thieves. Do you know how many people they steal from every day? They don't really make a living by selling that garbage on the streets... they are organized into mafias and steal from people walking by and some of them are even selling drugs. A lot of them aren't even from here... they are Colombians that are here to sell their drugs and exploit us. You see, why don't they join a government program and learn how to do something legal? They know they won't be able to make money that way and they want things easy.

Mission 2008: Vendor Removal

The centerpiece of the civic engagement programs associated with the popular power branch of government are programs called *Misiones* or missions. Missions “started out as programs aimed at providing health care in the poorest areas in the country, particularly the shantytowns in the cities (*Misión Barrio Adentro*)” (Becerra 2006, 4). Using a model of social development, they were not solely meant for service provision; rather they put the power of determining community needs within reach of residents. Community members worked with healthcare professionals to learn the neighborhood social landscape and reach as many people in need as possible.

“The missions were established to bypass the lethargic bureaucracy of the state, which had remained largely in the hands of the opposition. Thus the educational missions were not run initially by the Ministry of Education nor were the health missions in the hands of the ministry of health. These were the singular products of the Bolivarian Revolution...” (Gott, 2005, 256). As a result of the success of this program, the missions were expanded to other areas, such as literacy, adult education, and the provision of subsidized food. The last was the development of a mission meant to create jobs through the promotion of cooperatives called *Mision Vuelvan Caras*.

Simultaneously, oil revenues transferred into a fund managed by the president, which were supposed to allow the funds to move rapidly to organizations and neighborhoods without moving through the morass of bureaucratic institutions. Amounts spent on these programs is highly contested, as the accounting behind each program in each area is managed differently and the state has not conducted a thorough audit over the course of the six years they have existed. As late as spring 2008, national reports were concluding that no more than 3 % of the Gross Domestic Product is spent on the programs.

Because the dollars spent on the programs are direct revenue from PDVSA, the national petroleum company, spending has risen with the price of oil. As per a report produced by the Venezuelan Information Office, a government-funded entity, “dedicated to informing the American public about contemporary Venezuela”, the impact of this spending has been the following:

- 96% of Venezuelans are now literate;
- Since 2003, doctors in Venezuela have conducted over 40 million free consultations, and health professionals have held millions of educational activities that focus on improving nutrition and preventing high-risk behaviors;
- Over 8 million people are benefiting from a network of 6,000 markets that distribute more than 7 million pounds of food daily;

The government pours millions of dollars into promoting the *Misiones* and their positive impacts; every metro station in the city is plastered with promotional images, and massive billboards, murals, and banners extolling the government’s success in addressing the issues faced by an overwhelming number of Venezuela’s poor. Yet, despite the images of the deserving poor accessing subsidized food or young Venezuelans attending school with free meal programs, there is another reality in Venezuela.

During this same exact period urban violence, extreme poverty, and wealth disparities are still centerpieces of day-to-day life in the city and unemployment remains prominent. In a national study conducted by the Metropolitan University, to explore the nature of the informal economy in Venezuela it was found that over 50% of those peoples currently working within the informal sector were doing so because of an inability to access other employment (El Universal, August 17, 2008). In 2004 scholars estimated informal employment be near 60% of the workforce (Elvira & Davila 2005, 221). As a result, this group sheds light on the larger issues that the national government and its Bolivarian Revolution have not been able to address, such as basic employment and meeting the promise or redistributing capital.

This process of informalizing the labor market was initiated well before the emergence of Chávez and is the result of “the crisis of the 1980s due to the devaluation of the Bolivar in 1982...the counter shock of the petroleum markets in 1987, and budget measures taken by different governments according to Structural Adjustment Plans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)” (Gauvain 2007, 140). That said, measures to create opportunities for formal employment have been minimal and the support of vendors in the initial years of Chávez ’s presidency created a boom in street vendors selling. The result has been the structural marginalization of those who are unemployed in the formal economy and must subsist in the informal sector (Auyero 35, 2000). As missions provide semi-formal methods of employment and participants have been inculcated to believe that street vendors are now the enemy, a conflict between the poor mission participants and poor street vendors has been created.

One of the major complaints against vendors is that “they don’t take advantage of the government programs” and this becomes the reasoning behind why they aren’t only selling goods on the streets, but are also “drug dealers”, “mafia members”, and “thieves”. The vendors’ response to claims that they were not taking advantage of the programs that the state was offering them was countered by vendors who argued that the *becas*, or scholarships to participate in the programs, were not enough to support their families especially since over 50% of vendors are single mothers who need to work as street vendors because it offers the time flexibility to take care of their children while working.

The result of these competing revolutionary realities is: on the one side, a thriving politically mobile segment of poor climbing still living in poverty, and on the other hand, the mass of the poor working on the street in order to scrape by still living in poverty. This has resulted in an intense campaign on behalf of the state to discredit the unemployed poor, the informal poor, and the poor affected by violence in the city. For example, in 2008 Caracas gained notoriety by reaching the number one position in an international assessment of murder in major capital cities. During the month of December 2007, over 500 people were murdered. But even these statistics are underestimates, as the press is not allowed to confirm murders at the coroner’s office and police homicides are not counted, nor are prison murders. Similarly, vendor numbers are greatly underestimated as the state census apparatus does not take into account the number of people working within each stall and does not provide the resources to actually

count the number of vendors on the street.

The result is parallel lives for the urban poor living in Caracas. In the first case, there are those who participate in state missions, are considered heroic, and are held up as emblems of the governing party's success. In the second case, the poor who do not use the programs or actively participate in state initiatives of popular power are considered deviant and are regarded on as forces undermining the revolution. The gulf between the two is revealed by the battle about who has the right to determine the best use of the city's streets.

Although many street vendors and members of missions live in the same exact neighborhoods and are facing the same level of economic disenfranchisement, they are clearly on opposite sides of the fight to determine who has the right to use public space and how. Many mission members understand themselves to be "taking advantage of" public programs and view vendors as not doing enough for themselves in order to meet their needs. Street vendors, on the other hand, talk about their work as the only available way for them to make ends meet and on more than one occasion describe mission members as an intricate family, friend, or neighborhood network with ties to the government and using personal preferences to determine who has access to programs, subsidies, and support. Although this tension arose in my interviews with both street vendors and mission members, there is no visible manifestation of this conflict.

Spectacular Poor: Revolutionaries v.s. Vendors

As described in the previous chapter, after the forced removal of vendors from the Cazco Historico, the majority of vendors engaged in a process established by city officials, which resulted in the highly militarized protest of thousands of vendors. At that time, their proposal was accepted by city officials, but never acknowledged in future proposals for the relocation; nor was it pointed to as an example of vendor initiatives to relocate away from the streets of the city.

In the following weeks, vendors organized a hunger strike that lasted 10 days and called on the municipal mayor to respond directly to their demands. Instead of meeting with the representatives of vendor cooperatives or lead organizing groups, the city government started a campaign to discredit street vendors and placed the representatives of the communal councils of the Cazco Historico and of missions on the frontlines of the campaign. This culminated in a series of anti-vendor protests and public actions where "regular citizens" made clear their support of the city's policy of removing street vendors. The zenith of these efforts was a mass demonstration of anti-vendor people throughout the area where vendors had previously been displaced.

On the morning of January 16, 2008, the national newspapers headline's boomed with declarations of "We Are Taking Back the Streets" and "Reclaiming the City". In many of the articles there were calls to regular citizens to return to the streets so that vendors would not return. Upon arriving at the protests, it was clear that it was state supported as pick-up trucks with speakers, musicians, and Venezuelan flags were strewn throughout the neighborhood. I arrived to one of the protest locations prior to the marchers, and

everything about the event felt spectacular. Unlike the vendor protest, military and police presence was minimal and only present to point protesters in the direction of the march. Many of the businesses along Boulevard Mexico had professionally-made signs that expressed their support for the passage of Decree 278, which outlaws street vending throughout the historical center of the city.

The first thing that struck me, as the protesters grew closer was that on each of their signs was a signature with their neighborhood organization. For example, a common sign read: *'Volvemos a tomar nuestras calles. Si al 278. Parroquia La Candelaria, Consejo Comunal:'* We will take our streets back. Yes to 278. La Candelaria Parrish (Neighborhood), Comunal Council. If signs did not have the neighborhood signature on them, they were overwhelmingly large printed placards with the same message on them: *Queremos una Economia Informal que Dialogue* or We Want an Informal Economy that Dialogues. Pointing to the single vendor protest, the anti-vendor marchers used the moment to point to the “hostile”, “closed”, and “unwilling to dialogue” nature of street vendors.

Even though the city roundtables for vendors were well covered in the press and even though vendors widely publicized their plans for alternate selling locations, the anti-vendor protests pointed to the single public act of protest on behalf of vendors to make a set of claims regarding the hostile nature of street vendors. As I conducted interviews, it was clear that this protest was not the initiative of neighborhood residents or People’s Power in action; rather it was a spectacle called for by the state, which produced protest materials and went so far as to make sure that the messages conveyed to the press and the general public were uniform.

The spectacle of popular power falls in line with Guy Debord’s use of the term to describe modes in which production and consumption are given symbolic meaning beyond maintaining a system to dominate and control. Debord notes,

...the spectacle is both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not the mere decoration added to the real world, it is the very heart of this real society’s unreality. In all of its particular manifestations...the spectacle represents the dominant model of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have *already been made* in the sphere of production and the consumption implied in that production. In both form and content, the spectacle serves as the total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system (Debord 1983, 8).

The soldiers of the spectacle were on the streets to full effect. Marina, a woman in her early 40s, wore a bright red shirt, which is the emblem of those who are part of Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution. We met during my first summer of fieldwork, where she was the lead organizer of one of the education missions in a neighborhood that borders the Cazco

Historico and introduced me to people working on health in her neighborhood. Each of our interactions involved a curious exchange whereby she made clear her commitment to what she calls the “revolutionary process” and where she asked me a series of questions regarding my continued ‘interests’ in studying Venezuela and Caracas (by asking me questions, she insured that I was not part of the opposition media and that I was not a member of any opposition organization, which is common when running in “revolutionary circles” in Caracas). We sat with her daughter in one of the small plazas directly in front of the Parque Carabobo metro station, where the protest was gathering and she outlined why she decided to join the protest:

They called me last night from the communal council and I thought it was important for me to come and support the mayor and the revolution. You know the *buhoneros* were everywhere. Did you ever see them and how they took over every available space? You couldn’t walk down the street in peace without them forcing you to buy something or feeling nervous that they were going to rob one’s stuff. In these days without them everywhere, there is finally room to walk on the sidewalk and the streets aren’t filled with garbage. Everyone from my *parroquia* who is in the missions is here to support too.

