

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution: Power to the People?

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AD	Accion Democratica (Democratic Action Party)
ALBA	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America)
BCV	Banco Central de Venezuela (Central Bank of Venezuela)
CBRV	Constitucion de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela (Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)
CEPAL	Comision Economica para America Latina y el Caribe (Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean)
CEPR	Centre for Economic and Policy Research
CIM	Centro Internacional de Miranda (International Miranda Centre)
CLPP	Consejos Locales de Planificacion Publica (Local Councils for Public Planning)
CNE	Consejo Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Council)
COPEI	Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela (Social Christian Party of Venezuela)
FCG	Consejo Federal de Gobierno (Federal Council of Government)
FEDECAMERAS	Federacion de Camaras (Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce)
FIDES	Fondo Intergubernamental para la Descentralizacion (Intergovernmental Fund for Decentralisation)
FUNDACOMUNAL	Fundacion para el Desarrollo y Promocion del Poder Popular (Foundation for Development and the Promotion of Popular Power)
GASPP	Globalism and Social Policy Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
IE	Institute of Higher Education
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INCES	Instituto Nacional de Capacitacion y Educacion Socialista (National Institute for Learning and Socialist Education)
MBR	Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement)

MEM	Ministry of Mines
MERCAL	Mercado de Alimentos (Food Market)
MVR	Movimiento Quinta Republica (Fifth Republic Movement)
MINCI	Ministerio del Poder Popular para Informacion y Comunicacion (Ministry of Popular Power for Information and Communication)
MINEP	Ministerio de la Economia Popular (Ministry of Popular Economy)
MOVA	Movement of Literacy Training for Youth and Adults
MPPE	Ministerio del Poder Popular para Educacion Superior (Ministry of Popular Power for Higher Education)
NIMBYism	Not in my back yard
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OVV	Venezuelan Observatory of Violence
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PDVSA	Petroleos de Venezuela (Venezuelan Petroleum)
PNB	Policia Nacional de Venezuela (Venezuelan National Police Force)
PSUV	Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)
SISOV	Sistema Integrado de Indicadores Sociales de Venezuela (Integrated System of Venezuelan Social Indicators)
TINA	There Is No Alternative
UCV	Universidad Central de Venezuela (Central University of Venezuela)
UBV	Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela (Bolivarian University of Venezuela)
UNEARTE	Universidad Nacional Experimental de las Artes (National Experimental University of the Arts)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
U.S.	United States (of America)
USA	United States of America
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Spanish Terms

<i>Adecos</i>	Supporters of AD and COPEI
<i>Apertura</i>	Opening
<i>Barrio</i>	Neighbourhood (in Venezuela, usually used to describe poor or “popular” neighbourhoods)
<i>Brigadista</i>	Brigade volunteer
<i>Chavista</i>	Chavez supporter
<i>Comunas</i>	Communes
<i>El proceso</i>	The process
<i>El pueblo</i>	The people
<i>Escualido</i>	Term meaning feeble or ill used to describe Chavez opponents
<i>Poder Popular</i>	Popular Power

Abstract

The University of Manchester

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Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution": Power to the People?

2012

President Hugo Chavez was first elected President of Venezuela in 1998 on an anti-neoliberal platform that promised "power to the people" via processes of state-grassroots collaboration. The current process of social change is framed within a wider discourse and policy that aims to build "Socialism for the 21st Century" through the development of new forms of political, social and economic engagement based on new conceptualisations and practices of democratic participation. Central to this process are the Communal Councils and Social Missions; initiated by the government not only to provide essential services, but also to help educate and encourage marginalised individuals and communities to organise and mobilise for change. Supporters argue that the "Bolivarian Revolution" is promoting social inclusion, protagonist participation and the redistribution of power. On the other hand many critics see Chavez's reforms to date as an outmoded, top-down model of social change or as a classical populist project that serves to consolidate authoritarian social structures.

Based on extensive fieldwork in Caracas from January 2009 to April 2010, I look beyond the rhetoric to uncover whether or not the ongoing processes of social change have contributed to new forms of political awareness and popular agency and whether or not there has been a transformation of power relations and structures. In doing so I contribute to theoretical debates into how radical change can be achieved in the 21st century, through a focus on grassroots movements, education and their changing relationship with the state.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning

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PART I
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS, CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 1:
Introduction

President Hugo Chavez was first elected President of Venezuela in 1998 on an anti-neoliberal platform that promised fundamental changes in the configuration of political power via processes of state-grassroots collaboration. Central to the discourse of the “Bolivarian Revolution”, as it is known by the Chavez government and its supporters, is a critique of neoliberal representative democracy as a barrier to participation and a re-affirmation of the links between education, participation and democracy. The 1999 Constitution declares Venezuela to be a participatory, protagonist democracy that complements representative democracy with direct and participatory democratic institutions and processes. These processes are argued to be inherently educational and education is overtly linked to the project of democratisation and social transformation. Since 2005 the process has radicalised and become conceptualised as developing “21st century socialism” based on a critique of “really existing socialisms” and a re-affirmation of anti-authoritarian democratic socialist traditions.

Using a Gramscian lens, this research situates the current Venezuelan process within wider debates as to the possibility of social transformation via state-led change that is grounded in grassroots participation and “thick” conceptualisations of democracy. Guided by both critical theory and critical pedagogy, I explore conceptualisations of democracy and strategies for social change through a focus on the intersection of politics and education, of education and democracy and the relationships between the state and grassroots organisations in projects of social change. I draw on current academic debates into the possibility of reform from above in conjunction with the consolidation and institutionalisation of grassroots, democratic mechanisms of decision-making and action from below that form the seeds of the new society and that hold the possibility of replacing existing structures and institutions. I build on these debates to engage in critical discussion of the key concepts highlighted in the discourse and critiques of the Venezuelan process to build a framework with which to assess the process in practice. Examining how this project is developing in practice contributes to theoretical knowledge as to the pitfalls and potentials of state-led projects to build popular power and how these link to alternative forms of democratic engagement and to the pedagogical dimensions of democracy. In doing so I add empirical research to ongoing debates as to how to achieve democratic

social change and shed light on possible practical approaches that can form the basis of a coherent alternative strategy based on more expansive forms of democratic engagement.

1.1 The Context

With the consolidation of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European regimes the Left was in crisis. The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1990 seemed to confirm that, even in Latin America with its long tradition of revolutionary struggle, socialism had failed. Those “socialist” regimes that did persist degenerated into what Cliff (1955) calls “bureaucratic state capitalism” that bore very little resemblance to early visions of democratic socialism. It was in this context that Castaneda (1994), Fukuyama (1992) and Thatcher (1980) proclaimed the undisputed victory of neo-liberalism as the only viable alternative.

However, far from the “end of history” (Fukuyama 1992), the late 20th and early 21st centuries have witnessed mass protests, democratisation struggles and the worldwide anti-globalisation movement that have resisted and challenged the dominant neoliberal model. Furthermore the wave of elections of left-leaning governments in many countries in Latin America has moved the agenda beyond protest to the idea that “another world is possible” (Motta and Nilsen 2011; Carroll 2010). While these developments reflect a growing agreement on the need for alternative power relations and have focussed debates on issues of the state and the nature of power, strategies for the realisation of social change are still hotly debated with some calling for “changing the world without taking power” and others “taking power to change the world” (Holloway 2002; Wainwright 2004). However increasingly arguments are emerging that a viable alternative lies in the struggle “in and against the state” via alternatives where the goal is not to simply compensate for capitalism or demand more resources from the state but to ‘democratise decision-making power over social wealth’ (Harris 2007:13; Duffy and Everton 2008). The Latin American region has seen a diverse range of responses but on the political left the defining features have been a commitment to both state power and active participation (Roberts 2007b). These ongoing struggles have further challenged neoliberal dominance and instilled a new belief in the possibility that active citizens can change and manage society in conjunction with a strong state.

The terms “*el pueblo*” (the people), “*popular*” and “*poder popular*” (popular power) are widely used in the literature to describe the alternatives emerging in the Latin American context in general and in Venezuela specifically. However they are problematic and have

been interpreted in different ways. Held (2006) explains that while democracy implies rule by the people, the idea of “the people” is ambiguous. In liberal democracy the idea of “the people” is restricted to a narrow conceptualisation of those who have the right to vote for representatives who will best represent their needs and wants (Schumpeter 1943). In this sense “people power” is restricted to the electoral arena and can be exclusionary. For example at various times the right to vote has been restricted to those who own property, those who are literate, men only or certain ethnic groups. In populist discourse the term is used to invoke ideas of a battle between “the people” and “the elites” in which the populist leader claims to be one of the people or the embodiment of the will of the people (Hawkins 2003). While there may be increased mobilisation, as with narrow representative democracy, power generally remains centrally concentrated.

Motta (2011) explains that more recently the creation of a symbolic notion of “the people” is linked to moving beyond narrow, representative democracy and populist discourse and mobilisation. It incorporates ideas of more inclusive, collective decision-making and active, protagonist participation that involves all of society and not just political elites. From this perspective, “the people” generally refer to the poor and all those previously or currently excluded from decision-making and power; in essence the non-elites (Hawkins 2003; Canovan 1999). Similarly Kane (2001:8) explains that in Spanish the term “popular” essentially means ‘of the people’ and that ‘it excludes and stands in contradistinction to the well off middle classes and the rich’. “Popular” is therefore understood as ‘the working class, the unemployed, “peasants”, the “poor” and sometimes the lower middle-class’ who have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes. In this sense the term “popular” is closely related to the “grassroots”, the “community level” or ‘ordinary people’ (Kane 2010:277; Fung and Wright 2001:6) in contrast to powerful elites. Drawing on these definitions, I understand “popular” or “the people” as relating to the exercise of power from the community level. From this perspective, ideas of “the people” and “popular power” are central to the discourse surrounding participatory or “thick” democracy and to renewed debates over the way democracy is conceptualised and practised.

Wainwright (2003) argues that the renewal of the social democratic principle of commitment to state provision of services coupled with more participatory forms of control over public services and resources has been impelled by a growing dissatisfaction with existing democratic institutions, in particular the way democracy has been reduced to a competitive struggle for votes from a mainly passive electorate. This has driven a re-examination of alternative forms of democratic organisation, politics and power based on

more inclusive protagonist and participatory institutions and processes that move beyond narrow, representative democracy. While representative democracy or “thin democracy” stresses procedures and electoral processes and has a limited view of the role of the citizen in society, participatory and direct democracies focus on critical engagement, active citizens and social justice; on “thick democracy” (Gandin and Apple 2002). An assessment of projects that claim to be developing “power to the people” or “popular power” needs to engage with these debates to examine if reforms are promoting widespread participation of the population in decision-making processes or whether, in reality, calls to “the people” are more reminiscent of populism and/or new forms of exclusion and elitism.

While mainstream discourse has incorporated elements of radical discourse such as “democratisation”, “participation” and “active citizenship” it has done so in ways that serve to depoliticise and deradicalise them, thus failing to deal with issues of power and politics (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Often such mainstream approaches seek to compensate for deficiencies in the capitalist system and debate the appropriate mix of state and market without challenging the fundamental structures that cause inequality and exclusion. They promote representative democracy as the “ideal” form without critical debate into the limitations of representative democracy and the possibility of alternatives based on new relations of social, political and economic organisation. However increasingly wider debates are emerging that the way forward lies in alternatives that are ‘grounded in the initiatives of popular organisations’ and that consolidate participation and action with the ultimate goal of social transformation (Bebbington and Bebbington 2001:7). This requires a more critical engagement with issues of democracy, power, structure and agency and a greater understanding of the underlying determinants of and barriers to social change. It requires making explicit links between types of democracy and the nature of popular engagement with the state.

While it is increasingly recognised that any alternative has to come from grassroots struggle and organisation, it is less clear what kind of processes and what kind of structures and leadership might be needed to realise a more democratic society. Concepts such as “socialism”, “democracy” and “revolution” are being re-evaluated and re-defined and, while top-down authoritarian “socialist” experiments have been widely discredited, increasingly the possibility of more bottom-up democratic social change is on the agenda. However there is still no consensus on the characteristics of a better world or on the strategy for its realisation. What is clear is that the search for alternatives needs to incorporate a critique of past experience and an assessment of current projects for change.

1.2 Latin American anti-neoliberal projects

With the crisis of neoliberalism in the Latin American context, the state is back on the agenda as a main actor in social change and alternative processes are emerging at both state and community level that offer a ‘potentiality of how politics and the world could be’ (Escobar 2010:13). These struggles have reignited debates into how grassroots organisations should relate to state power in the pursuit of democratic social change and Venezuela’s “Bolivarian Revolution” is at the forefront of these debates; offering an arena to examine how struggle “in and against the state” develops in practice (Brogan 2005).

A main vehicle in the struggle for democratic social change has been new Constitutions and Constituent Assemblies that Calderon (2008) says may represent a renewal of democracy that can facilitate greater participation and protagonism. Under Chavez a new “revolutionary” Constitution was introduced in 1999; revolutionary not only because of the broad participatory process involved in its formulation, but also because of the broad changes it sought to bring to Venezuelan society by decentralising power and mobilising the citizenry (Raby 2006). Popular participation in the formulation of the Constitution included election of the members of the Constituent Assembly, Street Parliaments and other meetings to submit proposals to the Constituent Assembly and debate changes, and referenda to ratify the changes. Supporters of the Venezuelan process argue that the revolutionary possibilities of the Constitution lie in its emphasis on direct and participatory democracy, complemented by broader discourse on democratisation via the active participation and decision-making of the people (Harnecker 2007).

Gibbs (2006:269) argues that this effort to revitalise citizenship through the construction of mechanisms for public participation in decision-making via ‘a process of repoliticisation from the community to the national level’ is a key aspect of the Chavez government. The process aims to build participatory, democratic organisation from the community level upwards and redistributive and participatory policy mechanisms from the state level down. President Chavez says that the new Bolivarian Revolution aims to complement representative democracy with participatory democracy by providing the tools and spaces necessary for citizens to influence decisions concerning their economic and social well-being, thus decentralising power and ‘inserting people into the administration of government’ (Chavez in Garcia-Guadilla 2003:192).

Central to “el proceso” (the process: the common term in Venezuela for the reforms) are the Social Missions, created by the government to provide essential services and, more

importantly, to help educate and encourage marginalised individuals and groups to organise and mobilise to claim their rights. Parallel, grassroots mechanisms such as Communal Councils and other community organisations, and extensive programmes of education for conscientisation, organisation and mobilisation such as the Education Missions, aim to institute change from above whilst also strengthening popular power from below.

Initially the movement was conceived of as anti-neoliberal and then radicalised to a more anti-capitalist stance. Since 2005, the Venezuelan process has been conceived as developing a “21st century socialism” that, while still not fully developed, is based on a critique of “really existing socialism” and a re-exploration of the principles of democracy. Shortly after his re-election in December 2007 Chavez announced a new phase of the Bolivarian Revolution that would be based on Popular Power and an explicitly socialist platform. He called for “the explosion of communal power” (Chavez 2007). In line with this he announced the “Five Motors of the Revolution” (Ministry of Popular Power for Infrastructure (MPPI) 2007); the Enabling Acts (giving Chavez special power for 18 months), Constitutional Reform, Morals and Enlightenment (concerned with “Education with Socialist Values”), New Geometry of Power (concerned with how to construct popular power and participation that goes beyond representative democracy) and the Explosion of Communal Power (via Communal Councils and other forms of community mobilization). While the five motors are closely linked, education and the construction of the Communal Councils are argued to be vital in promoting and institutionalising popular power; putting ideological *and* political change at the centre of the process. While the Communal Councils are designed to provide the space for citizen protagonism in local and national affairs, education is seen as vital to develop citizens who are able to make effective use of these new spaces.

Venezuela’s construction of “21st century socialism” differs from past socialist experiments where there was a violent overthrow of the state and the revolutionary party controlled the means of production and dominated the political system in the name of the people. Instead “socialism” in the Venezuelan context is equated with bottom-up, participatory forms of social, economic and political organisation that are framed within new conceptualisations of democracy. For example in an interview I conducted in May 2007, Hector Navarro, one of Chavez’s closest allies, explained that ‘discussion has only just begun about what kind of socialism is or should be created in Venezuela. But what is clear is that socialism is more than just attending to basic needs, it also requires democracy. This requires the construction of popular power. The key question is how to

maintain and increase democracy'. Burbach and Pineiro (2007) argue that this commitment to participatory democracy is the defining feature of the Venezuelan conceptualisation of socialism. As such, at least at the level of discourse, it is reminiscent of the Gramscian approach to developing democratic socialism, as I explore in detail in Chapter Two.

While some critics on both the left and right of the political spectrum see calls by a head of state to take up a new socialist project as an outmoded, top-down authoritarian or populist model of achieving social change that does little to strengthen autonomous mobilisation and democratise power relations (Brogan 2005; Lopez-Maya and Lander 2005; Cameron and Major 2001), supporters argue that Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution" is a new alternative to neoliberalism that draws on past traditions of participatory and direct democracy and democratic socialism (Harnecker 2007; Lebowitz 2007; Raby 2006). It is only by examining how the process is developing in practice that any discrepancies between discourse and practice can be explored; thereby building a greater understanding as to the possibility of state-promoted autonomous or semi-autonomous grassroots movements as vehicles for democratic social change. The Venezuelan process therefore offers an insight into processes of social change at the levels of state and community that some call an alternative to neoliberalism, some socialism and others a new beginning that can reinvent democracy (Escobar 2010).

1.3 Education, Democracy and Social Change

At the same time as fuelling debates as to the relationship between state and society in projects for social change, the process in Venezuela has also brought to the forefront classical debates as to the linkages between education and democracy and the role of the state in education and social change. The Bolivarian Revolution is conceptualised as being developed through education for protagonist, participatory democracy and education is seen in the broadest sense as occurring not just in formal and informal educational settings but in all aspects of social, economic and political participation.

The idea of using education to further political ends such as state-building, government legitimation and the promotion of a particular kind of citizen that supports a particular kind of democracy is not new. What is interesting in Venezuela are the explicit linkages between education and power, education and democracy, education and social change that are reminiscent of both the popular education traditions in Latin America (Freire 1998, 1992, 1970; Fals Borda 1992) and the Western philosophy that stressed the centrality of education for, in and as democracy (Dewey 1916). Central to these philosophical traditions

is the idea of knowledge as a social product that can be transformed by people who act. Such an approach focuses on the centrality of linking knowledge production with democracy and human agency and the idea that knowledge is power (Wainwright 2003). If knowledge is power, then education can domesticate or liberate, empower or disempower depending on how education is organised, how it contributes to knowledge production, what kind of knowledge is valued and what mode of social organisation is promoted.

Carr (2008) stresses that debates over democracy and education are closely linked to debates over representative versus participatory democracy. While the former highlights procedures and electoral processes (thin democracy) the latter focuses on critical engagement and social justice (thick democracy). In Venezuela education is overtly linked to the project of social, political and economic transformation and Venezuelan education policy has an explicit agenda of preparing citizens to develop participatory, protagonist democracy (Griffiths and Williams 2009). In this way it differs from the neoliberal approach that implies that education is neutral to overtly state that all education is political and that education and democracy are closely linked. The Constitution recognises participatory practices as a right and as a tool of inclusiveness but also as a learning process. Since coming to power the Chavez government has directed high levels of resources to public formal and non-formal education, including the Education Missions. These changes rest on Constitutional reforms that assert that, ‘education is a fundamental human right and social obligation that is free, obligatory and democratic’ (CBRV 1999:44). Education is conceived in terms of its potential to contribute to and consolidate social transformation within the framework of a participatory and protagonist model of democracy. The Venezuelan project therefore allows for an examination of not only experiments to develop participatory democracy, but also the pedagogical dimensions of “thick” democracy and the role of education in processes of social change (Larrabure 2009).

1.4 Research Questions

Williams (2004) argues that projects for social change need to be evaluated by the extent to which they contribute to mobilisation and sustained political action by the populace as well as their impact on structural relations of power. Massey (2009:22) further highlights that power relations are a process and need to be analysed beyond policy statements to explore the ‘socio-political practices of their realisation’. It is this idea of how policy is put into practice and the impact it has on mobilisation and structural relations that my research explores. By examining the impact of Chavez’s reforms this research looks beyond the

rhetoric to uncover whether or not new forms of political awareness and popular agency have emerged and whether or not there has been a shift in power relations through the introduction and institutionalisation of new channels to make demands and have them responded to. Venezuela is therefore a dynamic site for research and debate into how to achieve radical change in the 21st century.

To this end I ask the following general research question:

How far has the state-led process of social change that characterises the Chavez government fulfilled its promises of transferring “power to the people” through the development of state-grassroots partnerships that reflect some of the principles “thick” democracy and/or democratic socialism through popular hegemony?

To answer this question I examine:

Q1) What discourses and reforms “from above” frame the processes of change?

Q2) What role does education play in the development of political awareness and grassroots agency based on democratic and protagonist forms of organisation and decision-making?

Q3) How much scope is there for autonomous or semi-autonomous popular mobilisation and participation that impacts on the reorganisation of power relations within a political process aimed at synergies between state-led reform and popular mobilisation?

Q4) How far do discourses and reforms “from above” resonate with the Venezuelan people and how far do they feel that discourse has been put into practice?

1.5 Outline of thesis

To answer these questions Goldfrank’s (1998) approach provides useful guidance. He argues that in order to evaluate social change we need to examine the macro, meso and micro levels. At the macro level we need to consider the conditions from above that encourage or hinder community mobilisation, at the meso level at how governments and institutions design and implement mechanisms for participation and at the micro level we need to look at the citizens themselves; the nature of their participation and how they view that participation. Such an analysis is conducted in subsequent chapters.

In Chapters 2 and 3 I unpack the key concepts highlighted in the discourse, policy and critiques of the Venezuelan process and situate them within wider theoretical debates on

democracy, education and the nature and means of achieving social change. In doing so, I establish appropriate benchmarks with which to assess the Venezuelan process. Chapter 4 explores the Venezuelan context prior to Chavez's election to trace the development of the crisis of neoliberalism and delegitimation of the institutions and processes of representative democracy that created the conditions for the search for alternatives. I also examine the measures introduced at the macro level aimed at encouraging community mobilisation since Chavez came to power. Chapter 5 outlines the methodology used to explore if and how the discourse of the Chavez government has been put into practice. Chapters 6 and 7 examine what is actually happening in Venezuela to gain an understanding of what kind of state and what kind of democracy is being constructed and how this democracy is working in practice at the micro, meso and macro levels. Chapter 8 explores how the process in general is viewed by the people living through it, while Chapter 9 brings all these findings together to evaluate the Venezuelan process and build an understanding of the pitfalls and potentials of state-led initiatives to build popular power.

Chapter 2: **Reinventing Democracy: power, participation and social change**

'We define participatory and protagonist democracy as a new form of democracy marked by the free and active participation of citizens in the formulation, execution and control of the public arena as a necessary mechanism to achieve the protagonism that guarantees individual and collective development. It is the obligation of the State and the duty of society to facilitate the generation of optimum conditions for putting this into practice'

(Article 62 of the 1999 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution" emphasizes the pursuit of an anti-neoliberal project of democratic social change via processes of state-grassroots collaboration that redistribute power to the people. However, while there is increasing demand for and emerging instances of alternatives to neoliberalism, challenging Thatcher's (1980) famous declaration that "There Is No Alternative" (TINA), there is less consensus on what such an alternative should be and the means of achieving it. While it is widely accepted that economic, political and social development requires changes in the configuration of political power (Veltmeyer 2006; Alonso 2004), current debates are polarised as to the nature of power and the role of the state in social change; with some calling for "taking power to change the world" (Wilpert 2007a; Wainwright 2004) and others for "changing the world without taking power" (Holloway 2002). In this Chapter I use a Gramscian analysis to build a case that resistance movements and power struggles are not mutually exclusive and that the struggle for state power is not necessarily incompatible with autonomous grassroots organisation. In this way I establish a theoretical framework that can be used to understand and assess the current Venezuelan process that aims to combine state-impulsed change with grassroots participation in the pursuit of more democratic forms of engagement and social change. Having established an over-arching theoretical framework that aids an understanding of the current process in Venezuela, I then situate the Venezuelan process within more specific debates as to the actual democratic forms and processes that might make this vision of social change a reality.

Ideas of new state-society relations based on popular power are intimately linked to increased dissatisfaction with existing democratic institutions and to renewed debates over the way democracy is conceptualised and practised (Escobar 2010; Calderon 2008; Wainwright 2003; Barczak 2001). This has driven a re-examination of what is meant by democracy and associated concepts such as participation and decentralisation, and an exploration of alternative forms of democratic organisation. Increasingly, arguments are emerging that conventional standards for evaluating democracy are "out of touch" with current realities of "really existing democracies" and, in particular, with popular

conceptions, understandings, aspirations and experiences of what democracy should look like and the institutions and processes that might make these aspirations a reality (Buxton 2011). This leads many commentators such as Goldfrank (2011), Buxton (2011), Motta (2009) and Shapiro (2003) to argue that benchmarks of neoliberal democracy are losing their relevance as evaluatory tools. They call for ‘a reassessment of the state of democratic theory in the light of the actual operation of democratic politics’ (Shapiro 2003:2).

I therefore examine the key concepts in the discourse of both supporters and critics of the Venezuelan process including democracy, participation, decentralisation, socialism and populism and situate them within these ongoing debates, to build an understanding of the institutions and processes that impact on the nature of social change. I thereby build a theoretical framework and analytical tools and benchmarks with which to analyse the Venezuelan process in practice, as well as an understanding of the pitfalls and potentials of current projects for change that aim to synthesise grassroots struggle and centralised state reform within a framework of “thick” democracy.

2.1 Theories of power and social change

While I argue that a general framework for social change requires engaging simultaneously with issues of political power, state organisation and ideology, such an approach is hotly contested. Callinicos (2004) points to two main approaches in the search for alternatives to neoliberalism; autonomism and using the state as a potential ally. The former rejects the need for a focus on the state while the latter sees the state as the central focus in the struggle over power. This section explores these alternatives and argues that, while the Foucauldian assertion that power is diffused throughout society and that resistance can lead to social change is important in any theory of social change that sees a strong role for the grassroots, this should not be at the expense of engagement with state power. Rather the two need to be incorporated into a theory of progressive social change.

2.1.1 Power

Theories of power are intrinsically linked to theories of social change (Gaventa 2006; Eyben et al. 2006). However power is a contested concept in social and political theory and theories of power are divided into those that focus on power as a capacity that some have and others don’t (power over) and those who focus on the relational aspects of power; on how power is generated and how power can be exercised at all levels in society (power to, power with and power within). As Mosse (2005) highlights, the fact that power is

conceptualised in many different ways gives rise to different theoretical approaches to power dynamics and social change.

Lukes (1974) identified three dimensions of power. The one-dimensional liberal-pluralist view of power assumes that power is equally dispersed throughout society and that different groups can exercise and compete for power (Dahl 1989). The second approach recognises that power is not equally distributed and that power involves exploring who has power to set agendas (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). The third “critical theory” approach explores how power is also exercised through social arrangements and collective forces such as the media and educational institutions. Sayer (2004) and Allen (2003) highlight how power is increasingly recognised as a relational concept and involves power as the capacity to act and have influence.

Eyben’s (2005) highlighting of the interrelationship between these different aspects of power is useful in examining the Venezuelan process. She called for an incorporation of “power over” which stresses the relational and structural aspects of power, “power to” in terms of the capacity to have an effect, “power with” which emphasises the importance of building collective strength and “power as knowledge/ knowledge as power” which emphasises the pedagogical dimensions of power. It is these ideas of power from collective action, situated within an understanding of the relational and pedagogical aspects of power that can hinder or support the capacity to act and have influence, that are central to an understanding of the Venezuelan process and that are explored in subsequent sections. I firstly explore the polarised debates between those who call for “changing the world without taking power” and those who call for “taking power to change the world” before highlighting how a Gramscian analysis can incorporate aspects of both, as Eyben suggests.

2.1.2 “Changing the world without taking power”

Calls for “changing the world without taking power” were evident in the 19th century debates between Marx and Bakunin. Marx (1875) argued that revolutionary change would come via the seizure of state power by a vanguard party followed by a transitional state or “dictatorship of the proletariat” and the eventual development of a communal state that worked for the good of society. The Anarcho-communism of Bakunin argues that with these strategies ‘the egalitarian, liberatory ends of socialism would inevitably be suppressed by the contradictory methods and forms used to advance them’ (Boggs 1977b: 363). Bakunin (1872) therefore rejected Marx’s theory, arguing instead for prefiguration; creating local, collective, small-scale organs of socialist democracy such as workers’

councils and neighbourhood associations that form the seeds of the new society. The spectre of Stalin and Mao adds credence to Bakunin's emphasis on grassroots-led social change and casts doubt on focussing on the state as the vantage point from which society can be changed. However his approach ignores questions of state power and oppressive power relations more generally that impede social change. It is also unclear how the stateless society that he envisaged would ensure the full development of every human being that Anarcho-communism advocates without, for example, schools and medical centres that would inevitably involve some form of state-like organisation.

Foucault (1998) also rejected the state as the focal point for a theory of social change. He challenged traditional assumptions about the nature of power; highlighting the fact that power is not just concentrated in the state but is immanent in every social relationship. He emphasises the positive aspects of power in terms of the "power to" resist and sees resistance as a powerful tool in the struggle for social change. However his assumption that power is diffused throughout society downplays structural power relations and runs the risk of reinforcing the status quo. Very often structures of domination are so ingrained that it is difficult to instil a sense of "power to" in order to promote radical agendas of social change that are fully "bottom up".

Holloway (2002:12) similarly calls for changing the world without taking power. He calls the state the 'assassin of hope' and cites many examples of governments winning state power only to betray the movement that put them there. Like Foucault he therefore calls for social change via autonomous resistance rather than through a state or political party. However the autonomous village organisations instigated by the Zapatistas in Chiapas and cited by Holloway as examples of resistance, are in reality state-like parallel structures, albeit with very different modes of organization and power relations to the Mexican state that they are rejecting. This leads Brand and Hirsch (2004:377) to argue that the Zapatistas actually provide clues as to 'how to conduct politics with reference to the state without moving oneself into state forms and thus reproducing existing relations of domination'.

Many of the other struggles Holloway cites such as the dockers in Liverpool actually call for *stronger* state institutions that are more responsive and accountable to the people. Furthermore he fails to acknowledge situations where pressure from the grassroots has forced the state to introduce significant legislative change such as the Civil Rights movement and the feminist movement. While such change does not necessarily mean equal rights in practice it is certainly significant. Finally there is also the danger that

ignoring the state can ultimately lead to a movement's demise. Holloway does not examine cases where resistance movements failed because they did not address state power which was then used to repress them, as evidenced by the self-managed factories in Argentina post-2001 (Hearse 2004) and the ultimate failure of the Paris Commune of 1871 (Lenin 1917a). Raby (2006:3) concludes that Holloway 'evades questions of representation, leadership, organisation and structure which are crucial to the success of any alternative movement'.

While these approaches are important in their critique of vanguard-led seizures of state power and their emphasis that people themselves can change society through collective action and co-operation rather than relying on a leader or party to do it for them, they fail to offer any real alternative other than resistance and risk depoliticising the debate. The lesson to be learnt from these critiques is that the problem is not the state per se but how and by whom the state is organised and controlled. If we accept Holloway's argument that capitalist social relations are relations of conflict and struggle then surely the state, embedded in these relations, is also an arena of struggle and conflict. Challenging and changing the nature of these social relations to establish new institutions of grassroots power is therefore possible. This requires struggle at state level alongside the consolidation of democratic decision-making and organisation from below. Moving beyond resistance therefore requires challenging existing "power over" relations and incorporating ideas of "power with" and "power within" that enable people to see the possibilities open to them. This entails an understanding of the state's role in domination but also as a possible force for change. As Raby (2006:57) argues, 'it is one thing to recognise that revolutionary state power has all too often lost its popular democratic foundations and quite another to deny the importance of state power'.

2.1.3 "Taking Power to Change the World"

In the 20th century most debates over how to achieve radical social transformation focussed on the state as the vantage point from which society could be changed, either via violent means to seize state power and instigate revolutionary change, or by electoral means whereby, for example, social democratic governments would reform the state apparatus and introduce comprehensive welfare schemes to compensate for the deficiencies of capitalism. The Civil Rights Movement, anti-Apartheid Movement and other social movements also saw the State as the vantage point to achieve social change, by demanding reforms from the State and/or campaigning to replace regimes. However, all of these approaches have met with problems.

Experience from the “great revolutions” of the 20th century reveals that the seizure of state power does not necessarily guarantee popular power and more democratic forms of social organisation as I discuss in more detail in sections 2.7.1 and 2.7.2. Past left seizures of state power often failed because the “revolutionary” organisations that seized control of the state were themselves top-down and bureaucratic, with centralised decision-making that was then reflected in state organisation. On the other hand reformist movements and governments have often found that attempts to instigate change are blocked or even repressed by the State apparatus (Hearse 2004; Petras and Fitzgerald 1988; Benn 1980; Lenin 1917b). Finally while there are numerous examples where radical grassroots movements have engaged with the state in order to gain concessions and/or promote social change, many found themselves incorporated into the state or having to compromise their demands to gain concessions from the state. Movements that try to engage with the state are therefore at risk of co-option or the dilution of their agendas (Kothari and Minogue 2002).

Rather than these problems representing a total failure of a statist approach, they reveal the necessity of re-evaluating the role of the state in hindering or promoting social change and re-assessing the institutional changes and processes that can promote new forms of organisation based on co-operation and the redistribution of power. It is here that ideas of working “in and against the state” become central to an understanding of how resistance and autonomy can be coupled with an assault on state power.

2.1.4 “In and against the state”: the need for synthesis between autonomy and the assault on state power

While I have highlighted that both autonomy and seizing/confronting state power are problematic in the pursuit of democratic social change, increasingly arguments are emerging that draw on the work of Gramsci and Freire to suggest that it is possible to find a middle ground between total autonomy and change from above by working ‘tactically inside and strategically outside’ the state (Mayo 1999:163, 1994a, 1994b; Kane 2001; Gadotti 1998). Such an approach emphasises that state power should remain central in any theory of power, agency and social change and that “power from below” via resistance and autonomous struggle is not necessarily incompatible with a strong state. As Wainwright (2004) rightly argues both resistance *and* taking state power are important, otherwise there is a danger of leaving oppressive structures intact if only the former is addressed and a danger of authoritarianism if only the latter is addressed. While grassroots struggle can

create the conditions for social change, it is just one step in the overall struggle. It is only through structural transformation that change can be institutionalised and preserved. The critical issue is who takes control of state institutions and whether or not new forms of control develop a more responsive and effective state and administrative bureaucracy that is internally structured along democratic, participatory lines and is accountable to and responsive to grassroots demands.

Much of the debate as to the role of the state in social change depends on how the state is defined and understood, itself a subject of widespread theoretical debate. Whilst Foucault and Holloway see the state as distinct from society and that alternatives arising from society should therefore ignore the state, I draw on the work of Jessop (2008, 1990), and Gramsci (1971) in particular, to argue that the state is intimately linked to society and should therefore be central to any theory of social change. States are more than just a neutral arbiter as pluralists argue, they are ‘a condensation of power relations within society’ (Hay 1996:7; Poulantzas 1980) that form what Jessop (1990:366) calls a structured and ‘complex institutional ensemble’. However this does not mean that the state is totally autonomous as some theorists such as Skocpol (1979) suggest, rather the state is a complex and differentiated set of apparatuses, institutions and practices that vary from society to society and over time. The state, in this sense, contains spaces for both domination and contestation.

The state pre-exists incoming regimes and therefore does have a degree of autonomy. Individuals working within the state apparatus have been socialised into the dominant norms and culture of society and state practices and will tend to resist change and seek to preserve their own position. Any government coming to power does not necessarily control the state and, where the incoming regime is radically different to past regimes, state actors will resist. However ultimately ‘it is not the state which acts: it is always specific sets of politicians and state officials’ (Jessop 1990:337). The state is essentially a tool, albeit one that has predominantly been controlled by powerful elites. The struggle for state power therefore involves the struggle to make the state a tool of more egalitarian and just social relations of power, production and organisation. In this sense the struggle is not so much against the state *per se* but against the organisational and ideological practices of the “old” state and its personnel that promote dominance, inequality and exclusion rather than democracy and inclusion. It is here that Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony are important as a means of bringing together structural and autonomist

discourse and developing a theoretical and practical approach to working “in and against” the state.

2.2 Gramsci: hegemony, counter-hegemony and social change

In his “Prison Notebooks” Gramsci (1971) lays out a comprehensive theory of social change that details how the struggle over the control of ideas and knowledge can promote social stability and domination but can also promote social change. This section argues that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, counter-hegemony and social change, and associated theories of power and of the state, allow for a synthesis of ideas of resistance with ideas of confronting state power, thereby providing a clear framework for understanding processes that aim to pursue social change through state-grassroots collaboration and working “in and against the state”.

2.2.1 Hegemony

Hegemony, derived from the Greek word *hegemonia*, means leadership or dominance, especially by one state or social group over others. Hegemony refers to the dominant social, economic and political forces in a given society that impact on ‘the socio-cultural production of the way people think’ (Peet 2003:17). It involves an indirect form of dominance whereby the hegemon, (leader or dominant group/state) is able to persuade other groups to see the world on their terms. Boggs (1976:39) explains that Gramsci’s conceptualisation of hegemony focuses on ‘the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes and beliefs that have the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. It is internalised by the population so it becomes “common sense” whereby the ideology of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things’. Hegemony is ‘inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed’ (Gramsci 1971:333). In this way dominant values and modes of organisation are accepted by subordinate groups as their own, even if such arrangements exacerbate their domination. Hegemony resides in both the system of production and in the realm of ideas and is developed not only through coercion or force but through consent. Indeed coercion or force is generally unnecessary if consent for the dominant ideology is secured. Gramsci (1971:137) refers to a ‘historic bloc’ whereby socio-economic relations (the base) and political ideologies and practices of the state and society (the superstructure) are mutually reinforcing and this forms the basis of a hegemonic order.

Gramsci stresses that hegemonic dominance is a product of social relations and is created and reproduced through social action rather than purely by the economic, material base. As Williams (1977:112) said, 'a lived hegemony is always a process' not a fixed ideology. As such, it is never total. There is always a dialectic between the dominant ideology and its promises and the lived experiences of those who give their consent. With this comes the possibility of counter-hegemonic struggle through the contestation of dominant relations and ideologies. This understanding of hegemony as a product of domination and counter-hegemony as the struggle to challenge these relations of domination requires an understanding of how power works and how power relates to social stability and social change (Carroll 2010).

2.2.2 Hegemony, counter-hegemony and power

As I highlighted in section 2.1.1 theories of power are intrinsically linked to theories of social change (Gaventa 2006; Eyben et al. 2006). Gramsci's theory of hegemony encompasses a relational theory of power and how it operates in society. Power, in the Gramscian sense, is not a "thing" to be seized but a relationship between social forces that can be exercised over others but also with others to transform existing power relations (Allen 2003; Dagnino 1998). Hegemony itself is a form of power that, in contrast to coercive power, works to empower particular beliefs, norms and practices at the expense of others, thereby shaping societal relationships in ways that maintain the power of the dominant groups or hegemons. Eyben (2005:23) explains that 'when power relations repeat themselves and form a pattern, they become institutionalised; they become the rules of the game', what Bourdieu (1977:72) calls 'habitus' or Gramsci (1971:325) 'common sense'. Unequal power relations are naturalised and consolidated through hegemony and this restricts opportunities for change.

Power for Gramsci therefore resides not only in economic relations, but in the realm of knowledge and ideas: in all societal organisations and structures of everyday life that secure consent for dominant ideology. This includes institutions of the state that hold the monopoly of the use of force and institutions of civil society such as education, the media and religious groups. Importantly this leads him to argue that counter-hegemonic struggle should be conducted at the level of the superstructure rather than the structure. The superstructure, as the arena in which dominant hegemony is consolidated, is also the arena in which the battle of ideas and power relations takes place. For Gramsci, political power is a reflection of economic power *and* ideological discourse and both need to be confronted via counter-hegemonic struggle.

Carroll (2006) distinguishes between anti-hegemony and counter-hegemony and argues that while the former focuses on Holloway's ideas of moving from "power over" to "power to" through autonomous resistance to dominant hegemony, the latter, emphasised by Gramsci, concerns the pursuit of alternative ideologies and modes of social organisation that have the potential of uniting people around an alternative project *and* that can potentially challenge and replace existing power relations. Counter-hegemony can therefore be understood as counter-power (Carroll 2010). Opportunities to build a counter-hegemonic movement develop in times of crisis in the existing order.

2.2.3 Organic Crisis

The idea of organic crisis to describe the point at which ruptures appear in the structure of the old order, thereby offering the possibility of change, is a crucial element in Gramscian thought. Gramsci (1971: 275-6) describes an organic crisis as when 'the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer "leading" but only "dominant", exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies and no longer believe what they used to believe previously etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born'.

However while Gramsci's comment that 'the new cannot be born' might suggest the impossibility of social change through human action, he goes on to stress that the frustration and scepticism that accompany such a crisis, often exacerbated by the use of force, leads people to question the theoretical assumptions of the dominant ideology and its promise of a "better" society. It is this recognition that the new cannot be born within existing ideologies and relations that raises the possibility of change. In this way Gramsci's theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony reconceptualises processes of social stability and social change.

Gramsci stressed that social change is not an inevitable result of economic crisis. Socio-economic conditions or crises merely set the conditions in which change is possible; social change has to be built through human action. By emphasising the way both economic/material conditions *and* ideas mutually influence one another, Gramsci avoids the deterministic, historical materialism of Marx and puts the role of human agency in social change firmly on the agenda (Figueroa 2006; Boggs 1976). While there is always the possibility that the crisis 'will be resolved in favour of a restoration of the old' there is also the possibility of creating new ideologies and developing new political strategies; the possibility of creating something new via counter-hegemonic struggle (Gramsci 1971:276).

Just how this struggle could be put into practice is developed through Gramsci's idea of a "war of position" and prefigurative practice.

2.2.4 From theory to practice: The War of Position and Prefigurative Practice in the pursuit of social change

Gramscian analysis emphasises the importance of moving 'from protest to power' through opposition to and confrontation with existing structures (Harris 2007:3). In practice, Gramsci argued that this should take place via a "war of position". Harris (2007:3) summarises Gramsci's idea of a "war of position" as a process of 'popular social forces building alternative institutions that allows the construction of an alternative historic bloc that holds the possibility, though not the certainty, of building a new society'. The war of position can serve to shift the balance of power by creating space for the practice of new alternatives and the consolidation of an alternative ideology that can challenge dominant ideological hegemony and possibly replace existing institutions and processes (Boggs 1976).

Lenin's (1917b) idea of "dual power" as a strategy for social change provides a useful complement to Gramsci's ideas of a war of position and the importance of struggle "in and against the state". Lenin envisaged workers' councils and other forms of community organisation operating in parallel with the official state apparatus to eventually establish a new form of state power. However Luxemburg (1900) cautioned that Lenin's ideas of dual power would only develop popular power if popular democratic forms of organisation were incorporated from the outset; otherwise there is a danger that dual power will develop new organs of domination to replace the old state. Dual power must therefore prefigure in microcosm the desired future society. Gramsci's work similarly emphasizes that while dual power is important, it cannot be solely administered from above but needs to be grounded in grassroots organisation, popular hegemony and prefigurative practice.

This idea of prefiguration, of recognising that the *means* of achieving the desired future society determine the ends, was central to Gramsci's conceptualisation of counter-hegemonic projects. As Boggs (1977a:100) says, 'the embodiment within the ongoing political practices of a movement of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal' is vital. It is only by incorporating grassroots participation from the very beginning that human beings capable of running the future society can develop. As Morrow and Torres (1995:15) point out, the Soviet model of revolutionary change was fundamentally flawed from the outset because it focussed on the

Leninist idea of seizing state power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, which in reality became the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party. They conclude that ‘any transformative political project must begin with democratic assumptions’ and that rather than the ends justifying the means, the means will condition the ends.

The need for popular hegemony is central to Gramsci’s theory of social change as a means of uniting large numbers of people around a common project, of de-legitimising old forms of organisation *and* providing the impetus and power to replace them. As Gramsci argued, it is possible to have a dialectical relationship between centralised organisation and the self-organisation of the grassroots and between what already exists and what might be constructed. In this way Gramsci’s theory is able to incorporate ideas of autonomous resistance and seizing state power, thereby providing a theoretical and practical framework to understand how working “inside and outside the state” can serve as the driving force for social change.

2.2.5 Gramsci and working “in and against the state”

The debate over the balance between state power and autonomous society creates tensions in any democratic society. Engagement with the state always comes with a danger of co-option but pure autonomy may mean no significant change and play into neoliberal ideas of rolling back the state. While there are merits to dual power and parallelism in that they allow local communities to build capacities in decision-making and self-management, complete autonomy does little to improve co-operation between communities and traditional organs of the state. Gramsci’s approach allows for a reconciliation of these contrasting debates. Gramsci (1977:65) asks ‘how can the present be welded to the future, so that while satisfying the urgent necessities of the one we may work effectively to create and “anticipate” the other’? It is this dialectic between what already exists and what might be constructed that resonates with theorising on the pursuit of social change by working “in and against the state”.

The Gramscian approach reveals that the state and society are not separate but occupy the same arena in the struggle for hegemony. He highlighted that ‘the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria’ (Gramsci 1971:182). The state in this sense is understood as a relationship of forces *and* as a strategic field for social and political change (Boden 2011; Jessop 2008; Poulantzas 1980). While the state may institutionalise bias and secure cohesion (Poulantzas 1980) and while ‘the state constitutes an uneven playing field which privileges some forces and

interests while proving less accessible to others' (Hay 1996:7), it is possible for a counter-hegemonic movement to engage in a "war of position" that can challenge and ultimately transform the state.