When I asked Marina about her own experience with street vendors, she responded:

You know, a lot of my neighbors work on the streets as *buhoneros*. I understand that they need to eat to survive and to pay bills, they need to take care of their kids... all the women that I know who are *buhoneros* do this work because they need to take care of kids and a normal job don’t let them do that... but they are the minority of *buhoneros*.

An older man sitting near us and following the entire conversation chimed in:

The vast majority of them are making money, taking advantage of people and they don’t care about those of us who live in the city. You know they sell drugs through those stands... a lot of the vendors don’t even care about selling, they wash money (launder money)... that’s drug money that is killing these kids on the streets.

I asked Marina what she thought alternatives might be to vending and she responded:

You know, the government developed so many new missions... You don’t have to be a vendor anymore, you

can go back to school, you can start a cooperative, or find work in the *consejo communal*. It's not like before... the government is working for the people and providing opportunities that we never had before. We can do things now that we never imagined before... so if they want to work on the street, it's because that's what they want.

When I asked her about the state's initiative to relocate vendors to new locations, she responded:

That's a perfect example... Chávez has done all he can to make it possible for these people to do other things... but they just aren't interested. You know they built all of the kiosks in *Quinto Crespo* and they keep building more spaces for them, but they don't want that... they want to stay on the street... you know it's hard for them to take responsibility.

Individual responsibility is an underlying theme of the Bolivarian Revolution. Similar to the findings of Nikolas Rose in *The Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* the idea of full access to one's citizenship was contingent on the ability of the individual to conduct one's self in a specific manner and not a given (Rose 199, 93). The argument that I heard time and again from people who were in favor of the government's forcible removal of street vendors fell within the following logic, "if the government provides them with health services, free kindergarten through university education, subsidized food, land rights and titles, and an onslaught of other services, rights, and subsidies, when will they take responsibility and better their lives within what the government has provided?" The most obvious flaw in this argument is that the government is not rolling out these programs and services within a fully socialized economy, wherein these services are coupled with the redistribution of wealth.

In Venezuela, the wealth gap between the richest and the poorest is one of the most extreme in Latin America and was only exacerbated by the arrival of Chávez because the subsidies that kept a middle class afloat were rolled back. In his critical article *An Empty Promise: The Unfulfilled Promise of Hugo Chávez*, Francisco Rodriguez notes that the Gini coefficient (the standard economic measure of inequality, where zero is the ideal) has increased from .44 in 2000 to .48 in 2005 (Rodriguez 2008,5). As an American academic, who left the academy to head a research team under Chávez at the Venezuelan National Assembly (comparable to the United States' Congressional Budget Office), Rodriguez points to the failed promise of redistribution and goes above and beyond economic measures to prove his point. The number of underweight babies, homes no access to running water, and families living in homes with earthen floors have all increased in the short time that Chávez has been in office (Rodriguez 2008, 5).

The government has been able to effectively remove any discussion of class from the vendor debate, or why vendors work on the streets of the city because of lack of access to wealth and employment opportunities, by using socialist rhetoric, vendors are captive to a

fate of the state's design. As the project of transitioning the economy from a purely capitalist model to a Bolivarian socialist model has no real agenda or points in which the transition may be measured the government may talk a socialist talk without any substantive change in how markets operate in the country. This coupled with the fact that petroleum production and engineering are the centerpieces of the Venezuelan economy and those that work within these fields are high skilled technicians who have also been part of the elite opposition of the country, the increase in national wealth has landed into the pockets of the nation's richest people.

The conversation between Marina and I continued in this tenor. She was adamant about demonstrating her support for the government and its efforts to create substantive change within the poorest communities of the city by opening up a set of opportunities that had historically been closed to them. Yet, when asked about the material conditions of those who lived in Petare and 23 de Enero, two of Caracas's poorest and most violent neighborhoods where the vast majority of the city's 100 per week homicides occur, she was clear that poverty, violence, and faulty infrastructure were a mainstay of these neighborhoods, and that "imagining a different condition for these neighborhoods is the responsibility of those who live there".

When I asked her about the claims of vendors that jobs had not been created for them under the Chávez administration and that unemployment for people in the poorest communities was still rampant, she responded with a cautious tone,

You know, I understand, what they're saying and I know that a lot of them are still poor, but seriously, the government has given them everything they need in order to improve their conditions... you're right they live in *barrios* that are still poor and violent, but that at some point they're going to have to assume the responsibility themselves... if the government has created all of these organizations, missions, has even included them in the constitution, when are they going to take advantage and make better lives for themselves.

When I asked her what she meant about including them in constitution, she pointed to the provision around People's Power.

Chávez was not like the other governments that created laws or worked free of the people's eyes. He was and is different from all of those people who acted like we could not understand and decided to treat us like children. He was the other end of that thinking and knew that we understood our hunger, our government, our money situation better than anyone else. He created the first constitutional reform where our voices could be heard, where *fulanito de tal* (colloquialism for "so-and-so") could get voted on the

committee by his neighbors who lived in the poorest neighborhoods or the richest neighborhoods or the most violent communities or the safest communities and decide how and who we would be governed. He trusted us. We have the power now to make decisions for our communities like never before. We have the power.

When I asked her where she thinks the vendors went wrong in being able to “activate” this power, she pulled a page straight of the President’s and Mayor’s book and said, “they don’t care about the people or the communities they fill with garbage and steal from; they want to own the streets, but haven’t realized that the streets are the people’s”.

The interview with Marina lasted just over an hour and a half and has proven to be a great lens through which I have been able to capture why the battle for the streets of Caracas, between street vendors and the Chávez state is a microcosm of the failure of larger political project of the state. Although I was able to interview government leaders, including Mayor Bernal, Marina’s interview is important because of her unsolicited faith in the government and belief that she is an active agent in producing spectacles of People’s Power.

First and foremost, this interview demonstrates how the concept and legal framework of People’s Power is activated within the popular imagination of Chávez supporters. Without missing a beat, Marina is able to “understand the struggle” of street vendors to feed their kids and make ends meet, yet consistently falls back to the point that the government has “done all it can” to support the street vendors to change their lives and create greater opportunities for themselves through the provision of government services and the opening of governing institutions. She is very clear to balance her argument between people’s responsibility and People’s Power, and when she has doubts, she relies on the government’s rhetoric that it is attempting to transition to a socialist economy and that this will completely alleviate the issues of poverty faced by those who sell on the streets of the city in order to make a living.

It sheds light on how the rhetoric of the government is able to create conflict amongst people with similar class interests. In this case, Marina lives in Santa Teresa, a neighborhood directly connected to the historical center of the city and that falls within one of the poorest and most violent residential neighborhoods in Caracas. She must supplement her government subsidies and free program access by working four to five days a week cleaning houses in the city’s richest neighborhood. Yet cannot understand why vendors must work on the street and understands their interests to be very different from her own. Throughout the interview she points to people who live in her own neighborhood who must work as street vendors, but describes their situation as one in which they “choose to work on the streets of the city”, which is very different from her own situation where she is also working informally yet does not have the same meaning because her labor is hidden behind the wrought iron gates of Caracas’s mansions.

This last point is important as I would argue that the state juxtaposes the urban poor

against each other and the vehicle through which the “soldiers of the spectacle of popular power” are being organized and trained are the social missions, communal councils, and Bolivarian learning circles. These people live in the same neighborhoods as the vendors and face the same conditions of poverty and violence, yet they have been set apart as the leaders of the Bolivarian revolution. They are overwhelmingly the *invisible* informal workers of the city, working as house cleaners, or drivers.

Lastly, this interview gets to the heart of why the case of street vendors is so important for understanding the limits of Chávez’s government to challenge the class system in Venezuela. The physical presence of vendors on the streets of Caracas are not only an affront to the government’s desire to return the use of the city streets to its residents, but it also exposes the inability of the government to, in ideal circumstances, redistribute national wealth and transform the material reality of the country’s poorest citizens. It has also exposed the inability of the government to, at the very least, create new forms of employment or impact the classist and racist structure of employment to create greater employment opportunities for the country’s poorest residents. This is the central challenge that street vendors present to the state. They are able to push against the idea of People’s Power by merely contesting their right to occupy the city’s streets.

This chapter introduced the legal, discursive, and applied mechanism of People’s Power. By describing how Hugo Chávez rose to become president of the Republic of Venezuela, it demonstrated the shift in national thought around the meaning and making of citizenship as Chávez argued for the need to break-up the patronage between the state and its citizens that had been a centerpiece of the Venezuelan government throughout the twentieth century. The revolutionary idea was to shift to a form of governance driven by citizens. A new form of citizenship was to be built around the idea of People’s Power in which citizens could participate in creating a new constitution, in communal councils that functioned as neighborhood level governing bodies, and in national debates and policymaking. At the most basic level this meant a shift in of institutions away from the old Ministry of Health or Ministry of Education towards a re-imagined Ministry of Health and People’s Power.

In the popular consciousness, especially among Chávez supporters, this shift resulted in a meaningful and substantive engagement of “everyday people” with the political process. People’s Power is not only a slogan it is an ideal that makes this government radically different from others in Venezuelan history. For those who believe, it is something that can be activated to allow for greater participation in the political process and has the ability to transform one’s political condition.

But this is exactly where the case of streets vendors offers another perspective. Street vendors, even those who are sympathetic to the government, are seeking ways to influence their material condition. Instead of attempting to transform how they participate in the government, they are attempting to find ways to eat daily, feed their children, and make ends meet. This conflict between material and political conditions is one that the government had not counted on and that places street vendors at the center of the government’s dilemma.