Carroll (2006:21) develops these ideas and argues that Gramsci's approach reminds us that hegemony needs to 'walk on both legs'. In other words, resistance to *and* transformation of the dominant hegemony through struggle at both state and grassroots levels are important in the battle to develop an alternative hegemonic project that reclaims the state (Carroll 2010, 2006; Wainwright 2003). Boden (2011) argues that such a re-imagining of the state in relation to hegemony and counter-hegemony allows for the combination of two previously separate strategies of the left: top-down strategies to mobilise the nation and state-created parallel grassroots organisations outside of the state. In other words Gramsci's re-imagining provides a theoretical framework that encapsulates the arguments put forward in section 2.1.4 on the need to work "in and against the state" in the pursuit of social change, thereby providing a useful framework with which to understand and analyse the Venezuelan process that aims to pursue an alternative to neoliberal hegemony based on state-led initiatives that give "power to the people". An understanding of the Venezuelan process also requires analysis of the crisis of neoliberalism that created the conditions for the emergence of counter-hegemonic struggle.

2.3 Neoliberalism: from hegemony to crisis to alternatives

This section situates the crisis of neoliberalism and the emergence of alternatives within a Gramscian analysis of hegemony, crisis and counter-hegemonic struggle. I highlight the key areas of dissatisfaction that have arisen from the crisis of neoliberalism, with a focus on the delegitimation of representative democracy and the neoliberal state. I also identify the key arguments put forward by alternatives to neoliberalism, particularly the Venezuelan alternative. These are then used as the basis for discussion of the need to re-evaluate key concepts and engage with wider debates as to the democratic forms and processes that can foster social change based on state-impulsed grassroots participation and power in practice. The discussion of these key concepts and processes forms the basis of the latter part of this Chapter.

2.3.1 Neoliberal hegemony

Gramsci's concept of hegemony provides a useful framework for understanding how neoliberal economic and political ideologies and processes have come to dominate and form a historic bloc. Key elements of neoliberalism, understood as a particular form of

economic and political power relations, include the centrality of the interests of capital and market processes, including free markets and privatisation, an emphasis on representative democracy and a reduced role of the state in social and economic spheres (Harris 2007; Held 2006; Carroll 2006; Harvey 2005). In terms of political organisation, the neoliberal model advocates relations between state and society based on minimalist conceptions of both the state and democracy wherein active participation, or the exercise of “power to”, is seen as incompatible with liberal democracy (Robinson 2008b; Held 2006; Alvarez et al. 1998). It is closely associated with the theory of Hayek, Friedman and Nozick and the New Right policies of Thatcher in the U.K. and Reagan in the U.S.A. (Held 2006; Munck 2003).

Economic and political modes of organisation ‘unfold around specific relations of domination’ (Figueroa 2006:189). Neoliberalism emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as the dominant ideology that secured consent for a hegemonic “historic bloc” on a global scale, institutionalised through the “Washington Consensus” and bolstered by the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (Boden 2011; Robinson 2008b; Wilpert 2007a; Harris 2007; Katz 2006; Harvey 2005). In the Gramscian sense, neoliberal ideology has been able to impose its hegemony as the “commonsense” mode of economic, political and social organisation, thereby consolidating the hegemony of market society and reinforcing the idea of neoliberalism as the only viable alternative (Harris 2007; Carroll 2006; Agnew 2005; Munck 2003). However increasingly neoliberalism has failed to live up to its promises and meet expectations. With rising inequality and poverty and global economic crises neoliberal hegemony, while still dominant, is increasingly being questioned. This raises the possibility that an organic crisis of neoliberalism is emerging (Carroll 2010; Wilpert 2007a).

2.3.2 From hegemony to crisis

Crises and challenges to the dominant hegemony occur when ‘the expectations it creates of a better life confront the reality of ongoing hardships for the majority of the population’ (Kohl 2006:309). In Latin America specifically, neoliberal policies have exacerbated inequality and poverty and have led to disillusionment or scepticism, to use Gramsci’s term, with neoliberal economic organisation. In political terms the neoliberal parameters of democracy have proven narrow and elitist and are currently being challenged (Alvarez et al. 1998; Bachrach and Botwinick 1992). This crisis of legitimacy has created the conditions that are conducive to the search for alternatives (Robinson 2008b; Roberts 2007b; Katz 2006). The region has seen increased popular mobilisation and a revival of

leftist movements due to the inherent tensions between the promises of neoliberal democracy and the lived experiences of social inequality and exclusion (Roberts 2007b).

Examples such as the Caracazo uprising against neoliberal reforms in Venezuela in 1989, the Zapatista rebellion against the NAFTA agreement in 1994 and the election of left-leaning governments in many countries of Latin America indicate growing opposition to neoliberal hegemony that has fuelled debates as to the possibility of “another world” and perhaps a counter-hegemonic force or forces (Motta and Nilsen 2011; Carroll 2010). The so-called “left turn” (Castaneda 2006) in Latin America is therefore an interesting arena to examine what social and political forces might achieve hegemony in the anti-neoliberal struggle, and Gramsci’s theorization of social change provides a useful framework with which to analyse these alternatives. Harris (2007) for example says that alternatives are emerging in Latin America that resemble Gramscian ideas of building alternative historic blocs that can engage in a war of position, rather than vanguard parties leading a Leninist insurrection. Chavez supporters argue that the Bolivarian Revolution represents a ‘genuine attempt to construct a new hegemony’ (Lopez-Maya 2003:89) through the redistribution of power and resources, as I discuss in more detail in the next section.

2.3.3 The Venezuelan alternative

The Venezuelan case is just one of a number of alternatives that are emerging that critique and challenge the political and economic dimensions of neoliberal “market democracy” (Harris 2007). As I explore in detail in Chapter 4, the polarising effects of neoliberal policy in Venezuela led to the ‘subsequent collapse of the institutions and processes that had previously secured consent for the hegemonic bloc’ and ‘urban unrest became endemic’ (Duffy and Everton 2008:115). The idea of hegemonic contestation was put firmly on the agenda (Chalcroft 2011). Figueroa (2006:203) concludes that ‘the effects of neoliberalism all converged to facilitate the triumph of Chavez’ and the pursuit of an anti-neoliberal alternative.

The crisis of neoliberalism ‘opens up space for the construction of counter-hegemony’ including arguments for autonomism and arguments for a re-appraisal of the state (Boden 2011:97). The current process in Venezuela proposes an alternative that focuses on the latter; on taking state power *and* redefining and transforming state-society relations through social change from above and below (Figueroa 2006:189-203). It offers a useful example to explore how counter-hegemony ‘walks on both legs’ (Carroll 2006:21) in that it is simultaneously a process of parallelism *and* state control, of building new counter-

hegemonic institutions and ideology *and* using the old state to do this. As such it is reminiscent of Gramscian ideas of a counter-hegemonic movement based not on anti-power but on counter-hegemonic power struggles that have the potential of eventually transforming the old state and society more generally. The “Bolivarian Revolution” therefore transcends the simplistic debate between taking or opposing state power and offers an arena to explore how working “in and against the state” might develop in practice (Boden 2011; Ciccariello-Maher 2007a). Harnecker (2007:149) argues that ‘although it may seem contradictory to some, it is possible, from above, to encourage people to build democratic power from below’. This research explores this possibility in practice.

2.4 Revolution, democracy and socialism: redefinitions

The “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela is conceptualised as a project that aims to develop “21st century Socialism” through state-grassroots collaboration and participatory, democratic institutions and processes. Terms such as revolution, socialism and democracy are therefore central to the discourse of the Chavez government and require redefinition in order to build a framework with which to evaluate a process that aims to develop “thick” democracy via struggle “in and against the state”, and build an understanding of the institutions and processes that might facilitate such struggle. This section examines the discourse of the Chavez government and situates it within wider debates as to the democratic forms and processes that can foster revolutionary social change.

I argue that it is possible to speak of revolution without the need for violent overthrow of a regime and that complementing representative democracy with participatory and direct democracy, as the Venezuelan process proclaims, has the potential to build more responsive and inclusive democratic institutions and processes. I also argue that Gramsci’s ideas of counter-hegemony and prefiguration are central in understanding the potential of the Venezuelan process to realise democratic social change. Counter-hegemony explores the struggle for viable alternatives and, for Gramsci, the only viable alternative lay in principles of democratic socialism. It is this approach that resonates, at least at the level of discourse, with the current Venezuelan process and which provides the most useful theoretical framework to assess how such a process might develop in practice.

2.4.1 Revolution: redefinitions

The Venezuelan process is known by the Chavez government and its supporters as the “Bolivarian Revolution”. The concept of revolution has generally been seen as the seizing of state power by violent means whereas the Chavez government came to power by

peaceful, electoral means. However more recently, the idea of revolution has been re-evaluated and redefined and is re-entering debates into social change, conceptualised as a *process* of ‘fundamental social, economic and political change’ (Cammack 1998:170). It is this idea of revolution as a process that is crucial to an understanding of the Venezuelan case.

While theorising revolutions has tended to focus on the causes of revolutionary upheavals, more recently the focus has turned to the processes that are put in place once a revolutionary movement gains power and the type of regime that emerges from these processes (Selbin 1999). The distinction between political and social revolutions and between revolutions from above and revolutions from below are also important in understanding revolutionary processes and outcomes (Cammack 1998). As Berkman (1929:195) argues, ‘There are revolutions and revolutions. Some revolutions change only the governmental form by putting a new set of rulers in place of the old. These are political revolutions’. While political revolutions may introduce changes that benefit previously excluded sectors, for example through more equitable distribution of resources, they rely solely on change from above that does little to fundamentally transform power relations; they are not social revolutions. Only a revolution grounded in pressure for radical change from below to consolidate new institutions and processes that enable the fundamental redistribution of resources *and* power would constitute a political *and* social revolution.

Finally, Selbin (1999) argues that successful revolutions require both institutionalisation and consolidation, where institutionalisation refers to the dismantling and replacement or reconfiguration of the institutions of the old regime and consolidation to whether or not the people embrace the revolutionary project and believe they can make a difference. While Arendt (1965:28) similarly stresses that it is vital that people believe that they are agents in a process of breaking with the old and building a new system, this transformation is much harder to achieve than the taking of political power, as Dorman’s (2010) research into the politics of African states reveals. There, as in Latin America, liberation movements have taken control of government, often through peaceful means. On seizing power these movements find themselves in control of the very state against which they had fought. This raises challenges as to how to avoid co-option into “old” political practices that can prefigure undemocratic outcomes following revolutionary success. It is here that Gramsci’s work on revolutionary transitions and the “war of position” is important as a framework to understand how revolutionary processes might successfully combine taking state power

and reforming the institutions and processes of democracy with parallelism and popular power.

Burgos (2002) highlights how the inclusion of Gramsci in Latin American thought has transformed the logic of thinking about revolutionary social transformation. Revolution is seen as more than a single explosive act. It is a process in which new power relations are constructed along with new ways of organising society that can increase the likelihood of democratic outcomes from revolutionary success. Deepening democracy and “working in and against the state”, rather than the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, become the focal points for transforming society. This allows for a change of focus ‘from the logic of the assault on power to the logic of the construction of new centres of power within the present society’ (Burgos 2002:14). This re-evaluation provides a theoretical framework to understand the current Venezuelan process that aims to promote revolutionary change through democratic processes at the level of the state and grassroots.

For Harris (2007:14), Latin American examples reveal the possibility of using ‘democratic means to fashion revolutionary institutional space’ while Partlow (2009:no page) calls current processes in Venezuela and other Latin American countries such as Bolivia ‘document-driven revolutions’ that instigate new Constitutions and political processes in order to promote revolutionary social change. In this sense revolutionary change, seen as ‘the struggle for a better world’, is possible via democratic means (Raby 2006:6). The Venezuelan case offers an arena to examine the extent to which this is developing in practice through an assessment of how the process of social change is unfolding, the institutions and processes that emerge from it, and how far the revolutionary project resonates with the people. Such an analysis also requires a re-assessment of what is meant by democracy as well as the democratic processes and institutions based on state-led reforms and grassroots power that might facilitate such revolutionary change.

2.5 (Re) Conceptualisations of Democracy

Ellner (2003: 8-10) highlights how Venezuela was a so-called model of democracy in Latin America since the signing of the Punto Fijo Pact in 1958 that established a power-sharing model of representative democracy between the two main parties, Accion Democratica (AD) and the Social Christians (COPEI). However the popular uprising against neo-liberal policy known as the Caracazo of 1989 brought to a head the increasing dissatisfaction with the “Punto Fijo” democracy and marked a turning point in the struggle for an alternative (Lander 2007). By the time of Chavez’s election in 1998 the formal state

apparatus including the mechanisms of representative democracy had lost their legitimacy. These events and the subsequent 1999 Constitution that calls for complementing representative democracy with more participatory, protagonist forms reflect wider debates on the crisis of representative democracy and the reinvention of democracy.

Such debates talk of “democratising democracy”: the idea that democracy can be deepened through the development of dual forms of participatory and representative systems that draw on traditions of participatory democracy and direct democracy and re-evaluations of social democratic and democratic socialist ideology (de Sousa Santos 2005). Any project that claims to be moving towards democratic socialism, as the Venezuelan government claims, therefore requires engagement with these debates and assessment of how far the process develops democratic institutions and processes that strengthen popular participation and grassroots power. While Chapter 3 examines in more detail the pedagogical dimensions of democracy, this section explores theoretical conceptualisations of democracy and how they relate to processes of social change or stability in order to situate the current Venezuelan process within these wider theoretical debates.

2.5.1 The crisis of representative democracy

Held (2006) defines democracy as a form of government in which governing power is derived from the people. The term democracy derives from the Greek Demos (the people) and Kratos (authority, rule). It basically means “rule by the people” but the form this should take and the way in which this rule is exercised in practice is contested and has been interpreted differently in different contexts. Pateman (1970) divides “classical” democratic theory into two schools; one that stresses democratic norms, procedures and institutions such as the election of representatives who would govern responsibly or run the risk of not being re-elected and one that promotes more participatory forms. More recently Gandin and Apple (2002) make the distinction between “thin” or “thick” democracy. Thin democracy is usually associated with neoliberalism and representative democracy and emphasises proceduralism whereas thick democracy is associated with more participatory agendas and reflects a concern with political literacy, critical engagement and political action.

In the West democracy has come to be associated with representative democracy whereby power is held by the people but exercised indirectly through elected representatives who make decisions on their behalf. Liberal representative democracy is usually manifested in two ways; protective democracy and developmental democracy (Held 2006). Protective

democracy is evident in many modern Western democracies and aims to protect and govern individuals with diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. The focus is on traditional individual liberties and freedoms with less focus on collective rights. Developmental democracy incorporates elements of protective democracy but also links democracy with collective human development. However, as with protective democracy, there is little focus on the active participation of citizens. The emphasis is on the idea that having the vote in a democratic system automatically guarantees that all people have political and democratic representation and that those representatives will be held accountable by the risk of future electoral defeat. However Leftwich (2002) argues that representative democracy is a conservative system of power that impedes radical change and also excludes certain sectors of society. This has led to the search for alternatives that ‘construct new kinds of relationships between ordinary people and the institutions that affect their lives’ (Gaventa 2004a:25).

In Latin America specifically, dissatisfaction with the institutions and processes of representative democracy has led to a belief in and search for alternatives that promote social inclusion and greater input on decision-making processes (Raby 2006; Burgos 2002; Barczak 2001) In particular recent trends of “direct democracy” and “participatory democracy” are argued to have opened up new channels for grassroots democratic participation. Muhr (2010a, 2008) points out that often the two concepts are seen as coterminous however while the two are inextricably linked, they are also distinct. Whilst participatory democracy requires giving ‘all the citizens a direct interest in the actions of the government and an incentive to participate actively’, direct democracy is the essence of participatory democracy (Macpherson 1977:51). Sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 explore these distinctions in more detail.

2.5.2 Direct Democracy

While representative democracy focuses on voting for representatives, direct democracy is a broad term that encompasses a variety of decision-making processes such as recall elections to revoke elected officials, referendums, public meetings and petitions to allow direct input in discussing, amending or proposing Laws. Direct democracy combines direct participation in the affairs of the state through autonomous self-government *and* a communal state made up of directly accountable and revocable delegates (Held 1996). It draws on the experience of the Paris Commune and Karl Marx’s ideas of citizens in worker and community councils having a direct part in public affairs and self-governance in order to redistribute economic and political power (Held 2006).

Barroso (2002) and Barczak (2001) point to the importance of direct democracy in Latin America in overthrowing patron-client relations and allowing the previously excluded majority to have a direct influence on policy decisions. In Venezuela this has been realised through Constitutional guarantees such as the right to recall elected officials, referendums and popular consultations. However Barczak (2001) also cautions that direct democracy does not necessarily lead to greater input on decision-making. For example while popular consultations in Latin America allow direct representation, they can also be manipulated by populist Presidents to by-pass the legislature and consolidate their own power. Nevertheless it is increasingly being recognised that it is possible to combine representative democracy with direct democracy to allow the majority a greater say in decision making.

Direct democracy, understood as organized society exercising popular power, also requires a decrease in social and economic inequality within a framework that allows for the full development of human potential to overcome barriers to engagement and enable previously marginalised people to engage on a more equal footing (Lebowitz 2006). This implies some sort of state-impulsed system of welfare to address inequality and exclusion. The Constitutional guarantees, Laws and processes that have been put in place in Venezuela suggest the development of such a framework. For example the Venezuelan Constitution guarantees mechanisms of direct democracy as a right, the Venezuelan government has instigated programmes of social welfare and education to enable people to engage fully in direct democracy and the Law of Communal Councils (2006) allows for the exercise of self-governance. However it is only by examining how these mechanisms are developing in practice and how they are viewed by the Venezuelan people that an understanding can be gained of how far these reforms contribute to a redistribution of power; aspects that I address in the second part of this thesis.

2.5.3 Participatory Democracy

Participatory democracy refers to autonomous, local involvement by the people in decisions that affect their own lives (Held 2006). Macpherson (1977) identified two crucial conditions for participatory democracy; a reduction in social and economic inequality and social exclusion to tackle the barriers to effective participation that are faced by many poor people, and the development of collective consciousness and the knowledge and skills to take part effectively. Participatory democracy therefore builds on traditions of developmental democracy and has inherently pedagogical dimensions. Participatory

democracy is an end in itself in that it allows for participants' real input into decision-making processes and a means in that the process is a pedagogical tool to develop greater and more effective democratic participation (Lebowitz 2007). It is here that the role of democratic participation as an educative process becomes central, as I analyse in more detail in Chapter 3.

Until recently much discussion of participatory democracy was normative or related to its shortcomings and there is a general consensus that participation does not necessarily equal popular power (Lupia and Matsusaka 2004). Participatory democracy cannot assume that people will want to participate nor that participation will lead to the pursuit of the common good. Indeed Lupia and Matsusaka (2004) caution that participatory democracy can develop into a situation where the majority threaten minority rights. Fung and Wright (2003:21-24) analysed experiments in participatory democracy and acknowledged that while problems exist, they can be overcome. Firstly there needs to be rough equality of power of participation in decision-making and secondly participation should reflect areas of public concern and be based on bottom-up participation within institutional frameworks that allow for real power in decision-making and implementation. They found that low participation had less to do with apathy and more to do with feelings that participation would have limited impact or had little relevance to everyday life.

Held (2006) concludes that active participation and communitarian outcomes are more likely when people have the opportunity to engage in participatory processes that directly affect their lives and where they feel their participation will have real impact. Again, education is important to not only encourage participation and allow people to make fully informed decisions but also to develop ideas of collective consciousness, tolerance, equality and justice (Lupia and Matsusaka 2004). Furthermore they found that when participation is based on democratic, grassroots participation and debate, alongside education to promote ideas of collective consciousness and justice, problems of the tyranny of the majority are reduced. Similarly Berry et al. (1993) found that while participatory democracy does not necessarily increase the numbers of people participating in comparison to control groups, the type of activities in which participants engage tend to be more political and change orientated and importantly tend to be more communal and co-operative. Democratic participation therefore promotes the very qualities needed to develop participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy in the Venezuelan context is conceptualised as people's social, political, economic and cultural participation as protagonists, derived from individual liberties and rights, especially in connection with basic needs satisfaction (MINEP 2008). While participatory democracy can be interpreted in different ways, the protagonist emphasis in Venezuela implies the direct participation of people in public affairs (Canache 2007). The aim is to institutionalise popular power through the full and direct participation of communities. The current Venezuelan project therefore allows for an examination of the potential and limitations of participatory democracy in practice. Rather than focussing on theory and "ideal types" it allows for a practical examination of the role of participatory democracy in encouraging and allowing people to take an active part in policy making and implementation and in developing democratic forms of engagement within communities and with the state. Evaluating projects of participatory democracy also requires a greater understanding of the nature of participation and decentralisation, including who participates, the spaces for participation, the degree and nature of decentralisation, and how they impact on popular power and democratic engagement.

2.6 Participation and Decentralisation: from tokenism to people power

While developmental democracy and state socialism tend to favour top-down provision of goods and services, participatory and direct democracy require working "in and against" the state with both top-down and bottom-up decision making and policy implementation processes that redistribute power. An understanding of how this might develop in practice requires examination of the tensions between central provision and decentralisation of decision-making, of autonomy and working with the state, as well as the nature of participation in newly created spaces. In Venezuela decentralisation and participation are framed within the wider project of state responsibility coupled with a transference of power to the people. In order to understand the process in Venezuela it is important to examine the pitfalls and potentials of participation and decentralisation as well as the nature of state-society relations necessary for such processes to effectively transfer power.

2.6.1 Decentralisation

Many countries worldwide are now experimenting with decentralisation, with the idea that bringing government closer to the people will deepen and consolidate democracy by making government more responsible and accountable to its citizens, reducing clientelism and making decision-making processes and resource allocation more inclusive (Diamond and Tsalik 1999). However critics argue that, as with participation more generally,

decentralisation can actually create new spaces for patronage and clientelism and rather than promote democratisation may empower local elites (Blair 2005; Falleti 2005). Garcia-Guadilla (2002:94) argues that, 'decentralisation requires democratisation which implies a concept of citizenship that is linked to participatory democracy', but in practice many projects promote deconcentration, where power remains centralised and there is little or no impact on building popular power. Finally decentralisation can be used as a tool to weaken the role of the state under neoliberalism (Gaventa 2004b). This can reduce the ability to implement overarching state-wide and regional programmes and lead to inequalities and conflicts between areas of different social need, as I illustrate in section 7.3.4. This leads Harris (2007:14) to conclude that, 'in certain circumstances a popular democratic government may be the best vehicle to maintain a strategic plan for social justice and overcome petty squabbles that can dominate local and regional groups'.

It is important to examine the extent to which decentralisation measures build democratic power. Falleti's (2005:327) study of four Latin American countries found that the transfer of power via decentralisation 'can range from substantial to insignificant' depending on the process and the type of decentralisation. He conceptualises decentralisation as a multi-dimensional process of state reform that, to varying degrees, transfers administrative responsibility, resources and political authority from higher to lower levels of government and argues that the extent of decentralisation in a particular context as well as the sequence of decentralisation determines the degree of transference of power. For example, a transfer of administrative authority without transfer of funding can make local government more dependent on central government for fiscal resources. His study of Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Colombia also revealed that the order of decentralisation is important. He found that in cases where political decentralisation comes first, local government is able to build decision-making capacity and that when this is followed by fiscal decentralisation second and administrative decentralisation third it is more likely to produce a significant change in local power.

The Venezuelan government claims to be committed to decentralisation measures as a means of redistributing power whilst critics argue that the Chavez government has actually recentralised power into the hands of the President and the executive (Brewer-Carias 2004; Canache 2004). Debates as to the potential and limitations of decentralisation as a tool to redistribute power and bring government closer to the people are therefore useful in assessing the nature of decentralisation in Venezuela and its impact on changing power relations.

2.6.2 Participation

Alongside decentralisation it is also important to examine the spaces that are opened up for participation and the nature of participation in these spaces in order to fully understand the degree to which participatory initiatives open up opportunities for democratic engagement and transformation of power relations. A variety of initiatives have been introduced under a variety of labels such as participatory democracy and participatory governance. However participation is not necessarily a sign of participatory democracy. As highlighted in section 2.5.3 mass participation is difficult to encourage and sustain and there is no guarantee that participation is always democratic. It is important to look at the type of participation (Pretty et al. 1995; Arnstein 1969) and also the nature of the spaces for participation in terms of how spaces are created, who participates, what people participate in and with what outcomes (Cornwall 2008). Schugurensky (2004a:4) also stresses that ‘participation does not occur in a vacuum. It requires enabling structures’.

Many theorists have examined different types of participation. Pretty et al. (1995:1252) developed a typology of levels of power of decision making in spaces for participation that are useful in assessing the nature of participation in Venezuela; manipulative (participants rubber stamp decisions made elsewhere), passive participation (where people are informed of projects by external agents), tokenistic participation by consultation (where communities are consulted but their decisions are not binding), participation for material incentives, functional participation (where participation is a means of reducing state spending on pre-decided projects,) and finally interactive participation (where participation is seen as a right and participants are involved in the formulation and implementation of social policy). Arnstein (1969) argues that only the latter can lead to citizen power because it addresses delegated power, partnerships and citizen control. Similarly Schugurensky (2009:51-54) stresses that community participation is a necessary but insufficient condition for a more democratic society. It is only when participation involves a democratisation of institutions, community groups and decision-making that it can contribute to wider democratisation. He cites Participatory Budgeting as an important example of a process that builds organisation and participation in a democratic way and has meaningful impact on the redistribution of decision-making power and control of resources. It allows citizens to deliberate and make decisions collectively on budget allocation, local infrastructure and wider policies concerning education, health and taxation, thereby moving beyond tokenistic consultation mechanisms.

Cornwall (2004:78) highlights that while it is instructive to examine the type of participation it is also important to examine the nature of spaces for participation. Crucially she identifies two types of spaces; popular and invited. Popular spaces refer to all spaces created through voluntary collective action and invited spaces to spaces created in a top-down direction that increase interaction with public authorities. She stresses that simply creating spaces for participation is not enough. Spaces themselves are constructed by power relations that determine who can enter, who has a voice and on whose terms (Cornwall and Coelho 2004). Depending on the nature of the space and the nature of participation, invited spaces can be a means of social control that can become bureaucratised and in some cases create new forms of exclusion, or they can be a means of social transformation that encourage the formation of new participatory collectives and new state-society relations (Hedmont 2008; de Sousa Santos 2005; Cornwall and Coelho 2004). The latter is more likely when participation is framed as a right rather than a favour (Gaventa 2004b).

Popular participation also requires the democratisation of the state's administrative apparatus (Hindess 2000). This is illustrated in Gilbert and Ward's (1984, 1985) study of community action and participation in Bogota, Mexico City and Valencia, Venezuela. In all cases they found a commitment to collective organisation from below but in practice projects were generally controlled from the top-down with little or no increase in the power of local communities to make decisions and little or no democratic restructuring of state-society relations. While popular participation can potentially democratise the state and empower marginalised groups it can also subject people to new forms of control. Participation may lead to clientelism, is susceptible to manipulation by populist leaders to consolidate their own power, and leaders can often be incorporated into the state thus compromising their autonomy and their demands (Harris 2007; Hindess 2000). Whether or not participation contributes to building a more democratic society therefore depends on the nature of participation and the context in which it takes place.

These tensions reveal the difficulty of finding a balance between state provision and popular control. It is precisely because participation is so difficult to sustain that people organise states (Putzel 2004). However ongoing problems do not mean that participation and decentralisation are not important, rather that they need to be framed within a transformative rather than instrumental project that combines state responsibility with local control and decision-making. Transformative participation therefore needs to address a range of issues including who participates, who makes decisions and the impact of these

decisions, as well as how participation is organised within community groups, within the state machinery and between the two. Participation requires the idea of citizenship as a right in order to build feelings of inclusion and self-esteem, a level of autonomy in grassroots organisations to avoid clientelism and co-option, mechanisms to ensure transparency, accountability and democratic procedures of all actors as well as sustained organisation and mobilisation (Cornwall 2004). Finally participation needs to be both wide and deep; wide in terms of the range of people who can and do participate and deep in terms of being able to participate meaningfully at numerous levels (Farrington and Bebbington 1993).

The Venezuelan constitution emphasises the importance of protagonist participation as a right and as central to the pursuit of more democratic forms of engagement. The Chavez government has introduced a range of initiatives including the Social Missions and the Communal Councils, designed to build capacity and increase participation in decision-making processes. While supporters argue that these measures have consolidated mechanisms to allow for transformative rather than instrumental participation (Hawkins 2010a; Wilpert 2007a), critics argue that these measures are, in reality, new forms of clientelism and top-down control that have failed to facilitate greater participation in decision-making and democratise state-society relations (Leon 2009; Corrales and Penfold 2007). In Chapters 6 and 7 I draw on these debates into the potentials and weaknesses of participation as a tool to enhance democratic engagement to analyse the extent to which the participatory initiatives introduced in Venezuela are developing transformative participation and new state-society relations in practice.

2.7 “Socialism for the 21st Century”: conceptualisation and process

Having discussed the possibility of working “in and against the state” and the importance of “thick” conceptualisations of democracy in the pursuit of social change based on the more equitable distribution of power and resources, the question still remains as to what over-arching conceptualisation of the state and society and the relationship between them can best “frame” such a transformative project. In the Venezuelan context the approach was firstly conceptualised as developing along social democratic lines of state responsibility combined with increased inclusion and participation. However, since 2005 government discourse has become radicalised beyond talk of alternatives to neoliberalism to frame the process in terms of a counter-hegemonic project through and for “Socialism for the 21st Century”.

While still not yet fully defined, government discourse states that this new brand of socialism involves a critique of past socialist experiments and a re-appraisal and re-affirmation of anti-authoritarian democratic socialist traditions. As highlighted in section 1.2, the Venezuelan discourse draws closely on Gramscian ideas of the central role of democracy rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat in building socialism. Such ideas of democratic socialism are often portrayed in government literature as synonymous with the desire to build “revolutionary” democracy based on complementing representative with participatory and direct democracy and the development of a strong state *and* grassroots power (Five Motors to Maximise the Revolution 2007; Simon Bolivar National Plan 2007).

This resonates with academic conceptualisations of democratic socialism as the ultimate form of participatory democracy (Brookfield and Holst 2011; Poulantzas 1980). Laclau (1977:174) for example stresses that the struggle for popular hegemony ‘is an effort to achieve the maximum possible fusion between democratic ideology and socialist ideology’. In this sense socialism cannot be restricted to political change or economic reform from above; it implies prefigurative practice and the self-emancipation of the people in economic, social and political spheres. This requires a more coherent theory of democratic socialism and socialist transition; one that has a clear vision of the “end goal” but also one that recognises that the means of achieving such a goal will determine the outcome. Any assessment of the Venezuelan process therefore needs an understanding of why past socialist experiments failed to live up to their revolutionary potential, as well as the institutions and processes that might make “21st century socialism” a reality. The following sections unpack theoretical debates as to the nature and means of achieving democratic socialism to build a framework with which to assess the progress of the Venezuelan project in practice.

2.7.1 From “really existing socialisms” to “21st Century Socialism”

While a universal theory of the transition to socialism is impossible (Harnecker 2007; Harris 1988; Bettelheim 1978), this section draws on a range of theories of socialism, anarchism and social change to outline the general features of socialism and possible means of developing it. Broadly defined, socialism refers to a form of social, political and economic organisation based on co-operation and self-management. Lebowitz (2006:57) says that the core goal of socialism, as developed in the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, was ‘the creation of a society that would allow for the full development of human potential and capacity’. This requires ‘the development of a different kind of power’ based

on self-organisation (Callinicos 2004: no page). However there is no general agreement on exactly what socialism “looks like”. Socialism has been defined and redefined and debates continue as to what socialism is and how it can be achieved.

Slater (1986) identifies four approaches to socialism that provide a useful starting point in understanding different approaches to achieving socialism; Social Democracy of the West, Radical Nationalism of Third World Socialism, the Leninist Model and Democratic Socialism through Popular Hegemony. The first of Slater’s (1986) approaches focuses on using the state to develop social welfare, redistribute income, nationalise certain sectors of the economy and promote social justice. This approach believes that socialism can be achieved within capitalist relations of production. It is more about reforming and compensating for capitalism than replacing it, with the idea that socialism will evolve within and through parliament and elections, Trade Unions and local government. However the movements that propose this often lose their revolutionary identity and transformatory potential on gaining office, resulting in state bureaucratic capitalism (Boggs 1977a, b).

Chile under Allende provides an example of the second approach. In such cases regimes introduce programmes of social reform, redistribution, nationalisation and the promotion of social justice alongside anti-imperial rhetoric. Petras and Fitzgerald (1988) argue that while Allende and his Unidad Popular coalition government pursued socialist reforms through the electoral, parliamentary system, they failed to take authoritarian measures sufficient to defend themselves from opposition forces that, backed by external powers including the U.S., were able to use illegal force to undermine the regime. They also argue that a critical opportunity was lost through the failure to instigate structural changes to the state by replacing the bicameral Congress with a Popular Assembly. This would have enabled his government to overcome blockages by the old Congress and to consolidate power.

Thirdly in the Leninist model, the Party and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat are the key features. State ownership of the means of production is central as seen in U.S.S.R., Cuba, and Vietnam. However these cases are characterised by the increased role of the Party, centralised control of planning and the decline of popular power. For example the Bolshevik vision of socialism was inherently centralised and top-down. While the Bolsheviks succeeded in their political objective of securing state power, they substituted worker power of the Soviets with party power and therefore established a dictatorship *over* the proletariat and new forms of political domination. Boggs (1977b:367) argues that ‘in

the absence of an effective counter-force within civil society the party-state became the unchallenged focus of all initiative and policy decisions'. He concludes that post revolutionary conditions such as economic chaos and civil war may have reinforced centralist tendencies but did not create them. Bureaucratic centralism and statism were built into Leninist theory from the start because Leninism was more concerned with the means of securing and maintaining revolutionary power rather than realising popular power. One of the key lessons of the 20th century is that the national state capitalism of the Leninist model, while it may increase the ability to resist internal and external opposition and may lead to real improvements in terms of greater equality and state provision of welfare, is not a step towards socialism. As Gramsci (1971), Luxemburg (1900) and Boggs (1977a, b) stress, it is important to recognise the importance of prefigurative practice and grassroots counter-hegemonic struggle in the pursuit of democratic social change, as I discussed in section 2.2.4.

It is Democratic Socialism through Popular Hegemony that Slater (1986) argues is the "ideal" means of building socialism and which most closely resembles the Gramscian approach to democratic socialist change; incorporating elements from the three previous approaches whilst stressing the need for grassroots organisation from the outset. While the first three approaches contain elements that would be described as socialist, they will not in the end lead to a socialist society based on self-emancipation and more egalitarian principles. They rely almost exclusively on the state to instigate change whilst doing little or nothing to enhance people's capabilities to enable them to take control of decision-making. While they may lead to improvements in the social and economic well-being, they do not fundamentally alter power relations in favour of the populace. It is only the fourth approach that constitutes a revolution from below by confronting state power *and* incorporating a central role for grassroots protagonism which is essential in any project for radical social change based on giving "power to the people".

As with revolution, it is therefore impossible to define socialism without incorporating a theory of the process needed to achieve socialist outcomes. Rosa Luxemburg's (1900) work is instructive in examining the conditions through which a democratic socialism grounded in popular hegemony might be realised. She argued that popular democratic forms of organisation must be instigated from the outset in order to ensure that the populace as a whole maintains control over the process of constructing socialism, thereby consolidating self-emancipation. Both Luxemburg and Gramsci acknowledged the importance of the classical Marxist and Leninist focus on relations of production as the site

for political struggle in the pursuit of democratic socialism, but gave primacy to the struggle emanating from popular hegemony. They therefore offer a middle ground between classical Marxism and anarchism. The seizure of state power is just one step in the struggle to develop and institutionalise new forms of popular control and organisation. The transition to socialism must be rooted in local structures of authority from the outset so that ‘by functioning as subjects of power in both the workplace and the community, people can develop their capabilities and capacities’ to move the process forward in a democratic direction (Lebowitz 2006:112).

Petras and Fitzgerald (1988) argue that any transition to socialism needs to balance authoritarian measures with popular democratic control over state and society. This requires mass-based democratic processes of revolutionary social transformation, alongside strong leadership to protect the revolutionary process. A regime that fails to use authoritarian measures runs the risk of defeat from counter-revolutionaries but one that fails to extend democracy from the outset may enhance its chances of survival but compromises the democratic essence of the socialist project. The transition to socialism involves establishing the foundations of a new social system as well as building participatory institutions for the long term operation of that system. The first may require more authoritarianism whereas the latter is more focussed on democracy. However as Haynes (1988) points out, it is difficult to balance authoritarianism and democracy in practice. The transition described by Petras and Fitzgerald (1988) relies too much on the leaders deciding on the “right” time to move from authoritarianism to democratic participation. Again this highlights the need for grassroots, protagonist participation from the outset and, crucially, education to equip people with critical awareness and the necessary skills to make decisions and ensure that their leadership is held to account as I discuss in Chapter 3.

Slater’s (1986) assessment of different approaches to achieving socialism and their associated strengths and weaknesses provides a starting point to analyse the potential of current processes underway in Venezuela to develop along democratic socialist lines. This also needs to be complemented with an understanding of why previous projects that claimed to be pursuing democratic socialist outcomes failed to realise their stated goals.

2.7.2 Past Socialist experiments: lessons to be learned

While there is a history of failed socialist experiments this does not mean that socialism can never work, rather it necessitates an examination of why these experiments failed.

While section 2.7.1 highlighted some of the inherent structures and processes that impact on the pursuit of democratic, socialist change, this section uses the examples of Cuba and Nicaragua to explore in more detail how institutions and processes that promised socialist outcomes developed in practice to provide further insights into the potential of the Venezuelan project to develop popular power. These examples are particularly salient to the Venezuelan case because they took place in the same region and the Venezuelan government has drawn on these examples in the development of its own “Bolivarian” strategy of social change. At the same time it is important to note that as a major oil producer Venezuela is not faced with the resource constraints faced by these two countries. The political economy of oil is a major factor in the Venezuelan context as I discuss in Chapter 4.

Despite its history of struggle, Latin America has produced few regimes that could be described as “revolutionary” and there is no blueprint that guarantees socialist outcomes. Nevertheless there is a lot to be learned from experiences in Cuba and Nicaragua that can inform debates as to whether or not to seize state power, the role of leaders and the primacy of the revolutionary *process* in determining the outcome of revolutions. As Dos Santos (1985) argues, past mistakes offer the possibility that future socialist revolutions will be more democratic.

Cammack (1998:195) argues that the Nicaraguan and Cuban examples reveal the importance of leaders in revolutionary processes and that ‘only when such leaders explicitly adopt a socialist programme conceived in the interest of the worker and the peasant majority will the movement they lead turn in a revolutionary direction’. However, as I have argued, leadership is not enough to ensure democratic socialist outcomes. While Cuba and Nicaragua both saw the overthrow of dictators by widely-backed popular uprisings and both embarked on “socialist” paths, they differ greatly in terms of processes and outcomes and in the way they tried to balance strong leadership with popular power. Unlike in Cuba the Sandinistas were committed to socialism before they came into power and they were very responsive to social movements and grassroots organisations before and after coming into power. Post-revolutionary policies also differed substantially to those in Cuba with the Sandinistas pursuing a ‘democratic brand of socialism’ (Cammack 1998:194) that was different to Cuba or the Soviet bloc. Despite losing power in 1990 the Sandinistas brought about significant social and political change and Nicaragua serves as an important example of how democratic socialist change can be achieved.

The key in Nicaragua was the Sandinistas' efforts to construct a new hegemony through literacy campaigns, agrarian reform, the extension of social services, and the encouragement of grassroots organisations to make demands on the state. The concept of grassroots hegemony was central and contrasts with the Marxist-Leninist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. While the vanguard political Party served as a vehicle to promote and protect the revolutionary project and implement the decisions of the popular majority, grassroots power was not subordinate to Party power. Various popular organisations such as Workers', Women's and Youth Associations formed the basis of participation and collective decision-making. The Sandinistas also radically restructured the state by introducing a directly elected executive, an elected national legislature based on proportional representation and worker participation in the management of state enterprises. This was alongside mass organisations at the local and regional level to formulate and implement state policies. The support for the revolutionary project was indicated by the Sandinistas winning 67 per cent in the 1985 elections from a 75 per cent voter turnout (Raby 2006; Selbin 1999). Harris (1987) concludes that the Sandinistas went about democratising the revolutionary process by strengthening grassroots organisations, creating a new state and introducing a pluralistic political system, all under the leadership and direction of the Sandinista government.

The Nicaraguan case reveals the importance of strong leadership coupled with democratic participation in the pursuit of democratic socialism. Petras and Fitzgerald (1988) argue that the Nicaraguan example is a unique case where revolutionary processes and major social transformation were combined with representative democracy and political pluralism. However they also stress that external and internal opposition are ongoing threats to any revolutionary project regardless of its duration. The Sandinista regime lost the elections of 1990 largely due to external and internal pressure, most notably U.S. funding of the "Contras". While Venezuela is not beset by the same economic vulnerability as Nicaragua due to its oil wealth, maintaining popular support for the "Bolivarian Revolution" in the face of internal and external opposition is crucial to the ongoing future of the process as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

Many of the key features of the Nicaraguan process are also evident in Cuba, such as the mass literacy campaigns that helped unite the populace around the socialist project, nationalisation and the redistribution of resources. However the Cuban leadership failed to develop popular organisations in the same way, instead relying on centralised, bureaucratic decision-making by the Communist Party. While central control of political and economic

spheres, lack of political pluralism and the adoption of a more authoritarian style may have led to Cuba overcoming external opposition in a way that Nicaragua was unable to, this has been at the expense of democracy. This leads Lowy (1986:270) to argue that while many of the features of a socialist society exist in Cuba, 'the masses do not yet have the power of decision'. Cuba has therefore not achieved the self-emancipation of the masses through the redistribution of power that is essential to a democratic socialist project. For example while the National Assembly of People's Power is nominally the main organ of state power it is not based on democratic principles. Delegates are democratically elected at the local level but they are Party nominated at the provincial and municipal level meaning that in practice real power lies with the Communist Party. Lowy (1986) argues that Cuba resembles most post-revolutionary states where democratic participation is restricted to lower levels of organisation and that this inevitably leads to the centralisation and bureaucratisation of the post-revolutionary state. However he goes on to assert that the Cuban system is no worse than Western representative democracy in terms of grassroots input when nominating candidates and has maintained a more egalitarian distribution of resources than many Western democracies.

Selbin (1999) stresses the continued relevance of revolutionary projects in Latin America. He argues that the Cuban and Nicaraguan examples reveal the difficulty of finding a balance between the instrumental and prefigurative spheres; between strong leadership, even authoritarianism, to protect the revolutionary project on the one hand and political plurality and popular participation on the other. While the Communist Party in Cuba has been able to maintain power, this has been at the expense of the institutionalisation of mechanisms for popular participation, including mechanisms to limit office and allow a greater role in decision-making. While initially the Sandinistas were successful in terms of combining both, they ultimately lost power in 1990 through the very electoral system they instigated.

Any project for Socialism in the 21st Century needs to learn from past successes and past mistakes. Raby (2006:57) argues that past socialist projects to seize state power teach us that 'the lesson is surely not to ignore state power but to insist more than ever on its importance while searching for the means to avoid the expropriation of revolutionary state power from the people'. This entails more than just seizing the state and changing relations of production, it requires enhancing human capacity to self-organise. While confronting the state and establishing new relations of production are vital, this needs to be coupled with popular participation and the construction of a new hegemonic discourse. In this way

any authoritarian measures that need to be taken in order to preserve the revolutionary process will still be guided by popular support. Boggs (1977a, b) argues that any future socialist project needs, from the outset, to combine the struggle to maintain political power (the instrumental sphere), with popular self-emancipation, collective relations and socialist democracy (the prefigurative sphere) that are the ultimate ends of the revolutionary process. Successfully integrating these two dimensions in practice remains a central challenge for any project that aims to pursue a democratic socialist project.

Many of the features identified in Cuba and Nicaragua are evident in Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution". Chavez has instigated mass literacy campaigns and broader educational campaigns, nationalised key industries and redistributed resources. As in Nicaragua he has preserved the electoral process whilst also introducing new avenues of popular participation such as the Constituent Assembly, referendums and the right to recall. The period since Chavez was elected in 1998 has seen the proliferation of community groups such as Youth Groups and Neighbourhood Groups as well as the Communal Councils and the new Party. All of this suggests that Chavez is pursuing a democratic brand of socialism along the lines of the Sandinista example. However, at the same time Chavez displays authoritarian tendencies similar to Castro in the name of defending "el proceso" in the face of internal and U.S. opposition. For example he has secured his right to run for President beyond three terms and on several occasions has secured "special powers" to allow him to push forward his reforms. Furthermore both supporters and critics of the Chavez regime point to centrist tendencies, despite the introduction of mechanisms for the exercise of popular power, and a failure to democratise institutions at higher levels of decision-making. One key difference is that Venezuela has oil and so is less vulnerable to destabilisation attempts and Chavez has also taken steps to secure alliances with sympathetic governments in the region and worldwide. Chavez therefore displays elements of authoritarianism whilst at the same time introducing measures to strengthen popular organisation and provide avenues for popular decision-making. In the second part of this thesis I explore how this struggle to balance the instrumental and prefigurative spheres is developing in practice in the Venezuelan context.