CHAPTER III:
DIGNIFIED WORK

Contrary to earlier predictions, the informal economy has been growing rapidly in almost every corner of the globe, including industrialized countries. It can no longer be considered a temporary or residual phenomenon, but work in the informal economy cannot be termed decent compared to recognized, protected, secure, formal employment (ILC, 2002).

It is the people who are executed and the people who make up the firing squad; the people are both vague randomness and precise law. There are no tricks, nor can there be (Carlos Monsevais).

The previous chapter describes the concept of People's Power as a technique used by the state to create a rationale for allowing more vendors to occupy the streets in order to make a living. Later on, the state used the concept to justify the violent removal of vendors from the historic center of the city. People's Power places the onus on street vendors to make claims to their right to city space, while the state extends and retracts the definitions of citizenship so as to exclude street vendors when they become a nuisance. They state also includes vendors when their votes are wanted.

This chapter will focus on the economic and labor relations between street vendors and the state. The concept of dignified work is key to this understanding. In the popular discussion of vending and vendors, there is never a word about the labor of vendors. Until recently, both sides of the debate- street vendors and state agents- drew on a popular idea of the labor of vendors to justify both their removal and their need to stay on the streets. Marina is perfect example of this as she is sympathetic to the need to work in order to make ends meet, yet falls on the government's language of individual responsibility to explain why she was present at an anti-vendor protest organized by the regime.

For proponents of the state's project to "clean" or "reoccupy" streets, dignified work means that vendors should be moved off the streets and sidewalks and into rented (or mortgaged) kiosks in commercial centers spread throughout the city. The rationale is that by placing vendors in a more organized and contained environment, they will enjoy a more dignified work environment and be less exposed to the elements and to violence. While the state uses this language to describe dignified work, street vendors argue that dignified work is "the right to stay on the street" and make ends meet until the government can provide an alternative to informal labor.

This chapter describes the living conditions of most vendors, so as to understand their definition of dignified work and expose a pressing conflict within the field of urban planning between the right to the city and the right to make a living. Most vendors live hand-to-mouth in vulnerable working conditions and the definition of dignity is informed by the basic need to feed oneself and one's family. This chapter recounts stories of working on the streets and the too often romanticized narratives of street vendors lives. It also reveals the urban planning imperative to use "highest and best use" to determine how space should be allocated, even at the cost of the poorest of city residents. It will tease out popular understandings of dignified work in Caracas. As street vendors fight to work in exploitative conditions on the streets of the city and the state fights to remove vendors from their only source of income, there is a gap in the understanding of the actual opportunities vendors have as a segment of the working poor in Venezuela.

Spectacle and Specters of Street Life

My first summer in Venezuela, I never used an alarm to wake-up in the morning. I would lie in bed until 7 a.m. when popular salsa and reggaeton music would start to make its way up the 15 flights of stairs and into the modest apartment I shared with a woman who was a leader of *Grupo Madera*, one of Venezuela's leading cultural movements. That summer, I lived in the historic center of the city, on *Avenida Fuerzas Armadas*, which was a main transportation artery through downtown Caracas. In this neighborhood, high-rise apartment buildings framed El Avila, the majestic mountain that surrounds the city on the opposite side from the Caribbean.

From a bird's eye view, I could look down on the street and watch vendors set up folding tables, neatly arrange their merchandise of illegally copied CDs and computer programs, the latest pirated movies, assorted clothes, cell phones rented by the minute, cigarettes and gum to display them to passersby. The straight and narrow sidewalk was transformed over the course of the day into a labyrinth of stalls, tables, cables, cords, small electronics, boom boxes, signage, and merchandise.

During my initial exploration of the conflict between street vendors and the Chávez's government, I developed a set of romantic ideas about vendors. I imaged they functioned in explicit opposition to government supporters and public officials. I imagined that the street vendors who filled the sidewalk outside of my apartment to be quietly subversive figures, using the street to make a living and, more importantly, make explicit claims to public space and their right to determine the best use for it.

These romantic imaginings are similar to the description earlier of Asef Bayat's use of the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary": understanding the movement of street vendors on the streets of Caracas as a "non-collective, but prolonged, direct action by people and families to acquire the basic necessities of life (land for shelter, urban collective consumption, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming, yet illegal fashion" (Bayat 2004, 81).

Through this narrative street vendor associations were coordinated political affiliations. These affiliations fought to determine the use-value of public space, and although the consumptive structure of buying and selling existed on the street, this was the will of the citizens. There was a level of political intent, understanding, and posturing on the part of vendors that was driven by a greater motivation to become political authors of the happenings of Caracas. The conflict with the state was initiated by vendors as a means of pushing on the ideological and practical limits of the Bolivarian Revolution. Street vendors functioned as an urban check to the political musings of Chávez's administration and as self-appointed markers of the limits of the government's calls for power and economic redistribution. They were not just informal workers.

My romantic notions were informed by Venezuelan narratives of street vending. Every Venezuelan I interviewed, who did not actively participate in street vending, had their own narrative about vendors and the role they played on the street, in the economy, and in the government. These narratives were deeply politicized and understood vendors to be actors who could influence local political parties, a national political agenda, or an international conspiracy to maintain or remove the Chávez government.

The most common stereotype was that vendors were immigrants from Colombia and Peru, using street vending as a larger front for political or economic gain. During one of my interviews with a priest, he argued emphatically that most vendors were members of the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*- Colombia's Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group), using the guise of street vending to hide from the Colombian government, with the support of Hugo Chávez. They were moving to Caracas to support the revolutionary government and train mini-militias to defend the revolution in Venezuela. He named Colombians in his congregation who confirmed this and was positive that before the emergence of Hugo Chávez there were no street vendors on the street of Caracas.

I met a coordinator of the Health Mission in her neighborhood, who was certain that her neighbor used the façade of street vending to sell cocaine. This neighbor, who I never met and who she says moved out of her neighborhood around the time of our interviews, was a Peruvian immigrant. According to the community health coordinator, she moved because she had made a small fortune through the sale of drugs.

Another community health worker argued that vendors were sent in by Alvaro Uribe, Colombia's staunchly neoliberal and pro-US president, who was positioning himself as one of the region's major oppositions to Hugo Chávez. They were sent in for the purpose of spying on the Venezuelan government, creating distrust amongst the urban poor, and thwarting of the Venezuelan government's plan for 21st Century Socialism. She was sure that it was this group of vendors that was organizing against removal and unwilling "take advantage of the government's social and economic programs" (Maritza 2007). Similar to the previous narrative, she drew an intricate link between the vendor protests and the Colombian government's efforts to discredit the Chávez regime.

These people, along with many other Venezuelans interviewed, drew connections between the increase in Andean populations (overwhelmingly Peruvian and Colombian) in the country, the rapid increase in drug related violence, and the emergence of territorial gangs organized by affiliation to drug sources. The actual reason for a noticeable increase in the number of Peruvians and Colombians was the passage of a Chávez-instituted amnesty for immigrants living in Venezuela from the Andean region. Although the presence of these communities has been long-standing, many members of the opposition argue that this amnesty was offered in order to increase Chávez supporters in eligible voters.

The argument that Venezuelans are a small fraction of the vending population was pervasive. From city and national government officials, who pointed to increased immigration from Peru and Colombia after the Venezuelan amnesty to the specter of FARC or right-wing paramilitary forces using vending as a front to uplift or undermine the Venezuelan government, I found both of these claims to be unsubstantiated. The vast majority of vendors I met were Venezuelan-born and traveled from economically depressed regions of the country to the city to make a living or were from one of Caracas' innumerable poverty stricken informal suburban satellites. The geography of the city, situated between a mountain range and an ocean, make the satellites the affordable point of entry into the city.

Along with nativist claims that no Venezuelan citizens (by birth or documentation) are actually street vendors, there were those who argued that street vending was one of the most lucrative jobs available in the city. In one interview, I was asked: "Can you imagine doing that work if you didn't make enormous quantities of money?" On more than one occasion, I was relayed the story of the vendor driving around in the latest Hummer or Mercedes Benz or the single mother vendor, who owned a mansion in Alta Mira, one of Caracas' ultra exclusive neighborhoods.

A researcher from the Central University of Venezuela's Urban Studies Department claimed that she had taken to street vending "just to see what it was like" and made an incredible amount of money. "Who would have said it? Sitting on the street, under an umbrella, watching my kid, I would make enough money to make me want to quit my real job." When I asked her why she hadn't quit her job if street vending provided her such luxuries, she quipped, "It's because I can't just sit all day and watch the world pass me by, I'm not one of those people... I need to work"(Carolina 2008).

Similar to the popular, political descriptions in the United States in the late 1970s about the welfare queen driving around in the latest Cadillac and using food stamps to pay for liquor, street vendors in Venezuela were similarly described as social pariahs sucking on the economic resources provided by the government and undermining the transformation to 21st century socialism. Both of these specters of the pillaging and undeserving poor are situated in moments of neoliberal expansion through regressive policies, actual state shrinking, and regime consolidation. In the most popular narratives, street vendors occupy public space and access government resources while living in the lap of luxury. This image grew more common as the government shifted its position on street

vendors—from the heroic poor to *petit bourgeois* occupying the public's space in order to make fortunes.

My initial narrative of the revolutionary vendor is part of the many imaginaries surrounding vendors. In retrospect, it is clear that all perceptions of street vendors and street vending were fiction. The government has capitalized on the poor understanding of vendors are by building on the myths of vendors as non-citizens or anti-government activists working to destroy the Bolivarian Revolution. In all cases the real conditions of vendors has been radically exaggerated, and the question of labor is subsumed by of political positions, class interests, and national identity.

Vendors are understood to have made a choice to occupy city streets and pass up innumerable opportunities to do something else. In all of these typologies of street vendors, there is never a discussion of the labor of street vending even though they are working in part of one of the fastest growing segments of the labor market.