2.7.3 Socialism for the 21st Century: the way forward?

While there is no consensus on the characteristics of a future socialism or the strategy for its realisation I have identified key features and strategies that are essential elements in such a project. A Gramscian analysis coupled with an assessment of past experiences suggest that progressive social change requires popular mobilisation and democratic

participation at all levels from the outset, as well as a strong state and leadership to oversee and administer the project. 21st century socialism requires struggle that takes place in and against the state. Autonomous struggle and the struggle to redefine and restructure the state are not necessarily incompatible; the two are intimately connected in the struggle for a new hegemony based on egalitarian, communitarian principles. The key is to examine which types of political organisation can strengthen the ability of grassroots organisations to influence the decisions and nature of government at every level and how these changes can become institutionalised and enduring.

The anarchist tradition that asserts that the *means* of achieving more democratic, socialist outcomes are as important as the end goal is crucial. In this sense socialism cannot be imposed from above, it must come from the people themselves. Any structures and institutions that are introduced in order to pursue socialist end goals must be based on democratic grassroots processes that prefigure the desired future society and any transitional processes that do not adhere to these principles run the risk of developing into the kind of state-led authoritarianism seen in Russia and Cuba. This does not mean ignoring questions of the state and political leadership, rather it requires a rethinking of what forms of state and what forms of populace-leadership relations best ensure human development and collective authority.

Seizing state power and restructuring relations of production and social organisation are just steps in the process of developing new forms of popular control. It is also vital to construct a new hegemonic discourse that underpins the process as a whole. Any project that aims to build a new form of socialism based on principles of democratic socialism through popular hegemony needs to simultaneously reclaim democracy at all levels of decision-making and organisation, develop a progressive popular ideology that unites people around common goals and promotes autonomous popular organisation. Education plays a crucial role in increasing consciousness and the capacity for organisation and mobilisation at grassroots level to enable people to take control of the process. As Che Guevara (1965) argued, the development of this new consciousness does more for the development of socialism than material incentives or political change. Educational initiatives must therefore form the basis of any project for change as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3.

Past examples and theorising suggest that the development of “21st Century Socialism” requires five essential strategies; increased capacity for collective action including a central

role for education, increased public spaces and institutions that facilitate the active participation of grassroots organisations in public debate and decision-making, alternative forms of organisation in social, economic and political spheres that replace the old forms, the construction of a counter-hegemonic discourse based on co-operation and inclusion, and strong leadership capable of combating counter-revolutionary opposition. However this leadership must have strong links with and be accountable to the populace. It is this final ongoing challenge as to the role of leadership in struggles for social change that I will address before looking at the role of education in social change. The question of leadership is particularly salient in Venezuela given the accusations of authoritarianism and/or populism that have been levelled by critics of Chavez and which are argued to threaten the democratic potential of the Venezuelan process.

2.8 Populism and Social Change

This section argues that while populism is often seen as a purely negative phenomenon, as a deviation from revolution or one step from authoritarianism or fascism, it *can* have the potential to bring about far-reaching social transformation. I argue that it is possible to be both populist and revolutionary and that if populism is viewed as a technique rather than a fixed ideology or strategy it can be a vehicle of progressive social change. What matters is the type of changes that are made.

The term populism is contested and is difficult to define and measure empirically. Laclau (1977) describes it as a multi-class political movement characterised by charismatic leadership and radical anti-establishment discourse. It is often associated with top-down mobilisation of excluded sectors and a tendency to by-pass institutional forms of representation and policy making. Populism arises in situations where the lower classes are marginalised, party systems have become delegitimised and autonomous grassroots organisation is weak. If populism is taken in its broadest political sense then it can be associated with any regime based on charismatic leadership and appeals to “the people”, regardless of the type of policies they pursue. Ellner (2005) distinguishes between “Classical” populists of the 1930s and 1940s and the more recent neo-populists such as Fujimori in Peru who are associated more with neo-liberalism. As Chavez is most often associated with “classical” populism it is this aspect that I will focus on. Classical populism is associated with nationalist and reformist policies of state intervention and popular welfare. It is characterised by anti-elite rhetoric and appeals to “the people” and “the nation” that serve to shape people’s political consciousness and identity, and relies on strong links between the leader and “the people”.

There is a rich tradition of populism in Latin America. The classic populist figures of the past such as Peron in Argentina and the AD Party in Venezuela succeeded in incorporating the working class and lower class into the political process for the first time. Classical populists often extended democratic citizenship and contributed to improved material well-being through the redistribution of resources, but many also served to diminish the role of political parties and civil society organisations. For example under Peron women were given the vote in 1947, Union membership expanded and the minimum wage was introduced. However while these reforms can be seen as beneficial, this classical populism was inherently top-down and gave people a *sense* of political inclusion without any actual transfer of power and without the institutionalisation of democratic rules of organisation (Levitsky 1998). Ellner (2005) argues that these “classical” populists provide examples of far-reaching change short of revolution.

Roberts (no date: 14) argues that ‘populism has an inherently ambiguous relationship with political democracy in Latin America’. Even where a populist regime does appear to be institutionalising avenues of representation and decision-making, it is important to examine whether or not they are based on democratic and inclusive principles in both theory and practice. While populist leaders may incorporate previously excluded sectors and therefore could be seen as democratic, they can also use their position to by-pass existing political constraints by seeking the authority to rule by decree and undermining democratic checks and balances such as the legislature and judiciary. Popular referendums are often used to justify such institutional changes and allow populist leaders to claim a democratic mandate for their actions. Fundamental institutions can therefore be changed and re-changed to suit the leaders’ own agenda, thereby eroding mechanisms whereby citizens can provide political input or hold their leaders to account. He calls for measures to reinvigorate Party systems, safeguard democratic procedures, reduce social inequality, strengthen civil society, combat corruption and institutionalise checks and balances to ensure against future “ruptures” that could pave the way for a populist leader.

The main weakness of populist movements is their dependence on the leader. While Raby (2006:245) rather optimistically argues that the strong identity between leader and people means ‘betrayal becomes virtually unthinkable’, Lebowitz (2006) argues that socialism cannot be populism because a society that looks to the state or a charismatic leader to provide all the answers does not develop their human capacities and potential, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation and control. Furthermore Ellner (2005) argues that while

populism can create opportunities for revolutionary change and/or reform, it also restricts opportunities for new leaders to emerge and it is questionable if it can institutionalise changes that will outlive the populist leader. These problems are particularly salient in the Venezuelan case where President Chavez's recent treatment for cancer of the bowel in 2011 has ignited debates as to whether the process can continue without him and whether his personalistic politics have stifled the development of successors.

The term populist has been used to describe a variety of movements with very different ideologies based on charismatic leadership and popular mobilisation, even though they may have pursued very different types of reforms and had very different political, social and institutional outcomes. The term therefore runs the risk of losing any analytical usefulness other than to describe a mobilising technique. However, if we do view populism as more of a technique than a specific political ideology, then the focus turns to the importance of examining the institutions and processes promoted by a charismatic leader and the impact they have on strengthening autonomous organisation and institutionalising avenues for protagonist decision-making and demand-making. As Laclau (1977) points out, what becomes important is an examination of whether or not democratic principles are built into the over-arching ideology. If they are, it is possible for a strong popular movement to check the actions of a populist leader.

Laclau (1977:174-197) further distinguishes between the populism of the dominant classes and the populism of the dominated classes; what he calls 'socialist populism'. He argues that while populism is not socialism, 'there is no socialism without populism'. Raby (2006:240) similarly argues that 'a successful popular revolutionary movement will necessarily have populist characteristics'. Gramsci's ideas of the war of position and the fight for hegemony are again relevant here; a populist movement is important in the struggle for popular hegemony. As Cammack (1998) and Laclau (1977) point out, the emergence of any kind of populism reflects a crisis of existing institutions and offers the opportunity to construct a new hegemony based on direct appeal to "the people". This holds the possibility of revolutionary change. So, while many people see populism as a purely negative phenomenon, Ellner (2005) concludes that populism has the potential for both non-revolutionary transformation and, importantly, for revolutionary change. Charismatic leadership coupled with strong links to an autonomous mass movement carries the potential for progressive and lasting change, but only if measures to institutionalise mechanisms of popular power that will outlast the leader are developed from the outset. In

this way populism as a technique *can* be a powerful tool in increasing political consciousness and challenging the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class.

Critics of Chavez have repeatedly accused him of “populism” and argue that his style of leadership, far from instigating long-term sustainable social change for the whole of Venezuelan society, is nothing more than a classical populist project designed to increase his own power base and authoritarian rule. On the other hand, supporters argue that his charismatic connection with the populace, as well as the measures that he has introduced to enable protagonist participation, represent lasting social change. Venezuela therefore provides the opportunity to examine how populism coupled with a commitment, at least in rhetoric, to protagonist, participatory democracy develops in practice, as I explore in the second part of this thesis.

2.9 Realising Social Change: Putting Theory into Practice

This Chapter has explored the possibility of a theory of social change that incorporates confronting state power and building grassroots resistance as well possible strategies whereby such a process of change can be realised. I argue that while strong leadership is important, the process of social change must be democratically organised from the outset, otherwise there is a danger of authoritarianism and centralisation of decision-making. I have explored redefinitions of revolution, socialism and democracy and established that claims to be building “Socialism for the 21st Century” based on complementing representative with participatory and direct democracy are most closely aligned with anti-authoritarian socialist traditions of democratic socialism through popular hegemony. I concluded that social change along democratic socialist lines involves ongoing organisation and education, the creation of a counter-hegemonic movement and ideology, mechanisms to replace and restructure existing state institutions and the incorporation of democratic forms of decision-making at all levels of society. This Chapter has established, as Munck (2003:508) argues, that a viable alternative to neoliberal hegemony lies in the struggle “in and against the state” through processes that ‘recover alternatives from the anti-authoritarian socialist traditions’. Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution with its promise of “Socialism for the 21st Century” provides an opportunity to examine how a process that claims to be pursuing these goals is translated into practice.

As Buxton (2011: xi) stresses, there has been a tendency to negatively evaluate the Bolivarian process against hegemonic standards of liberal democracy and to place too much emphasis on analysis of Chavez as a populist leader. This has ‘obscured the

dynamics of change at the grassroots level, while marginalising the complexity of the process of social change'. By unpacking the key concepts associated with the Venezuelan process and situating them within wider theoretical debates, I have constructed a theoretical framework with which to analyse the Venezuelan process in terms of its potential as a state-sponsored project to build grassroots participatory democracy. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of understandings of democracy and of processes of democratic social change that considers both macro level discourse and reform, and grassroots understandings, critiques and experiences. In the second part of this thesis I conduct such an analysis to examine how the tensions between autonomy and resistance, state control and reform from above and below develop in practice, thereby shedding light on wider debates as to the pitfalls and potential of engaging with the state in the struggle for more participatory and protagonist democratic institutions and processes.

As I highlighted in sections 1.2 and 2.5, education is intrinsically linked with theorisations of “thick” democracy and is also stressed to be central to the Venezuelan process of building popular, protagonist democracy. The pedagogical dimensions of democracy as well as the role of education in social change are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: **Education and Social Change**

“Revolution and Education are the same thing”
(Fidel Castro in Fagen (1969:2) *Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba*)

“There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate integration into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the “practice of freedom”, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”

(Richard Shaull (1970:34) *Foreword to Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

In Chapter Two I outlined a theory of change from above *and* below in the pursuit of a more democratic social order; one where the concept of democracy is extended beyond tokenistic participation to incorporate a theory of direct, grassroots participation in decision-making. I established that education is vital in any project for social change and that there are clear links between education and democracy, participation and social change. In line with this approach, and with a focus on how education can contribute to radical change, this chapter explores the possibility of an educational theory that incorporates the critical dimensions of structural reproduction theory but also adds an autonomous, grassroots dimension that incorporates agency. In other words I explore the possibility of education from above and below via state- grassroots collaboration; the possibility of education “in and against the state”. In this way I link structural analysis of the role of education with a theory of agency and social change via education. In particular this chapter is concerned with how education is linked to notions of citizenship and democracy. Various called citizenship education, political education or, in the case of Venezuela, education with socialist values, different regimes have tried to use education to reinforce legitimacy and pursue a desired future. These approaches differ greatly, depending on their notions of democracy and what the “good” citizen should be. This Chapter explores these linkages and strategies in more detail.

I build the case that, while structural relations of power are maintained by monopolies of knowledge, participatory strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities. In Chapter Two, I highlighted the importance of prefigurative practice as a means of developing practical skills and also, crucially, as a form of ideological preparation and learning that may be capable of building a counter-hegemonic movement. Education is therefore vital to ‘create new forms of democratic knowledge, through action and mobilisation of relatively powerless groups in their own affairs in a way that also involves their own critical reflection and theory’ (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001:76). In this sense Gramsci’s theory of

hegemony, counter-hegemony and social change, with its focus on the social reproduction of knowledge and power relations, is inherently pedagogical. Morrow and Torres (1995:15) argue that ‘any socialist project worthy of the name must incorporate principles of democratic participation that are historically without precedent’ and they argue that education plays a crucial role in this process. My research examines if Venezuela’s “Bolivarian Revolution” is setting such a precedent through a focus on the role of education, particularly non-formal education, in pursuing a project of social change based on democratic, protagonist participation.

3.1 Education and Democracy: re-establishing the linkages

The interdependence of education, democracy and social stability or social change is not new. In the early 19th century with the emergence of compulsory, formal education and ideas of democratic rule, education was increasingly argued to be indispensable in the promotion of democracy and progress (Mitter 1993). However, not only is what constitutes democracy highly contested, so is the nature of its connection to education (Fielding 2007). These debates have regained popularity in recent years as a result of the perceived failure of representative democracy and the perceived failure of education to promote democracy (Schugurensky 2004b).

The work of John Dewey has done much to shape dialogues on education and democracy and form a bridge between education theory and democratic theory. In his seminal work “Democracy and Education” (1916) Dewey stressed the interrelationship between education and democracy and the idea that schools should be the embryo of community life that both shape and reflect wider society. He argued that while schools need a level of autonomy to do this, there is also a need for overarching state responsibility in the provision of basic needs in terms of education, health and economic well-being to enable people to participate in education effectively and practice this autonomy: what Mitter (1993:467) calls ‘promoted autonomy’. While this is not without potential problems such as the over-influence of the state or a descent into partisan schooling that divides rather than unifies society, it highlights the important role of both state and organised society in education. What is more important is to examine if and how education, state-provided or otherwise, cultivates a democratic experience and if and how students engage in democracy in a critical way through education. Increasingly scholars such as Schugurensky (2010, 2009), Fielding (2007), Carr and Hartnett (1996) are revisiting these philosophical engagements between democratic theory and educational theory and between education and the state.

Education is inherently part of a set of socio-political institutions and therefore ‘in the middle of crucial struggles over the meaning of democracy, over definitions of legitimate authority and culture and over who should benefit the most from government policies and practices’ (Apple et al. 2003:1). Distinctions between representative, proceduralist traditions of democracy and more participatory traditions are closely linked to distinctions between the role of education in reinforcing social stability or promoting social change (Carr 2008; Carr and Hartnett 1996). While the representative tradition favours teaching about democracy and highlights procedures, electoral processes and the needs of the economy (thin democracy), the participatory tradition focuses on critical engagement and social justice (thick democracy) and reflects a concern with political literacy, critical consciousness and political action. Links between education and democracy are therefore made explicit in “thick” conceptualisations of democracy (Gandin and Apple 2002). From this perspective, education needs to go beyond teaching *about* democracy and incorporate strategies that link education *as* democracy and education *for* greater democratic engagement.

As Pateman (1970) highlights, one of the major functions of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is educative. Democracy has to be learned and the best way to learn about democracy is by being part of a group that acts democratically (Pateman 1970; Dewey 1916). Participatory democracy and direct democracy are therefore important ends in themselves but they are also pedagogical tools that enable greater and more effective participation (Lebowitz 2007). Like Dewey (1916), he goes on to explain that they also require that people have the necessary skills and conditions in order to take part and that this implies state involvement in educational provision and social welfare more generally. Held (1987:283-289) argues for a “double democratisation” where both education and society develop the conditions for each others mutual development.

The concept of citizenship is also central to these debates and is conceptualised differently depending on the underlying agenda and conceptualisation of democracy. Fien (1991) points out that the language of democracy and active citizenship has been used by educators from widely divergent political perspectives that range from education to fit the system and education to remake the system. Parker (1996) similarly distinguishes between traditional, progressive and advanced approaches to citizenship education for a democratic society that have very different aims and outcomes. The traditional approach focuses on how government works and teaching core democratic values, while the progressive

approach emphasises civic participation but within existing frameworks. The final approach draws on Benjamin Barber's (1984) ideas of "strong" democracy and places greater emphasis on the need for structural change, social critique and citizen participation to promote social justice. Linkages between education and democracy therefore require an exploration of how education systems promote ideas of the "good" citizen and how they should behave, as well as the conceptualisation of the "good" society that they promote. For example education can promote individualism or communalism, stability or struggle for change, the idea of meritocracy or the idea of equality and social justice, the idea of self-reliance and individual responsibility or the idea of communal wealth and the right to state provision of social services.

In the West there is much talk of citizenship and active participation in schooling but, as with many participatory projects, this has been from a more technical than political standpoint that falls short of advocating political literacy, critical thought and action for change. Many programmes have a narrow and often ideologically conservative view of citizenship that focuses on understanding what democratic society is, respect for the rule of law, obligations rather than rights and on voluntary community service and "doing good" rather than challenging students to think and act politically (Crick 2002; Wringe 1992). Furthermore active citizenship in the U.K. and U.S. is often more about building human capital than building the capacity for democratic political participation (Annette 2009; Putnam 2000). This is supported by Nordvall (2008) and Rubenson (2006) who, while focussing on adult education in Sweden and Norway, also point to a general trend in state-sponsored education towards a focus on social integration and stability rather than social change. They go on to argue that in welfare state regimes education can be a tool for equality, strengthening democracy and promoting increased participation in societal development. However, at the same time, it can also diminish opportunities for the creation of alternative hegemony.

Often the participation encouraged by "education for citizenship", even when it uses the language of critique, empowerment and change, is reduced to an emphasis on change in terms of increased volunteerism and encouraging people to vote without any real political influence; on mobilisation without empowerment. The participation that is encouraged aims to increase support and ensure adherence to the government agenda and often, in the neoliberal context, to support a wider agenda of "rolling back the state". Participation is therefore co-opted to serve the needs of the current regime. While it may give the illusion of taking an active part in society to solve pressing social needs and may in fact lead to

concrete improvements for communities, this type of participation does not develop critical skills nor does it tend to offer opportunities to influence actual decision-making and policy. It tends to address symptoms rather than causes of social problems and therefore does not contribute to lasting structural change, even if it may provide short term benefits. Whether or not there is an emphasis on political literacy, social justice and social change is determined by whether “thick” or “thin” democracy frames the underlying agenda (Carr 2008).

This idea is well illustrated in Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) study of two education projects in U.S. schools, one focussing on encouraging civic participation and the other on promoting social justice. Their study reveals how programmes that successfully educate for democracy can have very different outcomes that are politically very significant. They use their research to distinguish between three main conceptions of the “good” citizen in the discourse and practice of citizenship or political education; the responsible citizen who obeys the rules and might for example donate to a food drive, the participatory citizen who gets involved in existing processes and might, for example, organise the food drive and the justice-orientated citizen who would ask why the food drive was needed in the first place and act to solve the root causes of poverty and inequality.

They found that in the two cases they examined, education was successful in achieving the goals consistent with each project’s underlying conceptions of citizenship. Students in the first programme in Madison County learned about existing legislation, how to conduct polls, how government works and the importance of working in their community. However they displayed little or no awareness of political issues and power relations, talking about the need to “help other people” rather than looking at why they needed this help. This resonates with theorising on the shortcomings of projects framed within a “thin” conceptualisation of democracy in that students are taught “about” democracy and encouraged to take part in existing processes but they do little to enhance critical consciousness and promote social change. In the second project in Bayside they found that, given the focus on social justice, students engaged more in macro-level critiques of society and the root cause of problems. Students displayed increased levels of critical consciousness and knowledge of power structures. However, in this case the emphasis was much more on social critique, meaning that the development of skills for active participation was less evident. The programme failed to make links between critical consciousness and organised action.

They conclude that for education to be emancipatory it needs to develop skills needed to participate, enable micro and macro level critique *and* connect with the development and implementation of strategies for change that resolve rather than just compensate for problems. This means a focus on social activism to change structures rather than just participation within them. Askew and Carnell's (1998) work is also instructive. They also found that the social justice approach is important in developing critical consciousness and social awareness but that it is only when this is combined with a liberatory approach that stresses individual and societal change and taking responsibility for changing society that education can help move from critique to action. As Giroux (1980:357) argues, 'if citizenship education is to be emancipatory, it must begin with the major assumption that its major aim is not "to fit" students into the existing society', rather it should encourage citizens to remake their society.

Different understandings of democracy therefore imply contrasting education policies that can promote passivity, participation within existing frameworks or active citizens that seek to transform society (Sears and Hughes 1996). In Venezuela education is seen as vital to the process as a whole; as a means of changing consciousness and building capacity to enable people to take an active part in processes of social change. It is an integral part of the project to build more participatory and direct forms of democracy and to promote social, economic and political transformation. The variety of approaches to citizenship education reveals that the struggle to extend democracy in and through education is not unique to Venezuela. However, in the context of the "Bolivarian Revolution", it is the conceptualisation of democracy as participatory and protagonist and the explicit link between education and social change via state-grassroots collaboration that distinguish it from more liberal, representative approaches to education and democracy and make Venezuela a dynamic site to further explore the linkages between education and democracy in projects for social change. An understanding of these linkages requires further analysis of theories of the role of education in society, particularly the role of education in social change.

3.2 Theories of education: its role and purpose

Debates surround the role of education, both formal and non-formal, in promoting societal cohesion and/or social change. These debates centre on what the role of education should be, as well as the relationship between education and the economy, education and the state and education and the individual and/or community. Education in most societies is expected to play a role in constructing a desired future and many types of regime across the

political spectrum have tried to use education to promote legitimacy, economic growth and stability or change. Education is therefore inseparable from and shaped by its socio-political context.

Russell (1932) identified three divergent theories of education. The first sees education as primarily to provide opportunities for growth, the second stresses the role of education in developing individual capacity and the third stresses the role of education in producing useful citizens. All three are found in varying degrees in different education systems and are emphasised to different degrees by educational theorists. Similarly Williamson-Fien (1987) identifies three major interpretations of the role of education and the nature and location of the political arena; the conservative, liberal-pluralist and socially critical approaches. The conservative view emphasises formal institutions and politics and is limited to knowledge and understanding of government institutions and the rights and obligations of citizens. Political actors are limited to political parties. The liberal-pluralist approach also emphasises formal institutions but places more emphasis on participation in informal activities such as lobbying. This approach stresses political literacy and the skills necessary for public participation rather than just knowledge and understanding. Modernization theory, for example, draws on this tradition and emphasizes the role of education in promoting economic growth and societal development. The principle idea is that, through education, individuals become rationally empowered to transform themselves and the world they live in. Finally the socially critical approach extends the political arena to social life as a whole with the idea that the personal is political. It requires political education that explores power relations and equips learners with the skills to recognise, evaluate and challenge the dynamics of existing power relations.

This section examines these various theories of the role of education in pursuing particular goals before examining the possibility of a theory of education for social change that incorporates state responsibility for educational provision but also promotes the development of autonomous individuals and communities capable of playing an active part in the pursuit of a more egalitarian, democratic society.

3.2.1 Consensus approaches

The liberal view of education espouses the rhetoric of neutrality and social mobility and argues that education is a tool for enlightenment and a great equalizer that promotes societal development and democracy (Wexler 1981). For example Dewey (1916) viewed high levels of educational attainment as a prerequisite for democracy. Education is argued

to promote democracy because it enables a “culture of democracy” to develop and because it leads to greater prosperity, which is also thought to cause political development.

Functionalists offer a consensus view of the role of education in and for society. For them, education operates for the good of both individuals and society. Functional theorists such as Durkheim (1897) and Parsons (1959) emphasise the role that education can play in transmitting the norms and values of society. Durkheim argued that for society to operate effectively individuals must develop a sense of themselves as social beings with loyalty and commitment to society as a whole. Education plays an important part in this process. Parsons developed Durkheim’s ideas, arguing that education provides an important socialising function by transmitting the norms and values of society, selecting people for roles in society in terms of their abilities and promoting social cohesion and stability. Finally, education meets the economic needs of society by providing vocational training.

Both the functionalist and the liberal view tend to advocate a narrow vision of democracy and citizen participation, and their fundamental belief in the neutrality of societal institutions and processes ignores power relations within the education system and wider society that hinder some and benefit others. In the functionalist sense education under any regime, be it authoritarian or democratic, could be argued to play a positive role in socialising people into the norms and values and processes of that society. These approaches also ignore or downplay the role of education as an agent of change. For example Durkheim (1897:372-373) rejected the idea that education could be a force to transform society saying, education is ‘only the image and reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces the latter...it does not create it’. While Durkheim viewed this as essential for social order and cohesion, it leaves little room for the idea that education can be a catalyst for change.

Nevertheless, functionalist arguments highlight the important role that education can play in economic growth, socialisation into the norms and values of society and the maintenance of social order. While capitalist and socialist regimes differ greatly as to their vision of the desired society and the role of the individual and community within it, they both see the potential of education in producing their vision of the desired society and the “good” citizen which draws on the functionalist tradition.

3.2.2 Conflict theories of education

Like functionalists, conflict theorists see education as playing a reinforcing role in society. Similarly to Durkheim, Marxists see education as determined by the economic base. However they view this as negative in that education reinforces the norms and values of the capitalist class, thereby keeping the masses subordinate and accepting of the status quo. Marxist theory therefore challenged liberal and functionalist assumptions as to the essentially beneficial nature of schooling and viewed education in capitalist societies as an oppressive tool that reproduces the ideas of the dominant class and oppressive relations of production. However, while such theory highlights the importance of power issues and inequalities embedded in social systems, including education, the end result is the same as consensus approaches: education reproduces the existing order and offers little hope for agency and change.

The socially reproductive theories of education argue that schools mirror existing social divisions of labour and dominant ideologies that celebrate obedience rather than critical thought (Wood 1984). Such work is exemplified by Bowles and Gintis' (1976) work on the hidden curriculum and Althusser's (1971) on the Ideological State Apparatus of which the school is a part. Education legitimises the dominant ideology and the needs of the capitalist system. Bourdieu (1977) and Bernstein (1981, 1971) criticised the overly deterministic view of reproduction theory and argued that schools are relatively autonomous institutions. However, while they appear to be sites of neutral social transmission, as functionalists and liberal theorists argue, in fact schools confirm the culture of the ruling class while also devaluing the culture of other groups, thereby promoting inequality. This cultural capital theory moves beyond economic reproductive models to include culture and social structures. However, once again it tends to emphasise the ways in which education reproduces the dominant culture. Reproduction theories therefore downplay the importance of counter-hegemonic struggles within and outside the sphere of education and the potential of education to promote social change.

In summary, both consensus and conflict theories of education are inadequate. The liberal and functionalist approaches over-emphasise the progressive nature of education while reproduction theories fail to develop an alternative, liberating perspective. The dominant trend in critical social theory is that education is structurally determined and opportunities for opposition and/or agency are limited. Willis (1977) did introduce the idea of conflict and student resistance via the development of an oppositional culture in schools in his study "Learning to labour". However Willis lacks an analysis of how this counter-

hegemonic culture can move beyond resistance and be mobilised into effective opposition. Such resistance theory runs the risk of glorifying oppositional behaviour when in fact such behaviour reinforces inequalities, limits opportunities to use knowledge as a catalyst for change and ultimately serves the needs of capitalism. As Eyben (2005:21) stresses, resistance alone can ‘unintentionally reproduce the very rules of the game that keep the resister subordinate’. What is needed therefore is recognition of the potential of education to promote not only social stability but social change. Understanding this potential also requires examining theorising on links between education and indoctrination versus education for liberation.

3.2.3 Education for liberation or indoctrination?

While it is clear that education is used by most regimes to promote and consolidate the desired future society, what constitutes “education to construct a desired future” by one regime is often called indoctrination by another. Dewey (1937:328) defined indoctrination as ‘the systematic use of every possible measure to impress on the minds of pupils a particular set of political and economic views to the exclusion of every other’. Accusations of indoctrination have most frequently been levelled at authoritarian regimes and regimes that explicitly aim to use education to pursue their political project such as the 20th century revolutions and the current Venezuelan process. However Müller (2007) argues that *every* system of education has an underlying agenda, regardless of whether it is under neo-liberalism or with the goal of social revolution. Education in all societies therefore has a political as well as educational role. Russell (1932:127) argues that the expansion of education ‘has increased immeasurably the opportunities of propaganda’. However he also says that ‘it is not propaganda as such that is at fault but one-sided propaganda’ (Russell 1932:133); what is needed is to encourage critical judgement. The key is to examine whether or not education equips learners with the skills to recognise, evaluate and challenge the dynamics of existing power relations (Williamson-Fien 1987) or whether it aims to stifle independent thought and action and secure unquestioning acceptance of the status quo.

Despite the functionalist affirmation that education is and should be apolitical and neutral, there is a more general consensus that all education is political. Formal, and in some cases informal, education is largely organised and controlled by governments and this means that the entire schooling process is, by definition, political, both in terms of who has power over it and what schooling aims to achieve (Apple et al. 2003; Freire 1970). Furthermore, there is no such thing as value-free or neutral education. All education has an element of

social engineering; promoting a vision of the desired citizen and desired future society (Frazer 1999; Harber 1991). Education, regardless of the political regime in charge of its delivery, is fundamentally a political act that can serve to promote “thin” or “thick” democracy, secure passive acceptance and obedience or promote critical thought and action, domesticate or liberate. The education system is therefore at the centre over struggles surrounding the meaning of democracy, citizenship and legitimate authority.

Harber (1991) distinguishes between political socialisation and political education and argues that both can also become political indoctrination, depending on their underlying motivations and mode of implementation. Political socialisation is associated with liberal-pluralist ideas of teaching people to take part in the existing political system by, for example, voting and lobbying. It is generally associated with “thin” conceptions of democracy and encouraging participation within the present system without questioning the system itself. Education is argued to be neutral. There is little or no consideration of power relations or the idea of education as tool to develop critical thought and strategies for change. This approach can therefore be seen as indoctrination if it plays a role, consciously or unconsciously, in the reproduction of dominant political and social values as if they were “facts” and ignores other alternatives.

Political education is more associated with the development of critical thought and is generally seen as more democratic in that it encourages free debate, considers a range of alternatives and allows learners to construct their own ideas of the “good” society and how to achieve it. However McCowan (2006) says that the idea of political education is a subject of great debate. Political education can also be indoctrination if it is used to enforce uncritical acceptance of a new regime’s hegemony. He argues that while all education is political not all education is liberating. It is important to examine ‘what kind of political regime supports what kind of education, for whom and for what state purposes’ (Arnove and Torres 1995:313).

Often charges of political indoctrination are levelled at socialist or communist countries and totalitarian states, however Marcuse (1965) points out that any education that reinforces uncritical acceptance of the status quo, or a new regime, involves indoctrination. For example Russell (1932:80) questions the idea that Western democracy teaches people to think for themselves. He argues that throughout the Western world people are taught loyalty to the state of which they are citizens. They are taught ‘false history, false politics and false economics’ and this promotes the ‘willingness of the ordinary citizen to become

an unconscious accomplice'. For example the National Curriculum in Britain stresses factual knowledge rather than skills, whilst the U.S. uses national symbols such as the flag and singing the National Anthem to encourage loyalty. Capitalist political values are reinforced in Western maths text books by asking questions on mortgages, investment and profit. The hidden curriculum also teaches obedience, acceptance of hierarchy and conformism. Overall, political or citizenship education is used in these contexts to support, reinforce and legitimate existing social, political and economic relations. It tends to reinforce factual knowledge of existing institutions, rather than exploring different modes of governance, and can therefore be classed as indoctrinational.

This is not to say that so-called communist or socialist regimes are less indoctrinational, rather that *any* education that does not encourage critical thought and stresses a one-sided view of "the truth" is indoctrinational. For example while Russell (1932) admires much of the communist educational reforms and their emphasis on community, he also criticises the lack of opportunities for developing critical judgement and the subjugation of the individual to the collective. While Russian education went beyond the passive cognition of Western education systems and focussed on understanding the world so as to change it, students became 'missionaries of the communist faith' (Russell 1932:113). So, while education was seen as a catalyst for social change, it was only as long as those changes were ones designated by the communist party. As in Western democracies, communist countries have adopted a one-sided view of reality to legitimise their regimes. For example in post-Tiananmen China, schools and the media have portrayed the protesters as trouble-makers and counter-revolutionaries. Maths text books in Cuba ask pupils to calculate the monthly average of violations of Cuban airspace by American planes, thus reinforcing anti-American and anti-capitalist values.

Both capitalist and socialist regimes are therefore guilty of using education to suit their own political ends, reinforcing the idea that there is a fine line between education and indoctrination in any society, or as Friedrich and Brzezinski (1966:149) say, 'between employing the education system to develop in youth the ability and inclination to "think for themselves".... And using education for the purpose of making all those who come within its grasp think alike'. Only education that builds learners' knowledge of alternative social, political, economic and cultural possibilities and promotes critical thought and active participation for social change can be considered non-indoctrinational.

These debates surrounding indoctrination reveal the importance of analysing the nature of education in, for and as democracy to gain a better understanding of what vision of democracy promotes what kind of education and what kind of education promotes what kind of democracy. Such analysis is conducted in Chapter 6 to examine the extent to which education in Venezuela promotes critical thought and protagonist participation for social change, or if, as some critics argue, education serves to secure uncritical acceptance of the Chavez government. The remainder of this Chapter explores in more detail the possibility of education to develop critical consciousness and mobilisation for change, including an assessment of how the state can be brought into a critical theory of education for social change.

3.3 Towards a critical theory of education and social change

So far the theories explored have concentrated on what education does to people. They imply that individuals passively soak up what the education system tells them. Conflict theory has challenged the rhetoric of neutrality in education but has, for the most part, focussed on the negative aspects of education and the negative impact of the state on education. While an understanding of reproductive and socially controlling or indoctrinational processes in education is necessary, traditional consensus and conflict theories tend to ignore the multidimensional nature of power relations and the possible role of agency to promote social change. However, influenced by the work of Gramsci, more recent critical theory has started to recognise that more complex social relations are involved and that an acceptance of the important role of education in reproduction does not necessarily negate its role in social transformation. Increasingly it is recognised that education is not a simple one-way process from the education “system” to learners. In fact it contains sites for contestation. Understanding how education can move from resistance to social transformation requires exploration of the links between education, knowledge and power and closer reference to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

3.3.1 Education, Knowledge and Power

In Chapter 2 I established that any project of social change needs to engage with questions of power in its numerous forms. Lukes (1974) broadened the conception of power beyond “power over” to incorporate the work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962) into the way power affects the way issues are framed and agendas are set. He also identified a third aspect of power that concerns the way the control of *knowledge* influences consciousness and secures domination. Power and knowledge are therefore closely intertwined.

As highlighted in section 2.1, power is not just constituted by force; it is constituted in the realm of ideas and knowledge production and therefore has inherently pedagogical dimensions. As Heywood (1994) highlights, Gramsci's conceptualisation of hegemony emphasises the idea of knowledge as a social construct that predominantly legitimises social structures and power relations. Hegemony is both a political and discursive process and includes the power to shape not only political agendas but also what counts as knowledge and what roles people play in society. Unequal power relations become "natural" and restrict opportunities for change. In this sense power resembles Bourdieu's (1977) notion of "habitus" or Freire's (1970) ideas on the way knowledge is internalised to develop a "culture of silence" among the oppressed.

However both Gramsci and Freire stressed that while certain power relations can come to be seen as "normal", education for critical consciousness, organisation and action can enable previously dominated groups to confront hegemonic discourse and unequal power relations and establish more democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge and social organisation. The sense of "power to" is central. It is essentially the power to have an effect; it concerns agency. Again education is vital in helping people to realise that they do have the capacity to exercise power and that everyone exercises power. This comes through the promotion of a sense of "power with" through building collective strength and "power within" through enhancing people's self-esteem and self-confidence. With this comes the possibility of confronting and reconfiguring power relations.

3.3.2 The inclusion of Gramsci in Education Theory

As I highlighted briefly in section 2.2, education is central to Gramsci's work. He clearly states that 'every relation of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogical relationship' (Gramsci 1971:350). Establishing the "commonsense" of a society is a *process*; it is socially constructed or learned. Education systems are instruments in this socialization of a hegemonic culture based on shared consensus. However, crucially, Gramsci highlighted that this consensus is dynamic rather than static. This means that while both formal and informal education can consolidate existing hegemonic arrangements, they also contain spaces where these arrangements can be contested (Mayo 2005). For example Fielding's (2007) study of the Common School in Stepney, London from 1945-1955 reveals that the dominant neoliberal model of teaching about procedural democracy rather than encouraging critical thought and the practice of alternatives is not absolute and can be challenged to construct new democratic alternatives. This opens up the possibility of education and knowledge production as a force for change, rather than purely a means of

reinforcing the status quo. Theories of hegemony and counter-hegemony therefore allow for exploration of the pedagogical dimensions of the social reproduction of knowledge and power relations *and* the possible role of education in promoting counter-hegemonic struggle and social change.

Gramsci stressed that social transformation requires more than just changing material, structural relations of production. The struggle also needs to take place in the realm of ideas, and education is crucial in this struggle. He critiqued education that focuses on purely academic or technical knowledge, saying that this type of education restricts the development of critical consciousness and the ability to take an active role in processes of change. The creation of historical subjects capable of transforming society requires a different kind of education that develops ‘a person capable of thinking’ and also a person capable of acting (Gramsci 1971:40). For Gramsci, ‘the ultimate purpose and goal was to uncover conditions that would lead to the transformation of state and society through the formation of a particular type of consciousness’ (Fontana 2002:26). A new hegemony requires the creation of new knowledge based on critical reasoning and lived experiences to create grassroots intellectuals, or what Gramsci (1971:6) called the ‘organic intellectual’, capable of challenging dominant ideas and developing strategies for change (McLaren et al. 2002; Borg et al. 2002; Fontana 2002).

For Gramsci civil society was the focal point for autonomous human agency; mediating between the state and its citizens. While it is unlikely that states will be willing to instigate education that leads to excessive questioning and action as this may undermine their stability and legitimacy, a strong civil society is able to pressurise the state for change and prevent the development of a civil society dominated by the interests of the state (Cunningham 1992). Civil society therefore provides potential spaces for learning free from domination and also engagement with social change. For Gramsci, it is the system of educational and cultural institutions, Workers’ Councils and voluntary associations that provide the pedagogical opportunities to develop a counter-hegemonic revolutionary force. As Gramsci put it (1971:233), the process of revolutionary struggle is a process of learning and the superstructures of civil society ‘are like the trench systems of modern warfare’. Education is therefore crucial to counter-hegemonic struggle through ideological preparation and political education at the grassroots to deconstruct dominant discourse and ideology and discuss and construct alternatives.

The Gramscian approach reveals a complex relationship between education to enforce dominant hegemony and education to promote autonomous critical thought and counter-hegemonic struggle, thus moving beyond deterministic critiques of education to explore the possibility of agency and change. By allowing education a degree of autonomy outside of dominant relations and ideology, the idea of human agency is brought into critical education theory. As I illustrated in section 3.2, different ideological stances of different regimes are reflected in the type of education pursued and the outcomes of education programmes. However, even in cases where education systems are designed to teach conformity and close down tendencies for independent critical thought, the process of becoming literate alone means that people have the skills to read about alternative ideas and modes of organisation beyond what is taught through the education system. Furthermore, just as Torres (1991) found that any government-sponsored mobilisation has a degree of spontaneity, so too any government-sponsored education that aims to secure conformity to a particular conceptualisation of democracy, even “thin” procedural democracy, equips people with skills and knowledge that they can use to question the dominant hegemony. Wood (1984:220) calls this the paradox of education for democracy in that ‘on one hand the state strives to obtain legitimacy and stability for the existing order. On the other hand it embraces a creed that stipulates the right of citizens to alter any existing social arrangement’.

Finally, debates are also emerging as to the possibility for state-led education to play a key role when societies are undergoing radical transformation. As I highlighted in section 3.2, whether or not education for critical consciousness and social change is possible via state-led education, as the Venezuelan process claims, is contested. Subsequent sections explore in more detail these debates as to the relationship between education and the state in strategies for social change.

3.4 Bringing the State back in

While Gramsci importantly highlighted how education can be a site of struggle for social change, he focused more on education outside the state in order to transform the state; on grassroots organisations engaging in a “war of position” that might eventually replace existing state structures. He stressed that liberatory education cannot be imposed on people; it must come from people themselves. There is a long history of such grassroots education being used to compensate for deficiencies in the prevailing education system and to foster opposition to oppressive regimes, such as Hedge schools in Ireland, the Highlander School in the U.S., the Workers’ Education Association in England and the

popular education traditions from Latin America, that I discuss in detail in section 3.5. These examples show that opposition can go beyond the resistance uncovered by Willis (1977) and that opposition and resistance can be socially formative, not just reproductive. However, while these examples illustrate the possibility of education outside the state as a force for resistance and social change, there is less theorising on the possibility of moving beyond resistance to explore state-popular movement interaction in the pursuit of a more democratic society. What is lacking is a critical theory of education that moves beyond reproduction and resistance to consider education both outside of the state and in/by the state in the pursuit of social change.

Since the 19th century, education has increasingly become a function of the state, however most research into education or the state has failed to link the two (Carnoy 1992). In particular, analysis of state-led education in processes of social transformation remains under-theorised (Holst 2007; Jarvis 1993). Increasingly, in response to this deficit, critical theorists are exploring the possibility of a counter-hegemonic education that builds critical consciousness and mobilisation for change promoted *by* the state. For example Giroux (1981) argues that while theories of social and cultural reproduction remain central to critical educational theory, more recently theories of power and the state have been incorporated with theories of resistance and agency, hegemony and counter-hegemony, to consider the possibility of state-led education as a catalyst for social change and grassroots empowerment. A key question is whether or not state structures will instigate and implement educational changes that by their very nature threaten the stability of the existing state. Morrow and Torres (1995:343) therefore call for ‘a critical theory of power and the state’ as ‘a necessary starting point to study educational policy-making’.

Critical theorists questioned state neutrality and argued that the state is involved in the reproduction of capitalism, as I discussed in section 3.2.2. More recently critical theory has also engaged with the idea that the state is more than the repressive state apparatus; it also includes sites for contestation. For example Carnoy and Levin (1985) and Wood (1984) point out that any democratic capitalist state necessarily has to pursue contradictory goals in education policy and provision. On the one hand the state needs a trained, obedient workforce to reproduce the capitalist system and on the other there is a need to instil democratic ideals. It is here that the possibility for contestation emerges. While education, particularly state education, *is* generally orientated towards order as opposed to radical change, these theories highlight that the dialectic between structure and agency carries the

possibility that education can be a part of a project for social change. Education for democratic empowerment depends on this belief in the possibility of human agency.

Policy formulation within the educational sphere therefore ‘constitutes a crucial context of negotiation and struggle which may have decisive effects on the ability of society to maintain or transform itself. Education is either a powerful (and unique) tool for socialisation into a given social order or should challenge and resist hegemonic culture and resulting social practices’ (Morrow and Torres 1995:9). It is here that Gramsci’s theorising on the role of education becomes central to a critical theory of education for social change grounded in grassroots mobilisation. Subsequent sections explore these possibilities in more detail thereby building an understanding of the pitfalls and potential of state-led educational projects to promote social change.

3.4.1 State-impulsed education for democratic socialism: past examples, problems and future prospects

So far the opportunities I have outlined for contestation in education have focussed on capitalist societies. However, this thesis is concerned with the role of education in so-called revolutionary socialist transitions. While the conservative view is that the purpose of education is to consolidate those changes that have already taken place external to it, these more radical approaches see education as having the potential to challenge hegemonic arrangements and act as a catalyst for social change (Neave 1988). The current Venezuelan process that aims to use state-led educational reform to construct a new hegemony and promote widespread mobilisation for social change is at the centre of these debates.

In all cases, be they in or against capitalism or to promote revolutionary change, it is vital to examine if they employ a democratic approach to education or whether they constitute alternative forms of indoctrination and control. This section examines current theorising and past examples of where states have used education to promote social change. In particular it focuses on the Cuban and Nicaraguan approaches as these past experiments have influenced Venezuelan educational reforms and share some important similarities with the current Venezuelan project of state-promoted education for grassroots-led social change. By examining the goals, organisation and outcomes of these projects, I build an understanding of the potentials and limitations of state-led education for transformation that can inform an assessment of current educational projects in Venezuela and how they might develop in practice.

While most education systems have been based on structural-functionalist assumptions, in a few countries education reform has more directly engaged with political, social and economic conflict and change (La Belle and Ward 1990). The possibility of change is most profound in cases where states overtly aim to use education to build a new hegemony and promote social transformation, though state-promoted education for social change is not without its critics and problems and not all state-promoted education seeks social change. Arnove and Torres (1995) illustrate this, using the cases of Mexico and Nicaragua, to reveal how the goals, content and outcomes of education policy differ according to state policy. In Mexico from 1970-1990 the focus was on social integration and political legitimation rather than social change whereas in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas from 1979-1990 the focus was on education for political legitimation but also to promote fundamental change in education and society.

In general state-sponsored programmes tend to follow the Mexican route and promote stability and social, economic and political integration. Developing critical thinkers has generally been seen as an educative act that occurs outside the state. Luke (2000), for example, asks if critical literacy in a state-based education system is an oxymoron as states are reluctant to teach critical consciousness and autonomous organisation and mobilisation as it may undermine their legitimacy and position of power. Similarly Azevedo (1998:309) asks how can a regime 'develop a transformative and democratic project inside a state apparatus that has a logic that goes in the opposite direction of democracy and transformation?' Archer and Costello (1990:40) illustrate these tensions in their analysis of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas simultaneously aimed to secure support and mobilise the people around the revolutionary project whilst also equipping people with the skills and space to develop critical consciousness. They highlight the essential contradiction of such projects of radical social change where liberatory education is seen as playing a crucial role saying, 'how is it possible for a revolutionary state to design revolutionary projects that to be revolutionary must challenge that state? Either the state dictates the content of revolutionary education and therefore becomes oppressive or it nurtures a revolution in education that might overthrow the very structures that made it possible'.

Despite these inherent contradictions, socialists have regarded education as a principal dynamic in reconstructing society and 'there is a great deal to be learned from socialists' efforts to transform education' (Samoff 1991:1). For example Müller (2007) argues that revolutionary states can offer valuable lessons for education as a source of social equity.

Within revolutionary societies there is a strong focus on education to help create a more just society, as well as the more traditional focus on the needs of the economy. Education is also crucial in critiquing the old regime, instilling new dominant norms and values and promoting change. However she also identifies tensions between personal liberation and the needs of the revolutionary state. Müller cautions against the use of education as an instrument of ideological or political socialisation, instead arguing that education should strive to develop intellectual curiosity. This reflects a crucial debate in educational theory; whether or not education should serve the needs of the individual or society as a whole and how to find a balance between the two. Both Dewey (1916) and Russell (1932) argued that it should be possible for an education system to instil values of communitarianism and the social “good” alongside individual autonomous development. However, again this involves contested assumptions of what constitutes a “good” citizen and a “good” society and runs the risk of becoming indoctrinational.

As with more general theories of social change, Luxemburg’s (1900) and Boggs’ (1977a) idea of prefigurative practice is important. Education needs to incorporate the very modes of social organisation that it seeks to enhance. For Fielding (2007:544) this emphasis on prefigurative practice is ‘one of the most important past and continuing contributions of the radical traditions of state-led education to the furtherance of democracy’. He argued that it is not enough to wait until the planned widespread social change has been brought about; ‘education through its processes, the expectations and desires it fosters and the experiences people gain should prefigure in microcosm the more equal and just society the regime hopes to achieve’. Similarly (Schugurensky 2009, 2010) argues that in the same way that capitalist schooling mirrors the social relations in wider society, so too can, and should, schooling within a wider project to build protagonist, participatory democracy mirror the social relations of the “ideal” society envisaged by this new conceptualisation of democracy. In this way education becomes central to projects that aim to construct new relations between states and communities as part of a wider project of social transformation.

Samoff (1991) identifies five general characteristics of education in transformative societies. Firstly there is a multi-dimensional relationship between education and the state but overall education is firmly under state control. Education is a principal legitimising mechanism. Education is promoted as a human right. There is also an assertion of a fundamental relationship between knowledge, power and social change and, finally, often a high priority given to adult education. While the first three may be evident, at least in

rhetoric in mainstream educational theory, the latter two tend to be associated with more radical educational proposals.

In the Latin American context education and its links to democracy and social change is closely linked to the nature of the state and this is especially evident in revolutionary societies such as Cuba and Nicaragua (Torres 1991). Education plays a particularly significant role in processes of social, economic and political transformation in these revolutionary societies, and programmes are often explicitly linked to larger societal goals of breaking with the past, securing commitment to new societal relations and creating the “new man” (Ruscoe 1975; Guevara 1965). Both revolutionary governments instigated large-scale education programmes based on principles of popular education and social change and education is/was used as a powerful tool in the legitimation of the state and the construction of the new political culture of the population.

In Nicaragua under the Sandinistas from 1979-1990 the expansion and transformation of education was linked to the democratisation of society, the development of the “new” man and woman and the development of a new economic model. Following the revolution the Sandinistas inherited an education system that was one of the poorest in Latin America. They aimed to make education more egalitarian, universal and democratic, pursuing a Cuban-influenced structuralist approach designed to make fundamental changes not just in education but society as a whole by eliminating illiteracy, prioritising adult education, extending education to the socially excluded and promoting economic growth (Arnové and Torres 1995). Their first move was to initiate the 1980 literacy crusade, based on Freirean ideology and the Cuban campaign, which mobilised over 250,000 volunteers or “brigadistas” (Kleinbach 1985). As a result illiteracy was reduced from 50 per cent to 23 per cent in just five months (Castro-Leal 2004), leading Arnove et al. (1996:150) to call it ‘the most dramatic and successful campaign of the twentieth century’. In addition an innovative State/popular education partnership was established through Popular Education Co-operatives for adults and children unable to attend day-time schooling, with the support of materials and pedagogical advice from the Ministry of Education (Arnové and Torres 1995). Education policy under the Sandinistas demonstrated that ‘communities through their own efforts and *in conjunction* [my emphasis] with the government could provide essential social services’ (Arnové and Torres 1995:320). While the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 led to a dismantling of many of the educational initiatives by the new neoliberal government, many of the positive impacts in terms of community organisation have endured (Kane 2001).

Similarly in Cuba the aim was to harness education to promote social change. Since the Cuban revolution of 1959, education policy has formed part of wider social development objectives to promote equity and universal access as well as economic growth (Uriarte 2003). One of the earliest initiatives was the 1961 National Literacy Campaign whereby volunteers were mobilised to teach more than 700,000 people to read. As a result the illiteracy rate fell from 23 per cent to 4 per cent in just 10 months, the lowest in Latin America at that time (Torres 1995). UNESCO called it one of the most successful innovations in educational history (Brundenius 1981). At the same time education was made entirely public, compulsory up to Grade 9, centrally planned and free up to and including Higher Education. Measures to increase community participation in curriculum design and local decision-making were also introduced (Gasperini 2000). Cuba has ‘maintained a constant commitment’ to education (Muniz et al. 1984:247), leading Gasperini (2000:1) to conclude that the Cuban record of education is ‘outstanding’. This has been despite severe economic constraints, including the U.S. blockade, and regional and global trends towards privatisation, scaling-down the state and cost-cutting. The Cuban example therefore presents a compelling case for universal, free, state provision of education and illustrates how a country can ‘achieve positive social outcomes by spending large amounts of money on services’ (Uriarte 2003:4).

The Nicaraguan and Cuban examples reveal that state-led social programmes can have significant benefits for individuals and communities and society as a whole. It is important to note that such positive outcomes are not unique to socialist societies. In Western industrialised countries, influenced by Keynesian economic theory, the expansion of social welfare programmes also led to significant gains in terms of educational and social development (Mkandawire 2004). These gains also influenced the emergence of state-led social policy in developing countries as a means of reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth (Midgely 1998). However, the neo-liberal tradition that gained dominance in the 1980s associated state provision of social welfare with economic failure and this led to measures to “roll back the state” in both the developed and developing world (Hall and Midgely 2004). What the Cuban and Nicaraguan educational initiatives reveal is that, even in times of economic hardship, there are plausible alternatives to the hegemonic neo-liberal approach. Both examples offer a strong case for universal welfare provision (Deacon 2005) and a ‘reassertion of the politics of social solidarity’ (GASPP 2005:4) and add weight to the idea that ‘what is needed is *more* state education not *less*’ (Reimers 1995:35).

Most importantly, what distinguishes the Cuban and Nicaraguan cases from both social democratic reform and neoliberalism is the overt emphasis on state-led initiatives to promote grassroots organisation and mobilisation for social change. In terms of education specifically, the overt link between education and fundamental economic, political and social change offers a possible alternative to the rather stagnant Western notions of education for democratic citizenship. At the same time, the Cuban example reveals one of the pitfalls of state-sponsored education for social change. While there is some room for autonomous organisation, education programmes are predominantly controlled from above. This has led to accusations of indoctrination in that the state largely dictates the content of revolutionary education, thus restricting the pursuit of participatory, democratic organisation in and through education (Griffiths and Williams 2009; Gasperini 2000; Arnove and Torres 1995). More broadly, while many socialist or communist countries have promoted greater equity and instigated comprehensive social welfare schemes, this has not always been accompanied by greater democratisation. For example, in Russia and China the state came to dominate welfare provision, including education. Education promoted the government line rather than fostering critical thought and there was little room for autonomous, popular organisation within educational programmes and society more generally (Russell 1932). However the Nicaraguan case reveals that pursuing a state-led project of radical social change is not necessarily incompatible with popular participation and does not necessarily involve indoctrination. In particular it shows how state-led education projects based on participatory, democratic principles can contribute to broader participatory and democratic forms of social organisation and decision-making.

Education policy in Venezuela aims to combine universal, free state education with bottom-up organisation and mobilisation for social change. In this sense it differs to both neoliberal anti-statist and top-down, social democratic endeavours. By drawing on the lessons from past attempts to link state education and social change, I explore the potential of Venezuela's education programmes to develop change from above and below. In Chapters 6 and 7 I examine whether reforms are democratising the way education and society more generally is organised or if they are vulnerable to the tendency for state domination that many past experiments illustrate. I thereby contribute to existing theory as to the possibility of state-grassroots synergy in projects for social change that aim to develop participatory, protagonist democracy in and through education. Before doing so I explore in more detail the links between education, knowledge and power through a consideration of popular education and its relationship with the state.

3.4.2 Popular education: knowledge, power and social change

The Venezuelan government claims to be promoting state-led popular education as an integral part of community development, grassroots mobilisation and radical change (Kane 2010). This necessitates an understanding of how popular education links to power dynamics and processes of social change, particularly how popular education can engage with processes that aim to instigate change “from above and below”. Furthermore, an understanding of the achievements and shortcomings of past experiments of state-led popular education to build a new hegemony and promote new forms of social organisation provides valuable insights into how the current Venezuelan project might develop in practice.

Popular education is generally associated with adult education programmes. In the 19th century the term was loosely used to describe the general expansion of education. However at the same time more radical adult education projects of the 19th and 20th century saw adult learning as ‘inextricably tied to creating and extending political and economic democracy’ (Brookfield and Holst 2011: xii). Programmes had an overt goal to extend participatory democracy and confront unequal power relations through grassroots debate on what education and democratic citizenship should look like. It is the radical conceptualisation that has most influenced current thinking. Popular education re-emerged as a radical pedagogical project in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America, largely due to the work of Paulo Freire and as a result of political repression and economic exclusion of marginalised groups. “Educacion popular” in Spanish implies education to promote the emancipation, liberation and self-determination of the oppressed and exploited masses (Kane 2001). In this sense not *all* programmes that work with the popular sector can be classed as popular education. Many current adult education programmes have either been co-opted into government programmes or have lost sight of their radical roots and are now more concerned with fitting people to the needs of the economy and existing political processes than building a movement to create and develop democracy. For educational programmes to be classed as “popular” in the radical sense they need to be part of the struggle for liberation and change, rather than more conservative drives towards state education for the masses.

Popular education is ‘a process of increasing awareness so that people socially excluded from wealth, education and decision-making can reflect jointly on their situation, can realise that this will not be improved from above and can understand that they must organise to change the structure of society’ (Rivero 2005: no page). It is generally seen as

the ‘political-pedagogical alternative to mainstream adult education’ (Torres 1995:6) and is most often associated with literacy programmes. However literacy is seen as more than technical skills. It is a vehicle for engaging in power struggles (Giroux 1988). Knowledge production more generally is seen as an instrument of struggle and education ‘as a powerful and necessary tool in the development of a critically conscious citizenry, active in the construction of a democratic, socialist society’ (del Pilar O’Cadiz et al 1998:26). The paradigm of popular education is therefore intimately linked to processes of social change, equality, social justice and “thick” democracy.

Freire has ‘an umbilical link with popular education’ (Kane 2001:51). His educational philosophy is grounded in his work in basic education as well as drawing on a range of influences including Karl Marx, Che Guevara and Liberation Theology. In “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970) he laid out his vision of popular education in which he stressed the political commitment to the popular classes in the struggle to overcome oppression and injustice. Popular education starts from a political and social analysis of the living conditions of the poor and attempts to engage them in individual and collective awareness of their situation. Such knowledge is viewed as the starting point for both educational and political action. Freire emphasised ideas of consciousness-raising and knowledge production rather than banking education. Rather than teachers “depositing” information and teaching people what/how to think, pedagogy must be formed ‘*with not for* the oppressed’ (Freire 1970:30). For Freire education itself should be participatory and involve critical thought and social struggle, thereby linking theory with practice, dialogue with action and developing an understanding of the organic link between prefigurative practice and end results. Popular education is therefore distinguished by its democratic and participatory methodology and content, its overtly political ‘commitment to “the people”’ *and* its commitment to structural change (Puiggros 1994:13; Nunez 1993). It is a ‘normative process that is geared towards democratic participation that juxtaposes a utopian future against the contradictions of the present’ (La Belle 1987:202).

Both Freire and Gramsci drew attention to the fact that education can either be domesticating or liberating. It can either be used to reinforce the status quo or it has the potential for promoting social change. Education in its liberatory sense, or “popular education”, becomes vital in helping people to realise that they do have the capacity to exercise power and that everyone exercises power. It carries the possibility of confronting power in its various forms to establish new power relations. Knowledge production can strengthen voice, organisation and action and become the catalyst for social change. While

certain political economic and social practices can come to be seen as “normal”, popular education is a means of challenging hegemonic discourse through conscientisation, organisation and action; what Marx termed praxis. Through praxis people come to realise that capitalism cannot be reformed. Reform may ameliorate problems temporarily but the only way forward is through the construction of a new world view based on egalitarianism and community.

While not dismissing the role of leaders in struggles for liberation Freire stressed that they are not the only ‘proprietors of revolutionary wisdom’ (Freire 1970:42) and that strategies for action cannot be imposed but must come from the people themselves. He was therefore committed to participatory and inclusive practices that encouraged ‘education as the practice of freedom- as opposed to education as the practice of domination’ (Freire 1970:62). Freire saw no problem with education explicitly favouring marginalised groups. He stated that unless education sides with the oppressed in an attempt to transform society, it inevitably sides with the oppressors to bring conformity to the system and maintain the status quo and that ‘the solution is not to “integrate” them [the oppressed] into the structure of oppression but to transform that structure’ (Freire 1970:55). Critical consciousness is not enough; it must also ‘become the mobilising force for liberating actions’ (Freire 1970:31). Crowther et al. (1999) therefore conclude that education cannot be separated from active struggle. Education is a site of struggle and struggle is in itself educative. It is because of this commitment to action that popular education is seen to have an organic link with social movements, especially in Latin America, and many argue that the social movement is the school in which the struggle for social change takes place (Neary 2005; Kane 2001).

There are numerous examples of when the poor and marginalised have been able to bring about real change through organised protest outside the state, often using popular education as a mobilising tool. For example popular education in the Citizenship Schools at the Highlander Centre in the USA was influential in the Civil Rights Campaign, with Rosa Parks stating that the Centre had ‘everything’ to do with her decision not to move to the back of the bus (Rosa Parks in an interview by Studs Terkel cited in McMichael 2006: no page). Furthermore, the influence of popular education in the overthrow of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua suggests that transformation can come from the poorest groups in times of extreme opposition to liberatory movements. The success of these movements relied on strong popular protest outside and against the state and suggests that radical change requires mass oppositional mobilisation by strong, autonomous movements.

However Fink and Arnove (1991) and Neary (2005) highlight the fact that whilst popular education may have had some significant successes, particularly at the community level, it has generally been less successful at the macro level thus failing to live up to its transformatory rhetoric. Similarly La Belle (1986, 1987) suggests that popular education can only work for political reform rather than revolution and that often consciousness-raising does not extend to structural transformation, though the example of the Nicaraguan revolution calls his assertion into question. Nevertheless in many cases there seems to be a weak link between consciousness-raising and action. For example Luft (1984) found in a study of 20 popular education programmes in Bolivia that while there was a positive impact on the learners, there was little impact on structural conditions.

This is an ongoing problem in popular education that has led to numerous debates as to the role of popular education vis-à-vis the state. The state is generally viewed as ‘the basic pact of domination that guarantees the dominance of the powerful classes over the subordinate strata’ (Cardoso 1979:38) and, in the past, popular education initiatives have been wary of engaging with the state. However Mejia (1995) argues that as more space has been opened up for grassroots participation, popular education no longer needs to be as radically anti-state as it once was. Similarly Lange et al. (2000:20) highlight that while in the past, particularly in Latin America, popular education played an important role in the open confrontations with the state in the era of military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘political democratisation is prompting popular education to reconceptualise its traditional approach towards pedagogical processes, the capitalist state and formal schooling’. The 1990s saw important efforts to ‘rethink the basics of popular education’ in response to these developments and establish a new discourse on popular education (Kane 2001:214; Mejia 1995; Van Dam et al. 1992). This period of “refundamentacion” has seen popular education increasingly looked at ways of operating both “in and against the state” (Kane 2001:214) and there is much talk of moving ‘from protest to proposal’ (Fals Borda 1992:305). Many also point out that Freire himself became Secretary of State for Education in Sao Paulo, Brazil, indicating his belief that change could be instigated from “above and below”. So, while popular education’s organic link to grassroots movements is not in question, increasingly debates have emerged as to how these movements should relate to the state in the struggle for social change; as an oppositional force or “inside and outside the state”.

Gramsci’s influence is apparent here in that there is an increased recognition of the possibility of popular education engaging in a war of position rather than a full frontal

attack on the state. Mayo (2005: no page) argues that while the state does tend to work towards consolidating existing hegemonic arrangements 'it may be possible to use the Master's house to transform the Master's house'. Similarly Foweraker (2001) and Hellman (1995) emphasize the dialectical relationship between grassroots movements and the state or political parties, arguing that the state is both a pact of domination and an arena of conflict. Furthermore Cardoso (1989:4) argues that while social movements have been wary of the state they also realise its role as 'interlocutor at the negotiating table'. Finally Craig and Mayo (1995) and Neary (2005) argue that the failure of popular education to have an influence at the national level necessitates an exploration of how popular education can have a macro-level impact by working with the state sector.

A key question is whether or not this can be done without sacrificing radical change for piecemeal concessions or being co-opted into the neo-liberal agenda or the agenda of a revolutionary government. Foweraker (2001:iii) summarises the dilemma, arguing that 'where grassroots organisations interact with the state they may be subordinated to state policy and where they fail to interact they may be ineffective'. Kane (2001) draws on the work of Gadotti to argue that this problem is not insurmountable, and that 'the negotiating strength of the movement within the state depends on its capacity for mobilisation outside it' (Gadotti 1992:71 cited in Kane 2001:204). Both maintain that it is possible to have one foot inside and one foot outside the state. This requires the opening up of channels of participation by the administration and, crucially, the continued autonomy of grassroots movements in relation to the administration. Popular education has the potential of large-scale change by engaging with the state, and plays a key part in ensuring the continued autonomy of grassroots organisations when they do engage with the state. It has the potential to counter the tendencies for state co-option, both in engagements with a neo-liberal state and with states that claim to be pursuing a more participatory and egalitarian democratic agenda. Hence autonomy does not necessarily mean no relationship with the state; rather it means making linkages in the political system that change the political system itself.

As I have indicated, these debates have largely been centred on the relationship between popular education, grassroots organisation and the capitalist or reformist state. However, there have been cases where revolutionary governments/states have used popular education initiatives in the pursuit of more radical change. For example Kane (2001:28) refers to the 1970s and mid-1980s as the 'boom period' of popular education when it seemed to be living up to its radical rhetoric. Popular education was influential not only in

conscientisation and collective organisation by revolutionary movements to overthrow dictatorships in countries such as Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador, but also formed part of *post*-revolutionary societal change by the state/regime such as the mass literacy campaigns in post-revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua to build and consolidate a new hegemony. However, as I discussed in section 3.4.1, the evidence from past experiments reveals that, even where states have an explicit agenda of using education to promote a wider project of social change, the process and outcomes are not necessarily participatory and democratic, nor do they necessarily promote autonomous mobilisation, though the Nicaraguan case came close to realising this potential.

One other interesting historical case is the state-social movement literacy partnership “MOVA” in Sao Paulo, Brazil. An examination of this programme is useful in identifying what lessons can be learned from a state-social movement partnership as part of a wider programme to democratise the state and provides useful benchmarks with which to explore the Venezuelan case. MOVA was established by Paulo Freire and the Workers’ Party (PT) in the city of Sao Paulo during a ‘socialist’ administration and ran from January 1989 to December 1992 (del Pilar O’Cadiz and Torres 1994:208). The partnership was designed along participatory lines to allow state-social movement interaction without compromising the autonomy of the latter. Grassroots organisations had a strong role in the design and implementation of the programme, supported by financial and technical support from the municipal government. Literacy was seen as more than just a “campaign” to teach people to read and write, but as a vehicle for promoting social organisation and engagement in power struggles to radically transform political structures. Certainly MOVA did seem to make a difference at the micro level, increasing the self-confidence of learners and enhancing political consciousness. However while it did lead to new alliances between civil society and the state, ultimately this did not lead to large-scale structural transformation, nor did the increased confidence and awareness of participants lead to greater participation in political processes and increased organisation for social change. As in many cases, popular education failed to realise its radical potential in terms of structural transformation, despite the participatory, democratic nature of both the programme itself and its objectives (del Pilar O’Cadiz and Torres 1994). This suggests that even in cases where there is a real commitment by the state, popular education does not necessarily develop a more participatory, protagonist society.

Nevertheless the post-revolutionary literacy campaigns in Cuba and Nicaragua suggest that while state-social movement collaboration is problematic it can sometimes lead to wider

structural transformation. While the Sandinista revolution ultimately succumbed to internal and external pressures it remains an example of what can be achieved by state-society collaboration (Kane 2001). While the Cuba case may not have fully instigated participatory, democratic mechanisms within education and in wider society, it too was able to harness education to the project of social transformation. This suggests that some state-social movement partnerships to deliver popular education *can* impact at a structural level, though this requires a strong government committed to large-scale social change. What seems clear is that what is needed, as Gramsci argued, is popular education and mobilisation outside the system to create the conditions for structural change and, once the counter-hegemonic movement is strong enough, it can then negotiate with or pressurise the state for more progressive forms of government. Whether or not this is possible via state-led means is still unclear.

Mitter's (1993:467) idea of 'promoted autonomy' is particularly salient in examining the potential of such cases. This perspective argues that it is possible for states to use social policy, including education, to facilitate grassroots organisation and counter-hegemonic struggle without totally compromising autonomy. In this sense, state-led popular education to enhance grassroots organisation and state reform to open up spaces for participation and structural change are not necessarily incompatible with autonomous grassroots movements and democratic social change from below, though such cases are rare. The Nicaraguan case, albeit curtailed in 1990, provides the best historical example of this possibility and, I argue, the current project in Venezuela offers the opportunity for further understanding of the pitfalls and potential of such a project.

3.6 Conclusions: Democracy, critical education theory and social change

The link between education and democracy is made most explicit in critical pedagogical theory, both in its critique of education for neoliberalism and in its discussion of education as having the potential to develop more participatory forms of democracy. These arguments are made most explicit in discussions of adult education, particularly popular education. What becomes clear from the examination of theoretical debates and past experiments is that any programme for social change that incorporates a strong role for the grassroots requires educational programmes that equip people with the skills and organisational capacity to take an active and informed part in the process. The question is not so much whether or not education should educate for democratic participation but the nature of educational organisation and the kind of participation is encouraged. As Dewey (1916) said, the shortcomings of democracy can only be remedied with more, not less,

democracy and the best way of learning democracy is by doing it. In this sense education is not just something that occurs in formal settings but in all societal interactions. Participation is an educative experience, education is a means of enhancing this participation and education should not just be about democracy but a means of practising democracy. As Pateman (1970:42-43) says, ‘the major function of participation in the theory of participatory democracy is an educative one ...participation develops and fosters the very qualities necessary for it; the more individuals participate the better able they are to do so’.

However, it is important to note that citizen participation does not necessarily nurture a more democratic society. It very much depends on the nature of participation and the specific context in which it takes place. This requires an examination of the internal organisation of the programme, the way the curriculum is constructed, who participates and the nature of their participation, as well as the goals, outcomes and structural impact of the educational project. In particular, any state-led strategy that aims to pursue democratic socialism needs to be assessed in terms of the extent to which it increases the capacity for *autonomous* communities to direct the process from below and ensure against authoritarian tendencies, and the extent to which democratic principles and processes are instigated from the outset in all areas of decision-making and implementation to ensure that the end goal of greater democratisation is not compromised by the means of achieving it.

I have illustrated that while there is a wealth of critical theorising on the role of the state in education there is much less on if and how the state can play a more positive role in enhancing critical consciousness and promoting autonomous organisation. There is a lot said about what is wrong with education, be it under capitalism, socialism or totalitarianism, and some commentary on what resistance education “against the state” should look like. There is much less on how education can and should relate to the state when a society is undergoing radical transformation. While Luke (2000) asks if critical literacy within a state-based education system is an oxymoron, I have established the possibility of a “middle ground” between autonomous resistance to state power and using the state to build more protagonist, participatory forms of engagement with state processes and social transformation. Examples where states have a commitment to the development of “thick” democracy from the outset, in terms of the process and the end goal, suggest that state-led education to develop critical consciousness, grassroots mobilisation and radical social change *is* possible; they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I have also highlighted the fact that such examples are rare, regardless of the political leanings of the

regime in charge (Harber 1991). The current process in Venezuela provides valuable first-hand lessons to develop theoretical and practical knowledge in these areas; offering a rare opportunity to examine how such projects develop in practice.

3.7 Education in Venezuela

The Bolivarian Constitution states that education is a fundamental right and that the state has a responsibility for its provision (CBRV 1999). In the current process more generally, both non-formal and formal education are viewed as important in the creation of a new hegemony and as key to the state-led project of building participatory and direct democracy. The aim is to combine state transformation of political, social and economic relations with the creation of state-grassroots impelled, parallel education systems that promote protagonist participation. This is based on a recognition that governments change periodically but institutions such as education do not change overnight with a change of government.

This is why the parallel education Missions and other parallel community organisations such as Communal Councils are particularly important. They are new and therefore not subject to the “hangover” of previous regimes. They offer the opportunity to introduce new educational approaches, counter-hegemonic discourse and new modes of social organisation. In this respect the current process closely resembles Gramscian ideas of engaging in a war of position that can eventually take over and transform state structures. At the same time, there is a strong emphasis on the role of the state in instigating change from above that resembles both modernisation theory and more traditional socialist approaches to social change. As with past state-led projects there is therefore a danger that the Venezuelan state will come to dominate the independent role of community organisations rather than these organisations replacing old state forms.

The Venezuelan example therefore allows for an examination of whether or not it is possible to have state supported education for grassroots, democratic transformation. This is a matter of fierce debate in Venezuela. On the one hand detractors see the educational reforms as co-option and/or indoctrination by the Chavez government whilst others point to their liberatory potential. However, as Arnove (1986:23) points out, ‘some of those who object to political propagandising see the messages as indoctrination only when they are in conflict with their own personally held convictions or ideology’. It is only by examining how education reforms and the process more generally are developing in practice and how they are viewed by participants that these divergent viewpoints can be assessed.

While many people speak of the participatory process underway in Venezuela and make reference in particular to the role of the Educational Missions in promoting protagonist participation, there is very little empirical work into the form and content of these education programmes and if and how they stimulate popular power, nor has there been extensive examination as to how they relate to the state and the degree of autonomy that they have. It is not enough to describe the policies and measures that have been put in place. A closer look at the objectives, means and outcomes of such education is needed to ascertain if education does create autonomous, critical thinkers and actors or whether people are encouraged to “mobilise without emancipation” (Molyneux 1985) in ways that serve the state rather than promoting participatory, protagonist democracy. My research addresses this deficit and contributes empirical research as to how these processes are developing in practice.

In Chapter 6 I use the Venezuelan case to offer insights into the possibility of achieving a balance between state legitimation and wider state agendas, and critical education for social change. Through a focus on the parallel systems of education introduced in Venezuela, I examine if it is possible to have a relatively autonomous, democratically organised education, promoted from above, that allows people to practice democracy and use their learning to impact on the democratisation of wider society. In doing so I contribute to the development of a critical theory of both education and democracy, as well as a greater understanding of the determinants of and barriers to social change, particularly the possibility of working “in and against the state” in the pursuit of democratic social change. Before doing so I outline the crisis of neoliberal democracy in Venezuela that impelled the search for alternatives, in order to situate the current process within its historical context.

Chapter 4:
The Venezuelan Context: From Pacted Democracy to the crisis of neoliberal hegemony and the search for counter-hegemonic alternatives

'To talk about society in the Punto-Fijo years is to talk about a society that was almost dead. We can never go back. We cannot permit a return to an epoch when people were hungry, people suffered, people had no chances to study because all the rulers were interested in was power and money. They cannot take this away. It's not possible. The people with their consciousness will not allow this. Because it's not just that we have the President, the revolution; we have real democracy. There's no false democracy like we had before. We are a living part of the politics of this country'.

(Rogelio: Mission Sucre student 2009)

In Chapters Two and Three I developed a theoretical framework of democratic social change via state-grassroots collaboration, grounded in a Gramscian analysis of democracy, education and social change. This Chapter situates the historical processes of social change in Venezuela within a Gramscian analysis of the crisis of neoliberal hegemony and the delegitimisation of the Punto Fijo democracy, through to the election of President Chavez and his Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) on an anti-neoliberal platform that marked the start of the search for and pursuit of a counter-hegemonic alternative based on state-promoted protagonist, participatory democracy. It also examines the institutional reforms and processes that have been instigated since Chavez came to power to build an understanding of the framework that has been put in place to facilitate the reconfiguration of power relations and the development of “thick” democracy.

Because oil is such an important factor in Venezuelan history and in its future, I consider how the politics of oil has impacted on the country both before and after Chavez came to power in a separate section, section 4.5.

4.1 Democracy in the Punto Fijo years

Venezuela gained independence in 1811 as a result of popular struggles against Spanish colonialism, spearheaded by men such as Simon Bolivar and Francisco de Miranda. However, in the period following independence through to the discovery of oil in the early 20th century, Venezuela was dominated by a series of military caudillos (Raby 2006). Democratic elections were instigated following a coup in 1945 however the political history of Venezuela remained marked by coups and counter-coups, dictatorships, rigged elections, corruption and social unrest.

The pact of Punto Fijo, signed in 1958, was an attempt by elites to prevent the instability of previous years and re-establish the electoral democracy that was instigated under Betancourt following the 1945 coup. The Pact was able to survive two unsuccessful revolts

against the Betancourt presidency of 1959-1964 and a decade long guerrilla insurgency inspired by the Cuban revolution of 1959 (Gott 2005). In this sense the Punto Fijo years live up to their accolade as Latin America's "most stable democracy". However as Ellner (2003) emphasises, the claims of some political scientists that Venezuela was the "ideal" or "near perfect" democracy are less credible. While clearly a "success" in terms of stabilising party politics, this was within a narrow elitist and exclusionary form of democracy (Hellinger 2003; Crisp 1994). Effectively the Pact was a power-sharing agreement between Betancourt's AD and COPEI, formed by Rafael Caldera in 1946. Mass participation was confined to choosing leaders in elections and political control was managed by competing elites from the two main parties rather than being based on open, democratic competition. For example the Pact 'excluded the Communist Party, then a considerable force in Venezuelan politics' (Hellinger 2003: 29).

This leads many commentators to argue that, while stable, the 4th republic of the Punto Fijo years was never really democratic in any meaningful sense beyond the fact that regular elections were held, and was never meant to be (Crisp 1994; Karl 1986; Derham 2002; Ellner 2003; Hellinger 2003). In fact it was designed to secure the oil wealth in the hands of the elite. Karl (1987) goes as far as to say that it was precisely because of its undemocratic nature that Venezuela remained stable for so many years. Furthermore Lander (2007) asserts that despite the general perception of the Punto Fijo years as Latin America's most stable democracy and the oil boom years as the "glory years", inequality and social unrest was much higher than generally reported. Similarly, Ellner (2008:60) stresses that, despite stability, people did not enjoy greater democratic rights, especially given repressive policies to quell dissent during the 1960s that operated on a 'shoot first, ask questions later' basis. While its oil wealth made it one of the continent's richest countries, Venezuela was a country marked by extreme inequality and social, economic and political exclusion that restricted the basic levels of well-being needed to enable people to take a full part in democratic life as active citizens. For example, poverty remained a significant problem throughout Venezuela's oil boom of 1979-1983, with around 50 per cent of the population living in urban shanty-towns or low-income housing, 22.5 per cent living in poverty and 11 per cent in extreme poverty (Marquez 2003:200; Roberts 2003). Furthermore, with the expansion of the oil industry and consistent over-evaluation of the currency, it became cheaper to import goods than produce them and, coupled with a lack of investment, the agricultural sector declined from 33 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the 1920s to 10 per cent in the 1950s, and with this came a massive migration to urban barrios (Wilpert 2007a). By 1990 around 90 per cent of

the population lived in urban areas, many in informal barrios (Smilde 2011). He goes on to point out that many people living in the urban barrios and rural areas were not fully recognised by the state and lacked access to basic municipal services such as water, telephones and police protection, as well as formal employment. Furthermore, without official recognition of where they lived these people were unable to register for identification cards and were therefore excluded from voting and from other state services. These problems of exclusion were exacerbated by the growth in the informal economy as a result of the increased unemployment in formal sectors. For example there was a marked decline in both industrial and agricultural production due to a reliance on imports and lack of infrastructural investment. Hellinger (2003: 30-31) also points out that, even during the oil boom years, the wealthy profited the most, 'corruption was prolific' and parties became increasingly clientelistic. As I discuss in section 4.2, the economic crisis of the mid-1980s and 1990s only served to exacerbate these existing problems to the point that Venezuela became a country where the majority were excluded from organised formal society (Smilde 2011, Roberts 2003).

Nevertheless the 1973-1983 oil booms consolidated the legitimacy of this pacted democracy and oil-based nationalist development model. During this time state spending on social welfare, including Universal Primary Education, basic free health care, minimum wage and massive public works projects, was quite high and there was a general optimism that the quality of life would improve (Wilpert 2007a; Ellner 2003; Marquez 2003). However, while these measures suggest a level of commitment by the state to the provision of social services, they were not guaranteed constitutionally as rights, were dependent on high oil prices and were centrally planned and executed with little or no popular participation. In fact the 1961 Constitution contained no references to the role of organised society (Garcia-Guadilla 2003) nor did it guarantee state responsibility for social welfare. Most service provision was paternalistic and used clientelistically with beneficiaries usually expected to join one of the two main political parties before receiving benefits (Wilpert 2007a). Benefits, bestowed as favours rather than constitutionally guaranteed, were easily withdrawn when oil prices fell. Hellinger (2003) and (Canache 2007) conclude that Venezuelan democracy as founded by the Pact of Punto Fijo of 1958 and the 1961 Constitution was built politically upon a very narrow conceptualisation of democracy and materially on the distribution of oil rents through a vast system of clientelism and patronage with limited opportunities for active participation.

4.1.1 Participation during the Punto Fijo years (1958-1998)

During this time there were two main tendencies in terms of community organisation; development committees in the barrios that were largely political party stimulated and appointed and used to gain electoral support, and neighbourhood associations in middle class areas that called for more democratic participation and decentralisation (Garcia-Guadilla 2008b). He goes on to point out that while ostensibly autonomous organisations, these middle class neighbourhood associations were also largely co-opted and controlled by political parties. Instances of autonomous organisation were therefore rare and organisation outside of political party control was delegitimised and at times violently suppressed. Most community organisations that did exist considered social and political spheres as separate and so did not tend to participate in political arenas (Garcia-Guadilla 2003).

Several of the older people I interviewed during my field research in Caracas from January 2009 to April 2010 spoke to me about the repression of student and community organisations in the 1960s to 1980s, of police “hit squads” raiding the barrios periodically to deter anti-government organising, the banning of left-wing organisations and the existence of government “death lists” of known left-wing organisers or guerrilla fighters. Some said that they had been on these lists and had to flee Caracas for several years whilst others told of being shot and wounded and/or arrested whilst on peaceful demonstrations. Several also shared their experiences of the Caracazo in 1989 when police and armed forces opened fire on unarmed protestors. One Cano Amarillo resident took me to visit the old San Carlos prison in Caracas to show me a permanent exhibition detailing some of the student protestors and left-wing government opponents who “disappeared” or were murdered during the Punto Fijo years. So, while Machado (2008) rightly asserts that popular movements did not suddenly spring up in 1998, the prevalence, nature and scope of such organisations was limited due to the majority being appendages of political parties and the fact that opportunities for autonomous organisation outside of government-sanctioned parameters were severely limited.

Caldera’s presidency from 1969 to 1974 made it a policy to try and pacify the country and co-opt radical movements. Much of the left began to abandon insurgency and former guerrillas began to appear in Congress and even as cabinet ministers. A saying at the time was “We’re all *adecos* (AD or COPEI) now” (Hellinger 2003). The *adeco* project was further bolstered by the consolidation of liberal internationalist hegemony in the U.S. after World War II and ‘Venezuela served Washington’s interests as a foil for the Cuban regime

and as a model for the kind of “transitions to democracy” preferred by U.S. policymakers’ (Hellinger 2003:29).

Some basic initiatives were introduced to decentralise government and allow a degree of participation and organisation in the late 1980s and 1990s. For example, the Perez government passed the Law of Decentralisation in 1989, partly due to pressure resulting from the Caracazo uprising of that year and also pressure from middle class organisations for greater decentralisation and participation. These concessions included the direct election of Governors, who were previously appointed by political parties, the introduction of Mayors, also directly elected, to oversee municipal level development, some transfer of central government revenues to states and municipalities and some powers to decide local policy and generate their own revenues. However, critics argue that these measures were largely superficial, limited by continued financial dependence on central government, lacked adequate planning and organisation and mechanisms of accountability and, crucially, allowed for little or no direct participation (Leon 2009; Canache 2007; de la Cruz 2004). While community organisation did increase somewhat following these decentralisation measures, as in the past, most were quickly co-opted by political parties and in reality had little influence on political processes (Machado 2008; Garcia-Guadilla 2008, 2003; Buxton 2001). They were less a commitment to increased participation and more to do with the neoliberal agenda of promoting self-help and “rolling back the state” (Garcia-Guadilla 2003:183). Furthermore, the social unrest of the 1980s and 1990s that culminated in the election of President Chavez in 1998 showed that the limited concessions that were made were insufficient and failed to meet the demands of the majority of the people (Canache 2007; Alvarez 2003).

4.2 From crisis to alternatives

While the Perez regime which came to power in 1973 had nationalised the oil industry in 1976, and while some oil rents did trickle down to all social groups, bolstering a general optimism that the country was advancing, the main winners were the wealthy elites and corruption was rife. Hellinger (2003), in his assessment of the breakdown of Puntofijismo and the rise of Chavismo, situates the start of the material and ideological crisis on “Black Friday”, February 28th 1983, when the government of President Herrera devalued the bolivar. With this devaluation, confidence that pacted democracy would lead to development, opportunity and redistribution began to wane and ‘political parties lost much of their ideological coherence and became vehicles for contesting control over patronage’ (Hellinger 2003:30). Poverty levels doubled in the five years from 1984 to 1989. The re-

election of Perez in 1989 on an anti-neoliberal platform was thought by many to signal a return to the “good times”, but after inauguration on February 2nd 1989 Perez took just two weeks to announce that he had already negotiated a structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As part of the neoliberal package of reforms introduced in February 1989, price controls were relaxed, imports were liberalised, public spending decreased dramatically and exchange rates and interest rates were deregulated. By Monday 27th February 1989 there was a 100 per cent increase in the price of consumer gasoline and workers trying to go to work that morning found that bus fares had doubled overnight. This led to rioting in the barrios of Caracas and workers and students took to the streets to protest the neoliberal packages. Rioting quickly spread to 19 other cities. The government responded with violent repression, particularly in the barrios of Caracas, and known organisers and activists were executed or “disappeared” and the rebellion was suppressed. This popular uprising, known as the Caracazo, brought to a head the increasing dissatisfaction with the “Punto Fijo” democracy and marked a turning point in the struggle for an alternative (Lander 2007). It was the first large-scale indication of scepticism with dominant hegemony and waning consent for neoliberal economic and democratic modes of organisation. With declining consent the state, in Gramscian terms, was no longer leading but only dominant, and as Gramsci predicted, at such points of crises the state moved to exercise coercive power in an attempt to quell the uprising and maintain its dominance.

However the state was unable to completely quash popular protest and this popular rebellion signalled the “death knell” of the old regime; accelerating the growing crisis of legitimacy of both the pacted democracy model and the neoliberal economic model (Ciccariello-Maher 2007b). For example Canache (2004:34-37) points to ‘increasing social and political mobilization’, with 851 incidents of protest in the 5 years from 1989-1994, as a result of growing economic polarisation and dissatisfaction with representative democracy. Duffy and Everton (2008:116) directly link this unrest to the subsequent election of Chavez in 1998, saying that ‘the social crisis brought on by neoliberalism...radically undermined the legitimising institutions and political discourses of the Venezuelan state, opening the door to systemic challenges to the hegemonic order’. In Gramscian terms it marked the start of an organic crisis and the struggle for an alternative.

Despite promises in the 1970s to “sow the oil”, by the 1990s state spending on social welfare and large-scale development projects declined significantly to the point that there were hardly any programmes left that directly benefitted the poor and inequality and poverty increased dramatically (Wilpert 2007a; Muhr and Verger 2006). In 1989 alone the poverty rate increased from 46 per cent to 62 per cent and extreme poverty from 14 per cent to 30 per cent (Roberts 2003). By 1995 these figures had risen to 66 per cent of the population living in poverty and 36 per cent in extreme poverty. Furthermore, both he and Smilde (2011) report a decrease of around 40 per cent in the real wages of all citizens, bar the most privileged 10 per cent, by the mid-1990s. By the end of the 1990s, unemployment was at 15.4 per cent compared to 6.6 per cent in 1980, the number of people working in the informal sector increased to 53 per cent of the workforce, and the middle and upper class shrank from forty per cent of the population to ten per cent (Ellner 2003; Hellinger 2003; Roberts 2003). This leads Roberts (2003:60) to conclude that during the 1990s ‘poverty afflicted an absolute majority of the population’ who were ‘systematically excluded’ from the neoliberal development model. Society became sharply divided between a small elite made up of around 10 per cent of the population and the remaining 90 per cent who felt increasingly excluded from social, economic and political spheres. In summary, ‘the majority were experiencing ever-decreasing socio-economic prospects and enjoying virtually no political representation (Smilde 2011:6). During this time ideological debates over the character of democracy, the way oil rents were distributed and possible alternatives to neoliberal policy gained momentum (Hellinger 2003).

It was within this climate that Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (MBR) emerged. After a failed coup attempt in 1992 Chavez was imprisoned for two years. On his release in 1994, the renamed MVR began to consider the idea of contesting elections. In December 1998 Chavez was elected President with 56 per cent of the vote and a clear popular mandate for his overtly anti-neoliberal platform and promise of a more participatory form of democracy. A new Constitution, resulting from a process of popular consultation, as I highlighted in section 1.2, was ratified in December 1999 with 71 per cent voting ‘yes’ (Gott 2005:143-144). Fresh elections were held in July 2000 to legitimate every elected official, including the President, under the terms of the new Constitution. Chavez was re-elected with an increased majority of 59 per cent and the MVR won the majority of seats in the new National Assembly and 15 out of 23 state governorships. The principal idea of the new Constitution and subsequent elections was to mark a complete break with the past and ratify the new political project. These events of 1998-2000 marked the end of the hegemony of the Punto Fijo years and signalled the start of a new era, the

Fifth Republic, and the promise of more fundamental change in the renamed “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela”.

4.3 Who are the Chavistas?

In section 4.2 I highlighted that the 1990s saw a marked polarisation in Venezuelan society between a small elite and an absolute majority who were largely excluded from social, economic and political participation. This section examines the nature of both the Chavez support base (the Chavistas) and those opposed to the Chavista project. It argues that while some commentators have framed the Bolivarian Revolution within a class-conflict analysis, there is a more general consensus that the continued popularity of Chavez and his movement is best understood in terms of processes of democratic inclusion and exclusion that a narrow class-based analysis does not capture. Furthermore, it outlines how, to a large extent, traditional boundaries of class and left-right allegiance have lost their relevance in the Latin American context, as I explore in more detail in section 8.5 in the second part of this thesis. Nevertheless, this section also acknowledges the extent to which the sustainability of the Venezuelan process is very much contingent on the continued durability of the Chavez coalition. In particular continued support depends on how the process is actually developing in practice and experienced by Venezuelan people, especially as reforms take a more radical stance to develop 21st century socialism; themes that I explore in more detail in the second part of this thesis.