Every vendor I met was fighting for the right to stay on the street as strategy of everyday survival. They would take an alternative job within the formal labor market if it was made available, as it offers a level of security, there is never a threat of removal, physical violence, or loss of goods, and they would be eligible for state social security. When asked how long they planned to work as street vendors, not one person imagined participating in the informal economy for as long as they have. Not only are the working conditions harsh, the lives of vendors are focused on basic survival.

Luz Marina, a vendor I met just after street vendors were removed from their Cazco Historico vending sites and as they started to protest for their right to work, described her day as follows:

I wake up at 3:30 in the morning and move down the *cerro* (hill) by 4. I pack up my merchandise in my container and lock-up the table and umbrella I have on my stall by 6 at night.

In between 6 and 3:30? I take the metro to the metro bus and have to take one more small bus around my neighborhood go back around the hill and get into my neighborhood by going back and around the hill.

Yeah, there is a direct way to get there... directly into getting robbed and to having a bullet land right in me... I spend an extra 45 minutes and sometimes more than an hour going all the way around the hill to get back to the front and to my house because you never know who is going to be out and these guys are killing people just to say that they did it.

My kids are home with my mom and sister and they are waiting for me to bring food home, to cook... they're still small and I'm the only one there to defend them, to provide for them.

You see, I am the two parents, I'm the husband and the wife, the mother and father... I am everything and don't have anything unless I wake up and go to the street.

I need to work as a *buhonero*. It's not what I wanted or imagined, but what can I do now? It was never so bad. I would get the merchandise from this *Chino* (Literally Chinese guy, but used to describe anyone of East or South East Asian decent) and sell it on the street for a little profit and use that to buy food, the clothes on our backs, and pay for my little bit of sidewalk...

This is how a lot of people do it, but now you see a lot of people with more than one stall and they have to hire someone to watch over the other space and they make a little more money, but the people who are working on the stalls are really desperate because they work for a vendor who makes almost nothing... and they aren't in control of anything... it's like they get a salary but it's not the same.

When I pay for my part of sidewalk, it's not a bill or a charge that I can expect... *Piden una mordizco* (They ask for a bite (bribe))... the cops, the officials, anyone with any little bit of a position comes and asks for something.

Do you think if I could do something else I wouldn't? Before I worked as a vendor, I worked at a bank and they *retired* me because they didn't need me. I didn't make a lot of money, but at least I had social security and government benefits. Now, I make a little more, but have no security. I would use the clinic in my neighborhood but there isn't a doctor there when I have time, and when there is, the line is for hours.

I've been working at my stand for six years. I'm 32 and this is what I have. You think I don't look up and down the street and watch people get old and disappear on the street and imagine life passing me by? And every day it feels like there are more people on the street so this is the last place people like me can go, and now they want to take even this from us.

I never imagined I would be fighting for this, but what else do I have? I can't let my kids go hungry so I have to fight. I bring them with me so that they know that it's not just me but it's my two kids that will have nothing...

At 32, Luz Marina looked 45, with swollen eyes and weathered skin. She had a presence that was heavier than any person I'd ever met. She lives in Petare, Caracas' most violent neighborhood and known as one of Latin America's largest informal settlements (Nelson 2009, 45). In the year 2000, almost 45,000 people lived in Petare, with only 7% of the population being over the age of 50 and 57% of the population working in the informal economy (Zillman 2000, 197). Between 2006 and 2008, not one day went by when there was not news of a tragic death, of a drug murder, of infrastructural ruin, or mounds of garbage in the neighborhood of Petare. Of the street vendors I interviewed, over 60% lived in Petare or on its outskirts, and, most had lived there over a number of generations.

Although most vendors interviewed identified the street as the last resort for employment, vendors did not understand their work as a sector within a larger market. Instead of fighting for alternative labor opportunities or greater labor protections, they fought for the most basic right to continue working on the street. Similar to universal categorizations of marginality, which argue that the urban poor exist on the margins of society, street vendors argued that they had been pushed to the margins of economic practices. They did not see themselves as actors within the formal economy with labor rights, which are outlined in the national constitution.

As Janice Perlman's 1970s research on *favelas* on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro—where squatters were understood to be “cancer sores on the beautiful body of the city”—points out, *favelas* are in fact, far from marginal to the social, cultural, and economic life of the city—points out, informal workers in Caracas are far from marginal and maintain many aspects of formal political and economic life of the city (Perlman 1980). Perlman found that the marginal nature of the urban poor is “empirically false” and that the *favelados* were “socially well organized, culturally optimistic, and economically hardworking”(Al Sayyad 2004, 19). This is also the case for street vendors in Caracas. They buy goods from formal distributors, buy consumption and service goods from formal markets, and even pay taxes on water and utilities used in a number of their sites. That being said, street vendors continue the line of argument offered by the government, which focuses on their right to occupy certain spaces and not on their rights as workers or pillars of economic life.

In her later work Perlman recognizes that it is not only the cultural or social condition of the “marginal” that keep them in poverty, but rather it the influence of larger economic structures that thrive on their poverty. This is similarly the case in Caracas where it does not matter how hard the urban poor work or how optimistic they are: their lives are marked by a lack of capital and as such a lack of power to determine how they will live and where they will work. They can buy goods in formal fashion and pay for their utilities, yet they will always be informal.

On more than one occasion, the metropolitan mayor would make public proclamations that he was taking back the space of the city for the citizens of the city, implying that street vendors were not citizens and did not have the same right to urban space as other citizens. In street vendor protests, vendors would counter that they wanted to maintain their right to occupy city streets until alternative locations or sites for vending were created. Neither of these arguments called on the state, which claimed it was beginning a shift towards redistributing wealth and power, to provide alternative labor opportunities for street vendors nor the most basic labor protections. The debate between the state and street vendors never focused on work opportunities and conditions. Instead it was about the visibility of vendors, about geography rather than economy.

The visible nature of informal work was really at the center of the argument of the state to remove street vendors, and this often times butted against how the state articulated the right of workers and the right to work. For example, in early 2005, as the city and metropolitan governments initiated their plan to “rescue the streets of Caracas”, the national government presented a social charter to the Organization of American States (OAS), in which they offered a set of rules and guidelines for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in the region. Throughout the document, the concept of dignified work is presented as a right, which should underlay any form of labor participation. Under Title III, Chapter 1 on General Economic Rights, the Venezuelan national delegations declared:

Citizens have the right freely to develop dignified and decent forms of work, which allow them to express their creativity, productive effort and energy, and vocation, while providing sufficient income to enable them to fulfill their potential as human beings. The state shall recognize workers in the informal economy as subjects of rights who are carrying out an activity that supports the development of the formal economy. Accordingly, it shall provide such workers with social protection and financial assistance and shall seek to ensure that they cease to work on an informal basis as soon as possible.

This proposal ran in direct opposition to the action of the Venezuelans government on the streets of the city, which was, in that year, initiating the removal of vendors from Sabana Grande. For most labor scholars, dignified work requires a set of standards in the relationship between labor, employers, and the state, which include, but are not limited to:

- The right to organize into a union or co-operative within in the work place.
- A set of safety standards within the work place protecting a worker’s health and wellbeing.
- A living wage so that a worker is able to meet her/her basic needs and those of her/his family.

- The ability to choose a site of employment and employer, so as not to be forcibly employed.
- The existence of a state entity to monitor employers and protect employees from exploitation, harassment, and negligence (Milkman 2000, Turner 1993, Poblete 2003).

Informal workers, and especially workers who are visible, are located in some of the most vulnerable and exploitative labor positions imaginable. Street vendors do not have basic government protections that are provided to formal workers and are exposed to the negative health impact of sitting in the midst of car traffic for over eight hours a day, to harassment by police and public officials, and by the daily threat of robbery, and assault.

In Bolton's *Dimensions of Dignity at Work*, Cooper and May write, "The informal economy is in many ways the Cinderella subject of the dignity at work debate: the badly dressed poor relation who toils away cleaning up other people's mess with no status and who rarely sees the day of light. In the absence of a Prince Charming to transform their prospects, what chance do those in the informal economy have of enjoying dignified work?" (Cooper & May, 2007, 88).

For the first five years of Hugo Chávez's administration, he was the Prince Charming of street vendors on the streets of Caracas. He offered a level of recognition, promised to transform the economic prospects of vendors, and provided a level of access to state policy making. From publicly declaring his support of vendors and their right to work on the streets of the city to developing a popular narrative that painted vendors as victims of the failed government policies of the previous 40 years, Chávez and his political allies rallied behind street vendors in the hopes that it would result in the end of their political and economic isolation. Initially, the government activated a narrative about vendors that was about their displacement from the labor market and was part of a larger national discussion of the value of labor and dignified work.

As the presence of vendors increased, this narrative shifted. From being displaced workers vendors came to be seen as owners of the means of production, the self-exploited, *petit bourgeoisie*. This is the result of living in-between a national socialist imaginary and capitalist reality. The national government has not transformed labor relations or overturned the class structure. It has ameliorated the condition of the poor in several ways, yet Venezuela remains a market economy with private property and profit making still in tact.

The story of dignified work in Caracas cannot be told without a discussion of the Venezuelan miracle that took place in the ten years of Chávez's administration. By all accounts, the government has succeeded in shrinking inequality, creating opportunities for economic growth in the private sector, and redistributing the wealth of the nation. Most government studies, and studies using any form of government data, highlight these dramatic economic successes without contextualizing them.

In early 2009, the Center for Economic Policy and Research (CEPR) produced a report

titled, *The Chávez Administration at 10 Years: The Economy and Social Indicators*. Considered a leading progressive think-tank, CEPR understands itself to be a research and popular education institution, which promotes “democratic debate on the most important economic and social issues that affect people's lives in the United States as well as in Latin America”. In the 2009 report, they point to a set of economic indicators used by the state to point to the amazing transformation in Venezuela.

The report argues that Chávez has been able to increase the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by leaps and bounds above previous administrations, primarily through acquiring and nationalizing petroleum’s parallel infrastructure and distribution mechanisms, as well as by linking the revenues generated from company to social and economic programs mandated by the state for the poorest citizens. *Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)* has been nationalized since 1976, yet it was not until the arrival of Chávez that petroleum and petroleum revenues became an issue of public debate. Between 1976 and 2003, “it was widely assumed that the policies established in the legislation governing petroleum largely coincided with national interests” and since it seemed to work like “an efficient corporation resembling the private international oil giants” public parties and activists “largely lost interest as oil as a topic for debate”(Ellner & Salas 2007, 62).