The success of the Chavez coalition initially developed out of the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and the widespread rejection of both traditional political parties and neoliberal policies. As Cyr (2005) stresses, Chavez unified, but did not create, the anti-elite sentiment and desire for change that developed during this time among the majority of the Venezuelan people. Venezuelans across the social strata became increasingly distrustful of political parties, against the control of the oil wealth in the hands of a small elite, and wanted change (Marquez 2003). Similarly Smilde (2011), Ramirez (2005) and Roberts (2003) all point to an elite-mass cleavage that preceded the rise of Chavez: a cleavage that was divided between a small but powerful elite sector made up of the banking sector, business interests including the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce (FEDECAMERAS), the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the private media on the one hand, and the excluded majority on the other. In this climate the Chavez movement’s promise of fundamental change had widespread appeal (Ellner 2003, Hellinger 2003; Marquez 2003; Roberts 2003). Lopez-Maya (2003) points out that Chavez and his MVR avoided alliances with the traditional parties and instead constructed a wide alliance of alternative forces

known as the Patriotic Pole. Both Chavez and his main opponent Irena Sanz, a former beauty queen, campaigned as “outsiders”. However, Chavez’s appeal lay in his non-elite background, his anti-party, anti-neoliberal platform and his discourse of broad social, economic and political inclusion that appealed to the excluded majority of the population (Marquez 2003). Similarly Gates (2010) says that many Venezuelans had become disillusioned with the political establishment and neoliberal economic policy well before 1998. Chavez campaigned as a political outsider, which appealed to many people across Venezuelan society who had lost faith in the old political leadership and representative democracy and who opposed neoliberal policies. His anti-corruption stance and talk of inclusion appealed to an absolute majority that felt socially, politically and economically marginalised (Gates 2010).

While the Chavez government undoubtedly had a lot of support from the poorest sectors, the support base was actually broader than this and ‘the polarization of Venezuelan society and politics occurred more along an axis of life and poverty than around relations of production’ (Hellinger 2003: 37). Similarly Smilde (2011:5) stresses that the economic decline of the 1980s and 1990s had ‘consequences that went beyond class polarization’. For example, even those with professional and public jobs who lived in the barrios were not fully recognised by the Punto-Fijo state and lacked many of the benefits of modern citizenship, while many others worked in the informal economy. Both he and Roberts (2003) conclude that the idea of traditional forms of struggle located at the point of production were therefore ill-fitted to an understanding of the Venezuelan context. Rather the locus of struggle centred on underlying structural inequalities that affected an absolute majority of the population. Roberts (2003: 69) stresses that certainly during the early years, the Chavez movement did not ‘institutionalise the dimensions of a class cleavage’ and that, while Chavismo draws much of its support from the poor, Chavez ‘did not organise his followers as a class’, his ‘approval ratings hovered near 80 per cent’ and ‘his popularity clearly crossed class lines’ (Roberts 2003: 56). Similarly, Ramirez (2005: 95) argues that the “Chavistas” are diverse in their aims, actions and backgrounds and ‘vary widely in age, sex, class and education’, while Weyland (2003: 833) stresses that Chavez supporters were ‘socially heterogeneous and multi-class’. What brought them together were shared values and belief in a counter-hegemonic movement that developed over time out of their historical experience that began before the election of Chavez. Corrales (2005:106) asserts that ‘there is consensus that the Chavez movement in 1998 was inclusionary’ and that ‘Chavez united not just the very poor and marginalised but also the middle classes, the intellectuals, the new civic groups’. This was due to his anti-party, anti-market platform

and pro-inclusion, pro-democratisation stance. Chavez entered the Presidency with ‘the highest levels of popularity in the last forty years of democracy’ (Marquez 2003:211), leading Smilde (2011:6) to conclude that, certainly in the early years, the Chavez government enjoyed a ‘broad consensus’ and ‘high levels of approval’.

More recent studies reveal that the Chavez coalition continues to enjoy broad support from Venezuelan society, though as I discuss in more detail in section 4.4.4, the period from December 2001 to August 2004 did mark a period of struggle that followed more traditional class cleavages as elites reacted to their loss of power and were able to, albeit for a short period, galvanise support from sectors of the middle class. However, while many media accounts and some political commentators argue that support for Chavez and his movement versus support for the opposition differs clearly along class lines (Hellinger 2003; Roberts 2003), there is a more general consensus that continued support for the Chavez coalition cuts across class boundaries. For example, Lupu (2010:9) examined in detail who votes for Chavez and his government and found that ‘contrary to conventional wisdom, Chavez in fact draws electoral support from across Venezuela’s socioeconomic classes’. He stresses that while it is true that in the current Venezuelan process the very wealthiest are anti-Chavez, election statistics show that support for Chavez goes beyond the votes of the poorest and that, in fact, middle class support has grown. Many of the middle class have responded to Chavez’s redistribution policies and wider social policies (Ramirez 2005). Furthermore these commentators stress that while many Chavez supporters come from the barrios, to class all barrio residents as working-class Chavez supporters is also misleading. While the most staunch supporters of Chavez may come from the most marginalised sectors that were previously outside of formal citizenship, and whilst the staunch opposition are largely from the traditional conservative elite, there is a mass in the middle, both within the barrios and in wider society, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds who continue to vote on perceived government performance rather than narrow class interests (Smilde 2011).

For Lopez-Maya (2003), a key aspect of support for the Chavez project was the incorporation of the term “el pueblo” (the people) into the discourse, which resonated with the excluded majority. The movement as a whole continues to identify “the people” as the fundamental unit of the nation in contrast with the elitism and exclusion of the Punto Fijo years. The locus of struggle remains divided between included and excluded rather than clear “left and right” and “class” distinctions. It is therefore misleading to characterise the entire population as divided along class lines into pro- and anti-Chavez camps (Smilde

2011; Cyr 2005). Motta (2011:34) says that what is most important in the current process is the idea of ‘popular democratic subjects’ that cuts across traditional class boundaries. Similarly Azzellini (2010) says that Venezuela has embarked on a process of social transformation rooted in ideas of “people power” rather than appeals to class. The momentum of the current process of change is rooted in struggles over power and inclusion in economic, political and social spheres, making a focus on community-based struggle more salient than class struggle. This necessitates an examination of power struggles and notions of citizenship that transcend class boundaries.

A focus on class, beyond the fundamental elite-mass cleavage, is therefore inappropriate in understanding a process based, at least at the level of discourse, in widespread participation and inclusion. It is the notion of a historical current for change that incorporates a range of organisations and groups with structural, social and political differences that is important in understanding the current process of change in Venezuela and the continued electoral success of the Chavez government. Reducing the current process to class voting ignores the complexity of Venezuelan politics and of the current process of democratisation. Instead there is a need to ‘push beyond the focus on coherent bounded actors to try and understand social and cultural power and influence better’ (Rubin 2004). In Venezuela the concept of “organised society” and broader discourse of inclusion is increasingly salient. Importantly, Ciccariello-Maher (2007c) cautions that to lump the entire Chavistas movement into one homogenous bloc runs the risk of missing precisely what is most radical about the process: the incorporation of excluded sectors and the expansion of democratic participation. Ellner (2009) says that even after declaring himself a socialist in 2005 Chavez did not emphasise class struggle, rather he emphasised socialist values of equality and solidarity over purely economic debates over the means of production. Chavismo covers a range of ideological viewpoints that range from social democratic to radical revolutionary and incorporates diverse sectors of the Venezuelan population.

These findings resonate with testimonies of many of the people I interviewed. Many expressed feelings of being invisible and excluded during the 1980s and 1990s; feelings that cut across job status and income status and in some cases barrio and middle class residency. I also found that very few people identified themselves clearly in terms of class. Most Chavez supporters spoke about themselves as “the people” rather than in terms of traditional class boundaries. This was also true of anti-Chavez people that I spoke to and interviewed. Very few spoke about the ongoing changes and struggles in terms of class; rather they also referred to themselves as “the people” and spoke mainly of dislike of

Chavez and/or of new exclusions. The people I interviewed and met in both Cano Amarillo and Campo Rico, as well as more generally across Caracas during demonstrations, public events and in informal conversations, were very diverse with some being University educated, some working in professional jobs, including as University or schoolteachers or as civil servants in the government, small business owners, as well as others who had little or no education, worked in manual jobs or worked in the informal sector. The divisions I observed among them in terms of support for Chavez or the opposition were not along strict class lines: some informal workers were strongly anti-Chavez whilst some who would be classed as middle class due to their profession were very active Chavez supporters. Like Buxton (2011) I found that barrio residents are not unwaveringly loyal to Chavez nor are the middle class uniformly anti-Chavez.

Furthermore, Heath (2009) says that the meaning of class in Latin America is somewhat different to classical Marxist characterisations of class that emphasise relationship to the ownership of the means of production and that, in Venezuela, it is inappropriate to consider class as a simple dichotomy between manual and non-manual workers, especially as a significant proportion of the population works in the informal economy. The notion of class in Venezuela is highly subjective. While the decline of class voting in Western democracies has centred on analysis of the structure of the labour force in terms of a declining working class and expansion of the middle class, the same cannot be said for Venezuela where the middle class declined and the informal sector increased. Instead, Tischler (2007:112) says that class is better understood as ‘a community of struggles embracing diverse models of resistance’ rather than as a ‘homogenous and systemic social formation’.

For these reasons I felt that a focus on traditional class distinctions was inappropriate for understanding the dynamics of the process in Venezuela. Rather I focused on processes of inclusion and exclusion and the lived experiences of some of the people living through the processes of social change. As I explore in more detail in the second part of this thesis, the Chavez coalition has maintained broad support based on the perception and lived experience of many Venezuelan people that for the first time they have a government that fights for their interests (Smilde 2011).

However, as I discuss in the second part of this thesis, it may well be that if the Venezuelan process does start to move in a more socialist direction, particularly in terms of economic change, then class interests and class struggle may become more pronounced and more

salient to the future of the project. For example, Heath (2009:186) argues that increasingly the political lines of conflict are ‘more polarized along class lines than ever before’. Furthermore, Smilde (2011: 22) says that ‘Venezuelan society is undergoing an extensive change in political elites’. While he stresses that ‘Chavez has clearly succeeded in mobilising and incorporating people’, he also cautions that the Chavez coalition also includes a new emerging political elite consisting of state employees as well as the growing numbers of government-supported popular movements and organisations (Smilde 2011:8). He argues that these developments pose a challenge to the continued broad support for the Chavez movement. Similarly, Buxton (2011: xiv) points out that while the Chavez movement has enjoyed support from across the social spectrum, the government ‘faces challenges in sustaining a broad based alliance’. The second part of this thesis, in particular Chapter 9, outlines ongoing tensions in maintaining these alliances, especially if economic reforms develop further along a socialist path and people start to become increasingly dissatisfied with the new emerging elite.

4.4 A new hegemony?

The events of the 1980s and 1990s in Venezuela reveal that the anti-neoliberal tendency and dissatisfaction with narrow representative democracy predated the Chavez era. Chavez was elected in 1998 on a clearly anti-neoliberal platform that promised fundamental change in the configuration of political power and a break with the corruption, clientelism and control of oil wealth by a few powerful elites of the past. The high turnout in elections, the ratification of the new Constitution and the new Constituent Assembly suggest that the 5th republic marked a turning point in Venezuelan history that was backed by a general consensus on the need to move beyond representative democracy and seek alternatives to neo-liberal hegemony, as I illustrated in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

In section 1.2 I highlighted that with the crisis of neo-liberalism in the Latin American context there has been a re-assessment of democratic theory and the state is back on the agenda as a main actor in social change. Both these aspects are evident in the Venezuelan case. The 1999 Constitution enshrines mechanisms for the exercise of participatory and direct democracy to complement representative democracy and guarantees state responsibility for a range of political, economic, judicial and social rights, duties and freedoms. Certainly the new Constitution suggests the possibility of what Partlow (2009) calls a document-driven revolution through its emphasis on state-centred responsibility for development alongside active organised society, as I discuss in more detail in section 4.4.1.

While the idea of “sowing the oil” is not new, what distinguishes the current project is an emphasis on rights and on protagonist participation rather than purely top-down provision. Venezuela is therefore at the forefront of movements to refound democracy and instigate an alternative to the neoliberal model based on state-grassroots collaboration. The current process aims to build a new ideological hegemony and facilitate the conditions for debating and practising new forms of social organisation that are reminiscent of Gramsci’s core ideas of a “war of position” and counter-hegemonic struggle that I detailed in section 2.2.

While the term socialism did not come into usage until six years into the Chavez government and while the new Constitution has been interpreted in different ways by people of different political leanings, ideas of socialism that I outlined in section 2.7 are implicit in the Constitutional guarantees of social, political and economic organisation based on co-operation, solidarity, self-organisation and self-management and new configurations of power. Certainly at the level of discourse and constitutional guarantees, the Chavez government appears to have instigated a process that marks a clear break with the democracy of the Punto Fijo years and with neoliberal, anti-statist hegemony.

This section examines in more detail the policies and processes that have been instigated since Chavez came to power, as well as some of the ongoing tensions that have influenced the direction of the process, to gain an understanding of the extent to which they represent a break with the past and a move towards new democratic forms of organisation based on popular power. I draw on the assessment of the kinds of structures and processes needed to realise a more democratic society that I discussed in Chapter 2, as well as an overview of how reforms to date have been responded to and the hegemonic struggles that frame the processes of change.

4.4.1 New conceptualisations, institutions and processes of democracy

The 1999 Constitution declares Venezuela to be a participatory and protagonist democracy that stresses the active participation of citizens in the formulation, execution and control of the public arena (CBRV: 1999). This participation in political affairs can be manifested in a range of ways, as outlined in Article 70, including voting, referenda on Laws and constitutional amendments, recall referendums, public consultations, legislative initiatives, community organisations whose decisions are binding, and via self-management, co-management and co-operatives; reflecting an incorporation of both representative as well as direct and participatory avenues for the exercise of democracy. From the outset there

has been a clear emphasis on participatory and protagonist democracy to complement representative democracy and this is one of the most striking aspects in the Venezuelan case (Harnecker 2007; Gibbs 2006).

Not only is this participation framed as a right, the state is obliged to facilitate the conditions to put this into practice (CBRV 1999: Article 62). State responsibility for welfare and for fair redistribution of wealth is exemplified in a range of constitutional articles that guarantee welfare as a right rather than a privilege or favour and, crucially, guarantee the financial responsibility of the state in the provision of free access to a range of services such as health and education. Furthermore, the Constitution makes clear that public services and resources are the property of the state and shall not be privatised. The state is further conceptualised as embodying principles of individual freedoms alongside solidarity and the pursuit of the common good and guarantees ‘the right to life, work, learning, education, social justice and equality’ (CBRV 1999:7). However rather than a purely statist approach, the Constitution also makes consistent references to the right and duty of organised communities to participate in the making of decisions concerning the planning, implementation and control of social services. State powers ‘emanate from and are subject to the sovereignty of the people’ (CBRV 1999:10). The Constitution therefore institutionalises the idea of state-society collaboration whereby overall state financial and moral responsibility is combined with protagonist participation framed within a “thick” conceptualisation of democracy.

There is also evidence that the idea of complementing representative democracy with more direct and participatory forms via state-grassroots partnerships resonates with the Venezuelan people, as I explore in detail in the second part of this thesis, particularly section 7.1.2. Subsequent sections give an overview of the institutional changes and policies that have been implemented and how far they have developed the rights, duties and guarantees of the new Constitution in line with this new consensus.

4.4.2 From anti-neoliberalism to social democracy: the early years

In this initial period there was no talk of Socialism for the 21st century but there was a clear commitment to the pursuit of an alternative to neoliberal hegemony. From the outset Chavez gave speeches promising to eliminate poverty and tackle the widespread corruption of the Punto Fijo years (Wilpert 2007a). In his first speech as President in February 1999 Chavez said, ‘our project is neither statist nor neo-liberal; we are exploring the middle ground:as much state as necessary and as much market as possible’ (Chavez quoted in

Gott 2005:175). The Chavez government's policies at this time were characterised by two main elements that break with neo-liberalism; redistributive policies that channel state resources, particularly from oil, to the country's poor, alongside participatory policies designed to promote the active participation of organized citizens in social policy and politics more generally.

The first major initiative following the elections to ratify the new Constitution was Plan Bolivar in 2000; made possible thanks to increased oil revenues that gave the government sufficient funds to instigate a major public works policy. The Plan was based on Constitutional guarantees and electoral promises to address the widespread social inequality and exclusion of the Punto Fijo years. It consisted of a range of "quick fix" social policy programmes and infrastructural projects to promote social development (Raby 2006). Reforms at this time bore a strong resemblance to the principles of social democracy that I outlined in section 2.5.1; using the state to develop social welfare, redistribute income, nationalise certain sectors of the economy and promote social justice. However, even at this time there was also an emphasis on the need for popular participation and co-ordination between organs of the state, communities and the military in the planning and implementation of these programmes, within the over-arching framework of state responsibility (Wilpert 2007a; Raby 2006; MINCI 2005).

In November 2001 Chavez was granted special powers for one year by the National Assembly to enact a series of Laws. In November 2002 Chavez introduced a package of 49 new Laws under the provision of this Enabling Law. Gott (2005:220) says that these Laws, including land reforms and measures to prevent the privatisation of social security services and other state resources, were an important means to put Constitutional guarantees into practice and were the first real indication that Chavez had a 'genuinely radical' agenda. Such Enabling Laws were not new to Venezuela and had been used periodically from Betancourt's first tenure as President through to Caldera who was the incumbent President before Chavez was elected in 1998. Nevertheless there were accusations that the use of such Laws indicated the authoritarian nature of the Chavez Presidency.

While some criticisms of the cult of personality surrounding Chavez and his use of "special powers" to enact Laws may have been valid, many commentators argue that it was not so much his anti-poverty and anti-corruption stance or his use of special powers that enraged the old elite, rather it was his promise to displace them from positions of power (Kozloff 2007; Wilpert 2007a; Hellinger 2003). In the first place many opposition politicians had

lost their seats in the elections to ratify the new Constitution in 2000. Furthermore, the Venezuelan Cabinet had traditionally been made up of business leaders and other members of the oligarchy, Chavez appointed mostly people from the old Venezuelan left (Wilpert 2007a). However the main source of contention was over oil revenues and control of the state oil company PDVSA. In his electoral campaign Chavez accused PDVSA of having become a “state within a state”, operating with almost complete autonomy and in the interests of elites rather than the Venezuelan people. He promised to bring the company more firmly under Ministerial control (Kozloff 2007). The most significant and controversial of the Enabling Laws was the Hydrocarbon Law that aimed to halt the privatisation of the oil company and put the Company under firmer government control rather than in the hands of old elites, as I discuss in more detail in section 4.5. The immediate cause of the coup for Hellinger (2003) was Chavez’s decision to remove many of the executive directors of PDVSA who opposed the Hydrocarbon Law and who had been planning to privatise the company.

The coup of 2002 was spearheaded by leading figures from FEDECAMERAS (the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce), right-wing Unions and the private media (Gott 2005). However the coup collapsed within two days thanks to civilian protest and to Chavez supporters in the military. The coup organisers had seriously misjudged the mood of the majority of the Venezuelan people who saw the coup organisers as the very people they had wanted rid of in the first place; ‘the very oligarchy that they blamed for squandering Venezuela’s considerable oil wealth’ (Hellinger 2003:49; Wilpert 2007a). Chavez called for calm and conciliation following these events in an attempt to offset further unrest and unify the country and those responsible for the coup were not punished. However, December 2002 saw an attempt at an “economic coup” that lasted until February 2003 whereby PDVSA managers locked workers out of oil production installations. While the lock-out ultimately failed to bring down the government, largely due to large-scale mobilisations by supporters of the Chavez government, the economic impact was huge. This second attempt to bring down the Chavez government marked the end of the conciliatory tone and pursuit of a reformist agenda along the lines of social democracy and heralded the start of the radicalisation of the Chavez movement (Wilpert 2007a; Gott 2005).

Attempts to destabilise the Chavez government also served to mobilise Chavez supporters and bolster their desire for and belief in the possibility of more radical change. This, coupled with the election of left-leaning governments in Ecuador and Brazil, meant that the

Chavez government was in a position of strength to pursue a more radical agenda. Furthermore, increased oil revenues due to the increase in royalties from foreign oil profits, as well as the worldwide increase in oil prices, thanks to the Organisation of Petroleum Producing Countries (OPEC) agreed production restrictions, meant that the finances were in place to accelerate the redistribution of oil wealth. It was in this context that an extensive range of social programmes known as Social Missions were introduced in 2003 and 2004.

4.4.3 The Social Missions and social policy more generally

In general the Chavez government has greatly increased social spending. For example in 2006 social spending was 13.6 per cent of GDP and, if the mandatory social spending revenues from PDVSA are included, this figure rises to 20.9 per cent of GDP; 314 per cent more than in 1998 (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008). Secondary statistics produced both internally and externally highlight the positive substantive changes since 1998 when Chavez came to power and the government has maintained a commitment to social spending, even in times of economic recession. For example a report on ten years of the Chavez government by a U.S. based policy research institute, the Centre for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), identifies a ‘huge’ decline in poverty, with general poverty decreasing from 50.5 per cent (more than 11 million people) in 1998 to 26 per cent in 2008 and extreme poverty from 20.3 per cent to 7 per cent in the same period. They also report a ‘vast’ expansion of social security and a ‘substantially better’ labour market (Weisbrot et al. 2009:15-16). The Human Development Index rose from 0.77 to 0.82, indicating an overall increase in the quality of life of the Venezuelan people, including substantial improvements in areas such as health, food security, access to services and education, and there was an overall reduction in inequality. Venezuela currently ranks 58 out of 158 countries and is regarded as a country with high human development.

While these changes undoubtedly show that significant progress has been made in Venezuela in terms of rights, quality of life and greater social inclusion, they do not reveal whether the process is guided from “above and below” in practice or whether power relations have changed. Many of these advances could have been introduced by a populist leader or a social democratic government without any actual transfer of power to the people to act as protagonists of change. However, importantly, the Social Missions with their emphasis on popular participation in the planning and delivery of social services are one of the key features of the Venezuelan process that distinguish it from past social democratic or populist projects.

The Missions were established as a means to by-pass the bureaucracy of the “old” state which remained largely under the control of the opposition (Gott 2005). By 2008 there were around 25 different Missions covering areas such as health, education, nutrition, housing, employment and identity cards that enabled people to access wider social services including social security. They were conceived of as far more than state-financed, compensatory welfare schemes. Rather they were seen as arenas for developing state-society collaboration in decision-making and the allocation of resources and for the exercise of self-governance in their planning and implementation (MINCI 2005; MPPES 2004). From a Gramscian perspective these Missions are crucial in the construction and consolidation of a new hegemony. They are a means of engaging in a “war of position” whereby people can take an active part in the formulation and delivery of social policy through democratic, participatory processes that allow for the development of new counter-hegemonic ideologies and the practice of alternative modes of organisation.

In terms of education, Raby (2006) highlights how when the Chavez government assumed power in 1999 the education system as a whole was underfunded. Buildings and resources were inadequate and the system excluded large sectors of the population, including the middle classes, due to the cutbacks and privatisations of the 1980s and 1990s. General education spending went from just over 2 per cent of GDP in 1996 to 4.3 per cent in 2001 and to 5.8 per cent in 2007. This figure rises to over 7 per cent of GDP when the education Missions are included (Griffiths and Williams 2009; Wilpert 2007a; Raby 2006). Access to education at all levels and for all sectors of society has increased substantially (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008). Most importantly, non-formal and formal education is viewed as important in creating a new hegemony and as key to the state-led project of building “thick” democracy and mobilising the people, by providing opportunities to practise democracy within educational programmes and by equipping people with the skills and knowledge needed to organise, mobilise and participate effectively in wider society. The parallel Education Missions in particular are important as a means to develop counter-hegemonic ideology and practice. The organisation and impact of these reforms is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

4.4.4 Further radicalisation: Socialism for the 21st Century

In 2004, following the two unsuccessful attempts to overthrow Chavez via the coup and the economic lockout, opposition forces tried electoral means to oust the President using the constitutionally guaranteed right to recall all elected officials. As I highlighted in

section 4.3, in the run-up to Chavez's election in 1998, Venezuelan society became deeply divided into a small elite who had a place in formal society and the majority who did not. The period from December 2001 to August 2004 saw a period of struggle between the Chavez coalition and elite political and economic forces, which saw Chavez's reforms as a direct threat to their power (Smilde 2011). Wilpert (2007a:20) refers to this period as an attempt at a counter-revolution 'in response to the old elite's loss of class power'. Furthermore, he says that 'while Chavez was elected largely by the middle class' (Wilpert 2007a:19), the economic downturn following the coup meant that many of the middle class 'abandoned Chavez' (Wilpert 2007a:19). At this point class struggle did become a more salient feature of conflict in Venezuela and the opposition tried to capitalise on middle-class dissatisfaction by mounting the recall referendum. The old elite 'used its control of the country's mass media to turn the middle class against Chavez, creating a campaign that took advantage of the latent racism and classism in Venezuelan culture' (Wilpert 2007a:20).

However, this elite attempt to destabilise the Chavez government via constitutional rather than unconstitutional means failed, again largely for reasons that are rooted in the widespread dissatisfaction with old elites that I highlighted in section 4.3. As I explained in section 4.4.2, the coup and lock-out were largely defeated due to large-scale mobilisation of Chavez supporters. Similarly, while middle-class support for Chavez had weakened in response to the subsequent economic downturn, the referendum actually served to strengthen the Chavez movement and weaken the short-term appeal that the opposition had generated among middle-class sectors. Spanakos (2011:19), for example, refers to the importance of the campaign based on "Que no Volveran" (they can never return) that was used during the 2004 recall referendum to galvanise support for the "NO" vote in the recall referendum. The campaign highlighted the idea that ousting Chavez would mean a return to the exclusions of the Punto-Fijo years. The referendum campaign reinforced feelings of mistrust in old elites and was important in re-uniting people around the idea of change and a rejection of the past. Once again 'public opinion identified with Chavez as a politician of change' who had opened up space to the excluded majority (Spanakos 2011:19).

The referendum to recall the President was held in August 2004. The "NO" votes won with just over 59 per cent and Chavez remained in power. Despite sectors of the middle class responding to opposition calls to get rid of Chavez during and after the coup and lock-out, Smilde (2011:11) highlights that overall, 'the opposition movement has consistently done a good job of mobilising its base, but not of grabbing the centre'. In fact, they have

consistently underestimated the strength and breadth of the Chavez support base and ongoing mistrust of old elites among the wider society. While not all of society became staunch Chavez supporters, these destabilisation attempts and the referendum process weakened opposition forces to the point that, in June 2005, just 15 per cent said that they identified with the opposition, and this broad rejection of the opposition as a viable alternative strengthened the Chavez movement (Wilpert 2007a:27). Wilpert (2007a:3) concludes that these opposition attacks led Chavez ‘to become a far more radical left politician than he started out’ and also served to further mobilise and radicalise the pro-Chavez movement. Government discourse increasingly reflected on the impossibility of change within the existing capitalist system and the need for more radical change.

Chavez first spoke of “Socialism for the 21st Century” at the World Social Forum in 2005 and his 2006 election campaign was based on a socialist platform. Chavez was re-elected in 2006 in a landslide victory that saw him win 63 per cent of the vote compared to 37 per cent for his opponent Manuel Rosales (Wilpert 2007a). The opposition had unified to oppose Chavez but after this last in a series of defeats became fragmented and lost much of their oppositional force. The Chavez government therefore had the mandate, the impetus and the opportunity to move the process forward. As I explained in section 1.2, in December 2007 Chavez announced a new phase of the “Bolivarian Revolution” based on an explicitly socialist platform, framed around the “Five Motors of the Revolution”, the Simon Bolivar National Plan and the development of “Popular Power” via the existing Social Missions and the introduction of new mechanisms for the exercise of protagonist participation, most notably the Communal Councils.

While not fully elaborated, socialism is often portrayed in the discourse of the Venezuelan government and its supporters and in legislative initiatives as being synonymous with the desire to complement representative with participatory and direct democracy via state and grassroots power (Chavez 2008, 2007; MINEP 2008; MPPI 2007). This resonates with academic literature that socialism is the ultimate form of participatory democracy (Brookfield and Holst 2011) and is reminiscent of Gramsci’s ideas of the central role of democracy rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat in building socialism. The instigation of participatory mechanisms from the beginning of Chavez’s election, starting with the process to rewrite the Constitution, also suggests a commitment to prefigurative practice.

An examination of the Venezuelan context reveals elements of all four of Slater’s approaches to building socialism that I outlined in section 2.7.1. Initially the Chavez

government emphasised social justice and pursued a programme of wealth redistribution, welfare provision and nationalisation of key sectors of the economy, most notably petroleum, which resembles a social democratic approach. There is also evidence of radical nationalism with the anti-imperial rhetoric and appeals to national pride, invoking the figures of Latin American liberators such as Bolivar, Zamora and Miranda. However, unlike in Chile, the Chavez government has shown strong leadership in the face of opposition and has instigated structural changes to the state, including the new Constitution and the new National Assembly.

The incorporation of parallelism alongside an ongoing role for the centralised state, the formation of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), new economic Plans based on endogenous development and opportunities for new relations of production through worker-managed factories and co-operatives are reminiscent of the Leninist model of strong leadership, the consolidation of power, economic development and “dual power”. However, the emphasis on protagonist participation, parallelism and continued commitment to state provision of services within a new conceptualisation of the state as emanating from the will of the people, situates the Venezuelan process, at least at the level of discourse, most closely within the framework of “Democratic Socialism through Popular Hegemony”.

Nevertheless, while discourse and policy is certainly important, there is still no certainty that the promise of 21st century socialism will be realised. As Wilpert (2007a: 3) says, ‘just because Chavez announced the pursuit of socialism doesn’t mean his policies are socialist’. Other projects have had democratic socialist aims that have failed to be fully realised, as I highlighted in section 2.7.2. Furthermore, as the conflicts of December 2001-August 2004 reveal, the continued success of the Chavez movement depends on its ability to maintain support, not only from avid Chavez supporters, but also from the “floating middle” of the Venezuelan population. While the dissatisfaction of many middle-class supporters in the aftermath of the coup and subsequent economic downturn was short-lived and while Chavez won a decisive and resounding victory in the 2006 elections, increasing concerns about the pace and direction of change pose an ongoing challenge to the future of the process, perhaps more than continued opposition from old elites, as I highlight in Chapters Eight and Nine. In this sense the current hegemonic struggle is best understood as an elite-mass struggle in which many of the excluded have identified strongly with Chavez and his movement, particularly the poorest, but with a “floating middle” whose support has so far largely been based on satisfaction with government policies and lack of belief in an alternative. The struggle for hegemony is therefore an ongoing process and which social

forces will gain hegemony and whether or not class polarisation will again become more central to the hegemonic struggle is by no means certain.

In the second part of this thesis, I therefore examine in more detail if and how discourse is put into practice, how institutions and processes are developing and how they are viewed by the Venezuelan people, as well as the ongoing shortcomings and tensions encountered in the process, to shed light on whether or not the changes underway in Venezuela hold the potential of developing along democratic socialist lines.

4.5 The Political Economy of Oil

Finally, and crucially, it is impossible to understand the Venezuelan context without an understanding of the political economy of oil. As Chavez said in 1998, ‘oil is a geopolitical weapon’ (Chavez quoted in Kozloff 2007:7). Venezuela is one of the world’s largest oil-producing countries with some of the largest reserves of oil in the world and the huge profits associated with oil mean that it is a source of huge conflict in Venezuela in terms of who should benefit from the oil wealth. This section examines the impact of oil production on economic, political and social organisation in Venezuela before and after Chavez came to power.

Wilpert (2007a) outlines the early history of oil in Venezuela. Oil was first drilled in Venezuela in 1912 and by 1929 it was the world’s largest oil exporter. From 1943 to 1974 there were increasing moves by the state to increase control over the oil industry, starting with the Hydrocarbons Act of 1943 that secured a 50 per cent share of the oil profit of foreign companies for the state. This strengthening of the “Petro-State” continued into the 1970s when the oil industry was nationalised to form PDVSA. The predominant development model was based on “sowing the oil”; using increased oil revenues to diversify the economy and embark on a programme of infrastructural development and poverty reduction (Hellinger 2003). Expectations were high that this programme of oil nationalism and spending would secure the development and modernisation of the country. However the massive revenues from oil extraction made the country vulnerable to “Dutch Disease” whereby increased revenues from oil lead to a general decline or failure to develop domestic sectors and industries and an over-reliance on oil rents.

While the oil industry was nationalised in 1976, the management of the Company did not change. Most of the executives were Venezuelan nationals who had previously worked for transnational companies such as Shell and Exxon and they retained their anti-statist, pro-transnational culture and policies. The Ministry of Mines (MEM) was supposed to have

ultimate control over the Company but in reality had little influence. Corruption and bribery of Ministry workers to retain management control was rife. PDVSA could operate with almost complete autonomy from the state; effectively becoming a 'state within a state' (Mommer 2003: 131).

Almost as soon as it was nationalised the management took steps to re-privatise the Company and also actively steered revenue away from the state by diverting profits to international subsidiaries. As a result profits plummeted as did state income and, compounded by falling oil prices worldwide, the country sank into debt (Wilpert 2007a; Gott 2005; Mommer 2003). In 1989 Perez, who had presided over the nationalisation of the Company in 1976, introduced his package of IMF and World Bank approved policies which signalled the start of the "apertura" (opening) period where price restrictions and subsidies were removed and PDVSA was re-opened up to the private sector. These measures sparked the popular Caracazo uprising of 1989 however neoliberal policies continued into the 1990s. By the end of the "4th Republic" PDVSA operated almost totally autonomously and the huge oil revenues were predominantly enjoyed by a very small percentage of the population (Mommer 2003), leading Wilpert (2007a:89) to conclude that since discovery and throughout the Punto Fijo years 'the industry never actually pursued Venezuelan interests'.

Chavez campaigned on a platform that PDVSA managers were too tied to foreign oil companies and that oil revenues did little to benefit the Venezuelan people as a whole. He promised to change this and to put the company more under the control of MEM. One of the first moves of the new government was to negotiate a decrease in oil production with OPEC and oil prices subsequently increased (Gott 2005). The new Constitution had forbidden the privatisation of PDVSA and the 2001 Hydrocarbon Law sought to address this by securing a 51 per cent share of new oil production and exploration for the Company, as well as increasing the royalties from private companies from 16 per cent to a minimum of 30 per cent (Kozloff 2007; Gott 2005). The Law also required PDVSA to release its accounts in the hope that this would, at least in theory, enable the Ministry to monitor whether or not the Company was continuing past policy of diverting profits abroad and passing its external debt to PDVSA to reduce profits (Mommer 2003). Chavez fired many of the top executives in the company who had pushed for privatisation and who opposed the 2001 Hydrocarbon Law. This brought to an end the plans of previous governments and current elites within PDVSA and the business community more generally

to privatise the company. These measures were largely responsible for the unsuccessful 2002 coup and oil lock-out (Kozloff 2007; Hellinger 2003).

The measures introduced since the Chavez government came to power are in direct contradiction to the neoliberal approach of previous regimes and in line with Constitutional guarantees to halt the privatisation of the industry and its affiliates and lessen the control of multi-national oil companies, thereby securing state control over the industry and oil profits (Kozloff 2007; Wilpert 2007a). The most recent initiative has been to promote Latin American integration via energy integration. Agreements have been made with the state oil companies of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay with the aim of reducing costs of oil extraction and production. This has been complemented by the development of the Bolivarian Alliance for Latin America (ALBA) which aims to boost Latin American economic development and prioritise regional development over the sale of oil to developed nations outside the region.

As during the oil boom of the 1970s, Chavez is attempting to link oil nationalism and economic development and diversification to a conception of democracy. However the crucial difference is that it is within a very different conceptualisation of development and who should benefit from the oil wealth, based on principles of social justice and equality and a very different, more inclusive vision of democracy (Hellinger 2003). The Chavez government has had considerable success in reforming the oil industry, though the history of relative autonomy as well as entrenched corruption and clientelism have proven very hard to combat and new corrupt elites have emerged within the Company (Kozloff 2007; Gott 2005; Hellinger 2003; Mommer 2003). The country remains heavily dependent on oil revenues and the continued success and popularity of the government and its policies remain closely tied to the political economy of oil.

4.6 Conclusions: A new framework for democratic social change?

While there are many ongoing contradictions and tensions that I discuss in the second part of this thesis, reforms to date suggest that the Venezuela of the Chavez era is very different to the Venezuela of the Punto Fijo years. The anti-neoliberal sentiment that began to build in the 1980s has found institutional expression in the election of Chavez and his movement, in the new Constitution and in many of the subsequent policies and processes that have been introduced. There is evidence of a new counter-hegemonic discourse and practice, exemplified in the numerous mobilisations in support of the process, in the policies and programmes that combine a strong state with principles of popular,

protagonist participation and in the consistent re-election of Chavez and his government on an increasingly counter-hegemonic platform. The mobilisation of the people behind “el proceso” marks a clear break with the pacted democracy of the Punto Fijo years and a clear challenge to neo-liberal hegemony.

Unlike the 1961 Constitution the current Constitution explicitly and consistently emphasises the importance of organised society’s participation in decision-making processes and in policy planning and implementation. Alongside state-led redistribution of wealth and services, the process has opened up new spaces for protagonist participation and the democratisation of decision-making in the allocation of resources, policy-making and implementation of programmes. This commitment to the role of the state alongside “people power” distinguishes the Venezuelan process from top-down social democratic reforms and from neoliberal and “big society” agendas that seek to increase participation as a means of “rolling back the state”.

Most importantly Chavez has introduced parallel structures funded by oil revenues, including the Social Missions and Communal Councils, that have been institutionalised via Laws. This suggests that, unlike many populists, Chavez is attempting to institutionalise democratic avenues of decision-making that could outlast his leadership, that increase people’s capacity to organise and mobilise and that offer the possibility of developing new forms of state-society relations. While many of these changes have been instigated from above, they can be seen as an attempt to radically change the state and by-pass it where necessary. It is this commitment, at least at the level of discourse and policy, that distinguishes Venezuelan politics under Chavez from other more conservative democratisation projects (Irazabal and Foley 2011). These changes lead Hellinger (2003:52) to conclude that ‘few leaders have so effectively dismantled a well-entrenched political class, challenged the hegemony of a superpower and animated the desire for social justice of a people’. While still in a process of development, with ongoing contradictions and problems, reforms to date have been ‘absolutely crucial for enabling Chavez to turn Venezuela into an experiment for twenty-first century socialism’ (Wilpert 2007a:87).

As I have stressed throughout this thesis, while constitutional rights and guarantees alongside Laws, policies and institutions are vital in outlining the framework of the new society, what is important is how they are put into practice. While significant changes have been made, examination of ‘the nature and long-term effects of the political changes’ is required (Alvarez 2003:147). The second part of this thesis looks beyond how far the

Venezuelan process has instigated a counter-hegemonic project at the level of discourse and policy-making, to explore how the Education Missions, the Communal Councils and opportunities for participation and protagonism more generally have been put into practice and how they are viewed by the Venezuelan people I interviewed and observed. Before doing so, Chapter 5 details the methodology I employed to investigate these processes of social change.

Chapter 5: **Methodology**

'To understand our process you need to look beyond debates between positivism and interpretivism. There are 2 scales to look at: personal and collective changes and institutional changes.'

(Arnaldo: Mission Sucre facilitator UNEARTE 2009)

The focus of my research is to examine the processes and outcomes of projects for democratic social change, particularly if and how structural reform and grassroots initiatives can interact to pursue democratic, participatory outcomes that promote the redistribution of power and resources and that are grounded in principles of “thick” democracy. In Chapter 2, I outlined a theory of democratic social change “from above and below”, grounded in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, counter-hegemony and the “war of position” that brings together autonomist and structuralist discourse and emphasises the importance of working ‘tactically inside and strategically outside’ the state (Mayo 1994:137). I further developed these ideas in Chapter 3 where I explored the pedagogical dimensions of counter-hegemonic struggle, including the links between education and democracy and the possible role of education as a force for social change grounded in “thick” democracy. I highlighted that, while there is a lot of research into what is wrong with education, be it under capitalism, socialism or totalitarianism, and some commentary on what resistance education “against the state” should look like, there is much less on the role of education when a society is undergoing state-led participatory, democratic transformation. Furthermore I argued that while there is a wealth of theorising on the possibility of democratic social change “from above and below” there are fewer examples of projects that have attempted to put theory into practice. As Buxton (2011:xii) highlights, the current process in Venezuela, as an example of a ‘state-sponsored participatory democracy’, offers an important context to explore debates on meanings of democracy and how change from above and below might develop in practice. This forms the focus of my research. I therefore contribute to wider theoretical debates as to the pedagogical dimensions, and potentials and limitations, of state-grassroots partnerships in the pursuit of democratic, participatory social change.

Furthermore Buxton (2011) highlights that much of the research into the Venezuelan process to date has used benchmarks based on liberal conceptualisations of democracy to negatively assess the process. Additionally Hellinger (2011b:340) says that in much academic and journalistic literature to date, ‘what ordinary Venezuelans think and what they are doing remains largely obscured’. What is needed is deeper investigation into ‘popular understandings of really existing democracy and its practice’ (Buxton 2011: xii).

In Chapters 2 and 3, drawing on these insights, I developed a different set of benchmarks with which to assess the Venezuelan process, based on the proclamations and critiques of the process and grounded in the broader theoretical framework of “thick” democracy. I also emphasised the need to understand grassroots perceptions, experiences and desires. The empirical basis of my research draws on these benchmarks and theoretical debates to assess the discourse and practice of the Chavez government as well as the experiences and perceptions of some of the Venezuelan people living through the processes of change.

To this end I ask the following general research question:

How far has the state-led process of social change that characterises the Chavez government fulfilled its promise of transferring “power to the people” through the development of state-grassroots partnerships that reflect some of the principles of “thick” democracy and/or democratic socialism through popular hegemony?

To answer this question I ask the following specific questions:

Q1) What discourses and reforms “from above” frame the processes of change?

Q2) What role does education play in the development of political awareness and grassroots agency based on democratic and protagonist forms of organisation and decision-making?

Q3) How much scope is there for autonomous or semi-autonomous popular mobilization and participation that impacts on the reorganisation of power relations within a political process aimed at synergies between state-led reform and popular mobilisation?

Q4) How far do discourses and reforms “from above” resonate with the Venezuelan people and how far do they feel that discourse has been put into practice?

5.1 Theoretical Context: Critical Social Theory

An emphasis on social change necessitates engagement with structural changes at the macro level, micro level experiences, and the linkages between the two. This requires research at macro, meso and micro levels to examine reforms that have been introduced, including the structural spaces that enable or constrain participation, and how these have impacted on autonomous organisation. At the same time it requires examining how autonomous or semi-autonomous organisation from below is impacting on structural reforms and policies at higher levels and how material and ideological frameworks shape

the meanings and experiences of the Venezuelan people engaged in or in opposition to these processes.

While many social theories tend to emphasize one of two general approaches, social structure or social action, a range of theorists have sought to bridge the gap between structure and agency and explain their inter-connected role in social change (Marx 1852; Gramsci 1971; Giddens 1984). They reorganise and redefine basic concepts such as structure, society and institutions and combine them with concepts such as agency, social action, ideology, praxis and dialogue. My own research draws on these theories and their associated concepts and incorporates elements from critical social theory, the hermeneutic tradition, participatory methodology and popular education theory and practice; thereby adopting a critical approach that considers ‘structural conditions and popular agency’ (Hickey and Mohan 2004:69). Central is the idea that human beings are capable of acting autonomously to create and control their lives but this is within the context of structures of social domination that take historical, material, ideological and cultural forms. However at the same time as people are constrained by these factors, they also have the capacity, realised or unrealised, to reproduce *or* transform these structures. Both oppression and liberation are thus products of collective actions. Understanding both stability and change therefore requires examining the interplay of structures and agency.

In particular Gramsci’s core ideas of consent, ideology and hegemony are central to a critical theory of social change that incorporates structural conditions and grassroots action. As Gramsci stressed, while ideological domination is exercised by dominant classes, the acknowledgement that dominance is a product of both material and ideological forces allows for the possibility of agency and change through organised groups challenging dominant ideology. This offers the possibility that ideological change can precede and promote material, structural change. The methodological challenge of any investigation based on Gramscian ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony therefore needs to start with an investigation of the structural material and ideological social forces and key collective actors that frame a particular context, before examining how processes of change and counter-hegemonic ideologies and practices are developing in practice (Bieler and Morton 2003). It is this approach that guides my research.

Ontologically my research methodology is grounded in a belief in this dialectical relationship between structure and agency; that human beings are simultaneous products and shapers of the social structure and social life. Such an ontology that incorporates

individual agency and social structure is central to my investigation into the possibility of achieving a balance between “changing the world without taking power” and “taking power to change the world” by working “in and against the state”. By drawing on both structural and interpretivist accounts of social reality I develop a methodology that will enable me to more fully understand the extent to which developments in Venezuela are contributing to participatory, protagonist democratic social change from above and below.

Epistemologically my research adopts a critical, ethnographic, participatory approach to allow me as an outside researcher to gain an insight into the reality of those being observed in order to create knowledge and understanding about the nature, form and impact of government reforms and programmes on community organisation for social change. The emphasis is on co-operative inquiry, on research with people rather than on people. I as the researcher am not outside and separate from the subjects of my research; rather the research reflects both the ‘emic’ or actors view and the ‘etic’ or observers view (Reason 1994). In this way I give primacy to the experiences and perceptions of the people I interviewed and observed whilst maintaining an understanding of how wider discourses and structures impact on behaviours and understandings, as I explain in more detail in section 5.2.

5.2 Research Methods

The consideration of structure and agency is reflected in my choice of research methods. Kane (2001) outlines two major approaches to evaluating the outcomes of projects for change. The first focuses on measurability and a scientific approach with the researcher external to the project, whilst the second focuses on the more qualitative, subjective dimensions of change with the researcher and those being researched acting as subjects rather than objects in the research process. Most research over the past 20-30 years into conscientisation, education and collective action for change has focused on the latter approach and has employed participatory methods (Stromquist 1997; del Pilar O’Cadiz 1995). As my research is concerned with state-led efforts to increase grassroots conscientisation, organisation and mobilisation for change, particularly the pedagogical aspects of such processes, I draw on these participatory approaches to social enquiry, including Freirean popular education methodology.