From 2002 on there was a marked a shift in this relationship. The corporate nature of the petroleum industry rubbed directly against the administration’s plans to transform the social and economic landscape of the nation, as revenue generated went to executives and to maintain the system of production. In 2002, managers and technicians played a decisive role in attempting to destabilize the regime by calling for a national oil strike as a result of Chávez’s call for their removal and new appointment of radical high level executives- who argued that this violated the long established merit system for promotions within the state-owned company (Black 2005, 419). It was after this conflict that Chávez asserted national control of the entire sector and its revenue.

From 2003 on, the GDP nearly “doubled growing by 94.7 percent” in just over 5 years (CEPR 2009). Although economic expansion was sparked by nationalization of the petroleum sector, that sector was not the main site of economic growth. The nationalization of industries auxiliary to petroleum and services was coupled with the expansion of the private sector, particularly in the area of finance, insurance, and banking. This expansion is an essential outcome of the economic supports necessary to manage an expanding petroleum industry. As per the report, the economic growth resulted in the expansion of a social safety-net, which provided greater educational, health, and labor opportunities to the Venezuelans. In summary, the report says:

- During the current economic expansion, the poverty rate has been cut by more

than half, from 54 percent of households in the first half of 2003 to 26 percent at the end of 2008.

- Extreme poverty has fallen even more, by 72 percent. These poverty rates measure only cash income, and do not take into account increased access to health care or education.
- Over the entire decade, the percentage of households in poverty has been reduced by 39 percent and extreme poverty by more than half.
- Inequality, as measured by the Gini index, has also fallen substantially. The index has fallen to 41 in 2008, from 48.1 in 2003 and 47 in 1999. This represents a large reduction in inequality.
- Real (inflation-adjusted) social spending per person more than tripled from 1998-2006.
- From 1998-2006, infant mortality has fallen by more than one-third. The number of primary care physicians in the public sector increased 12-fold from 1999-2007, providing health care to millions of Venezuelans who previously did not have access.
- There have been substantial gains in education, especially higher education, where gross enrollment rates more than doubled from 1999-2000 to 2007-2008.
- The labor market also improved substantially over the last decade, with unemployment dropping from 11.3 percent to 7.8 percent. During the current expansion, it has fallen by more than half. Other labor market indicators also show substantial gains.
- Over the past decade, the number of social security beneficiaries has more than doubled.
- Over the decade, the government's total public debt has fallen from 30.7 to 14.3 percent of GDP. The foreign public debt has fallen even more, from 25.6 to 9.8 percent of GDP.
- Inflation is about where it was 10 years ago, ending the year at 31.4 percent.

By all quantitative indicators collected and analyzed by CEPR, Venezuela has experienced a dramatic economic boom, which resulted in an expansion of labor market participation, shrinking of inequality, and redistribution of wealth through social services, educational opportunities, and state participation. There are, however, several qualifications that need to be made to this rosy picture. First of all, the 2000s were a period of high oil prices, which greatly benefitted Venezuela. But that boom has passed and things are looking more dire today than ever before.

Second, the report claims that the statistics provided are not under dispute, but in fact all numbers produced by the Venezuelan state are problematic. As the article written by Francisco Rodriguez counters, the administration came up with “creative accounting gimmick” when faced with the gaps between promises of redistribution and the reality of wanting to expand spending in other sectors (Rodriguez 2008, 2).

TABLE 4
Employment and Unemployment, 1998 - 2008

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
<i>In Thousands:</i>											
Labor Force	9,699.3	10,259.2	10,163.9	10,576.0	11,369.0	11,793.5	12,036.3	11,936.5	12,056.5	12,211.8	12,433.9
Total Employed	8,605.1	8,691.4	8,682.7	9,123.5	9,611.7	9,524.8	10,035.7	10,344.1	10,783.2	11,092.1	11,469.6
<i>By Sector:</i>											
Public	1,402.6	1,348.2	1,352.8	1,378.4	1,364.8	1,371.3	1,491.7	1,633.6	1,804.8	1,930.0	2,064.5
Private	7,202.5	7,343.3	7,329.9	7,745.1	8,246.9	8,153.4	8,544.0	8,710.6	8,978.4	9,162.1	9,405.1
<i>By Economy:</i>											
Formal	4,403.9	4,253.7	4,110.9	4,491.9	4,752.5	4,528.8	4,923.2	5,387.1	5,853.4	6,222.7	6,445.9
Informal	4,147.4	4,435.0	4,565.7	4,630.1	4,856.1	4,988.4	5,108.8	4,924.2	4,929.7	4,869.4	5,023.7
<i>% of Total Labor Force</i>											
Labor Force	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total Employed	88.7	84.7	85.4	86.3	84.5	80.8	83.4	86.7	89.4	90.8	92.2
<i>By Sector:</i>											
Public	14.5	13.1	13.3	13.0	12.0	11.6	12.4	13.7	15.0	15.8	16.6
Private	74.3	71.6	72.1	73.2	72.5	69.1	71.0	73.0	74.5	75.0	75.6
<i>By Economy:</i>											
Formal	45.4	41.5	40.4	42.5	41.8	38.4	40.9	45.1	48.6	51.0	51.8
Informal	42.8	43.2	44.9	43.8	42.7	42.3	42.4	41.3	40.9	39.9	40.4
Unemployment	11.3	15.3	14.6	13.7	15.5	19.2	16.6	13.3	10.6	9.2	7.8

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), 2009; República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2009.

Note: Data correspond to the first half of every year (from INE’s biannual Household Survey).

Third, in the table above offered by the CEPR report, there is a striking understatement of labor market shifts over the course of the last decade. Though the report does not directly engage the issues of informal work the data points in the table indicate the magnitude of informal work as part of the larger labor market, still over 40% of the workforce. Moreover, the total number of those employed increased from 8,605,100 in 1998 to 11,469,600 in 2008. There was a decrease in the percentage of informal workers of 24%, the absolute number of informal workers increased by 8,763,000.

There are three additional points to be made. First, the data presented in the CEPR report is not broken down spatially. So much of the growth reflects investment in petroleum and transportation infrastructure being developed outside of the city of Caracas. I am certain that the increase in employment in the city is not in proportion to the size of the national population. With the national population highly concentrated in Caracas and increases in employment occurring in regions outside of the city, national

data is of little use for understanding the economic and labor market dynamic of Caracas.

Second, there is a loose relationship between the number of people participating in the informal sector and the number of street vendors on the streets of Caracas. As is stated earlier, research and data on the informal economy point to a boom in the number of street vendors in Caracas after the election of Chávez. Although this expansion is a by-product of the shrinking state which started in the 1980s, the boom is also attributed to the passage of the new national constitution which allowed for the increase of vendors.

Lastly, there is no direct relationship between employment and dignified work. The use of quantitative data is often used to make claims about labor market participation without including measurable indicators of the quality of work, including access to basic protections, the right to organize, or security from termination based on discrimination. The CEPR report merely infers that more jobs means an improvement in quality of life of Venezuelans. In fact, recent improvements in quality of life are more the result of direct government intervention and intentional expansion of basic services, than economic growth and job generation.

As we traverse from the imaginaries of street vendors to the meager attempts by vendors to eke out the most basic existence and then to attempts to reconcile the economic boom, we arrive at last at a deeper understanding of the fight for work on the streets versus the right to dignified work. From the vantage point of both the government and street vendors, the case for dignified work is weak at best and deeply flawed at worst.

Because street vendors describe dignified work as the ability to stay on the street, they are ultimately fighting for work that puts them in a precarious situation in the city. The state has taken the concept of dignified work and offered a basic principle: if neither the state nor the private sector can provide people with dignified work, they can seek employment to meet their basic needs by any means necessary. Neither of these conceptions addresses the basic protections that should be offered to workers. Street vendors represent a failure on the part of the state to meet the basic needs of its citizens. As a result, the project of the state shifted away from meeting these needs to hiding vendors in commercial centers with limited access to products, consumers, and protection. The confusion of street vendors and of the state backed up by reports that applaud Venezuela's economic growth without linking it directly to improvements in quality of life, fail to challenge the labor conditions of informal street vendors in the streets of the city.

As the state uses the language of dignified work to justify the forced removal of vendors, street vendors continue their fight on these similar terms. They are fighting not for access to capital or for the government to attempt its promise of economic redistribution, but for the right to stay on the city's streets. This makes the streets the focus of their battle as opposed to the labor conditions in which they work.

CHAPTER IV:
HUMANIZING THE STREETS

*In order to be humanizing, the city must belong to its public
(Fried 1990, 84).*

*Do you think we woke up in the morning and brought our families out to Mira Flores (the presidential palace) to paint, and sing, and celebrate because we thought we would lose this election? Did you think we were going to lose? No one, not even Chávez himself, thought we could lose... that's not something that happens in our days.
(Spectator, after the results of the failed 2007 referendum were publicly announced)*

The relationship between street vendors and the state is not confined to battles over public space or dignified work. This complicated relationship is manifest in many aspects of urban political life. Chapter One laid out the theoretical framing of the battle for the streets of Caracas; Chapter Two framed the popular and political discourse of People's Power used by the state to manage its relationship to street vendors; Chapter Three inserted a discussion of labor and work on to the previous framings, now this final chapter situates the clash on the streets within the larger political conflicts taking place in Venezuela. It looks into the future of popular politics in Venezuela by laying out how vendors have been able to influence the local electoral process by fragmenting the traditional base of the national government.

This chapter will focus on the role of street vendors as political actors actively engaging in and at times shaping the political realities of Caracas. They act as informal workers, as the urban poor, and are supposed beneficiaries of the national project to redistribute the wealth of the nation. The role of street vendors as political actors engaged in the electoral process is countered by the state's project to humanize the streets of the city. To humanize means to transform the traditional form and function of urban life, whereby the urban citizenry is allowed to identify the best use of public space. In the eyes of the national government the preeminent violators of this project of humanizing the streets of the city are street vendors so their removal has become the main expression of the project to humanize the street of Caracas. However the project of "giving the city back to its public", as the quote above suggests, is deeply ambivalent.