Importantly Freire (1974, 1970) warned against both “elitism” and “basism” in research and learning, arguing that both objective knowledge and everyday experience are vital components in the study of social change. Similarly Fielding (1988) emphasises the

importance of establishing macro-level contexts as well as examining micro-level processes in specific contexts. In line with this, my research comprises the triangulation of secondary data such as official statistics produced internally and externally, secondary academic research, official documents such as the Constitution, Laws and other policy documents and government literature, with micro-level data from my primary research in the form of interviews, focus groups and participant observations; all structured around the research questions that I developed from the key theoretical debates surrounding state-led processes for democratic social change, as I explain in detail in section 5.3.

Because of my focus on whether or not the current Venezuelan process is building a new counter-hegemonic alternative based on grassroots organisation and mobilisation, it is clear that any investigation into how “el proceso” is developing in Venezuela requires gaining an understanding of how people themselves see the process unfolding and what impact it has had on their personal and public involvement. In terms of my specific focus, which stresses the pedagogical dimensions of such processes of change, it is of particular importance to examine how educational initiatives impact on critical awareness and participation, and in turn, how participants view the process of change and opportunities to participate in it. Both Hellinger (2011b:340) and Buxton (2011: xii) stress that analysis needs to go beyond changes at the structural level in order to address the ‘lack of quality analysis of the *popular* experience of the Bolivarian Revolution’. My choice of research methods aims to address this deficit through fieldwork that situates current processes within wider structural frameworks but with a focus on the experiences of some of the ‘ordinary’ (Hellinger 2011b:340) people living through the processes of change, including their perceptions of state-society relations and opportunities for the exercise of protagonist participation.

Beer (1997:6) argues that ‘societal actors’ conceptions of their own autonomy are essentially their understanding of how they relate to the state’. This is important in my own research to gain an insight into how people see their relationship to the Bolivarian state and how they see their role in the processes of change underway. Murtagh (2001:226) argues that narratives from communities themselves can ‘capture the processes and experiences of change using ethnographic methods rather than stark quantified indicators’. The empirical foundation of my primary research is therefore qualitative data gained through participatory methods of data collection to capture the perceptions of local actors, activists and officials as to how structural reforms have impacted on conscientisation, the capacity to mobilise and the opportunities for increased participation in political processes. This

includes the ability to make demands on the government and whether or not there has been an increase in government responsiveness to these demands.

I use a case study approach or, as Yin (1994:23) defines it, ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context’, to examine if and how educational and other community decision-making initiatives instigated by the government impact on the ability to participate in social change and how they allow for learning about and practising democracy. This involves an examination of the aims, content and process of the various initiatives to determine how far they impart the functional knowledge and skills for active participation and how far they emphasise and promote active, democratic participation, debate and contestation. An examination of how particular groups have been able to make use of new spaces that have been opened up and how they view these changes allows me to draw conclusions as to how the process as a whole might be developing in practice, through a focus on how ordinary people understand and evaluate the process. Crossley and Vulliamy (1984:198) point to the way in which case studies have ‘exposed the gap between rhetoric and practice’ and this forms a central part of my research. By gaining an understanding of the inter-relationships between particular community organisations and the state, I offer another context in which to understand the complex relationship between state and community in projects for social change within a framework that aims to develop the complementing of representative democracy with more direct and participatory forms. I thereby contribute to theoretical debates as to whether or not it is possible to build forms of government and social organisation that reflect some of the principles of democratic socialism through popular hegemony through a state led process such as that characterized by the Chavez government.

As with all case studies there are issues with generalisability. In the first place the majority of my research involved observing government instigated programmes and one would expect the majority of people participating in these programmes to support the government. Furthermore my research took place in mainly poor barrios and it is the poor that make up the majority of Chavez’s support. An examination of government-created programmes in these specific contexts may therefore only reveal the perceptions of those supportive of the process. However, as Gomm et al. (2000: 99) argue, while case studies are often seen as unsuitable as a basis for generalisation they *can* be a microcosm of a larger system or whole society and ‘in some sense symptomatic of what is going on more generally’. For them what is important is to think about how typical the case or cases might be of the wider population.

While it is true that the majority of people I interviewed were generally supportive of the process, many also expressed concerns and critiques of progress to date and were by no means passive supporters of the changes made to date. I also endeavoured to interview people in the barrios, within educational programmes and in the wider community who were overtly anti-Chavez and his government, as well as access opposition media and academic literature in order to gain insights into perceptions and understandings of the current process of change as viewed by opponents of the Chavez government and those with a more neutral stance.

Furthermore my research is primarily concerned with possibilities that have been opened up since the Chavez government came to power. A focus on some of the actual programmes that have been introduced, who participates in them, the way they are being organised and implemented and with what results, enables me to draw conclusions as to some of the opportunities that exist for the development and practice of “thick” democracy. Finally by comparing my own research findings with secondary quantitative and qualitative research, I endeavour to situate my own primary research within wider understandings of how the process is developing and how it is understood and evaluated by the Venezuelan people, in order to draw more general conclusions as to how the process is developing in practice and how far the programmes I examined reflect wider societal processes of change.

5.3 Designing my research

Central to my research is how to assess opportunity and agency, where opportunity is understood as the formal and informal institutions and ideologies that enable or constrain agency and agency is understood as the capacity to make meaningful choices and act upon them (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005). The former requires examining the opportunities for effective participation, the nature of participation in these spaces and the impact of such participation on structural relations. The latter requires examining the knowledge and skills people have, the level of political consciousness people display in terms of their knowledge of the avenues open to them to exercise participation, both within and outside government-promoted spaces, and the extent to which they believe in themselves as agents of change. This section outlines the key indicators that frame my research and the approaches I used to access information in line with my key research questions.

Hellinger (2011a:38) stresses in his research into how the Venezuelan people view the current changes in their country that 'it is important to allow respondents to express their views of democracy, not simply to measure their attitudes against pre-conceived notions of what democracy is'. Such an approach was important in my own research in order to ascertain the experiences and perceptions of the people I interviewed and observed, rather than impose categorisations on them. For this reason I used semi-structured, open-ended narrative interviews in which I posed general questions asking people to describe some of the most important changes they had seen or experienced since the election of Chavez in 1998. In the majority of interviews respondents started by talking about the new Constitution and new conceptualisations of democracy and some related this to the idea of socialism for the 21st century. If not, I asked people specifically to explain what democracy means to them and, if they did not talk about socialism, then I asked a further question asking them to describe what socialism means to them. I then went on to ask more general questions as to how people viewed their experience in the Education Missions and/or other arenas for participation and how they viewed their relationship with the state. Finally I asked a general question about what they thought were the main achievements and/or shortcomings of the process to date and what changes they would still like to see in order to promote their vision of the desired society. In this way I tried to allow respondents to develop their own ideas on how they view the processes of social change underway in their country, while at the same time structuring my research around the key thematic areas outlined in my research questions.

Measuring opportunity requires examining the formal and informal institutions that exist for participation. Firstly, in line with my first research question on the opportunities that have been opened up from above and the discourses that frame these changes, I outline the discourse of the Chavez government and the changes from above that have introduced and institutionalised new channels for the practice of participation from below. Such discourse and policy reforms are identified in Chapter 4 using secondary sources, including a review of the 1999 Constitution, various Laws and policies and government pamphlets and documents. In Chapters 6 and 7, I examine in more detail the reforms that have been introduced and use secondary statistics, produced both internally and externally, to gain quantitative data such as the impact of reforms on well-being and the numbers of people involved in community organisations. In this way I provide an overview of the material and ideological structural arena in which the Chavez government aims to open up spaces for participation and for the redistribution of power and resources. However establishing that government discourse stresses building a new hegemony based on state-promoted

grassroots organisation for social change, and identifying constitutionally guaranteed rights to participate and numbers participating, says little about whether or not these rights are reinforced in practice, whether or not participation is open to a wide range of people or about the quality of participation; it says little about agency.

Agency is a difficult concept to assess. It relates to the extent to which people possess the skills, capacity and belief that they can be effective actors in processes of change; it concerns power in its numerous forms. It has elements that could be empirically measured such as voting behaviour, numbers attending demonstrations and public meetings, membership of political organisations and “assets” like literacy. While I draw on such data in my own research it does not reveal whether or not people have *actual* political influence. Conventional indicators of “political participation” and “agency” more generally therefore need to be assessed beyond numbers. For example while membership of the Education Missions or of a Communal Council could be measured quantitatively and be used as evidence for political involvement, agency and support of the Chavez government, it cannot uncover people’s motives for joining, such as peer pressure, hope of individual gain or the belief that non-membership may exclude them from access to goods and services. Nor would it reveal the quality of and impact of participation. It is therefore important to uncover whether or not people have the ability, the desire and belief in the utility of participation and the opportunity to take part in public life and also the nature of and quality of their participation. This requires examining who participates and who does not, the types of organisation people participate in, the nature of their participation and the result of participation, including how far these processes contribute to counter-hegemonic struggle based on grassroots protagonism. Agency also carries psychological and social connotations that are difficult to measure. These can best be revealed through talking to people and asking them about their perceptions of how they are able to contribute to social life and decision-making as well as observing how they come together in educational groups, Communal Councils and other “public” spheres to debate issues and plan strategies to make changes. Understanding agency therefore needs to go beyond statistical data to uncover people’s feelings and experiences.

I therefore supplement secondary data with narratives, interviews and observations to uncover people’s own perceptions and experiences of the opportunities these institutions and policies have or have not opened up for meaningful participation and how far the discourse from above resonates with the people. To this end, Chapter 6 addresses my second research question in terms of how far education contributes to the development of

new forms of political awareness and a new ideological hegemony grounded in principles of democratic organisation and mobilisation; in “thick” democracy. I use semi-structured interviews, participant observations and focus groups alongside secondary research into the Education Missions to build an understanding of the impact of these programmes on political awareness and grassroots organisation as well as how the programmes are viewed by the participants.

In Chapter 7 I build on this understanding of if and how state-led reform promotes autonomous grassroots mobilisation, using similar research methods. I thereby focus on my third research question by exploring some of the wider opportunities for democratic, protagonist participation in government-created and autonomous spaces to identify some of the potentials and problems of working “in and against the state”. Chapter 8 addresses my final research question as to how far the reforms and discourse of the Chavez government resonate with the people. I triangulate secondary data, including data from large-scale social surveys such as the Latinobarometer (LB) that investigate people’s satisfaction with the way democracy operates in their country, with primary, qualitative data from participatory methods such as unstructured interviews, participant observation and oral histories and narratives to uncover the potentials and shortcomings of the processes of social change to date as viewed by some of the people living through it. I thereby engage with micro and macro issues and the linkages between the two.

Examining issues of opportunity, agency and participation will shed light on whether or not the reforms to date have led to increased autonomous mobilisation and a greater input in decision-making, to uncover if and how participatory initiatives have enabled people to become protagonists of change. It will also enable me to draw conclusions as to the extent to which structural change from above has developed more direct and participatory forms of democracy. In this way I endeavour to gain an indication of ‘how Venezuelans at the forefront of the Bolivarian Revolution think about democracy’ (Hellinger 2011a:39) and how it is developing in practice. Finally, in Chapter 9, I draw on these research findings to develop more general conclusions as to the potentials and ongoing tensions in state-promoted projects to promote grassroots, protagonist participation in the pursuit of democratic social change, in line with my over-arching research question.

It is important to note that assessing impact is particularly hard and that it is also difficult to attribute causality. Nevertheless the Government Social Research Unit (2004:6) points out that ‘qualitative research also lends itself to evaluations which require an understanding

of process....impacts and outcomes’. Life histories, for example, are a useful means of gaining a picture of processes of change and the development of social and political life over time. This will depend to an extent on memory and will also reflect attitudes and opinions, however allowing people to recount how their lives have changed can give a good insight into the changes since Chavez came to power in 1998. As Roche (1999: 108) highlights, ‘simply talking and listening to people is probably the most common and useful way of assessing impact’.

However while Roche is correct in arguing that a lot of information can be garnered by talking to people it is also important to note that what people say in an interview situation may not be the whole story. As May (1993) highlights, people’s views are framed within wider material and ideological structures. Similarly Leach and Scoones (2007:9) stress the importance of examining who mobilises and who does not and what forms of knowledge frame these experiences; arguing that ‘mobilisation processes emerge from and remain strongly shaped by political histories and cultures; both of citizens and of the public and private institutions they encounter’. It is here that the ethnographic approach is useful. It acknowledges that it is as important to uncover what is not said as what is said during interviews and observations and the way experiences and ideological discourses shape meaning.

This is important in my own research. What people say in an individual or group interview or focus group may not be the whole story. In order to increase the validity of my research it is very important to look beyond what people say and try to uncover the context and motives lying behind what people say and what they actually do in practice as well as behind what they say is happening and what really happens in practice. Careful observation of body language and consideration of the particular context of each interview or focus group is needed to try and pick up what is *not* said, what is said to appear part of the group, to please the group or to appear part of the process. It may be difficult for people to feel that they can criticise certain aspects of the Chavez regime as they want to give an overall good impression, or they may feel constrained by the strength of the “Chavista” ideology. They may also form their own judgements on my motivations for carrying out the research and shape their answers accordingly. In an interview situation people may emphasise the socially desirable aspects of their behaviour and attitudes to “fit in” with the ideology of the Bolivarian Revolution. For example, they may exaggerate their ability to influence decisions because of the rhetoric surrounding “popular power” and “participation”. They may also exaggerate the achievements of the Chavez government as they want the regime

to be seen in a good light. The converse may be true when talking to members of the opposition who may ignore positive developments and stress any negative aspects in an attempt to undermine the regime as a whole.

Because of these issues it is useful to triangulate evidence from oral testimonies with observations to try and pick up on any hidden feelings and influences, including exclusion or peer pressure, or any negative feelings about particular policies or developments. While the knowledge of being observed may alter people's behaviour, the fact that I conducted my research in Venezuela for an extended period of time should minimise this. This approach enables me to uncover the perceptions, understandings and experiences of some of the social actors within the "Bolivarian Revolution", alongside understandings of the ideological and structural constraints and opportunities that frame these perceptions and experiences. The next section provides more detail of the research process itself.

5.4 Research process

My primary motivation for carrying out this research was to examine the processes and outcomes of state-grassroots partnerships in the pursuit of democratic social change and, in particular, the role that education plays in these processes. This interest in education and social change developed out of my experiences as a teacher of sociology and politics, as well as during my M.A. dissertation that examined the role of popular education in social change and the relationship between popular education and the state. During the course of this research, I became much more familiar with the work of Paolo Freire and also with examples of where revolutionary societies such as Cuba and Nicaragua have tried to use education to further their transformatory goals. At the same time, I had read about the current processes of change in Venezuela and became interested in the role of the state-led Education Missions in the pursuit of social change. As Berry et al. (1993) highlight, instances of state-supported education for social transformation are rare, and the Venezuelan case offered an opportunity to examine how change "from above and below" in the pursuit of democratic socialism, and the role of education in such change, might develop in practice. It was this opportunity that motivated my PhD research.

The first stage of my research involved a comprehensive literature review of theorising on education, socialism and social change, as well as a review of the literature on the Venezuelan context, both before and after Chavez was elected. I made a preliminary research visit to Venezuela for six weeks in April and May 2007. For two weeks of this visit, I joined a group of Australian Trade Union activists who were visiting Venezuela

with the Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN). As part of the activities organised by the AVSN, I was able to access and interview a number of Venezuelan officials, including government Ministers, officials from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Science and Technology, and educators from the Bolivarian University (UBV) and Central University (UCV) and Education Missions. I was also able to visit the National Assembly and a number of Social Missions, including Mission Barrio Adentro and several Education Missions. The initial contacts I made during this period proved invaluable when I returned to Venezuela in January 2009, by putting me in contact with educators and students in the Education Missions as well as providing information on centres running the Education Missions. They also provided me with a range of documentation, including copies of the Constitution and various Laws, and official government literature on government policies such as the Simon Bolivar National Project, the Five Motors of the Revolution and the Education Missions, which enabled me to gain an early insight into the discourses “from above” that frame the process of change.

Importantly this initial visit, including participation in the May Day march, gave me an opportunity to talk to a number of Venezuelan people about their experiences both before and after Chavez was elected that informed my literature review. For example, I realised very quickly that new conceptualisations of democracy were central to an understanding of the current Venezuelan process. This prompted me to research more thoroughly the links between democracy and education, participation, socialism and social change when I returned to Manchester in May 2007. For example, I re-read the work of John Dewey on the links between education and democracy, as well as wider literature on direct and participatory democracy and democratic socialism. Based on this preliminary visit and literature review, I formulated my research questions and the benchmarks that I would use to examine the processes of social change in Venezuela in practice. This framework, and my specific research questions, also largely framed the questions I used to guide my interviews, and also the thematic areas I used to analyse the data from both primary and secondary sources, as illustrated in Appendices 1 and 3.

I returned to Venezuela from January 2009 to April 2010 to conduct my actual primary research. At the start of my visit, I joined two academics from Australia, Tom Griffiths and Jo Williams, on a ten-day education programme they had organised; visiting the Ministry of Education, Universities, schools and Education Missions. Again this gave me the opportunity to make new contacts and also interview government officials and educators. I also enrolled in a two months course of intensive daily Spanish classes to improve my

language skills. I already had a good grasp of Spanish from a previous eight-month visit to Latin America in the 1990s and from Spanish lessons in England in the year prior to conducting my research. However, these classes were important in enabling me to conduct and translate all my interviews without the need of an interpreter. I felt that this was important in enabling me to fully engage with the research process and also create a relaxed atmosphere with interviewees. My Spanish teacher, who lives in Petare, was also able to help me find a place to live on the outskirts of Petare, where I lived for four months. I then moved to Cano Amarillo, after meeting some local residents on the 2009 May Day march who invited me to visit the Mission Sucre programme at the National Experimental University for the Arts (UNEARTE) in Cano Amarillo, and who also organised a place for me to live.

I had already identified the National Institute for Learning and Socialist Education (INCES), Campo Rico as a possible site for my research in my pre-research visit to Venezuela. I approached them in late January 2009 and started attending classes in February. On a weekly basis, I attended one daytime programme of Mission Ribas where I observed a range of classes with different facilitators, and one daytime programme of Mission Cultura. Throughout my research I had no difficulties in gaining access to education programmes. Either, I just went to the centres and asked if I could observe classes, or people I met offered to take me to their classes or introduce me to people who were studying or working in the Missions. In this way I gained access to the four centres where I focused my research. This was also true of the wide range of other activities I attended, including Communal Councils meetings, demonstrations and public meetings, and activities and meetings of local community groups. In fact, probably my main problem during the research process was having to say no to the large numbers of people who wanted me to visit their projects and programmes. Ultimately I decided that, in order to gain an in-depth picture of how the education Missions were developing in practice, I should focus on four centres in the two areas of study. I did also visit a wide range of other projects that I have been unable to include in any detail in this thesis, though they did give me a deeper insight into how the process more generally is developing in practice.

My research therefore focuses on education programmes and wider participation in two districts of Caracas; Cano Amarillo, Libertador in the West of the city (from May 2009-April 2011) and Campo Rico, Petare in the East of the city (from February 2009-April 2010). I chose these areas for two main reasons. The first was that, unlike the 23 de Enero district for example, they were not areas associated with large-scale organisation and

mobilisation prior to the Chavez era and so would enable me to examine if and how the capacity for and incidences of participation and protagonism had increased since Chavez came to power. Secondly these were both areas where I lived and was able to gain access to a range of education programmes through contacts I made early on in my research. Also, living in both these areas meant that, beyond attending classes, I was able to immerse myself in the day-to-day lives of the residents and also attend a wide range of meetings and community events with them in order to gain a rich understanding of their perceptions of the process and their part in it.

In the evenings I observed Mission Sucre programmes; two nights a week at a centre in Campo Rico, two nights a week at (UNEARTE) in Cano Amarillo and one night a week at Fermin Toro High School on the border of Cano Amarillo. In these classes I observed a range of subject specialisms including Environmental Management, Social Management, Tourism, Electrical Engineering, Art and Social Communication (Journalism). In all centres I attended, I also attended the compulsory classes in socio-political formation and the classes concerning the compulsory Community Project. I was able to accompany several of these groups as they developed their Community Projects, in particular one group of Environmental Management students and one group of Social Communication students. I accompanied both groups when they conducted their preliminary community diagnostics as well as various community meetings and workshops that they organised and attended in the development of their projects. I also interviewed many students about their experiences of the community project. In addition, I accompanied students from UCV and UBV as they conducted their community projects and attended numerous other education programmes across Caracas.

For the first few months I concentrated on observing classes and getting to know the students, facilitators and wider community, thus allowing me to build a rapport with the participants. During this time I had informal talks with people about the nature of my research and also made written notes of discussions and conversations we had. Alongside the main themes and benchmarks I had identified from the literature review, this period enabled me to identify key themes and areas of interest that I used to formulate the questions for my semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1). I started formal, recorded interviews in May 2009. I conducted 67 in-depth, recorded semi-structured interviews with participants in education programmes, many of whom were also Communal Council members. This included 48 with Mission Sucre participants, 6 with Mission Cultura participants and a further 13 with Mission Ribas participants. I also conducted interviews

with 4 government officials, 11 self-named opposition supporters as well as over 30 interviews with participants in pro-government and opposition marches and demonstrations, members of various community organisations including technical committees and Communal Councils and residents of Cano Amarillo and Campo Rico (not all of whom were Chavez supporters: some were neutral, some anti-Chavez and some were opposition supporters). The interviews lasted, on average, from around 20 to 40 minutes. In section 5.2.1, I outlined the key indicators that frame my research, in line with my key research questions, and the way in which I approached the interview process: posing general questions to start and then more specific questions on democracy and socialism and practical experiences of education and participation. In this way I aimed to allow informants to express their own opinions whilst also keeping a focus on the themes I had identified as important in assessing the process in practice.

In addition, I took part in numerous debates and discussions on a more informal basis, both in the areas I was living and in day-to-day interactions in various locations across Caracas. I endeavoured to make notes on these interactions in my field diary as soon after the conversations as possible in order to record key points raised as well as my general thoughts on the nature of these encounters. I also conducted 4 focus groups with students in the Education Missions. In addition I used participant observation of education programmes, Communal Council meetings, demonstrations and public meetings in order to more fully understand the nature of participation and its impact on democratic organisation for change. More in-depth details of data sources are provided in Appendix 2.

Before I started my primary research, I had no fixed idea of the number of people I would interview. Instead, I conducted interviews until it became clear that no new information was emerging in terms of the key thematic areas I was looking at. Again, I had no problems in securing consent to be interviewed, with most people I encountered being very happy to share their experiences. The one area that I would like to have conducted more interviews is with opposition supporters. While there were people within the two communities I lived in and within the Education Missions who openly expressed themselves to be anti-Chavez and/or opposition supporters, a lot of the anti-Chavez people I encountered were on marches and demonstrations where it was difficult to hold a more formal interview. As a result I only conducted 11 recorded interviews with self-proclaimed opposition supporters. Nevertheless, I was able to gather a lot of more informal information from people on marches and demonstrations that gave me a good insight into the main views of those opposed to the Chavez government. Furthermore, as I have

already mentioned, not all of the residents of the two barrios and participants in the education programmes that formed the focus of my research, were pro-Chavez. More information on the questions I used to guide interviews and the key thematic areas that emerged from my literature review, research questions and primary research, are provided in Appendices 1 and 3.

I also kept a personal field diary to record my thoughts and observations and compiled a file of newspaper articles, official documents, pamphlets, community project presentations and Education Mission resources. I attended a range of public meetings, for example meetings to debate the new Law of Education, meetings of academics debating the direction of the process in Venezuela at the International Miranda Centre (CIM) and meetings of Communal Council and other community organisations. I also attended community cultural events, public demonstrations and marches by opposition and pro-Chavez groups and took part in more informal debates with residents of Cano Amarillo on a day-to-day basis. These methods enable me to gain a greater understanding of the process and impact of state-led programmes to facilitate community organisation and the nature of participation in political spaces, in order to gain an in-depth picture of how “el proceso” is developing in Venezuela and how it is viewed by some of the people living through it.

5.5 Analysing and organising data

My primary research produced a large amount of qualitative data that needed to be analysed and presented in a more concise form. Neuman (1997:426) stresses that in general ‘data analysis means a search for patterns in data’. This involves me as a researcher identifying the key themes that emerge from official discourse and from wider theoretical debates, as well as from the people I interviewed and observed, in order to build a picture of how Venezuela’s “Bolivarian Revolution” is developing. The key frameworks and benchmarks that I outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, alongside my own specific research questions and the responses of the people I interviewed, provided the key thematic areas through which I not only conducted my research, as I indicated in section 5.3, but also the framework within which I organised and analysed the primary data from my interviews and observations, as I outlined in section 5.4 and illustrate in Appendix 3. While each of my primary research Chapters is aimed at addressing my over-arching research question and while there are cross-cutting themes in each Chapter, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 are generally structured in terms of my specific research questions 2, 3 and 4 respectively, while Chapter 9 draws more over-arching conclusions.

In the first place I had to transcribe all of the interviews that I had conducted. As a general rule, I tried to do this as soon after the interview as possible. Early transcribing of interviews meant that I could return to the interviewees to clarify any points I was unsure of and/or ask additional questions. Furthermore, it enabled me to identify any new themes that emerged from the interviews that I might want to explore in more detail in subsequent interviews. For example, three areas emerged during the course of my initial interviews that I had not emphasised in my literature review and in the subsequent interview prompt sheet. The first was the importance of personal changes in terms of increased self-confidence, increased self-esteem and visibility that people reported as one of the major changes since the election of President Chavez and a major impact of their participation in the various social programmes and in political arenas more generally. I therefore added a question to my interview prompt sheet about personal changes that people had experienced as well as changes in society more generally. Secondly, it became clear from my initial conversations and interviews that the Communal Councils were viewed by many people as integral to their vision of protagonist, participatory democracy and as key elements in constructing a different kind of relationship between the state and society. My original research plan was to focus on the Education Missions and give a general overview of opportunities for participation in other state-sponsored and autonomous spaces, based on my engagement with community organisations in the two areas where I focused my research and on participation more generally, for example, in demonstrations and public meetings. However, these initial interviews made me realise that an understanding of how the process is developing in practice required a more specific focus on the Communal Council process, as well as an overview of these other forms of community participation. I therefore started to accompany people to Communal Council meetings and interview members about their experiences on a more regular basis. Finally, I had not considered the idea that joining the Missions was viewed by people as an act of democratic participation and “doing democracy” in and of itself. I therefore included this as an additional thematic area when analysing the data from interviews.

Having transcribed all the interviews, I then processed the interview transcripts into key thematic areas (see Appendix 3). I found that many of the categories I had identified overlapped with each other. For example, often people’s means of conceptualising democracy were also an indication of their satisfaction with democracy. In these cases, I included the same quotation under each heading. At this stage, I still had a large amount of data in each thematic area. The next stage was to try and draw more general conclusions from the information provided by the people I had interviewed. In many cases I found that,

under each thematic heading, I had numerous quotations that all said almost the same thing. For example, when asked to conceptualise democracy almost every person I interviewed, pro- and anti-Chavez, referred to the importance of the Constitution and to the differences between representative and participatory democracy. In such cases I therefore selected one or two quotes that could be used to summarise the sentiments of the majority of people I interviewed. In this way, in terms of citing key informants, I endeavoured to identify key points made by specific individuals that were indicative of more general thoughts and experiences of the people I interviewed. In most thematic areas I was able to identify themes that were typical of a wider group, for example, Mission students, community residents who were generally pro-Chavez, or opposition supporters. Again in such cases, I selected one or two quotes that were illustrative of more general sentiments. I conducted this process for each thematic area, whilst also identifying and selecting exceptions and/or contradictions to more general feelings and experiences. In this way I was able to process the texts into a more manageable form whilst still retaining a sense of “typical” responses and themes.

Having completed this process, I then supplemented my primary data with secondary material in the forms of official documents, secondary statistics and secondary research and theory, again disaggregated under the same key thematic headings and sub-headings. This enabled me to triangulate my findings with secondary data to compare and contrast my findings, and also situate the key themes that emerged from the primary research process within wider academic research and theoretical debates. Furthermore, this process enabled me to identify areas where I needed to access more secondary research to support or question my findings. For example, while I felt that my small-scale research enabled me to draw wider conclusions in terms of areas such as the role of the education Missions in enabling the practice of democracy at the micro level, I was wary of drawing general conclusions as to “satisfaction with democracy” and “satisfaction with government”, especially as I focused on two poorer areas of Caracas that might be expected to show more support for the Chavez government and its reforms. However, by conducting additional literature reviews to identify secondary data from large-scale research such as the Latinobarometer, I was able to conclude that my findings were actually typical of wider evaluations of democracy and government. At this stage I also conducted further literature reviews in areas that had emerged as important during the research process, most notably into the Communal Councils which I had mentioned in my original literature review but became much more of a focus during the course of my research.

The thematic structure that emerged from this analysis, alongside the benchmarks that I identified in the literature review and my key research questions, were then used to structure the second part of this thesis where I present my research findings.

I also addressed the range of ethical implications of my research, including the right to confidentiality and the need for consent. The majority of informants that I interviewed and observed gave permission to use their real names. In cases where I was not able to secure formal consent, mainly people I spoke to on demonstrations and at public meetings, I do not use their names to preserve their anonymity. While I did not give people copies of their transcribed interviews, I did discuss with them on an ongoing basis how my thesis was progressing and the preliminary conclusions I was drawing and, on several occasions, I spoke about my research during classes in socio-political formation which gave the respondents an opportunity to discuss my approach and offer additional inputs. I also returned to Venezuela in December 2011 for five weeks with a copy of my near-completed thesis. I was able to discuss the content of my thesis with many of my informants and also translate for them the quotations I had used from their transcripts to illustrate my findings. I have also maintained email contact with many of the Mission Sucre students and residents of Cano Amarillo to update them on my progress and the direction of my research. These processes have given people a chance to comment on my research and on the conclusions that I have drawn from my research.

In line with academic theorising (Richardson 2000; Giddens 1976; Gadamer 1975; Garfinkel 1967; Wittgenstein 1958), with a particular focus on hermeneutic and ethnomethodological approaches, I recognise that the way I present my findings does not give a “true” representation of objective reality; it is socially constructed. The process of selection, interpretation and writing-up of data is shaped by my own value judgements as well as the narrative devices I employ. While I endeavour to allow people’s own stories to lead the direction of the research and use people’s own narratives to illustrate key points, I recognise that ultimately the finished research is based on my own interpretation. I endeavoured to maintain a reflexive approach throughout my research by clearly documenting the way in which I conducted my research and keeping a daily field diary to enable me to reflect on the impact of my own values and background on the way in which I interpret and present data and the conclusions that I draw.

While I realise that it is difficult to make definitive generalisations from my research, triangulating my primary research findings with secondary research, and maintaining a

critical awareness of how material and ideological factors shape the entire research process, enables me to build a general picture of how the Venezuelan process might be unfolding. This enables me to draw conclusions as to how far the state-grassroots processes underway in Venezuela reflect some of the principles of “thick” democracy and/or democratic socialism through popular hegemony. Such analysis forms the basis of the second part of this thesis.

PART II:
PRIMARY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 6:
Education and Social Change
Learning Democracy by Doing: The Social Missions in Action

'Bolívar said that a people can be dominated more, manipulated more, if they are ignorant. We lived for years in a state of ignorance and domination. For people to participate fully they need education. This is why the Missions were created. When the people have consciousness they can't be manipulated. Now the people are changing, they are awakening. Education is the main weapon in the struggle.'
(Tony: Mission Sucre student UNEARTE 2009)

In Chapter Three I established that debates surrounding the links between education and democracy are intrinsically linked to debates over the appropriate mix of representative and/or participatory and direct democracy. I illustrated how underlying conceptualisations of democracy impact on how democracy is developed in and through education. I highlighted the fact that education can be either domesticating or liberating and that education *can* be a motor for change when framed within “thick” conceptualisations of democracy based on active, citizen participation. In such cases the theory and practice of liberatory education becomes central in the struggle to create and extend participatory democracy. Brookfield and Holst (2011) say that radical adult education in particular is concerned with organising education for, and encouraging learning about, the creation of democracy. While this has traditionally been seen as a process of counter-hegemonic learning that takes place outside the state and while state-led projects tend to focus on social stability and social integration rather than social change, I also highlighted the fact that increasingly the idea of “working in and against the state” is being considered. I established that the current process of social change in Venezuela, with its emphasis on the pedagogical dimensions of the project to build “thick” democracy through state-grassroots partnerships, offer an important opportunity to examine how this might develop in practice.

This Chapter examines if and how government discourse is put into practice in and through the government-introduced Education Missions. As Carr and Thesee (2009:285) say, we need to look at how education ‘supports, cultivates and engages in/with democracy’ and this involves examining the organisation of education about, for and as democracy. I therefore explore the extent to which involvement with the Missions increases people’s active and informed participation in wider organisational and decision-making processes. This involves particular reference to education for whom (access), how (organisation and implementation) and to what end (nature of participation) and how education links to wider processes of democratic participation. While it is not possible to generalise from my

findings to the whole of the Missions in practice, particularly as I focussed on just 2 areas of Caracas, the purpose of this Chapter is to examine examples of how government discourse is put into practice and the spaces that have been opened up for learning about and doing democracy; thereby shedding light on how far the education Missions contribute to the formation of the protagonist, participatory democracy the Venezuelan Constitution guarantees and which the Chavez government claims to be pursuing.

6.1 Democratisation of access

The current Venezuelan Constitution stresses the goal of human development and the realisation of human potential within the wider framework of protagonist, participatory democracy (CBRV 1999). As I established in Chapter 3, this cannot occur in a vacuum. It requires a reduction in inequality and the satisfaction of basic needs to overcome some of the barriers to participation faced by poor people, as well as the development of a collective consciousness and the capacity to participate effectively (Lebowitz 2007; Macpherson 1977). Furthermore, when thinking in terms of the *democratisation* of access to education, it is not enough that access be extended to previously excluded sectors. Invited spaces need to foster access and inclusion but more importantly need to be accompanied by the reinvigoration of the *right* to services and the *right* to participate, rather than these being seen as a favour or charity (Gaventa 2004a,b). The emphasis on rights reinforces feelings of self-esteem and belonging that are empowering in and of themselves and also consolidates the idea of collective well-being and state responsibility for social welfare.

These factors are particularly salient in the Venezuelan case where by 1998 the country was marked by high levels of poverty and exclusion, high levels of inequality and where previous social welfare provision was offered as a favour from government rather than as a right of citizens. In Chapter 4 I highlighted the measures that have been put in place since Chavez came to power that have served to tackle inequality and exclusion and redistribute wealth to satisfy basic social needs, thereby addressing the basic prerequisites for building participatory democracy. Furthermore, I established that the Social Missions aim to be more than compensatory welfare schemes. They are a central part of the project to build greater participation in social policy provision and society more generally as a right of citizenship. This section argues that the education system, particularly the various Education Missions, *has* contributed to a democratisation of access to education which is a crucial starting point in the development of “thick” democracy, though more still needs to be done to ensure that this wider inclusion does not also create new exclusions.

6.1.1 The expansion of education post-1998

Since winning the elections in 1998, education has been one of the government's top priorities with the greatest increase in state resources from pre-school up to University level. Higher Education (HE) enrolment has increased among all socio-economic groups since Chavez came to power. This illustrates the general commitment of the government to the expansion of access to free public education at all levels and for society in general, not just Chavez supporters. Griffiths and Williams (2009) argue that the marked expansion of Free State education up to and including undergraduate University education is, in itself, quite radical in the current global neoliberal context.

Table 1: Higher Education Attendance of 20-24 year olds according to social strata (in %)

	1981	1997	2002	2006
1 (poorest)	28.5	16.4	20.8	36.7
2	23.7	20	27.8	39.7
3	23.9	24.5	29.7	44.8
4	25.9	31.3	39.3	49.5
5 (richest)	33.3	43.8	54.7	63.4

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL): a regional Commission of the United Nations (2008)

However, as the CEPAL figures reveal, by 2002 the percentage of the poorest students enrolling in University in the 20-24 age group had still not reached its 1981 figures and the richest groups were benefitting the most. Furthermore older people who had been excluded from access to education in the past were still not taking advantage of Free State Education for a number of reasons. The census of 2003 revealed that many older people were illiterate or had not graduated High School or Secondary school and so did not have the qualifications to enter University and many who were eligible complained of ongoing exclusionary practices and hidden costs by the "old" Universities that disadvantaged poor people (Petras 2008). Finally, Barroso (1997) found that barrio communities were shaped by prolonged processes of exclusion and were characterized by low self-esteem that served as another barrier to education.

Given the commitments of the Constitution to promoting a fairer, more just society, there was therefore a clear need for targeted programmes to include the poorest groups. It was with a vision of social inclusion and the widening of access to education to previously excluded sectors in line with Constitutional guarantees of education as a fundamental human right that the Education Missions were introduced (Wilpert 2007a; D'Elia 2006; Raby 2006).

6.1.2 The Education Missions: increased access *and* a discourse of rights

The Social Missions, including the Education Missions, were introduced in 2003 following the radicalisation of the Chavez government after the coup and lock-out of 2002-2003, and in response to the 2003 census that revealed the extent of the educational deficit. The census found that 1.5 million people were illiterate, more than two million people had only reached primary level education and a further two million had been unable to complete secondary school education. Finally, a further ½ million secondary school graduates who qualified for University admission had been unable to, despite a desire to attend (MPPES 2009; D'Elia 2006:91). This was largely due to the increase of hidden costs such as fees to register, take exams and graduate, quota systems and selective admissions procedures that favoured the upper middle and upper classes (Sanchez 2007; Raby 2006; Ellner 2003; Hellinger 2003). The percentage of working class students who applied to University and received a place dropped from 70 per cent of applicants in 1984 to 19 per cent in 1998 (Wilpert 2007a).

Following the census Chavez announced the introduction of the various Education Missions to address these shortcomings. The first of these was the Mission Robinson literacy campaign launched in July 2003. This was followed by high school equivalency education via Mission Ribas and Higher Education provision for previously excluded sectors via Mission Sucre later that year. Mission Cultura, a teacher training course, followed in 2005 and Mission Alma Mater, designed to extend access to mainstream University education, in 2007.

1.3 million people have become literate through Mission Robinson and Venezuela was declared “free” of illiteracy by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2005 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). Over 2 million people have graduated from Missions Robinson and Ribas and, by 2008, 571,917 students were studying in Mission Sucre, with 30,000 graduates so far. Enrolment in Higher Education in general has increased from 700,000 in 1998 to over 2 million in 2008 (MPPES 2009). According to UNESCO (2010) Venezuela has the world's 5th highest rate of University enrolment, with 83 per cent of eligible citizens currently enrolled in higher education. This represents a 193 per cent increase since 1999. The government has also extended the system of grants given to students to enable access. In 1998 50,986 grants were allocated. This had risen to 350,477 by 2008. Of these grants, in 2008, 15.3 per cent went to the highest socioeconomic groups, 32.2 per cent to the middle class and 52.2 per cent to the working class and poor (MPPES 2009). Again these figures suggest that access to

education and financial assistance has been expanded across all social sectors and not just for Chavez supporters. The Social Missions have served to incorporate previously excluded sectors into the education system *and* redistribute resources to the poor and to society more generally.

Importantly, the municipalisation of education via the Missions has been central in enabling people to access education and to feel that they can take an active part in the organisation of their education; enabling the construction of knowledge in ‘flexible and accessible places’ (MINCI 2005). While programmes are validated by the Institute of Higher Education (IE) and each course area has standards of attainment that have to be reached, the emphasis is on co-responsibility and social control by local actors to transform the education system. This municipalisation is a democratic exercise in itself in that the Missions are located and co-ordinated within and by local communities and this has empowering and self-esteem impacts (Ellner 2010). Not only has access been extended, but the Constitution and Organic Law of Education clearly guarantee the *right* to Free State education up to undergraduate level and there is now widespread awareness among the people of these rights; in itself a significant act of increasing consciousness, reinforcing ideas of citizenship and promoting democratic involvement beyond periodic voting.

6.1.3 Views of people in the Missions

These findings tie in closely with the experiences of many of the participants that I interviewed in the various education Missions in 2009-2010. Their testimonies reveal that even after Chavez came to power, many poor people still lacked self-confidence and believed that University education was not for “the likes of them”. In the first place several reported that they had taken part in organising and conducting the original census in 2003 and that this was an important first step in increasing both self-esteem and a sense of belonging. One student, Francisco (October 2009), explained that for many years the people in the barrios felt left out of national development and felt that they were invisible. He used the example of the fact that pre-Chavez most maps of Caracas did not show many of the barrios, instead they appeared as green areas. This illustrated and reinforced the idea that the poor were “outside” society and therefore worthless. He explained that the census allowed people to take an active part in their community through organising and conducting the census and that the process brought communities into direct contact with government and state officials, many for the first time. The census process reinforced the feeling of belonging and self-worth and the idea of education as a right rather than, as seen during the Punto Fijo years, as a privilege or gift “from above”.

Many also explained that the Education Missions had allowed them to access education whereas before they were excluded, mainly for financial reasons and because of active exclusion by the “old” universities. The idea of bringing the University to the people rather than them having to go to the old Universities was symbolically as well as practically important. They were now able to work during the day and study at night in a centre near where they lived and were able to take an active part in the organisation and implementation of the programmes.

The testimonies of the people I interviewed echo the findings of Lacruz (2006), Cartaya (2007) and D’Elia (2006) and add weight to their assertions that the Education Missions have had an inclusive and empowering effect on the poor who feel that for the first time they have the right to an education and that they are important in the process of nation-building. They argue that this brings a strong sense of self-worth, ownership and belonging that are important in developing in people the idea that they can become co-creators of their own society. They are the basic starting points for and essence of participatory democracy.

6.1.4 New exclusions?

Undoubtedly the education system in general and the Missions in particular have fostered greater social inclusion and democratisation of access to education. Nevertheless some critics argue that certain groups, particularly those from higher socio-economic groups and those who are openly anti-Chavez, are excluded from access to the Missions (Penfold-Becerra 2007).

However, as I indicated in section 6.1.2, statistics produced both internally and externally point to an increase in funding, infrastructural investment, study grants and increased enrolment across *all* levels of education and for all socio-economic groups. Members of all social classes have also made use of the Education Missions as Table 2 shows.

Table 2: Enrolment in the Education Missions according to social strata (in %)

	Robinson I	Robinson II	Ribas	Sucre
Poor	39.1%	41.5%	35.5%	19.9%
Working class	33.3%	30.3%	29.8%	25.2%
Middle class	20.6%	18.3%	24.4%	32.3%
Upper class	7%	9.9%	10.3%	22.6%

Source: Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) (2007)

While the poorest predominate in the lower levels of the education Missions this is not surprising as they were the most excluded from primary education in the past. Middle and Upper class students are in the majority at higher levels of the Education Missions. Again this is perhaps not surprising as the middle class were excluded from Higher Education during the cutbacks of the 1980s and 1990s. Muhr and Verger (2006) conclude that while the Education Missions were introduced specifically to compensate for previously excluded people, this does not appear to be at the expense of higher socio-economic groups, suggesting a general widening of access rather than new exclusions.

In terms of my own research I found that that while the majority of people would probably fall into the lower quintiles in terms of income, there was a significant number of people in each of the programmes who either already had a profession, were retired professionals or were affluent housewives, who were studying for pleasure and/or a means of supporting the process. What was also apparent, and probably more important in the light of claims of exclusion, is that while the majority of students in each programme were pro-Chavez, many held a more neutral stance and saw themselves as “floating voters”. There were also several students and facilitators who were openly anti-Chavez and his government and who described themselves as opposition supporters but who had taken advantage of the educational opportunities that had been opened up.

I was also not aware of any overt exclusion in terms of the admission process. I was able to observe the admissions processes at UNEARTE, Cano Amarillo and Fermin Toro, Campo Rico. Students need no proof, for example, of Party membership as they did in many programmes prior to 1997. Any opposition supporters I spoke to on marches and in the local community gave the impression that they choose not to join the Missions because they associate them with the President, rather than being actively excluded from joining or setting up an education programme. While this is still a problem that needs to be overcome, it suggests that *if* there is an imbalance of socio-economic groups in the Missions it is more to do with self-exclusion along political lines than exclusion by the programmes themselves.

In terms of the Social Missions more generally, I again found no evidence of exclusion. In fact, many people who were staunch opponents of the Chavez regime spoke to me about using, for example, the government subsidised MERCAL foodstores and free health facilities. Nevertheless, as the Missions have relative autonomy in terms of their organisation and control it is quite possible that some individual programmes actively

exclude certain groups. For example Wilpert (2007a) says that while there is no concrete evidence of discrimination, an emphasis on collective responsibility can easily become “we help our own” and that the extreme polarization in the country emphasises the idea that “we have to stick together” and that this may lead to exclusions in certain areas.

6.1.5 New Spaces for Clientelism?

Patronage and clientelism were rife in Venezuela prior to the Chavez government and Wilpert (2007a:198) says that anecdotal evidence suggests that it is still ‘fairly common’ both among Chavez supporters and government and among the opposition supporters and Parties. This is supported by Penfold -Becerra (2007) and Hawkins and Hansen (2006) who argue that participation in the Venezuelan government’s poverty reduction programmes in general has strong clientelistic overtones and that this undermines the principle of citizenship essential to democracy.