In Chapter Two, I described the technique of popular power used by the state in its discourse to shift responsibility for state decision-making to its citizens. The practices of humanizing the street are an extension of this. The main difference between Popular Power and humanizing the streets is one of timing. The language of the former surfaces at the time of popular elections and is often built into the political sloganeering of the

PSUV and Chávez. The project of humanizing the streets does not rely on a set of state mandates, it is confined to elections and inserts into the discussion a look into the opposition movements and their ability to gain momentum in order to obtain power and speak to the needs of the urban poor.

This chapter will analyze the shifting economic class landscape that emerged to support or reject Chávez's national political project during their moments of reform and referendum. It will offer a view into how the urban poor were voting or not and shaping the outcome of elections between 2005 and 2008. The battle between street vendors and the state has taken place alongside a set of larger political shifts in Venezuela. Over the course of fieldwork and writing of this dissertation, there were six nation-wide elections, half of which were referenda on the presidency of Hugo Chávez. Underlying each of these elections was a desire by both Chávez and his opponents to transform the nature of the political and, to a lesser extent, economic landscape.

In looking at these elections, arguments made by the Chávez administration that class divisions are fueling the split in the national electorate will be complicated, and a richer story about class divides and elections will be exposed. In short, these elections demonstrate the shifting electoral landscape in Venezuela and waning political support for Chávez's party by the urban poor.

As the urban poor, especially those in the informal economy, have begun to understand the limits of Chávez's discourse, they have become actively engaged in opposition politics. In his early years as president, the claims Chávez made about the need to redistribute the wealth of Venezuela, were taken very seriously by everyone in the country. As we enter the tenth year of his presidency, the real impact of this political project has been to maintain wealth in the hands of a few while softening the blow of poverty by providing basic services and infrastructure primarily through sweat equity endeavors. Even these policies of redistribution have been detrimental within a larger economic context. As one observer notes:

Yet in Venezuela, Hugo Chávez is instituting a number of policies that have the explicit goal of redistributing income to the poor. No one would dispute that many of the recipients live in desperate poverty. Nevertheless, these particular policies have been tried before and always lead to the same results: centralized power, rapid inflation, reduced investment, higher unemployment, and falling national income. History will repeat itself again in this case. If redistribution is to be done, how it is done is just as important as how much is done (Kennedy 2008, 20).

The reaction to this limited flow of capital to the supposed beneficiaries of the Bolivarian Revolution and the reality of lack of access (for example, currency inflation overvalues the national currency makes many consumer goods unavailable) has been an important tool to organize the urban poor. Street vendors are readily identified as leaders of these mobilizations: exposing the limits of services redistribution, directly impacted by limited employment opportunities, and working in the informal economy, on the street, in their homes, and within their communities. Loose mobilizations of the urban poor have resulted in a set of decisive victories against Chávez.

That said victories are bittersweet for a number of reasons. First, street vendors continue to fight for their right to work on the streets of the city as opposed to economic transformation that would create greater opportunities for them to work in the formal economy. Second, newly elected opposition officials do not offer progressive alternatives for street vendors and use vendors to win elections, and after winning mimic the actions of PSUV candidates. The result is the further marginalization of street vendors.

This chapter is organized in three sections. The first section fans out from the streets of the city and looks to the political organizations opposing the state. It offers an abbreviated history of these bodies and identifies the line drawn in the sand between the opposition and Chávez's government. This section also describes the winning and losing strategies of the opposition. The second section takes a deeper look into the three decisive elections that occurred in concert with vendor removal in Caracas and alongside the public discussion of the "need to humanize the streets of the city" throughout other metropolitan regions in the country by removing street vendors. The third section returns to the discussion of humanizing the streets by removing vendors and describes how this strategy has resulted in the waning of Chávez's base of support.

THE OPPOSITION

From the time of his ascent to the presidency in 1998, opposition forces in Venezuela were steadfast in their determination to remove Chávez from office. The opposition used contradictory approaches to achieve this end, with little success. The discontent felt on the behalf of the opposition reached its peak in 2002. As Richard Gott describes:

The atmosphere in Caracas in the early months of 2002 was explosive and conflictive. A sense of impending disaster spread over the city. Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations took place each week, as the country mobilized behind rival banners. Groups of retired officers, politicians from the old political parties, union leaders, and spokesmen from the Catholic hierarchy united to denounce the government and to claim that they support within the armed forces for a possible coup: newspapers and the private television channels kept up an endless litany of

stories hostile to Chávez and officials in Washington began to make critical comments about what was widely seen as a deteriorating situation... For experienced observers of Latin America, Caracas in April of 2002 was growing to resemble Santiago de Chile in September of 1973 (Gott 2005, 223).

In Chile, the popularly elected social democratic president, Salvador Allende, was murdered on September 11, 1973 and his project to nationalize a part of the country's national resource was brought to a sudden halt. Chile's right-wing opposition was at the center of organizing popular protests against the government, destabilizing government and economy in Chile, and ultimately overthrowing the national government and replacing it with one of the longest neoliberal authoritarian dictatorships in the region (Power 2002). In Venezuela, the mishmash of opposition forces attempted to pull a page out of this familiar book in order to remove Chávez from power. The defining term in the previous sentence is mishmash, which resulted in the continued failure of opposition forces.

The conservative, elite opposition hoped to use this as a framework for "taking back" Venezuela. Namely, "the country's principal industrialists, businessmen, the leaders of the principal trade union movements, the owners of the main newspapers and television channels, the bishops of the Catholic church, the conservative officers of the armed forces", all backed by the United States government, used the protests and counter-protests as a diversion for the plot to remove Chávez from office (Gott 2005, 224). Initially, the opposition was centered on class interests and was the direct result of Chávez's attempt to reorganize the state's petroleum industry. In late 2001, Chávez called for reorganizing PDVSA, the state-run petroleum company, which would remove long-standing management, who were popularly identified with the Pact of Punto Fijo parties. This single act would result in six months of planning and the attempted execution of a coup.

By April 11, 2002, the planning on behalf of the head of the national chamber of commerce and the country's largest trade union was set in motion. A small protest in an opposition neighborhood soon spiraled into a mass of an estimated 150,000 people marching to the national palace, Miraflores, with the objective of removing Chávez (Gott 2005, 225). Upon reaching Miraflores, protestors were met by supporters of the national government and violent clashes erupted. With the support of a significant number of military leaders, the coup was underway. Popular unrest resulted in a public call from one of the country's highest-ranking military generals to the president, urging him to step down from office. As Chávez and his supporters attempted to react to the coup, they realized that they were cut off from military support and his removal from office was inevitable.

Deciding that battling the coup would be impossible and deciding to negotiate with the coup plotters, and after nearly a day holed up in the national palace, Chávez declared that the coup plotters would have to detain him in order to remove him from office. By 4 am

on April 12th, he submitted himself to the opposition military leadership at Caracas's largest military fort. By that afternoon and after making a set of false claims about Chávez's resignation, the head of the national chamber of commerce was sworn in as the new president of the republic. As he publicly declared the new government arrangements, which included nullifying the constitution and appointing new leadership throughout government, the coup plotters began to make a set of curious missteps. Similar to the organization of the Pact of Punto Fijo nearly half a century earlier, the new government appointments explicitly excluded representatives from labor and the more progressive factions of the opposition. The new government also called for an immediate reordering of the national military ranks, without taking into account the role the highest-ranking military officials played in the coup. Throughout this process, Venezuelans were uncertain of the national situation since the national media channels were shut down and the privately owned media networks were declaring that Chávez willingly resigned from office.

As loyalist military officials began to receive news that Chávez had not resigned from office and protesters in support of Chávez to set the streets of the city on fire and occupied its central arteries, the coup plotters began to see their support away. The protesters and sympathetic military officials began the process of taking back the country. By April 15th, Chávez had been reinstated in office and, in a conciliatory mood, he did not recognize the coup and freed the coup plotters and their most violent supporters. Unfortunately, this was not the last tactic of the opposition.

Just eight months after the failed coup, opposition forces began to plot another action to destabilize national political and economic institutions. Simultaneously, Chávez learned a lesson about pushing for unilateral reform and consolidating power. As Jennifer McCoy notes:

The president drew the lesson from the short-lived coup against him, that he was too tolerant and permissive. Consequently, he attempted to consolidate his position within the armed forces by purging disloyal officers, intimidated the private media by threatening administrative and financial sanctions if they continued to overstep the line in opposing him, and take advantage of the year end petroleum strike by asserting national political control over a petroleum agency that he believed had become a "state within a state" (McCoy 2004, 291).

Once again, the role of petroleum and the power it offers was at the center of the oppositions discontent in Venezuela. Instead of destabilizing political institutions the focus in this round was to upset the economy of the nation. The national petroleum strike was a direct response to Chávez's move to assume greater control over the revenue earned by PDVSA and began to take place after Chávez called on the national military police to assume control of Caracas's metropolitan police, which was under control of an

opposition mayor in the fall of 2002.

On December 2nd 2002, opposition forces called for a general strike to stop petroleum production. After a slow start with little support from petroleum workers in the oil fields, a shift occurred allowing the opposition to once again call for a premature victory. What started out as management initiated walkout and spiraled into a national strike against the national government was a ploy to influence a national referendum. This referendum would take place in the coming months and could result in the removal of Chávez. In consolidating control over national military forces after the coup, Chávez was able to stave off civil unrest. As Black notes, “Chávez turned to the armed forces to provide internal security, distribute goods and services, and assist in the restoration of oil production”(Black 2005, 224).

The major difference in Venezuela’s social and political context during the December strikes was the level of organization of the urban poor.

The poor had voted repeatedly for Chávez since 1998 yet his revolutionary programme had been largely directed from above, without much popular participation. After the April coup, many of the less privileged realized they had a government they needed to defend. The repeated protest marches of the opposition had an unexpected effect. They conjured up a phenomenon that most of the middle and upper classes would have preferred to leave sleeping – awakening the political consciousness of the poor and the specter of a class and race war (Gott 2005, 240).