Grindle (1977:30) defines clientelism as ‘informal patron-client bonds based on informal personal exchanges of resources between actors of unequal status with no legal basis’. She argues that clientelism diminishes the democratic nature of inclusion. Many opposition supporters I spoke to argue that the Education Missions and the Social Missions more generally are nothing more than a means of buying votes and that people only join them to get a handout. For example Alvino, a resident of Cano Amarillo said, ‘as with most things in this country the Missions don’t work because 50 per cent of the people who join the Missions are looking for a payout. You see it in all the barrios; in this barrio. The government says to the people “You come here and we’ll pay you” and I don’t agree with that’ (May 2009). Similarly, I attended an opposition march in August 2009 organised by Capriles Radonski, the opposition Governor of Miranda State, to demand more funds from central government. The march passed by the Teresa Carreno Theatre in central Caracas where Mission Ribas students were attending their graduation ceremony. A group of around 30-40 of the marchers stopped and started to shout ‘Thieves, Thieves’ at the students who were entering the building. When I asked them why, several people said that the students in the Missions were stealing their money in order to study. It was not the idea of government financing for social services that they objected to, but what they saw as funding for “Chavistas” via the Chavez government. Even those that support the process recognise a lack of consciousness among some people and a willingness to accept ongoing clientelistic practices. For example one Mission Sucre student from Campo Rico said, ‘there are many people who are Chavistas because they get benefits. They are the kind of people that can be fooled, like happened before, where if they got money to go on a march

they'd go. This is a problem carried over from the past. They lack consciousness. But we understand that the change is little by little. Education is the key' (September 2009). Hawkins and Hansen (2006) found that while many people in the Missions talk about rights and participatory democracy they also have a strong charismatic linkage to President Chavez that may undermine their ability to act independently. Inclusion in the Missions may therefore become more a means of pacification than inclusion that can empower. However, they go on to say that these linkages are more charismatic than clientelistic and that people join government-sponsored schemes in order to improve their community rather than a direct exchange of resources in return for votes. Similarly I found that while many people in the Missions have a strong emotional bond with President Chavez with many saying 'Thanks to Chavez...' when talking about their new educational opportunities, they are not passive followers of the government line and many emphasise that the Missions are in existence as a right and a duty of government as enshrined in the Constitution and Education Law, rather than a means of buying people's support. For example, Evelia, a Mission Cultura student said, 'they say that the government just hands out money to keep support. This money is our right: the Constitution says so. We don't receive gifts from the state, we administer state resources' (December 2009). As Torres (2002, 1998) points out, social welfare is considered a right of citizenship in Welfare States and while people may vote for a government that guarantees these rights, they are not generally seen as clientelistic relations. Despite recognition by Chavez supporters that some people still passively accept payments from above, there is a clear sense among most people I spoke to that money is channelled via the Missions as a right rather than a payment for loyalty.

Furthermore Hawkins and Hansen (2006:119) argue that as a programme becomes more institutionalised clientelism reduces. They define institutionalisation as 'the process of developing a unique identity as an organisation (an ideational component) and a set of rules to guide their organisation's decisions and activities (a material component)'. The new Organic Law of Education (2009) guarantees 'the institutional development of, permanence of, and optimal functioning of the Education Missions in their distinct forms' and, after eight years of operation, the Missions are developing a legal space and a unique identity as organisations. They also have clear guidelines for organisation and relative organisational autonomy and so are more than informal exchanges of resources between actors of unequal status. So, while the Missions are undoubtedly a vote winner for many people, they are not, in general, based on clientelistic relations.

Nevertheless Ellner (2011) and Penfold-Becerra (2007) argue that the Chavez government has used the social programmes to mobilise support along political lines. For example, Ellner cites the prominent role the education Missions played in the February 2009 Referendum on lifting term limits. During the campaign Chavez himself declared that ‘for the first time the Missions have presented themselves as political actors and as a vanguard of the revolutionary struggle’ (Speech in Zulia, January 20th 2009 cited in Ellner 2011: 438). However Ellner does also stress that there is much more to this popular mobilisation than purely responding to calls from above and that Chavez supporters ‘hardly represent an uncritical mass which endorses all the actions of its leaders’ (Ellner 2009a:2). Political victories such as the overthrow of the coup in 2002 have empowered the Chavistas who see themselves as active participants rather than passive followers. This was shown in the grassroots rebellion against the decision by the upper echelons of the PSUV to nominate Party candidates for the 2010 National Assembly elections. Due to pressure from grassroots members the Party leadership announced that all candidates would be voted for by Party members. He also points out that what the Chavez government has done has been to clearly break with the idea that education is a neutral process. Programmes aim to counter-balance the overt politicisation in FEDECAMERAS, the opposition media, the church, private education and also many public educational institutions, thereby levelling the playing field.

Overall it would appear that while it is probably true that Venezuelans tend to self-select into government programmes for ideological reasons (Hawkins 2010a), the Missions have a legal basis, clear procedures of organisation, there is no partisan conditionality to entrance, there is a strong sense of autonomy among students, facilitators and organisers and their provision is framed within a discourse of rights as enshrined in the Constitution rather than as political favours. This suggests that they are not merely clientelistic programmes. While some students may be attracted by the chance of study grants there are thousands studying who receive no grants so the claim that the Missions “buy” support cannot explain the large numbers studying and giving up five nights a week for no remuneration. Nevertheless, for many there is a charismatic rather than clientelistic link with Chavez and the movement and it is possible that individual programmes could be manipulated along clientelistic lines.

Hanoman and Hunn (2008) conclude that the democratisation of education in Venezuela in terms of the widening access to all levels of the education system as a right is an important starting point for participatory democracy. However, while these are necessary elements

for participatory democracy they are not sufficient. The idea of education as a right is not peculiar to Venezuela, nor does it guarantee a more participatory, protagonist form of democracy. Social democratic governments have also implemented Welfare States with free education promoted as a right. However Cornwall (2004) and Cornwall and Coelho (2004) caution that all too often invited spaces are created in a top-down direction and, while they may extend democracy, they may ultimately restrict transformation.

As Farrington and Bebbington (1993) point out, it is not enough to look at how wide in terms of inclusion the participatory process is, we also need to look at how deep it is in terms of decision-making power at various levels. It is therefore important to examine how participation in the Missions is organised internally as well as how education links with wider processes and mechanisms of decision-making and social change. The sections that follow examine the extent to which the Education Missions have contributed to the democratisation of knowledge, the democratisation of organisation and the democratisation of participatory practices, both within the Missions and in relation to wider social practices.

6.2 Democratisation of knowledge

Heaney (1993:16) argues that ‘the most effective power is exercised by the control of knowledge’. During the Punto Fijo years in Venezuela, access to knowledge was used as a form of control. As Jose, a Mission Sucre student in UNEARTE explained, ‘we suffered from a poverty of knowledge and this lack of knowledge was a form of slavery’ (February 2009). While the democratisation of *access* to education since Chavez came to power has been important in extending access to knowledge for previously excluded sectors, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the democratisation of knowledge. Democratisation of knowledge requires democratic participation in the way education is organised and in curriculum development, as well as expansion of whose knowledge is valued.

Article 15 of the Law of Education of 2009 says that the purpose of education is ‘to develop a new political culture based on protagonist participation and the strengthening of popular power; the democratisation of knowledge’. The emphasis is on the municipalisation of education and the need for widespread participation of academics, students, workers and communities in the co-management of education. Sanchez (2007) explains that official discourse emphasises that the Missions are a means of giving power to the people so that they can become protagonists in their own development and in so

doing become protagonists in the wider project of social change via democratic participation. They are a means of facilitating the construction of new organisational relations between the state and society through greater grassroots input in the organisation, content and implementation of programmes. The discourse of the Education Missions draws heavily on Freirean conceptions of popular education in terms of horizontal relations of organisation within the programme, the co-production of the curriculum and the importance of debate and dialogue. Guidelines for democratic planning are provided but it is up to each programme to put them into practice. The idea is that state institutions participate in the organisation of the Missions but the programmes are not subordinate to traditional bureaucratic structures.

This is reminiscent of Lenin's dual power or Gramsci's war of position in that, at least in theory, participants are able to practice alternative modes of democratic organisation and develop a new hegemony based on democratic co-operation that holds the possibility of wider structural impacts. It is therefore important to examine how far the Education Missions have contributed to more horizontal relations of planning, organising and implementation and if education enables people to learn about, debate and practice alternatives that can challenge existing social relations and systems of knowledge production or complement wider alternative processes. Testimonies from the people I interviewed as well as my observations of particular programmes suggest that the Education Missions have enabled discourse to be put into practice, as I illustrate in subsequent sections.

6.2.1 Horizontal relations of organisation

As outlined in section 6.1.3, while initiated by the Chavez government, the Missions are predominantly based in, organised and run by the community in parallel to the existing education system which allows them to escape much of the centralised state bureaucracy whilst still developing state-grassroots relations. Certainly the programmes I observed were based on democratic forms of organisation. For example students vote for their programme Co-ordinators, their Programme Spokespeople and their Subject spokespeople and have the right to revoke all elected persons. Students, Facilitators and Coordinators in all the programmes I observed also talked about more horizontal relations in terms of planning programmes, transparency about budgetary figures and resource allocation, and in the construction of the curriculum. The Missions do still have elements of vertical organisation in that they have to register with the central Foundation and courses are

validated by the Ministry of Education but there is much less bureaucracy and considerable localised input and autonomy (Ziritt and Huerta 2007).

When problems did arise, mainly due to the fact that the Education Centres were controlled by members of the opposition who were unhappy that the Education Missions were operating on “their” premises, participants said that students, facilitators and coordinators worked together both with and without the Ministry of Education to resolve their issues. Problems I observed in two centres included Mission participants arriving at classes to find there was no electricity, that resources were missing or that locks had been changed on the classrooms to deny them access. In both Centres the participants were aware of their rights and that the buildings were public property and students mobilised to demand that the Ministry of Education intervened to resolve their problems. In both cases the Ministry responded to students demands. These examples show that students do not passively accept problems but know their rights, seek solutions to their problems and take an active role in the running of their programmes and the management of the Aldeas (Centres). This is further illustrated in the way that the curriculum is organised.

6.2.2 Co-construction of the curriculum

The co-construction of the curriculum is most apparent in Mission Sucre. Missions Robinson and Ribas use video curriculums and are therefore less flexible in terms of curriculum organisation but there is still space for debate and reflection. Mission Sucre delivers undergraduate courses in key thematic areas such as Environmental Management, Social Communication, Travel and Tourism, Public Administration and Electronic Engineering. While guidelines are set as to core competencies that have to be reached, there is considerable scope for students to adapt the curriculum to their own contexts and experiences. This idea of constructing the curriculum out of the life experiences, aspirations, demands and problems of the participants was central to Freire’s work and is evident in the programmes I observed as this section demonstrates.

For example, classes in Environmental Management at Fermin Toro High School were closely linked to the geography and environment of the local area and to Venezuela as a whole. While some sessions resembled more traditional “banking” education in terms of imparting knowledge about weather cycles, environmental degradation, geological formation and environmental law, students were also encouraged to relate this knowledge to their own context and experiences and a lot of time was given to dialogue and critical discussion of causes and solutions to environmental problems both locally and globally.

Furthermore these classes were complemented by practical classes where students went out into their local environment to “put theory into practice”. For example students studied problems of waste water, rubbish and recycling in their local area, looked at soil erosion, tested water purity in local canals and rivers and examined environmental projects such as park planning and maintenance. Clear links were made between learning and the community and the students worked much more in groups rather than in competition with each other, thus emphasising the importance of the active construction of knowledge to advance both individual and collective interests.

This co-construction is also evident in the classes in socio-political formation. While these classes are a compulsory part of the Education Missions, their organisation and content is communally constructed within each programme and adapted to the particular needs, skills and interests of the students and facilitators. There is a facilitator specifically for these classes; in the programmes I observed usually a graduate in economics, social sciences or politics. The government does not provide primers for socio-political formation, allowing for considerable flexibility in terms of individual course content and format. In Campo Rico the course took the form of classes by the facilitators on political theory as well as classes where students could present on a topic of their choice which the group then discussed. Arnaldo, the facilitator for socio-political formation in UNEARTE, explained how their curriculum arose out of the interests and desires of the students themselves, based on a preliminary joint diagnostic (November 2009). The course was entitled “Socialism for the 21st Century” as students had expressed an interest in learning more about what the term means, its origins and how theory could be applied to the Venezuelan context. The course entailed classes in socio-political theory including the work of Comte, Durkheim, Marx and Gramsci as well as student presentations and debates. Rather than transmitting the government line, these classes developed from the demands of the students and enabled them to learn about a range of political theory.

The expansion of education and new ways of organising education within the Education Missions has contributed to the democratisation of knowledge in terms of reinforcing the idea of education as a right, who has access to knowledge and, as this section illustrates, in terms of what and whose knowledge is valued. The control of knowledge has been extended beyond traditional “experts” to include popular input in the way education is organised and in the content of that education. While I cannot generalise from the programmes I observed that all education Missions are run in a democratic manner, the classes I observed and the testimonials of the students illustrate that the space exists for the

collective organisation of education and the collective construction of the curriculum. This suggests that the Education Missions can be spaces for the democratic organisation and implementation of education programmes that enable people to learn about and develop skills in democratic organisation. This is not about idealising people's knowledge and skills or their ability to self-govern but developing democratic spaces in which they can develop as learners, enhance their knowledge and practice democracy for themselves, as the next section explores in more detail.

6.2.3 Practising democracy at the micro level

The attention to prefigurative practice that I discussed in sections 2.2.4 and 3.4.1 is apparent in the way the Education Missions have been organised and implemented and it is this that Hanoman and Hunn (2008) say distinguishes the Missions and the Venezuelan process more generally from social democratic and top-down socialist endeavours. They examined how far the Education Missions are instruments for and in participatory democracy and found that, in terms of internal organisation, the Missions give people a say in how their "society" works and enable people to develop their potential to do so. They conclude that by bringing democracy closer to the people the Education Missions give people the opportunity to increase consciousness, develop ideas on what democracy means and develop skills in the practice of democracy; skills and knowledge that may be transferable to wider society beyond the Missions. A key difference in Venezuela is that alongside an emphasis on rights there is this emphasis on democratic organisation and community participation rather than top-down provision, and this is what is "radical" in the Venezuelan case (Wilpert 2007a).

This is supported by my own research as well as a range of academic theorists such as Raby (2006) and D'Elia (2005) who argue that popular participation in the planning, organisation and implementation of the Social Missions has been instigated from their inception and that this allows people to practice democracy on the micro scale. Such participatory practices have the potential of promoting social learning and citizenship development at both the individual and collective level that can be transferred to other settings (Schugurensky 2004a, b).

Freire (1970:48) said that 'the oppressed are not marginalsliving "outside" society. They have always been inside; inside the structure which made them "beings for others". The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression but to transform that structure so that they become "beings for themselves"'. The Missions are much more than

compensatory welfare schemes designed to integrate people into existing structures. They constitute a form of “dual power” or “war of position” that enhances participatory democracy by enabling people to practice alternative modes of organisation at the micro level, in parallel with existing state institutions and practices, and creating space for participants to build their expectations of, demand for and ideas on how to achieve their desired future society. With this comes the possibility of consolidating an alternative ideological hegemony that can challenge existing institutions and processes. The Missions therefore have an important impact on the “democratisation of knowledge” by enhancing people’s ability to “learn democracy by doing”, expanding whose knowledge “counts” and democratising control over knowledge production.

6.3 Democratisation through knowledge: what sort of education to promote what sort of democracy?

In Chapter 3 I highlighted that it is increasingly acknowledged that every education system has an underlying agenda, regardless of the type of regime. Education in all societies plays a political as well as educative role, either to reproduce existing relations and maintain hegemony or promote social change. This is particularly apparent in programmes of what is variously called political education, citizenship education or popular education that have been practised at various times by regimes of very different ideological orientation. Education programmes that aim to strengthen democracy can have very different motivations, underlying assumptions and outcomes and many regimes across the political spectrum have used education to maintain or promote social arrangements, foster political legitimacy and develop their idea of the desired citizen (Rubenson 2006; Parker 2005; Westheimer and Kahne 2004; Harber 1991).

While many have also encouraged the participation of citizens, encouraged the idea of the “democratic person” and have used the language of liberation, empowerment and justice, very few state-led initiatives have shown a clear commitment to building critical consciousness and creating spaces and opportunities whereby people can become active agents in the restructuring of state-society relations. However, in sections 3.4.1 and 3.5 I highlighted that while many see developing critical literacy in a state-based education system as an oxymoron (Luke 2000; Azevedo 1998), traditions of critical and popular education as well as examples such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua illustrate the possibility of state-based education to promote critical thought and structural change.

I also outlined how Gandin and Apple's (2002) typology of "thick" and "thin" democracy is useful in examining in more detail the links between education and democracy and democratisation through knowledge. I concluded that any regime that aims to construct "thick" democracy needs to move beyond a narrow view of education and democracy to emphasise critical thought and political action (Carr 2008; McLaren 2007; Gandin and Apple 2002; Guttman 1999; Giroux 1988). This section examines the idea of 'democratisation *through* knowledge'; how what is taught contributes to the development of particular types of citizen and conceptualisations of democracy. I examine the extent to which the content of the Education Missions promotes critical thought *and* democratic engagement through an examination of what is being taught in the Missions, what sort of citizen is encouraged and within what framework of democracy.

6.3.1 Socio-political formation in Venezuela: critical consciousness or indoctrination?

Ideological education forms a central element of the Education Missions and the 5th Motor of the Revolution stresses the need for "education with socialist values". Official literature stresses the need for integrating dialogue and critical thought into all subject disciplines. All students, regardless of subject area, also have compulsory weekly classes in socio-political studies. Ideological classes are argued to be important in consolidating education about, for and through democracy within a framework where democracy is conceptualised as combining representative, direct and participatory democracy. Socio-political education in the Missions is seen as important to break with the individualism and domination of past hegemony and, by building critical consciousness, to constructing a new hegemony of the people.

For example Francisco, a facilitator in Mission Sucre, Campo Rico outlined the importance of socio-political study in the Missions saying, 'you have to socialise people and this is very difficult. It's more than anything an ideological problem. Many people are with the process but they don't understand it. Many people will go on a march, put on a red shirt but they don't know why they are marching. So ideologically we are lacking. The Missions are an important space in which to start to change this' (November 2009). While the construction of a new hegemony is generally seen as important by many Venezuelan people, it is important to examine in more detail whose hegemony is being constructed; the Chavez government's, the people's, or do the two coincide? Is there space for the co-creation of a new hegemony based on participatory, protagonist democracy? By examining what is being taught, how it is taught and with what goals and outcomes, I explore if socio-political education lives up to these proclamations and expectations and allows for the

development of critical consciousness and promotion of autonomous action, or if it is more an attempt to consolidate the hegemony of government.

Critics of the classes in socio-political formation, including the majority of opposition supporters I interviewed, argue that it is a clear case of government indoctrination to enforce their hegemony, based on Cuba-style indoctrination. Griffiths and Williams (2009) point out that one of the problems with political education in Cuba was that the liberatory potential of political formation was often reduced to “banking” style enforcement of official ideologies and an emphasis on education to serve the needs of the economy, with limited opportunity for critical engagement. Similarly Arnove and Torres (1995) argue that in Nicaragua, while education programmes such as the National Literacy Campaign and Popular Basic Education did allow for debate and discussion of grassroots problems and demands, there was also a tendency for them to act as forums to transmit the political line of the Sandinistas.

In Venezuela clear links are also made between education and the economy and there is also an emphasis on the need to create the “new person” and instil new values as was seen in Cuba and Nicaragua. However many of the students and facilitators I interviewed refer to the influence of Simon Rodriguez, Freire and Fals Borda on Venezuelan education and say that the main goal is ‘rescuing humanist values: ideological principles of justice, truth, peace, equality and social participation’ (Gilverto: Assistant Co-ordinator of Mission Sucre, Campo Rico, September 2009). They argue that the values that are taught are not about teaching loyalty to the government or the imposition of a doctrine, they are a commitment to change. This is supported by Griffiths (2009) who says that the values that are stressed are universal values of solidarity and humanity rather than simply trying to enforce obedience to the government “line”. Certainly the education Missions do have an overtly political agenda: to construct an alternative democracy. While Ellner (2011, 2009a) argues that this overt politicisation violates the separation of powers between public and private spheres supporters argue that, while this may be true, it is done overtly with the clear sense that “the personal is political” in line with principles of popular education that call for an overt commitment to the oppressed. Socio-political formation in Venezuela is seen as a means of counter-balancing the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism and exploring alternatives.

Testimonies of students and facilitators as well as my observations of socio-political classes and classes more generally suggest that the accusations of indoctrination are

exaggerated. The organisation of the classes allows for debate and dialogue, especially as the students have input on the curriculum and there is no primer for socio-political education dictated from above as I discussed in section 6.2. Any government-produced materials that were used stress the rights and duties guaranteed in the Constitution and the importance of protagonist participation, rather than reinforcing a particular doctrine. Also the works of theorists such as Freire, Gramsci, Gadotti and Marti are distributed either for free or at discounted prices in government-subsidised bookstores; indicating that a wide range of political and pedagogical theory is made available by the government and is read by many people.

For example in March 2009 I was on the metro reading Lenin's "States and Revolution" and a man next to me asked what I thought about it. He said that he thought some of his arguments were flawed and that he preferred Rosa Luxemburg's work because she stressed that you can't achieve socialism with the control of the state by a vanguard Party that dictates the decisions; you need grassroots democratic participation from the start. We then went on to talk about Gramsci and anarchist thought. The man worked full-time as a metro maintenance worker and had learned to read and write through Mission Robinson and was now studying in Mission Ribas. Conversations like this are not rare. Debates on the metro in the supermarket and in the street are an everyday occurrence. Education in the Missions contributes to this but there is also a saying in Venezuela that "education is everywhere". While detractors argue that political education is a means for the President to consolidate his position and indoctrinate the people, this is not how most of the people I spoke to view the process. The President talks a lot about the works of Gramsci, Chomsky and Marx among others and people do listen to what he says, but they also go away and read the texts for themselves and form their own opinions.

The testimonies of students I interviewed as well as observations of class debates also suggest that students are developing skills that they use to critically evaluate their society and that they are not simply repeating the government "line" or being taught allegiance to the Chavez government. For example, one Mission Sucre student from Campo Rico I interviewed explained that 'socio-political theory is concerned with political formation, but not political formation in terms of the political thought of the Party. No: political from the point of view of society. It's about realising the role that you have as an individual within the community and wider society: what's known as emancipatory or liberatory education. Not just education but building consciousness as a social being' (October 2009). Similarly Rogelio, a Mission Sucre student in Cano Amarillo, said that 'people without education,

who lack consciousness, are easily dominated. We want political knowledge so we can understand what position our country is in and how we can help our country. And this is not a form of brain manipulation; it's democracy. We are gaining consciousness' (March 2010).

I found that there is considerable scope for debate within the classes, not only to develop critiques of neoliberalism but also the changes made since the election of Chavez in 1998. I attended many classes where students engaged in lively critical debates about particular articles of the Constitution, particular Laws, problems with particular departments and individuals in government, PDVSA, private business and communal councils. For example, many expressed ongoing shortcomings of state and government in terms of continued centralisation of power and of ongoing problems with clientelism and corruption, highlighting that some within the current regime are actively seeking to perpetuate this old hegemony at the macro level and that old norms are, at times, reproduced in new forms of community participation at the micro level. For example one student from Mission Sucre, UNEARTE, said 'there are still people who say they are with the revolution but they are there to steal. We know this but with greater consciousness we can change this' (December 2009). Similarly Carmen, a student in Mission Sucre, Campo Rico, said that the classes have given her the tools to fight for the society that she wants and that this is her right in a democratic society. She said 'we have much greater ability to organise ourselves and we have more ideological knowledge. For example if the government do something I don't agree with I don't just have to accept it. I have many ideas about what to do' (October 2010).

Students also discussed measures that they felt still needed to be put in place such as a stronger more independent mechanism of social control and aspects of the process that they felt had not moved forward sufficiently such as economic reform and social service infrastructure, particularly housing and health care provision. My observations and interviews with students suggest that classes in political formation contribute to the development of critical consciousness that goes beyond securing passive support for government hegemony and that students are developing skills which they use to critique progress made to date. Certainly many students I spoke to, both pro- and anti-Chavez, were able to and very willing to articulate their critiques and views on what still needs to change, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.

Nevertheless D'Elia (2006) and Hanoman and Hunn (2008) suggest that while there may not be overt indoctrination in the Missions there may be more subtle forces that restrict the full development of critical consciousness. They found that while people do feel that they can play a part in their own and the nation's development and that they have the knowledge, power and skills to do so, teaching and learning is only partly transformative in that the education process is restricted within the structure of the government's political ideology and discourse which limits discourse in opposition to it, thus limiting the scope of critical consciousness.

I agree, in part, with their findings. Firstly, the strong charismatic linkage that many people have with President Chavez may impact on critical debate. Furthermore the extreme polarisation in Venezuelan society restricts opportunities for meaningful debate because the hard line opposition refuse to acknowledge anything positive in government policies and programmes and the hard line "Chavistas" refuse to acknowledge any critiques from the opposition. There is also a culture within the wider pro-Chavez movement that promotes the idea that "you're either with us or against us" and that a criticism of the government is ammunition for the opposition. Outside of the education Missions I have been in group discussions where some Chavez supporters are very quick to label anyone who criticise the President or the government an "escualido" (a term meaning feeble or ill used to describe the opposition), even people who obviously are generally supportive of the process. For example Alvino, a fierce critic of the Chavez government from Cano Amarillo said, 'it's not important to me if someone is Chavista or opposition but here if you say something bad then you're an "escualido". This does not help anything. What's important is to listen to others: to debate' (May 2010).

While I was not aware of any overt discrimination in the Education Missions and many people were willing to critique the government in interviews I conducted and in class debates I observed, this polarisation must impact to an extent on people's willingness to openly critique the government for fear of being labelled in this way. This has obvious impacts on the ability to develop as critical thinkers. In a 2011 speech to the incoming National Assembly in which the opposition regained significant seats since their boycott of the 2005 elections, Chavez called for meaningful debate between all political factions. It remains to be seen how this will develop in practice and how this will impact on the opportunities for wider debate within the Missions and in society more generally.

However, while issues of polarisation need to be addressed, it is too simplistic to argue that the education process is restricted within the structure of the government political ideology as D'Elia (2006) and Hanoman and Hunn (2008) suggest. What seems more apparent is that there is a synergy between the discourse of the Chavez government and the majority of the people that was not created "from above". Government ideology in terms of critiques of neoliberalism and an emphasis on participatory, protagonist democracy, equality and justice is largely congruent with local ideas, critiques and desires that predate the Chavez government, as I highlighted in Chapter 4. Rather than being imposed from above, they originated in the crisis of hegemony of the Punto Fijo democracy through to the election of Chavez on an anti-neoliberal platform in 1998 and were consolidated in the participatory process to rewrite the Constitution, in the popular mobilisations to overthrow the 2002 coup and lock-out and in continued electoral support for the Chavez government. It is therefore not surprising that government discourse dominates education Mission classes because, as most participants see it, it is the discourse of the people, not a discourse or ideology imposed "from above", as I explore in more detail in Chapter 8.

Furthermore while there is obviously a strong linkage between President Chavez and the people, there is also evidence that many people are not blindly supportive of the President and government. For example one Cano Amarillo resident explained to me, 'I am not a Chavista, I am a revolutionary. When Chavez does something I agree with I will support him but if he doesn't I won't' (February 2010). While much critique is attributed to a "hangover" from the previous regime and its institutional arrangements, people are increasingly starting to question if the actual motives and agendas of the people involved in the process "from above" are different to their discourse and therefore in conflict with the ideas of the new society that people are hoping to create. In the majority of cases such critiques do not extend to the President himself, though as I illustrate in section 6.4, support for the President is not absolute.

While I can only comment on the Missions I observed, they illustrate the potential of political education via state-led education programmes to develop critical consciousness, promote an alternative vision of democracy and increase awareness of the need to translate critique into action for social change. My observations and interviews suggest that the education Missions are much more of a debating forum than political indoctrination. While some critics argue that this is as far as it goes and that opportunity for *autonomous* critique is limited by acceptance of the government's proposed alternatives as "given", the testimonies of the people I interviewed suggest students do not passively follow the

government “line” nor do the programmes secure their passive support for the government. Instead government ideology based on ideas of “power to the people” is also their “line”. Arnove et al. (1997) stress that even when education is used, in part, to legitimate a political system it can also be used to interrogate it. My interviews and observations suggest that many students use the knowledge they gain in the Missions to interrogate the process and identify ongoing problems and limitations in ways that lead to greater critique rather than conformity to the government.

It was Gramsci who first highlighted this complex dialectic between education to enforce dominant hegemony and the same education as a means of developing counter-hegemony. Just as education to promote a conservative political agenda can contain spaces for developing counter-hegemonic ideas, so too can education designed to construct a new anti-neoliberal hegemony contain spaces for the contestation of government ideology and development of counter-critiques to the dominant forces trying to construct this new hegemony. In teaching the skills to resist neoliberal hegemony and emphasising the need to find alternatives, the Missions contain spaces for the construction of counter-alternatives rather than just accepting the government’s proposed alternative as the “only” alternative. Furthermore while the government equates the new participatory, protagonist democracy with “Socialism for the 21st Century”, there is no fixed blueprint of what this socialist society should look like. While this is viewed by some as a weakness, it also means that there is space to think about what this future socialism should look like. The Education Missions therefore provide the opportunity to develop new ways of thinking and critique that eventually, rather than secure support for government ideology, may lead to the consolidation of an alternative grassroots hegemony, especially if people feel that the government is not putting its discourse into practice. This is not to say that people are starting to lose faith with the overall project, rather that they are developing the skills to identify what still needs to change in order to build a more protagonist, participatory democracy.

However, while there is a general recognition of the need to move from critique to action in both government ideology and among students in the Education Missions, it is also important to examine whether the mobilisation that is encouraged serves to legitimate the government or if students develop the ability to mobilise autonomously. The next section examines in more detail whether or not government claims to be encouraging critical consciousness, social organisation *and* political action are translated into practice by

examining the type of participation that is encouraged in and through the education Missions.

6.4 Democratisation through and for participation/ Participation for and through democracy: organisation and mobilisation and the Education Missions

As Archer (1996: xi) argues, ‘the problem of structure and agency has rightly come to be seen as the basic issue in modern social theory’ and there is much debate as to whether states constrain or enable autonomous association and activity. In Venezuela, at least at the level of discourse, the government is actively encouraging critical thought *and* action and has opened up spaces for participation as part of a wider project to build protagonist democracy. However it is important to look at how these spaces and mechanisms work in practice and the nature of participation that is encouraged in these spaces. It is only by doing this that we can understand the form of democracy being created (Goldfrank 1998). Such analysis helps reveal the extent to which the Venezuelan government initiatives reflect a real commitment to putting their discourse of complementing representative democracy with more direct and participatory forms into practice.

Schugurensky (2010:1-12) for example argues that ‘traditionally, both in terms of research and practice, the fields of participatory democracy and citizenship education have operated independently of each other’. Even when there is a commitment to participatory democracy, most education programmes do not structure the organisation of education as an exercise in participatory democracy nor do they incorporate participatory democracy as a key curriculum component, for example via practical projects in partnership with communities and the state. Certainly at the level of discourse and in terms of the organisation of the Mission programmes, Schugurensky’s conditions appear central in the Venezuelan case. In the first place, government discourse in Venezuela stresses a commitment to participatory democracy. Secondly, as I illustrated in sections 6.1 and 6.2, the mode of organisation of the Education Missions is structured as an exercise in participatory democracy; allowing people to practise democratic participation, often for the first time, *within* the Missions. Finally skills in participation are not only developed through involvement in the internal organisation of the education Missions, a Community Project, designed to develop practical skills in participation with the wider community and promote interaction with the state, is also a compulsory module for all students regardless of academic discipline.

Many of the students I spoke to felt that joining the Missions was a means for supporting the process in general and, importantly, an example of active participation in the process in and of itself. They explained that the Missions encourage more than just passive attendance in the programmes; the participatory nature of their organisation and implementation provides opportunities to develop decision-making and organisational skills and exercise protagonist participation. While this participation in the Missions themselves is important, this section examines how official commitment to more widespread participation is developed through the Missions, with a focus on the compulsory Community Project. It explores if and how the education Missions promote wider participation and action, the nature of participation and action that is encouraged and facilitated from above and the impact this participation has on state-society relations. In doing so I examine whether participation is framed more in terms of acts of charity, self-help and volunteerism and used as a means of containing and controlling people, or if the spaces and mechanisms that have been introduced allow for meaningful participation in decision-making, greater state-society interaction and wider structural transformation.

6.4.1 The Context of Participation

In Chapter 3 I illustrated that the motives and outcomes of projects to promote participation differ greatly. Just as all education is political, so too all participation is political. Education to promote participation can either increase participation in the existing social order or it can be liberatory by promoting critical analysis and action for transformation (Cariola 1980). Participation is an educative act and education programmes *can* be exercises in participatory democracy but only education through and for democratic participation can lead to participatory democracy. Such cases are rare (Berry et al. 1993). I further highlighted that high levels of participation and mobilisation do not necessarily indicate participatory democracy. Much depends on who participates, who makes decisions, how decisions are made and the impact of these decisions. It also depends on whether procedural norms to make opinions heard and responded to are in place or whether decisions are made on an arbitrary, clientelistic basis. Participation is therefore a necessary but not sufficient condition for a more just, democratic society.

As I outlined in sections 2.4.2 and 4.1.2, the rhetoric of community involvement and participation in local development in Venezuela is not new. However, initiatives prior to 1998 were generally aimed at co-opting participation and pacifying the population and did little to promote structural change. They were conceptualised as a government “favour” rather than a right of citizens. Rodgers’ (1967) assessment of projects in the Latin

American region as a whole concludes that most government-sponsored projects were predominantly used as a means of social control and to promote community self-help as part of a wider agenda to legitimise the government, reduce state responsibility and pacify the poor. Furthermore Skinner (1982) found that in the Peruvian context, projects were only supported insofar as they fitted the government agenda and when participating communities started to make more radical demands the projects were soon abandoned by the government. However, Castells (1977) also points out that the limited nature of these initiatives can actually create new sites of conflict and contestation as people's expectations and frustrations rise and they start to mobilise for more meaningful change. In this way even tokenistic participation designed to co-opt or dilute more radical demands and forms of organisation can have unintentional and potentially more transformative outcomes.

President Chavez was voted in on a platform of changing the practices of the Punto Fijo years and promoting protagonist participation. It is therefore important to examine if and how the Chavez government's approach differs from past projects of community involvement in local development. When interviewing the students about links between the education Missions and organisation and mobilisation for change, almost all pointed to the compulsory community project as the most important first instance of how the Missions promote active, democratic participation. While Chapter 7 explores if and how the nature of participation as a whole has changed in Venezuela, the next section examines the compulsory Community Project in more detail.

6.4.2 The Community Project

The Community Project is a compulsory part of Mission Ribas, Mission Sucre and Mission Cultura. In contrast to many projects to promote "active citizenship" within a neoliberal or social democratic framework, the Community Project in the Venezuelan Education Missions is framed within principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and popular education and is promoted as being central to the project of promoting social change rather than stability. In line with principles of popular education, the first stage of the Community Project is to conduct a preliminary participatory diagnostic in order to raise consciousness, problematise reality and promote student-community interaction. PAR and popular education methodology is also evident in the emphasis on the co-construction of strategies to deal with identified problems and desires; in other words getting to know and interpret social reality so as to change it. Students are encouraged to critically reflect on these processes in their end of project presentation. They present their final presentations to the

local community who have a chance to give their input on the process and students are then graded as a group by representatives from the community and facilitators from the education Mission. The students then individually write up their Project and this serves as their undergraduate thesis. While it is not compulsory many students go on to put their projects into practice.

Alfredo, a Mission Sucre student in UNEARTE, explained that ‘the community project entails a relationship between the students and the community because the fundamental idea of our process is that the people, the community become involved in solving their own problems and changing society’ (November 2009). As I explained in section 6.1.1 many barrios in Venezuela had a historical legacy of low self-esteem and limited self-organisation. The Community Project gives many people their first experience of interacting with their community and in planning projects. It offers opportunities for people to develop their skills and their self-confidence in order to take an active part in their community and promotes joining existing organisations and setting up new projects. I observed this development of self-confidence in certain students during the course of their Community Project. At the start they felt worried that the community would not listen to them because they were “nobody” and had nothing to offer. However, during the course of the process, with the help of fellow students who had more experience, as well as through their classes in social theory and in how to conduct a community diagnostic, the students gained in confidence and skills and started to believe that they could make a positive difference. Many students who were nearer the end of their projects also indicated similar experiences. The students also reported that carrying out the Project was important in raising their consciousness of problems and resources in their own community. It enabled them to research Laws and regulations to find out what rights they had in relation to specific problems and how they could go about solving them. At the same time they felt that they were learning from the community and sharing their own learning with the community.

In Mission Ribas in INCES the students I observed were in the very initial stages of their Community Project but I was able to look at some of the project reports from the previous year. At Mission Ribas level the idea is that students conduct a diagnostic to identify a specific problem in their area and then plan a project, including researching Laws and regulations relating to their topic area, costing the project and identifying funding sources. They then have to produce a final proposal. While not all of the projects were actually implemented in practice, many of them were. For example, one group of students carried

out a project on domestic violence in their community. They made links with the Ministry for Women and also with domestic violence help-groups and the project culminated in the setting up of a self-help group in a local community centre with support and funding from these outside organisations. Another project resulted in a canteen being built in a local school after the students planned the entire project, including working out costs, identifying local contractors who could carry out the work, identifying relevant clauses in the Constitution and Law of Education regarding state responsibility for school infrastructure and petitioning the Ministry of Education for funding.

In Mission Sucre and Mission Cultura I found that many of the projects were planned and implemented unless they dealt with research into large cross-sectoral problems, in which case students generally produce a report that can then be used by the community to petition government for more widespread change. I was able to accompany two groups of students from two different centres in the Cano Amarillo area from the start of their projects; one group of Social Communication students at UNEARTE and one group of Environmental Management students at Fermin Toro High School. I was also able to accompany one member of the Mission Cultura group in Petare to see how her project was being implemented in the community.

The Social Communication students conducted their preliminary diagnostic with the Cano Amarillo community and residents said that a video of the history of the community would be a useful resource that they could use with younger members of the community to try and instil a sense of pride in their area and perhaps address some of the issues of youth crime. The students were able to use the practical skills learned in their core subject classes to start researching the history of the area, interviewing and videoing local people and filming points of historical interest in the area. This was important in terms of changing ideas as to “whose knowledge counts” as students and their community engaged in researching archives and academic texts about their area and also used the testimonials of residents to learn more about the history of the community. It was also important in raising the self-esteem of residents who learned that their experiences were valued. The students also made links with existing organisations within the local community such as the local community T.V. station Catia TV and the local Communal Council. When I left Caracas they were in the process of the final edit of the video but I attended their final presentation in March 2010 where they presented their evaluation of the research process and outlined the structure of the video. The feedback from the community and the Communal Councils was very positive in that they felt that the Project had brought different sectors of the

community together, made links between the University and the community and also provided them with an important resource that they could use in the future.

The Environmental Management students found that the main concern in terms of environmental issues in the area was drainage during the rainy season. Dirty water would run through the streets into the canal that runs through the area. The students began their project by using their skills learned in academic studies to survey the area and surrounding areas, test the quality of the water and also investigate regulations relating to drainage. At this stage they realised that the project was a sector-wide problem and the students modified their project, again with community consultation, and decided to work on recuperating a children's play area in the sector and rejuvenating a vegetable plot in the High School grounds for the use of Mission Sucre students and daytime students. They also decided to use their practical research classes to build a portfolio of evidence on water quality and drainage in the area and related Laws and regulations that they could then present to the local Communal Council to be used to petition for cross-sectoral infrastructural change. All of these projects were still ongoing when I left Caracas.

These are just two examples I observed and there were many more ongoing projects in the various programmes including the setting up of a community newspaper, the establishment of a school for children with special needs and a programme to teach sex education to High School students. In all these projects students stressed that the idea, the planning and the execution of the programmes came from within the communities rather than being dictated from above, though they did also say that they interacted with state institutions when necessary. For example, Leidy, a Mission Sucre student in Campo Rico, was involved in setting up the school for children with special needs. She explained that the community identified the need for the school in their area as there was no provision (October 2009). The community and the students identified a building, planned and costed the resources needed and then, using the Law of Education which guarantees Free State education for all, petitioned the Ministry of Education for funding. The school is now up and running. It is locally organised but teachers and resources are funded by the Ministry of Education. This example shows how as a result of Constitutional guarantees and the opportunities opened up by the education Missions, people can take an active role in social policy provision and in making the state more responsive to constitutionally guaranteed rights. Leidy explained that, prior to joining the education Missions, she had never been involved actively in her community which illustrates how the education Missions and the social Missions more generally are encouraging new actors to participate in societal change.

One Mission Cultura student, Yudanis, was from a middle class part of Petare. As a result of her participation in Mission Cultura she was able to make links with community organisations in poorer sectors of the area to work on a joint project between local educators, Communal Councils and the community more generally. They established the School of Formation for Community Organisation. Yudanis explained that the goal of the school is to ‘develop people’s ability to articulate their demands and needs, to decide the public interest, develop policy and manage the resources of the state’ (February 2010). Their initial diagnostic identified that the Communal Councils in several zones of the sector felt that they needed more training in terms of their theoretical knowledge and in terms of developing community Projects. The Foundation worked together with the community to produce a library of twelve booklets covering theoretical topics such as political theory, ideology and hegemony, the history of the barrio and the transformative subject. They also cover topics on communication for exercising power, constructing community workshops and developing Projects. The booklets were ratified by the local Communal Councils before being printed in 2009 with financial support from the Ministry of Popular Power for Science, Technology and Industry. Yudanis stressed that the booklets were constructed entirely by the community with no interference from the Ministry, though they did collaborate with the Ministry in terms of accessing resources and financing the printing of the booklets.

The booklets now form the basis of the curriculum of study for Communal Councils in the area, guided by facilitators from the Foundation. The Communal Councils involved also visit other sectors of the community to encourage them to organise and set up their own Communal Councils, thereby sharing their own learning with the wider community and building sector-wide linkages. I accompanied Yudanis on one such visit in February 2010 where established Communal Councils who were studying with the Foundation went to a squatter settlement in La Suissa, Petare to encourage the local community to set up their own Communal Council so that they could work together to develop their community, for example by petitioning for land rights and infrastructural development. This example shows the way that the Community Projects enable students to make links within their own community and also how the Projects can develop into ongoing programmes that have lasting effects for the community more widely by enabling them to organise more effectively and make linkages within their own community and with state institutions. Yudanis said, ‘it’s more than just us learning- we are learning in order to take our learning out to people. So the learning has a cascade effect’ (March 2010).

Mansbridge (1995:1) says that ‘participation does make better citizens. I believe it but I can’t prove it. And neither can anyone else’ as subtle changes in character are not easily measured. However, he adds that people themselves can report on how the experience has changed them. Many students I interviewed said that the Community Project was an important means for them to learn how to participate in the development of their community. The format of the Community Project closely follows the procedures that Communal Councils follow when conducting their project proposals and so gives students an idea of how a Communal Council works or should work. Many of the projects have a real impact on the quality of life of those communities and contribute to the redistribution of state resources. The Community Project facilitates the participation of people who had previously been inactive, encourages people to join existing organisations such as the Communal Councils and enables people to set up their own projects and interact with the state to demand and shape services.

6.4.3 Participation in state-controlled spaces or changing state-society relations?

While these examples show that, to an extent, programmes foster ideas of self-help and volunteerism that are associated with “thin” conceptualisation of democracy, they are not framed within a discourse of charitable work with an underlying agenda of “rolling back the state”. Many actually result in students and communities mobilising to demand more resources from the State in line with constitutional guarantees and many generate new paid work for community members, funded by the state. The discourse is not about “helping others” but on working with and within the community to build ideas of solidarity, working together and using professional skills to develop the community and society as a whole. Furthermore the Projects are framed within a discourse of duties *and* rights thus combining ideas of building the “responsible citizen” and the “responsible state”. The Projects reinforce students’ and their communities’ knowledge of their rights, of the Laws and regulations that guarantee those rights and the role of the state as guaranteed in the Constitution. They also gain knowledge of the mechanisms and strategies they can use to put pressure on the state to comply with state obligations. The Projects can also link with wider projects of change through their interaction with other community organisations such as the Communal Councils and also by forging links with, learning to work with and putting pressure on state institutions. This contributes to making the state more responsible and responsive whilst also changing state-society relations by reinforcing the idea of the state as a tool of the community rather than bestowing “gifts” on the community.

A major critique is that many of the Community Projects relate to small-scale local issues to improve the local community. For example Estaba et al. (2006) argue that the parallel Missions have so far failed to impact on the mainstream public sector and are restricted to compensatory schemes. Many of the Projects *are* concerned with addressing communities' most pressing needs, particularly infrastructural problems. However students pointed out that after years of neglect, these were the areas of most pressing need in a country that when President Chavez came to power had around 70 per cent of its people living in poverty and very poor or non-existent basic services. Furthermore testimonies of Mission participants illustrate that Projects can and do impact on the mainstream public sector and encourage community interaction with the State for change beyond the local level.