The impact of the strike within this context was less than ideal for opposition forces. After sixty-three days of the national strike, the result was a complete failure for opposition forces as they were fired en mass from their management positions at PDVSA. All in all, 18,000 workers were fired representing nearly half of the total 40,000 member workforce (Gott 2005, 253).

The final stand for the opposition was the recall referendum of 2004. After failing to achieve their goal of removing Chávez from power by extra-governmental means, the opposition decided to look to the new governmental constitution as a pathway for the change they hoped to see. They would need to secure signatures of 20% of the electorate in order to allow for a yes or no vote on Chávez’s presidency. Again, a set of unpredictable forces coincided to catapult Chávez out of yet another crisis.

In this final instance, it was a shifting international context that helped Chávez defeat the opposition. In particular, oil prices and regional shifts both aligned to create a context formidable for the opposition. By the time of the vote for the recall referendum, the price per barrel of oil had increased to nearly US\$50, which was a “five-fold increase in as many years, the result of the US war in Iraq, the general decrease in world oil supplies, and the increased demand from China and India” (Gott 2005, 262). The increased access

to capital from petroleum revenues allowed Chávez to make greater strides in service provision and infrastructural transformation for his base of supporters. The second transformation was the shifting tide of political leadership in Latin America. “After nearly six years in power, armed with little more than revolutionary rhetoric and what was, after all, a moderate social democratic programme, Chávez had become the leader of the emerging opposition in Latin America to the neoliberal hegemony of the United States” (Gott 2005, 262).

As in the previous two attempts to remove Chávez from office, the opposition underestimated his mastery of capturing the national imaginary. Each of these campaigns assumed that the poor would fall in step with the rich. In mid-August, as the polls closed, Chávez was handed an overwhelming victory and a national mandate to keep his office. “The referendum designed to lead to his overthrow provided him with an overwhelming majority. Some 5,800,600 people (59.25 percent of the electorate) voted for Chávez to remain as president while 3,989,000 (40.7 percent) wished him to go (Gott 2005, 262)”.

By the end of the summer of 2004 opposition forces were splintered and baseless. Between the coup attempt and the national oil strike, they learned that non-electoral means were not only unpopular, but more importantly had the opposite of the desired effect: rallying Chávez supporters after the referendum, they realized that the politics of the elite were no longer effective in shaping the outcomes of elections. They were left with little leadership and less of a strategy for regaining political power. This was clear in the national congressional elections that followed the referendum. During the December 2005 elections, to fill the 167 seats of the national congress, all of the major opposition parties boycotted the election in the hope of de-legitimizing the electoral process. This, yet again, backfired, and Chávez’s party won over 2/3 of the required seats in order to allow for constitutional reforms.

Elections are understood, by the government and the people, as one of the most meaningful vehicles through which popular mandates for the nation can be enacted and as an important measure of citizen’s support of the government and its policies. Even through the years of the Pact of Punto Fijo, elections were taken extremely seriously. Electoral turnout in Venezuela was above regional averages. Personally, I have found elections to function as amazing vehicles for popular engagement and, as they are extensively monitored by national and international bodies, including the Organization of American States (OAS), the Carter Center, and the National Democracy Institute (NDI), useful measures of popular opinion of government standing. During my fieldwork in Venezuela, I was present for two elections and able to see the preparation running up two other elections.

Along with the Pact of Punto Fijo parties, the opposition includes a hodgepodge of guerillas, communists, social democrats, neoliberal reformers, and social conservatives. Since Chávez’s election in 1998, the relationship between these groups has been in flux. Until the boycotted National Assembly elections of 2005, the opposition had some semblance of representation within political institutions of the nation. But those elections

marked the absolute destabilization of the opposition and disappearance of their agenda from the country's politics. The National Assembly in has 167 deputies, who are elected by party through a system of proportional representation. Since the opposition decided to opt-out of participating, the results were devastating. The following chart lists the top five parties, with total number and percentage of votes and as the number of seats won.

**2005 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS
NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE)**

Affiliation/Party	Number of Votes	Percentage of Total	Seats
Movimiento V Repbulica (Later PSUV)	2,041,293	60	116
Por la Democracia Social (For Social Democracy)	277,482	8.2	18
Patria Para Todos (Fatherland for Everyone)	197,459	6.8	10
Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party)	94,606	2.7	7
MIGENTE (My People)	20,482	.6	2
LAGO	61,789	1.8	2
Unidad Popular para Venezuela (Popular Unity for Venezuela)	46,232	1.4	1

Thirty-three other parties were even less successful, and were shut out entirely. A splintered opposition was unable to unify around policy platforms or economic agendas. After this election, Chávez controlled both the legislature and the executive branches of the government, and was a number of censures away from silencing the judiciary.

BREAKS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN VENEZUELA

The first half of this story demonstrates that in his first five years in office Chávez was forced to focus his attention on keeping his elected position, as opposed to running the country, redistributing wealth, and transforming the national economy from a capitalist to a socialist model. That said, in the six years since, he has only been successful in creating a power vacuum: concentrating wealth and political power in the hands of a small minority (Rodriguez 2008). He has developed a set of punitive measures to limit the power of opposition media forces, and managed the expectations of the people by a system of patronage through service provision. But is discontent over the last 5 years has resulted in a set of decisive losses for Chávez and his electoral, political, and economic strategy. Chávez's election winning streak came to an end in December 2007.

On the morning of December 2, 2007, the city of Caracas was thick with tension, as the day had come when the most ambitious of Chávez's political transformations would be voted on in a national referendum. Organized as a process of constitutional reform, the ballot offered simple yes or no choices on a total of sixty-nine constitutional amendments. As the previous elections resulted in resounding victories, Chávez

considered this one to be another opportunity to provide resounding support his political and economic project. This first step would be complimented by the,

...full use of his 2007 enabling law to change more than sixty pieces of legislation without legislative approval...the creation of a “presidential committee” that will put to referenda such proposals as allowing the unlimited reelection of incumbents and attaching even stricter conditions to recall votes... a redrawing of the administrative and political map to curb the influence of governors and mayors... a renewed effort to expand the role of the president’s “Bolivarian” ideology in the hiring and training of public-school teachers. Finally, Chávez wants to found a yet-to-be-specified set of “communal assemblies” that will compete with existing local authorities (Corrales and Pennfold 111, 2007).

Beyond the obvious challenge, again sixty-nine constitutional changes to be made with two voting options, of sheer quantity of constitutional reforms presented to voters during these elections there was also the inability to disconnect the numerous issues on the ballot from one another. The ballot was overwhelming. It included issues, such as:

- Expanding social security benefits and supports to workers in the informal economy.
- Ending the autonomy of the Central bank of Venezuela, placing it under the executive branch.
- Reorganizing the existing representative districts in the country, allowing the president to control elected city mayors and state governors by an unelected “popular power” mandate.
- Lowering the national voting age from 18 to 16.
- Banning discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Prohibiting international support of national candidates or policies.
- Allowing public funding of political associations.

The most controversial issue dealt with term limits. The referendum called for the possibility of indefinite reelection and increased terms from 6 to 7 years. The vote was highly contentious and garnered international attention because of the scope of reform. In this instance the opposition was able to unite under a “Vote No” banner and student organizers from the opposition were finally able to move to the forefront of the political stage.

The momentous election resulted in hundreds of national and international news articles predicting the outcome, using the election as proof of extreme beliefs of the national government, and fueling the fire of electoral politics in Venezuela. Some pundits understood this to be the moment in which Chávez would finally expose his dictatorial ways and steal the elections away from the opposition. Others clamored that this election would be proof of the Venezuelan people's support of the national project to transform the political and economic system. At the end of voting day, there was a 44% abstention rate and Chávez lost.

Less than one year later, on November 23, 2008, Venezuelans entered another test of Chávez's and the PSUV's popularity. Mayoral and gubernatorial elections were held nationally for the first time since Chávez's second presidential victory in 2006. In 2005, the outcome was disastrous for the national opposition parties. Since 2006, Chávez's political party, in its various iterations, was in charge of all the major economic and population centers of the country except one and was confident in its ability to sweep another election to show that support of the movement to socialism. Winning this election would also mean that the PSUV controlled the congress and was able to make mass political transformations. This election would be a rebuttal to Chávez's 2007 defeat, allowing him to regain momentum. Yet, while they won an overwhelming majority of posts, the PSUV lost the votes necessary for the metropolitan mayor of Caracas and two of the eight other population centers in the country.

On February 23, 2009, yet another attempt at a constitutional referendum took place. This time the centerpiece of the December 2007 referendum was the only thing on the ballot: Venezuelans were asked to remove the three-term and two-term limits placed on the president, mayors, governors, and assembly deputies. Chávez sympathizers argued that this was necessary in order to make sure the socialist project of the current government would be allowed to reach fruition. Opposition leaders argued that this was the final blow to Venezuela's democracy, as Chávez would now have legitimacy to be president for life. Although the referendum passed, it failed in the metro region of Caracas.

For many years now elections, regardless of the issue to be voted on, have been referenda on Hugo Chávez. Initially, the opposition was reticent to believe the fairness of elections and opted out of crucial elections. This was a self-destructive move as it legitimately gave Chávez and the various iterations of his party control over states, cities, and municipalities that otherwise would have opposed his political agenda. The opposition was deeply fractured and encompassed groups as diverse as Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) or Movement towards Socialism, an urban guerrilla movement and the Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela (COPEI) or the Social Christian Party of Venezuela, which represented socially and economically conservative Christians. The government has been very successful in placing these two and every party in between under the banner of "the opposition" and, truth be told, these groups have been clumsy in their electoral strategies making the government's work much easier.

As the city of Caracas is the center of political power as well as the national population

center, it is a scene of intense mobilization during elections. Bright red banners hang from streetlights throughout the center of the city, mega-music machines blare political music outside of the city's metro stations, and demonstrations are a daily event. Chávez used Caracas' streets as his personal political soapbox. He rallied his supporters to use in the ballot box as the most effective indictment against the elitist politics that had dominated the country over the course of the previous fifty years, against the neoliberal politics of the United States, and against anything that did not align with the politics of his party. When introducing the physical presence of street vendors it would be impossible to be a self-promoter of redistributing the wealth of the nation with the mass presence of street vendors.

The streets of the city were also the site of the largest opposition protests led by leaders of the Pact of Punto Fijo parties and by emerging progressive and conservative parties aligned under the single opposition banner to stop any further advances by Chávez.

As street vendors within a larger community of informal workers have become a target of the government, there has been a clear shift in the political support for opposition parties. The clearest victories occurred in the city of Caracas, where the poorest municipality and the metro-region mayor fell to opposition party members in the 2008 elections. After their failed attempt to influence the government in office, street vendors began working with opposition parties in order to make their voices heard.

Since these elections, Chávez has tightened his grip. He has limited the power of local and gubernatorial elected officials and shut down opposition media outlets. Despite this crackdown, organizing in the cities across the country is going farther than at any time in the last ten years. Street vendors are at the forefront of delegitimizing the government by creating an institutional and physical home for the dissatisfied urban poor.

To return to the original purpose of this chapter, the project to humanize the streets of the city by the Chavez regimes has had a number of impacts. It has drawn attention to the streets of the city as the site where it is clear that the redistributive promises made by the regime has not been fulfilled. It has also given life to the place where politics happens. It has activated the streets of Caracas for protests and proclamations. Within the rules of resistance established by the regime, street vendors and the opposition have been able to assert claims to the promises of the regime. The urban poor are now using the canvass of the streets to fight for their right to the petroleum wealth generated by the country, for the dignified work promised in the constitution, and the popular power that has been the mainstay of the Chavez agenda.

Although they have been actives in taking back the language of humanizing the streets the urban poor, and more specifically street vendors, are not fighting for a radical transformation in labor or political relations. They are fighting to hold Chavez to his word and as a result not reframing the debates about people's power, dignified work, or humanizing the streets.

CONCLUSION

Hugo Chavez falls in line with a longer history of populist politics in Venezuela and the rhetoric of revolution and the promise of power are nothing more than rhetoric or promises. The history of Venezuela demonstrates that the politics of petroleum or more appropriately the project of sowing the oil have led to similar impasses as the one we find ourselves in today. Whether it was the dictatorship of Gomez or the democratic prospect of the Pact of Punto Fijo, the wealth generated from oil production have been the main drivers of the rhetoric and promises and the impasse is the moment when the reality of being able to accomplish the proclaimed end of inequality is not realized.

In these other moments in Venezuela's history it may have been the rural poor, organized labor, or disenfranchised which exposed the failure of the government. Today, for a number of reasons the people central to exposing the inability of Chavez to meet his stated goal of redistributing the oil wealth of the nation are street vendors. The central place is the city. The global movement of rural people moving into central cities has not been lost on Venezuela. Caracas is the home of nearly one quarter of the total national population. But this is not the only reason why street vendors and the city shine the light on the limits of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Chavez used street vendors as the example of the failings of previous regimes. He used the streets of the city to declare his commitment to lead a revolution undergirded by socialism and the distribution of oil wealth. The parameters of the revolution were set in Caracas and this allowed for an investigation and analysis of how far these promises had really gone.

Through the lives of street vendors and the politics of the city of Caracas over the last ten years, we are able to understand the changes that have occurred in Venezuela since the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998. There has been limited economic redistribution and no real attainment of the promise of meeting the goals of a Bolivarian Revolution as is demonstrated by the continued boom in the informal economy.

In the place of 21st century socialism or even a viable alternative to neoliberal reform, a power vacuum has been created with Chávez at the center. Civic participation, popular governance, and local power have never come to fruition as true partners or challengers of the national government as they are all established and managed by the regime. The regime has been successful at calling for a revolution, setting the terms of engagement, and identifying the ideal subjects of the projects. Vendors are central to this process as they have been a key group, which started out as the ideal type of the revolutionary citizen and later transformed into the exact opposite of the revolutionary citizen.

The streets of the city are what exposed them to scrutiny and set them apart from the rest of the urban poor. The streets displayed them, in their ever increasing numbers, to the rest of the country and to the regime and begged the question: If the Bolivarian Revolution is focused on redistributing the wealth of the nation and supposed to be closing the inequality gap, why do we see more and more people taking to the street to work? The best place to understand the political and economic shifts that have taken place since

Chávez's election in Caracas. The city is the heart of Venezuela's political life, the population center, and the nucleus of the economy. It is on the streets of the city and in public life that the contradictions of Chávez's socialist project are most apparent. It forces one to ask:

- How does political power get framed by the state?
- How much real power is in the hands of the people?
- What does it mean to expand social service provision without engaging in economic redistribution?
- What does dignified work look like?
- If the government is led by the people, why does the regime need to consolidate power?

The failure of the state to transform the conditions of the poorest citizens has been masked by political discourse and techniques of regulation. The discourses of popular power, dignified work, and humanizing the space have worked to splinter the interests of the poorest factions of the city and make people who have similar class interests battle against each other for the streets of the city. It has also been effective as a means of deflecting responsibility away from the state, since citizens putatively have the power to shape their lives, jobs, neighborhoods, and city. The discourse has been coupled with techniques of regulation and in the current moment, outright state repression.

These techniques take the shape of a set of faux participatory planning processes, community empowerment committees, and deepening patronage networks that make it nearly impossible for the urban poor to transform their lives. These techniques are also the creation of ideal types of citizens and forms of citizenship, which are set up the regime allowing them to control who is on the inside and who is on the outside of the revolutionary practice.

Through the lives of street vendors and the stories of two removal projects, the failures of the state are made apparent. The numbers of street vendors and their larger community of people working within the informal economy continue to grow. Economic development remains concentrated in the petroleum sector, with few employment prospects beyond that sphere, we expect this growth to continue. With failed economic policies and the declining prices of oil, this has been at the greatest expense of the poorest Venezuelans. Street vendors are the litmus test for economic diversification, employment creation, and wealth redistribution. Today, one can safely say that there has been little effort made to redistribute wealth from the upper class or the state. This is clearly stated in the article written by Francisco Rodriguez documenting his personal experience working for the regime:

Soon after joining the National Assembly, I clashed with the administration over underfunding of the Consolidated Social Fund (known by its Spanish acronym FUS), which had been created by Chávez to coordinate the distribution of resources to antipoverty programs. The law establishing

the fund included a special provision to ensure that it would benefit from rising oil revenues. But when oil revenues started to go up, the Finance Ministry ignored the provision, allocating to the fund in the 2001 budget only \$295 million—15 percent less than the previous year and less than a third of the legally mandated \$1.1 billion. When my office pointed out this inconsistency, the Finance Ministry came up with the creative accounting gimmick of rearranging the law so that programs not coordinated by the FUS would nevertheless appear to be receiving resources from it. The effect was to direct resources away from the poor even as oil profits were surging. (Hard-liners in the government, incensed by my office's criticisms immediately called for my ouster. When the last moderates, who understood the need for an independent research team to evaluate policies, left the Chávez camp in 2004, the government finally disbanded our office.) (Rodriguez 2008, 4).

In the place of redistribution the Chávez regimes offers liberal band-aids of social services and community missions. These have been marginally effective at addressing the problems faced by the urban poor such as access to basic needs and services. These band-aids and the missions in particular have been brilliant at consolidating power and establishing an interested group of people who benefit from patronage and will support the government on the street of the city as the face of the deserving poor.

All this has led to attempts by street vendors to organize to transform their political representation. This has failed for two reasons. The first is that opposition candidates use vendors for votes, but have no interest in actually addressing the central question of the growth of the informal economy and how to create alternative employment. The second is that opposition candidates, once elected, have been stripped of their political authority by Chávez. This was the case in the office of High Mayor in Caracas in 2008. The winner of the election was a member of the opposition and soon after trying to use his power to address some of the failings of the Chavez regime and getting notoriety and support from great segments of the urban population, his office was stripped of all of its fiscal responsibilities and ability to institute policies across the municipalities across the city.

The story of the battle for the streets of Caracas also sheds light on the limited scope of the right to the city framework and hopes for an urban revolution. In Venezuela, it is most appropriate to use the regime terminology of Bolivarian Revolution and place it in the city by speaking of Revolutionary Urbanism. Informal street vendors are fighting to use public space as market space to eek out a living. They are not fighting for use-values beyond the freedom of exchange. On the other hand, the current regime, motivated by the power of the state, wants to use the street as a platform for its populist project of mass

mobilization, electoral victories, building patronage networks and maintaining power, and a utopian vision of the Revolution. In so doing, it chooses to create urban voids and wastelands free of vendors whose visible presence disrupts the dominant discourse of the regime's achievement of People's Power, dignified work, and the humanized city.

The story of Caracas is critical for the field of urban planning for a number of reasons. First, it sheds light on the political implications of state-run economic development projects and moves these endeavors out of the realm of benevolence and into the realm of intentional power. By understanding that practices of building cities and stating explicitly that agendas for economic development are political in nature, the field of urban planning must grapple with the implications of their craft beyond that of transforming physical landscapes. When asking if a project or a policy is "the highest and best use" for city space, they must also ask:

- Who benefits from this project or policy?
- Who is negatively impacted by this policy or project?
- What are the political implications of the policy or project?

Second, it demonstrates the limits of participatory planning and practice. As the state is motivated by maintaining power by any means necessary and has failed to materialize the promises of redistribution, it has co-opted this language to meet its own end of keep power and deepening its control over the production of urban space and the boundaries of urban citizenship.

Through the concepts of people's power, dignified work, and humanizing the city this dissertation questions the ability of the Chávez regime to meet the most basic needs of the city's residents most in need. The regime has been effective at creating a culture of resistance and popularizing norms of revolution- from 21st century socialism to the Bolivarian Revolution- at a great cost to the Venezuelan people. It has identified itself as the most revolutionary figure resisting the neoliberal world order. In this it has created little room for the Venezuelan people to actually counter its claims without being to the right of the government or in opposition to revolution. It has made resistance impossible in the resistance society.

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