This is further illustrated by the project of electrical engineering students in Mission Sucre in Petare. They identified problems with electricity supplies to certain schools in their area. One member of the group, Francisco, explained that some newly created squatter settlements had no electrical supply and also that schools in rural areas of the country had similar problems (September 2009). They decided to set up a pilot project in one school to install solar panels to produce electricity with the idea that, if successful, the project could be expanded to isolated communities and communities with limited resources. It would also be environmentally friendly. They approached the Ministry of Water, the Ministry of Land and Agriculture, Ministry of Environment and the National Institute of Rural Development and secured funding for the pilot scheme. Their Community Project will culminate in a presentation to the various Ministries and, if proven effective, their hope is that the project will be adopted on a nationwide basis. This is just one example, but it shows the space and opportunity that exists to have an impact on policy and practice beyond the local level.

Archer and Costello (1990) found that in Nicaragua one of the key changes promoted by Sandinista education programmes was that people started to demand services for their own communities and, importantly, this was accompanied by the feeling that through their participation they were making a positive contribution to their country. Education fostered new conceptualisations of knowledge and greater collective local organising. This is also evident in the Venezuelan Education Missions. The Projects develop skills in participatory investigation that encourage students and the community to identify problems, generate demands and work together to find solutions to their problems, often for the first time. In doing so participants feel that they are making a positive contribution to their country.

Depending on the project, this participatory process also promotes greater demand-making on and interaction with the state.

The Missions provide a clear framework for making linkages with institutions of the state. Students reported that clear procedures emphasising their right to make demands on the state gave them confidence in approaching the Ministries and that being part of an organised programme facilitated these exchanges. For example Yudanis explained that people now feel that they have the power to play an active role, saying ‘when we address the various state institutions we do not go with the idea of begging or asking a favour. No, we go to demand the rights that that our constitution gives us’ (February 2009). Students also explained that the Community Project was very important in breaking with the traditional apathy of the past where people would wait and hope for the government of the day to find solutions to their problems. One student, Pedro, from Mission Cultura, Campo Rico, said, ‘yes we approach the government when needed: if we need to set up a new school or MERCAL but if we can solve something ourselves we will. In the past we were kept in a state of incapacity because of the type of politics they imposed. We were heavily dependent so if the government did nothing we got nothing and we could do nothing. Now we are putting in place a process of creation’ (December 2009). These examples suggest that people are much more active in identifying their needs and finding solutions, sometimes involving state institutions and sometimes not, and that participation is not confined to pre-decided government projects. Students and communities decide on their own projects, take an active role in the planning and implementation of the projects and pressurise the state for change and resources where necessary.

The Community Project is also seen as an important means of changing perceptions as to the role of the “professional”, drawing on Che Guevara’s (1965) ideas on the close connection between work, education and community. The Missions develop the idea that becoming a professional is not just about individual satisfaction but is a means of working in solidarity with your own community to develop the community and society more generally.

Ledwith (2001) describes how since the 1980s discourse on “empowerment”, “participation” and “active citizenship” has been hijacked by the “New Right”. They emphasise the idea of “the community as the state”. This closely resembles the left-wing idea of the “communal state” which is commonly used in Venezuela. However the crucial difference is that while the former reflects an underlying agenda of “rolling back the state”,

the latter is about continued state responsibility coupled with the transformation of state-society relations to give people more control over decision-making and budget allocation. While the former represents an erosion of rights in favour of responsibilities with an emphasis on individualism and self-help, the latter stresses the rights and responsibilities of *all* sectors of society within a framework of commitment to a more just and equal society (Craig 1998). Certainly at the level of discourse and in the testimonies of the students I interviewed, the Education Missions appear to be developing the idea of transforming state-society relations rather than encouraging self-help as a means of rolling back the state. Wilpert (2007a) concludes that the Education Missions are already changing the nature of the Venezuelan state and that these parallel institutions have proven an effective way to get state resources to the population.

6.4.4 From non-formal education to mainstream participation

The Community Project has also been introduced by the Chavez government as a compulsory part of “mainstream” University education, both public and private, though it is less consistently implemented in certain Universities, particularly those controlled by opposition Directors. I attended the final community presentation and evaluation of two projects; one in March 2010 by a group of Environmental Management students at the Bolivarian University (UBV: established by the Chavez government) and one in April 2009 by Education students from the Central University (UCV: a “traditional” University that pre-dates the Chavez government). In the first case the students worked with a local community to set up an organic coffee co-operative on the outskirts of Caracas. The community had occupied and petitioned for ownership of an abandoned plantation in their locality and wanted to start a co-operative. The students were able to help in terms of academic knowledge of organic farming, information on how to set up a co-operative and also with linkages to relevant Ministries and other organisations. At the time of the final group presentation the co-operative was up and running and had secured a contract to supply the government-run MERCAL supermarkets with coffee. They were also running outreach programmes for other community groups who wanted to set up similar schemes and collaborating with neighbouring Communal Councils to set up community recycling projects and projects to use household waste to make compost that could be sold or used on community vegetable plots. Again, this example illustrates how one Community Project can have a cascade effect to promote further community organising. It also illustrates how once pressing needs are met in the community they can start to make further demands that have an impact on wider relations, in this case in the economic sphere.

The UCV project involved a group of mainly middle-class students and was based in a barrio community just outside Caracas. Their final presentation was attended by members of the community and teachers from the local primary school where the students had chosen to conduct their project, based on their preliminary diagnostic with the community. The 4 students I interviewed said that they had never been into a barrio before and that the project had changed their perceptions of barrio communities. Whereas before they believed the stereotype that people in the barrios were lazy and just waited for handouts from the government, they now had a greater understanding of the problems faced by people and their efforts to make a living and improve their community. In turn, people in the local community said that the Project had helped to change their perceptions of UCV students and helped reduce the divide between the academic world and the barrio world. The project was important in bringing people from different socio-economic groups together and had concrete results for the community. Previously parents of children in the primary school said that they felt distant from the teachers in the school and lacked confidence in taking a more active role in their children's education. The UCV students had organised teacher-community workshops and both parents and teachers reported that they felt the project had enhanced the links between school and community.

Jose, the Professor from UCV in charge of organising the Community Projects within his department said that there is a lot of resistance to the Community Project from opposition groups, particularly in more conservative Universities like UCV, as they see it as another attempt at political indoctrination. Many therefore do not implement the Projects, even though they are meant to be compulsory. He stressed that in a country marked by extreme polarisation, the Community Projects could be a means of bringing people from different backgrounds together and developing opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge and debate. Furthermore, he explained that the Projects are not dictated from above. Students choose the location and projects are devised and implemented by students and the community. He argued that the Project is not really different to an undergraduate thesis anywhere in the world. The only difference is that it has to be based in actual primary research in the community, guided by principles of participatory research. These examples suggest that the Community Project is an important means of promoting participation and community-student-state linkages in both formal and informal arenas that could promote a new hegemony based on co-operation and active participation.

6.4.5 State-promoted participation

Ramirez (1990) says that education, particularly adult education, constitutes a tool to enable the participation of communities in their own development. The Education Missions clearly give people the opportunity to learn how to participate and to contribute to their community's development through the Community Project. While many projects relate to local issues with limited impact at macro levels, my research suggests that this is not a hidden agenda to co-opt more radical organisation and mobilisation. Participation in and through the education Missions allows people to learn how to participate effectively, often for the first time, and allows for interaction with the state. As pressing needs are met, students and their communities are starting to make more widespread demands.

The testimonies of Mission students show that many feel that they are more able to take control of their own development and that space exists for their autonomous participation. Students and communities are making claims and devising their own projects as citizens rather than clients. Many of the projects operate outside of formal structures but also interact with the state to secure resources and pressurise for change. The focus is very much on community action rather than just pressure for services from above. Jarvis (1986) makes the distinction between community development which is reformist and community action which is transformative. The way students in the Missions view their role and the purpose of their participation combines elements of the two. There is a strong belief in state responsibility to provide social services and contribute to community development, alongside the idea that active participation contributes to a transformation of state-society relations through greater local control over the direction of development.

My primary research is supported by similar case studies on the Education Missions. For example, Hanoman and Hunn (2008) argue that the Community Project is an important means of developing the active participation that is established in the Constitution while Hawkins (2010a) found that the Project gives students and their communities a political voice and introduces participatory democracy into the educational experience. The Community Projects are a community process of learning that Dewey (1897) argued is essential for democracy. He stressed that people learn democracy by being members of a group that acts democratically. The Community Projects I observed as well as the organisation of the education Missions more generally illustrate how space has been created, initially from above but locally controlled and organised, that actively encourages such democratic practices. Gajardo (1991) says that participatory investigation must enable the participants to influence social policy implementation to promote popular sector

interests. The findings I have outlined reveal that the Community Projects and the education Missions more generally enable people to influence the organisation of education and learn how to exert an influence on how social policy is planned and implemented.

6.5 Linking critical consciousness to action beyond the Education Missions

Testimonies from students I interviewed, from participant observation of the classes themselves and from secondary sources suggest that the Education Missions have contributed to the development of critical consciousness that goes beyond mere reinforcement of the government line, as I illustrated in section 6.3.1. However many commentators argue that ‘the objective of much consciousness-raising does not extend to much needed structural transformation’ and that an articulation of problems such as corruption or injustice does not necessarily translate into strategies for change (La Belle 1987:204; Gajardo 1991; Luft 1984). As Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) study revealed, even where programmes have an overt goal of increasing critique this is not necessarily translated into action. Critical consciousness is important but needs to be linked to education for mobilisation and political action to ensure effective participation in determining the direction of change and in combating any tendencies towards vertical relations between the state and the people (Arnové and Torres 1995). As Freire (1992:23) said, ‘a more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction. Now the person who has this understanding can engage in a political struggle for the transformation of the concrete conditions in which the oppression prevails’. This section examines how active participation is encouraged in and through the Missions beyond the Community Project and the type of participation that is encouraged.

In the first place I found that this understanding of the need to link critique to action was prevalent among many people I interviewed and reinforced through classes in socio-political theory and through the Community Project. For example, Francisco, a Mission Sucre student from Petare said, ‘the education proposals and programmes are based in the emancipatory thought of Simon Rodriguez. He proposed that education cannot be where you merely consume or receive knowledge in a passive way but that education should be in order to emancipate people to become an actor in society’ (October 2009). The majority of people in the Missions show a high level of political awareness, theoretical knowledge, knowledge of their Constitution and Laws and stress that they feel their classes in sociology and politics have enabled them to take a more protagonist role in the process.

They emphasise the importance of problematisation, reflection and action and the practice of building knowledge of democracy through democratic participation. One student and resident of Cano Amarillo, Rafael, said, ‘with education people know their rights and understand theory and then they can look at where things are going and act’ (May 2009). Similarly Miriam, a Mission Sucre student at UNEARTE, said, ‘it is important to have knowledge of struggle. If we know past philosophy, if we understand sociology and socialism, we can analyse what’s happening in Venezuela better and move things forward’ (November 2009).

Most said that classes in socio-political studies were vital in changing the culture of the country and breaking with the past, so that rather than being passive and accepting of dominance, people see themselves as agents of change with the power and the right to act. They link consciousness-raising to the idea of constructing a new hegemony based on more protagonist and participatory forms of engagement. They explained that the dominant hegemony of the Punto Fijo years was a top-down, individualist hegemony that secured consent for unequal power relations, clientelistic modes of governance and a very narrow conception of democracy and the role of the people in it. There is recognition that after 50 years of domination such practices have come to be seen as “normal” and that many people still accept domination and are not fully aware of their capacity to act as protagonists. It is this hegemony that people want to change. For example Alfredo, a Mission Sucre student in Cano Amarillo, said that ‘a people who do not mobilise, apply themselves to learning, to reading, to action remain dominated by the ruling class. But when a people start to do these things you create a new hegemony’ (December 2009).

Students were well versed in the options available to them to make their views heard and act as protagonists of change such as via Neighbourhood Assemblies, Communal Councils, Popular Consultations to debate new Laws and mechanisms to put pressure on the government for change, including the right to revoke elected officials, referendums, petitions, protest and voting. Many also described how they had put these rights into action and said that their experiences of education had given them the confidence to do so. For example in a discussion with students in Mission Sucre, UNEARTE in April 2010, several of the students explained that they were involved in the successful grassroots revolt against the decision of the Party to nominate candidates in the 2010 elections and they felt that their political education had equipped them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to challenge what they saw as a departure from principles of democratic organisation. Many others also said that the knowledge and skills gained through the Missions had enabled

them to participate in other grassroots organisations such as the Communal Councils, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, and also have a meaningful input in public debates and proposals to the National Assembly and in interactions with state institutions. This included organising protests to resolve issues of non-payment of mandatory bonuses, student grants and food stamps by government ministries and organising to resolve problems in the Mission Sucre centres themselves. Several students also said that they had been actively involved in the debates and drafting of proposals surrounding the 2009 Law of Education and felt that they were able to interact with government officials and have their proposals responded to in ways that they would have been unable to prior to their educational experiences.

Furthermore, while I highlighted in section 6.3.1 that much critique to date does not extend to the President himself, in December 2011 when I returned to Venezuela for a short visit, several of the students informed me that they had joined part of the wider student movement organising to discuss the implications of the Presidential veto of the Organic Law of Higher Education and to organise a petition directly to the President. The Law was passed by the National Assembly in November 2010 and then vetoed in January 2011 using Presidential “special power”. President Chavez said that this was to allow for more widespread debate in the light of opposition demonstrations when the Law was passed. Many students feel unhappy, arguing that the Law was the product of years of organising, submitting proposals and public debate which students felt an active part of and which was passed by their elected National Assembly. This suggests that people within the Education Missions are starting to use their knowledge to critique aspects of the process, even the President, when they feel that actions do not live up to the promise of more protagonist, participatory democracy *and* that they use their knowledge and skills to move from critique to action. However, the fact that Chavez could veto the Law casts doubt on the extent to which government discourse on the importance of responding to popular protagonism is put into practice, as I discuss in more detail in Chapters 8 and 9.

6.6 Conclusions: Education in, for and through democracy in the Venezuelan context.

Education in Venezuela is a contested terrain. Detractors see the new model of “Bolivarian Education” as political indoctrination while supporters argue it contributes to the project of giving power to the people through the collective construction of knowledge and values and the development of strategies for social change. The discourse of the Venezuelan government, official documents relating to the Education Missions, the Constitution and associated Laws make clear links between education and building participatory,

protagonist democracy through state-impulsed grassroots organisation. The fact that these issues and ideas are overtly on the agenda is important in and of itself as people are aware of alternatives in terms of types of democracy and types of educational organisation. Mere reference therefore implies possibility.

As many people in Venezuela say, “Education is everywhere”. For this reason it is difficult to isolate the impact of the education Missions from the variety of other social processes. However, testimonies of students and facilitators suggest that education within the Missions has given participants increased confidence, knowledge, skills and space to enable their participation as protagonists. This gives students a first opportunity to learn how to participate with the idea that learning can then be applied in wider contexts.

Brookfield and Holst (2011) argue that the traditional project of radical adult education was to create and extend participatory democracy by encouraging grassroots conversations about what education and democratic citizenship mean and how they can be achieved. They call this radical because it challenges the dominance of neoliberal ideology as the only way to order social life. The education Missions in Venezuela are geared towards challenging the dominance of neoliberal ideology by providing the space to develop critiques of neoliberalism and discuss alternatives. They encourage conversations about what democratic citizenship might mean and allow people to practice democracy for themselves. Ideas of critical consciousness, political literacy and social justice are firmly on the agenda and people are becoming aware of alternative theory and practice in terms of education and democracy. This knowledge raises expectations and allows people to develop their own ideas and critically assess policy and processes.

La Belle (1987:216) points out that often ‘popular education fails to bring about structural change because of the limited social and political space available within which to initiate such change’. In such cases education can become more stabilising than change orientated and often, despite the rhetoric of empowerment, there is little shift of power. Many people I interviewed feel that participation within the Education Missions, especially the Community Project, illustrates their power to take part in and implement projects, thereby contributing to structural change. Marshall (1950) explains that citizenship essentially involves economic, political and social participation to ensure the fair distribution and enjoyment of societal resources. The Education Missions have made a lot of progress in these areas. As a result of these programmes communities are mobilising and taking advantage of their new power to direct government spending and devise projects. The

capacity for collective action among poor communities is increasing and mechanisms have been introduced to promote public spaces and institutions that enable people to put their knowledge and skills into practice to organise education without excessive interference from the state, shape and implement policy, demand resources from the state and actively participate in public debate and strategies for change.

With reference to Pretty et al.'s (1995) typology of types of participation, this Chapter has shown that elements of "interactive participation" are evident in and through the Education Missions. Participation is seen as a right by the people and the right to participate is guaranteed in the Constitution, Laws and decrees. They offer opportunities for self-mobilisation without excessive influence from external actors and allow for the development of community-state interaction. There is also substantial input on the way education policy is implemented and organised internally. Finally there is some involvement in devising social policy in and for local communities via the Communal Projects and there is scope for the skills learned in these situations to be applied to wider projects.

One key problem with the creation of parallel structures is the question of if, how and when to integrate with existing institutions. Hedmont (2008) for example argues that the institutionalisation of popular spaces for participation can often lead to their bureaucratisation and the destruction of their transformatory potential. This is particularly important in the Venezuelan case given critiques of corruption, inefficiency and non-democratic practices in wider society and the state. While students felt that the Education Missions were organised and implemented along democratic participatory lines, many also pointed out that this is not always matched by democratic participatory practices outside of the Missions at the level of state and government. Wilpert (2007a) reinforces this saying that despite the participatory nature of the Missions and their proven significance as an alternative means of implementing social policy, practically all other areas of the government still operate in a very top-down way that is resistant to change. So while the Missions may create the desire for, knowledge of and experience of implementing more democratic organisation on a micro scale, it seems clear that wider changes are also needed to complement these processes and scale-up from the local level.

After eight years of existence the Missions are starting to become institutionalised but it remains to be seen if and how the Missions will be further incorporated into existing state structures and whether this will lead to their co-option and loss of autonomy or to a transformation of the old state. While ideas of "dual power" and engaging in a "war of

position” reveal the merits of the strategy to set up the education Missions in parallel with the old state, whether and when to move from a war of position to a situation where these alternative organisations can take over the old, bureaucratic structures is not clear, nor is a more participatory public administration guaranteed.

Nevertheless while ‘these days to talk of adult learning and education in the same breath as democracy and socialism can be seen as hopelessly out of date’, adult education *can* be a means of creating and extending participatory democracy and socialist outcomes (Brookfield and Holst 2011:2) and Venezuela’s Education Missions illustrate these possibilities. However in order to fully understand how participatory, protagonist democracy is developing in the country as a whole it is necessary to look in more detail at the spaces for and nature of participation in society more generally and its impact on structural relations. These are addressed in the next Chapter.

Chapter 7: **Democracy in Practice in the Chavez Era**

'What we have here is a participatory and protagonist democracy. We talk a lot about participation but it's important to examine what people are participating in. This is not about just participating in government decided projects. That's where the protagonist element is important. The people can lead the projects. The government, the infrastructure provides the framework but in line with constitutionally guaranteed rights. This isn't a gift, it's a right. They don't bestow, they fulfil a legal duty. There's a legal framework but it's the people that put it into action. For the first time the people have the power to make decisions and mechanisms have been created to facilitate popular participation. You need to look at everything that's happening at the grassroots. Now the people increasingly make their own demands. There has been an explosion of popular organising; of popular power'.

(Rafael: Student Activist and resident of Cano Amarillo 2010)

Recent trends in “direct democracy” and “participatory democracy” in Latin America are argued to have opened up new channels for getting involved in politics (Barroso 2002; Barczak 2001). However protagonist participation is not simply achieved with policy statements: it requires institutional change, capacity building and behavioural change. In Chapter 6 I concluded that while the Education Missions have had important impacts on these processes, offering an arena to learn about and practise democracy, they also need to be accompanied by wider structural change to facilitate protagonist participation in society more generally. This Chapter examines how constitutional guarantees and government discourse on complementing representative democracy with direct and participatory democracy are put into practice beyond the Education Missions and the extent to which they offer further opportunities to “learn by doing” and develop as active participants in processes of social change. By examining the wider initiatives that have been introduced since Chavez came to power and the opportunities for and instances of participation and direct involvement in political processes, both grassroots-led and government-initiated, I assess how far Constitutional guarantees and government reforms have fulfilled their promise to “democratise democracy” (de Souza Santos 2005).

As I revealed in Chapter 2, conceptualisations such as democracy, participation and decentralisation are contested, as are the institutions and processes that facilitate their development. Debates surround their relative merits in building popular power and impacting on social change that is grounded in grassroots participation and protagonism (Gaventa 2004a; Cornwall 2004; Pretty et al. 1995; Arnstein 1969). A variety of initiatives have been introduced under a variety of labels such as participatory democracy or participatory governance. Inherent are ideas of inclusion, accountability and partnerships between multiple stakeholders to enable wider ownership. However, recent development discourse highlights how the incorporation of once radical concepts such as

“participation”, “democratisation” and “active citizenship” into mainstream development has deradicalised and depoliticised the concepts. Alternative approaches ‘have often been co-opted to the extent that there remain few alternatives’ (Kothari and Minogue 2002:9). Critics therefore call for more critical engagement with issues of power, structure and agency, particularly the role of the state and active citizens in projects of social transformation (Cleaver 2004; Hickey and Mohan 2004; Gaventa 2004a; Cornwall 2004). Measures to promote decentralisation and participation therefore need to be assessed in terms of the power relations involved; whether they are merely instrumental initiatives or if they contribute to building democratic power from below.

I draw on the theories of participation, democracy and decentralisation developed in Chapters 2 and 3 to assess the Venezuelan process in terms of how institutional changes have contributed to the decentralisation of power and the development of direct democracy and participatory democracy. As with the Education Missions, it is important to look at who participates, how participation is organised, what people participate in, the nature of spaces for participation and the impact of demands on structural relations and outcomes. While my primary research focussed on the Education Missions, I also interviewed Mission students and the wider community about their views and experiences of the process more generally. I attended meetings with Communal Council members, interviewed both pro- and anti-Chavez Venezuelans about their views on the opportunities for participation and also observed wider participatory practices in the community.

As Dewey (1916:87) said ‘democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associational living’. By examining local viewpoints and experiences I explore how macro level changes have impacted on popular mobilisation, the capacity to organise and the ability to take an active part in decision-making, as well as how far activism in civil and political society has been institutionalised, in order to draw conclusions as to the mode of associational living and hence the nature of democracy that is developing in Venezuela. I examine how people view the way the Constitution and Laws have been put into practice, who makes use of the spaces created, how people use and shape these spaces in practice and the impact they have on wider structural change. I explore if new types of citizen activism have emerged at the local level and how far they have included previously marginalised groups. Crucially, I examine how far local people perceive the reforms to have introduced and institutionalised new channels to make demands, how these have been responded to and in what ways actors build their capacity to participate as protagonists in the process.

7.1 The Venezuelan Constitution: new legal frameworks and new conceptualisations of democracy

As I highlighted in Chapter 4, the crisis of hegemony of the Punto Fijo years was central to Chavez and his movement's rise to power in the elections of 1998. By the time of Chavez's election the formal state apparatus and government at municipal, state and national level had lost their legitimacy and people were wary of engaging with old bureaucratic structures (Duffy and Everton 2008; Ciccariello-Maher 2007b; Ellner 2003). One of the fundamental causes of this crisis was that measures to decentralise participation were largely tokenistic and did little to redistribute power over resources and decision-making. Chavez was elected on a platform of counter-hegemonic change, based on a commitment to tackling the corruption and clientelism of the Punto Fijo years and the promise of initiating reforms to give people a greater role in political decision-making and control, whilst still maintaining a commitment to state provision of public services (Escobar 2010). This section examines government discourse, the institutional frameworks that have been put in place and how far they resonate with the Venezuelan people.

7.1.1 Government discourse and reforms

The government position in Venezuela is clearly orientated towards ideas of augmenting representative democracy with participatory democracy and direct democracy within the wider framework of what is known as the Bolivarian Revolution. The Venezuelan process as a whole is conceptualised as being developed through "thick" understandings of democracy that have overtly pedagogical dimensions (Burbach and Pineiro 2007). While the education Missions have one of the most overt and obvious links with education about, for and through democracy, they are just one of the opportunities that have been introduced to "do democracy". Education occurs in all aspects of participatory social life including the workplace, community organisations and in state-society interactions (Hanoman and Hunn 2008). The Chavez government has introduced over 25 other Missions, as well as additional spaces and mechanisms to promote community participation and organisation, such as Communal Councils and other neighbourhood associations. This suggests a general commitment to putting discourse into practice.

As I highlighted in Chapter 4, these commitments find their expression in the Constitution and Laws, the Five Motors of the Revolution and the Simon Bolivar National Project. In Latin American countries a main vehicle for refounding democracy has been establishing a new Constitution that institutionalises alternatives to liberal or representative models

(Escobar 2010; Partlow 2009; Calderon 2008). One of the Chavez government's first moves was to engage the people in a process to rewrite the Constitution in order to consolidate and institutionalise the anti-hegemonic project. One resident of Cano Amarillo explained that in the Venezuelan case, 'the Constitution of 1961 established that we had a representative democracy but this meant in practice that the bourgeoisie had the power to elect representatives and they controlled the type of participation. Now, following a popular referendum, the Constitution was changed and one of the fundamental principles is that the type of democracy is participatory and protagonist' (May 2009).

Crucial to the Venezuelan process is 'the expansion of the territorial distribution of power by "popular power"' (Muhr 2008:150). Muhr (2008) highlights how the classical distribution of national public power, the judiciary, legislature and executive, has been expanded to include citizen power via the Ombudsman, Comptroller General and Public Prosecutor and electoral power via the National Electoral Council. Within this new power geometry, National government, Federal States and Municipalities are required to decentralise powers to allow for a greater role for organised communities to participate and share responsibility for proposing and planning policy and in the execution, evaluation and control of social programmes and public services; most importantly via the Communal Councils and Social Missions. Ideas of direct democracy, participatory democracy and decentralisation of powers are therefore central to the discourse, legal frameworks and policies of the Bolivarian process; making power relations central to the Venezuelan project. Massey (2009) and Devine (2007) argue that this new power geometry in Venezuela aims to change both the geography of power relations through decentralisation as well as the way power is exercised in these new spaces, thereby developing popular power.

7.1.2 Popular conceptualisations

The interviews I conducted, alongside secondary surveys, suggest that many people in Venezuela have embraced these new conceptualisations of democracy and believe in the importance of complementing representative democracy with more direct and participatory forms. For example, the Constitution was ratified in a popular referendum with 71.78 per cent of the vote. People mobilised around its promises of decentralising power and opening up opportunities for protagonist participation *and* maintaining a key role for the state in terms of responsibility for social welfare and development; thus putting the idea of "change from above and below" firmly on the agenda.

Fundamental principles of representative democracy such as freedom and liberties and voting rights are still seen as central to political participation. For example the 2008 Latinobarometer (LB) survey, a large-scale, region-wide, independent annual survey of public opinion, found that 80 per cent of Venezuelans saw voting as the best way to bring about change (LB 2008). However they also found evidence that the Venezuelan people see participation in politics as more than merely voting in elections. For example, 77 per cent of Venezuelans said that protests, street marches and demonstrations are normal in a democracy and 67 per cent, the highest in the region, said that they are also indispensable to make demands heard, revealing a belief in the importance of grassroots mobilisation alongside periodic voting. The report also found that in the Latin American region as a whole, only 10 per cent felt that democracy means “government by, for and of the people” compared to 65 per cent in Venezuela. This again suggests that while many Venezuelans value what is often called the “minimal” or “thin” conceptualisation of democracy, and see voting as the most effective way to bring about change, they conceptualise democracy in broader terms that go beyond representative democracy to incorporate ideas of direct, active participation.

Of the 97 students and residents of Caracas I interviewed formally just 3 were unable to articulate what democracy meant to them, which ties in with LB findings that Venezuelans have high levels of political awareness. This is not surprising given the high level of participation in the formulation of the Constitution and the fact that many people have their own copy of the Constitution which they refer to directly when discussing their own conceptions of democracy. Articles of the Constitution are also displayed on foodstuffs such as bags of rice in the government MERCAL stores and so access to information on the Constitution is readily available to the people. Many of the people I interviewed (67 people) were also participants in Social Missions who would perhaps be expected to have a greater knowledge of the Constitution than non-participants.

When asked to define democracy and when asked to describe their ideal type of democracy many people, both supporters and opponents of President Chavez, first cited the importance of their Constitution and the freedoms and rights it guarantees. Many also referred to the importance of the extension of the franchise in Venezuela and cited the fifteen elections that have occurred since Chavez came to power as important aspects of as well as indicators of democracy. For example, Gilverto, a resident of Cano Amarillo and government employee in the Presidential Dispatch Office, said that ‘democracy is the right and the capacity that every one of us as Venezuelans has to participate in electoral acts and

in national projects; to have input, to give our opinions. Before this wasn't the way. Now it's about constituent power. The highest form of punishment of bad management is through the vote' (March 2010).

However, for the majority of people I spoke to, Gilverto included, it is impossible to separate their ideas of freedom, civil liberties and voting rights from ideas of participation and acting as protagonists. This was true of both people participating in the Social Missions and also members of the community who were not involved in the Missions that I interviewed. For example Beatriz, a student of Mission Sucre, UNEARTE, said that 'before what we had what was known as representative democracy. The governments of the 4th republic imposed government upon us. We could not do things for ourselves. Now we as a people have the right to speak out, to express our views and to act. Now we have a chance to play a leading role as protagonists' (December 2009). She went on to explain that active participation in politics, the Social Missions and community organisations was now a central feature of Venezuelan democracy. Similarly one resident of Cano Amarillo who was not a participant in the education Missions explained that the democracy that they are developing in Venezuela is 'a process to break with the old paradigm, the pseudo-democracy, whose function was not government for and by the people but government by and for the elites; a top-down leadership' (October 2009). These findings support secondary research and suggest a congruence between government discourse and policy, constitutional guarantees and local understandings and expectations that is grounded in "thick" conceptualisations of democracy. It is this commitment that distinguishes Venezuela from other more conservative democratic projects (Harnecker 2007; Wilpert 2007a).

However, it is also necessary to examine if and how discourse and legal frameworks have been put into practice, if and how the Venezuelan people have made use of their new rights and how people view the changes that have been made. As Canache (2007) highlights, while there is widespread support for the Constitution, it has been interpreted in different ways by people with different political leanings in line with both liberal and more radical conceptions of democracy and there is considerable debate between these different political factions as to how effectively constitutional guarantees have been put into practice.

While the Constitution itself is a 'thoroughly democratic document in terms of both content and the process by which it was produced and ratified... the key to the

revolutionary process lies in the implementation of the constitution and consolidation of popular grassroots organisations to take real possession of the rights formulated in this abstract document' (Raby 2006:187). Legal guarantees do not necessarily lead to greater participation and greater input in decision-making. The following sections highlight that while many Constitutional guarantees have been implemented and the practice of direct and participatory democracy at the grassroots has made considerable progress, there is still a sense of incompleteness in terms of consolidating participation and direct input on decision-making at higher levels of the political process.

7.2 Direct democracy in the Venezuelan context

The protagonist element emphasised in the Venezuelan Constitution implies the direct participation of the people in public affairs with ultimate sovereignty lying with constituent rather than constituted power via revocation by the people and social-oversight (Ciccariello-Maher 2007a; Canache 2007). Such constituent powers go beyond the traditional checks and balances of liberal, representative democracy and give people more power to run the state themselves through local organisation and through mechanisms to hold government and state to account; thereby transcending debates between taking or opposing State power.

The Venezuelan Constitution guarantees a variety of rights to exercise direct democracy that complement traditional representative democracy. Article 5 of the Constitution (1999:10) states that 'the organs of the state emanate from and are subject to the sovereignty of the people' while Article 62 (CRBV 1999:29) states that 'all citizens have the right to participate freely in public affairs, either directly or through their elected representatives' and that it is the duty of the state to develop the optimum conditions for putting this into practice. The Constitution then outlines in articles 63-74 the range of avenues by which this control can be exercised including universal suffrage, public demonstrations, Street Parliaments, Popular Consultations, Citizens' Assemblies, the right to revoke mandates of all elected officials, nominate candidates to the Supreme Court, call referendums, decide and propose Laws, oversee public institutions, invoke audits of public institutions and via a range of organisations such as co-operatives, community enterprises and Communal Councils.

7.2.1 Direct democracy in practice: voting, the role of Referendums, Street Parliaments and Popular Consultations

There are numerous examples to illustrate how the Venezuelan people, both supporters and opponents of the Chavez government, have put their right to practice direct democracy into practice. As I established in section 7.1.2 voting is still seen as an important means of exercising democratic rights and voting in Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Venezuela is consistently high as tables 3 and 4 show.

Table 3: Voting in Presidential elections

Presidential elections	1998	2000	2004 recall referendum	2006
Turnout	63.76%	56.63%	70%	74.67%
% Chavez	56.2%	59.76%	59%	62.84%

Table 4: Voting in Parliamentary elections

Parliamentary elections	2000	2005	2010
Turnout	56.05%	25.26% *	66.45%
% MVR/ PSUV	44.38% MVR	60% MVR	48.3% PSUV

* Many opposition parties boycotted these elections which accounts for low turnout

(Tables 3 and 4 are compiled from the independent Carter Centre Election Reports (1998-2007) and Venezuela's National Electoral Council (CNE) website)

Furthermore the turnout of 65 per cent in regional elections in 2008 and 67 per cent in the election of Deputies for the National Assembly on September 26th 2010 indicate that the majority of Venezuelan people continue to see voting as a viable means of expressing their political will and are active in exercising that right. High turnout in elections indicates that the majority of Venezuelan people have faith in the democratic electoral process in their country.

However, as I indicated in section 7.1.2, while voting is seen as an important means of participation, the Venezuelan people have become much more involved in political life and are making use of, and value highly, wider opportunities for direct participation beyond voting (Burbach and Pineiro 2007; Wilpert 2007a; Raby 2006). For example Wilpert (2007a) argues that Social Audit control is central to the idea of direct democracy as it allows for direct citizen involvement in public administration. He points to specific examples where social audits of public institutions have been initiated by communities such as the audit of the Vargas Hospital in Caracas as a result of neighbourhood groups' suspicions of corruption in the use of hospital finances.

During my time in Venezuela I was able to observe numerous examples of direct democracy in practice ranging from Street Parliaments, Popular Consultations on the 2009 Law of Education and mobilisations by both “Chavistas” and “opposition”. Most people, both pro- and anti-Chavez, that I spoke to were fully aware of their rights under the Constitution and gave numerous examples of how they put these rights into practice, including organising petitions to instigate recall elections against corrupt officials, petitioning government ministries and attending public consultations and demonstrations. Opposition groups have used both constitutional (recall, demonstrations and petitions) and non-constitutional (coup and lockouts of 2002-2003) means to make their demands heard (Coelho et al. 2010). The right to revoke mandates was used by Chavez opponents in the failed 2004 recall referendum against President Chavez and there have been referendums in 2007 and 2009 in line with Article 344 of the Constitution that states that modifications to the Constitution require a National Referendum. Turnout in the 2004 referendum was 70 per cent, 55.89 per cent in 2007 and 70 per cent in 2009. These high turnouts indicate that the majority of the Venezuelan people, both pro- and anti- Chavez, have embraced their rights to practice direct democracy and that they see these avenues as a viable means to make their demands heard.

Many of the Chavez supporters I interviewed valued highly the right to have input on policy. For example Francisco, a Mission Sucre student in Campo Rico explained, ‘The way in which the people can influence politics and policy is another interesting and important element of democracy. Before, the Laws were decided in Parliament in a closed space. Now if they are redefining a Law or producing a new Law in Parliament, in the first place they have to draw up a proposal and to do this they call on all political actors in the country. That means all of us can make proposals in writing, via the internet, by text message, by all sorts of mechanisms that facilitate participation. The National Assembly then collects and collates these proposals into the articles of the proposed Law and then they go out into the streets via a process that’s called Parliaments of the Street. So they only pass a Law after an extraordinary level of participation’ (October 2009). Similarly Rogelio, a Mision Sucre student at UNEARTE, said that, ‘when they are changing the Laws, improving the Laws, we will go and meet and debate and discuss. We decide which Laws serve and which don’t and we change the old Laws. Therefore we have participation; we are a living part of the state. Not like before; before we meant nothing, we could not do anything. Today, the key is that we decide what we want for the country’ (December 2009).

Some of the Street Parliaments I attended in 2009 to discuss the proposed Law of Education did resemble government rallies more than debating forums. Nevertheless most people I spoke to explained that these particular Parliaments were the end point of years of popular consultation and that they felt that their demands had been heard and incorporated into the new Law. For example several said that certain articles in the Law of Education were directly influenced by public input, including the explicit reference to disabled students, specific articles on indigenous rights, including bilingual education, and the inclusion of the right to one person one vote in electing education managers whereas before the votes of academic staff and managers had more weighting than those of students and ancillary staff. Thousands of Communal Councils and local communities more generally also mobilised to put forward their proposals for the new 2009 Communal Council Law. While Pretty et al. (1995) say that often input into policy-making processes is reduced to manipulative participation or participation by consultation, there is a real sense among the people I interviewed that they have meaningful input in policy decisions that suggests interactive participation.

7.2.2. Ongoing limitations in the practice of direct democracy

In general, the opportunities for the exercise of direct democracy are numerous and the examples illustrate that such rights have been embraced by Venezuelan people across the political spectrum and that many people feel that these mechanisms operate effectively. However, while the exercise of direct democracy can be seen to have had some success in terms of impacting on national level politics, the practice of direct democracy in terms of state-society interactions at intermediate levels and on a more permanent rather than periodical basis has been mixed. Raby (2006) for example found that, up until 2006, participation operated on two main levels; the first at the neighbourhood level where people participate in institutions that directly affect their day-to-day lives, such as the various technical committees, community welfare initiatives and Social Missions, and the second at both local and national levels via electoral campaigns and mechanisms for the exercise of direct democracy such as input on national Laws, referendums, consultations and street parliaments. She argues, however, that there has been less progress in intermediate institutional structures such as the municipal and state councils. This suggests ongoing challenges to the consolidation of new power geometries.

Furthermore, some of the constitutional guarantees to give people more direct input in decision-making processes have not been effectively put into practice. For example, the Constitution called for the creation of Local Councils for Public Planning (CLPP) based on

principles of participatory democracy and for the creation of the Federal Council of Government (FCG) to plan and implement processes of decentralisation of power and resources; neither of which has so far been successfully implemented. The CLPP, established in the 1999 Constitution and an Act of Congress in 2002, were meant to consolidate direct, democratic participation at municipal level by bringing together local public officials and communities to prioritise, plan and implement municipal development projects and budgets. These Councils had the potential to be far-reaching instances of popular participation with the state; however, they largely failed (Wagner 2004). This was partly due to a general mistrust by the people of “old” institutions and a lack of capacity and confidence among previously excluded sectors, but mainly due to opposition by local Mayors who saw the Councils as a threat to their power and who tried to obstruct the process, either by trying to control the Councils by appointing members or by failing to initiate the processes to set up the Councils (Ochoa 2010; Garcia-Guadilla 2008; Machado 2008; Wilpert 2007a). There was a clear need and demand for new avenues for the practice of direct democracy on an ongoing basis.

Since the elections of 2006 the government has taken steps, with varying degrees of success, to overcome some of these problems and introduce new mechanisms to encourage people to take a more active role in governance. The following sections analyse attempts to formalise ongoing state-society partnerships in decision-making since 2006, with a particular focus on the Communal Councils that are argued to be the nuclei of direct, participatory democracy.

7.3 The Communal Councils: spaces for clientelism or popular sovereignty?

The Law of Communal Councils was introduced in 2006, drawing on the idea of workers’ councils as well as the neighbourhood assemblies that emerged in Venezuela during the Caracazo of 1989 (Ochoa 2010; Machado 2008; Burbach and Pineiro 2007; Wilpert 2007a). Article 2 of the Law (2006:3) states that ‘The Communal Councils, within the constitutional framework of participatory and protagonist democracy, are organisms of participation, articulation and protagonism that enable organized society to directly manage public policy and projects to respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities in the construction of an equal and just society’. While Muhr (2008) emphasises the role of the Councils as instances of direct democracy, I argue that they are simultaneously instances of the exercise of direct democracy and the practice of participatory democracy in that they allow people to become active agents in the affairs of the state but also involve active participation in processes of self and community

development. The idea of the Councils was to start at the very local level and construct a different kind of power based on collective organisation and decision-making that gives people the opportunity to address their needs and learn how to organise, plan and execute projects. In doing so, people develop self-confidence, a new collective consciousness and capabilities in democratic organisation that can impact on the nature of participation at higher levels.

Escobar (2010:15) describes the Communal Council Law as a landmark in the process of building popular organisations and ‘the most important element in the strategy by which the government has sought to create a self-sustaining popular process for the exercise of direct democracy’. They are the pillar of the 5th motor of the revolution: the explosion of popular power. Diaz Ortiz (2006:27-31) and Canache (2007) similarly argue the Councils are ‘fundamental instances of popular power’ that are neither purely state organisms nor purely social organisations. They are autonomous movements with connections to state organs that can potentially drive state restructuring towards a communal state and consolidate the future of protagonist democracy.

While there is widespread support for both the achievements and potential of the Councils they are not without their critics. Even staunch supporters point to ever-present risks of co-optation and exclusionary or clientelistic practices, as well as problems with funding mechanisms and central control that threaten the consolidation of autonomous community participation. As Massey (2009:22) highlights, the promise of the Councils to embed new power relations needs to be analysed beyond the level of discourse and policy to explore the ‘socio-political practices of their realisation’. The following sections therefore address the achievements and ongoing problems with the Communal Council process and illustrate that while the Councils have proven effective in enabling people to take an active part in local development, they have yet to have significant impact on structural relations at higher levels of state and government.

7.3.1 Who participates?

The Communal Council initiative was designed to consolidate widespread community participation and various authors estimate the level of participation at around 35 per cent of the population or 8 million people, organised into over 25,000 Councils (Escobar 2010; Hawkins 2010; Ellner 2009b; Americas Barometer 2008; Lopez-Maya 2008). These figures suggest that the Councils have widespread appeal and that many previously

inactive Venezuelans are now organising in their own communities. However, the question remains as to who is being mobilised.

Garcia-Guadilla (2007a, 2008a) found that it is not only Chavistas who have embraced the idea of the Councils. Many middle class areas that are predominantly anti-Chavez have responded positively to constitutional rights to form Neighbourhood Assemblies and Communal Councils, seeing them as a mechanism for reinvigorating the old middle-class Neighbourhood Committees of the 1980s. He reports that these middle-class Councils have used government-created spaces not only to improve local services, debate issues and push for reforms but to actively campaign against Chavez and his government. In August 2009 I attended a march in Caracas to protest cuts in state funding organised by an opposition Governor, Capriles Radonski. One of the key points in the official leaflets distributed on the march was that cuts in state funding meant cuts in Communal Council funding; again suggesting that even staunch government critics have, at the very least, accepted the role of the Councils in local development. Furthermore Smilde (2009:6), who is generally quite critical of the Councils, concedes that ‘many of the most successful Councils are in affluent neighbourhoods’ and that this reflects a general trend among the middle classes whereby they are ‘willing to collaborate with the government where their interests overlap but are not easily moulded beyond that’.

The AmericasBarometer, a U.S.-based survey of democratic public opinion and behaviour, surveyed 1,500 Venezuelan people across different geographical and partisan profiles and asked specific questions on popular participation, the Social Missions and the Communal Councils (Hawkins et al. 2007). The Report identifies quite broad participation in government programmes, though participation overall is mainly by Chavez supporters. As with the Social Missions, they found that this is less to do with inherent exclusionary processes or conditionality and vote-buying, as happened in the Punto Fijo years, and more to do with self-selection. Furthermore these programmes had an explicit objective to include previously excluded sectors and this basically means including the poor, many of whom support Chavez, therefore disproportionate numbers of “Chavistas” forming Councils is less about exclusion and clientelism as Corrales and Penfold (2007) would suggest, and more a product of widening participation to encompass the previously excluded and inactive majority (Hawkins 2010a). The figures suggest that the Councils do allow for widespread participation and that they are not inherently exclusionary or populated only by Chavez supporters.

While most of the people I interviewed in depth were from poorer sectors, I also found some examples of Council formation in middle class areas of the city. For example Pedro, who lives in a middle-class apartment building in Petare, said ‘the Communal Councils are not just for people living in the barrios; they are for everyone’ (February 2010). Overall secondary research and the testimonies of the people I interviewed suggest that the Councils have encouraged wide participation and the mobilisation of previously inactive people, though individual Councils are very much composed along class and partisan lines (Garcia-Guadilla 2008a, b; Hawkins 2010a). While these studies found that this is mainly due to the fact that housing is generally segregated along class lines rather than exclusionary mechanisms built into the Council process itself, it suggests that the Councils have had limited impact on encouraging groups from different socio-economic backgrounds to work together on common projects.

7.3.2 Participation in what and how?

Machado (2008), in an expansive review of Communal Councils including over 1,000 interviews in eight regions of Venezuela, found general support for the Communal Councils among the Venezuelan people and a general satisfaction with the way they operate in practice in terms of the ability to plan and execute projects, relationships with the institutions of the state, the financing of projects and internal democratic organisation in line with the procedures laid out in the Law of Communal Councils. However, while there is a general agreement that most Councils are organised democratically, there is less consensus as to whether they are instances of popular power that have democratised decision-making power over social wealth or if they are reduced to technical instruments for the implementation of pre-decided government projects and/or participation in very localised projects with little impact on wider structural relations.

Chaguaceda (2008:11-42) says that in the Cuban context state-sponsored participation is reduced to what he calls ‘pragmatic collaboration’ whereby the state apparatus controls the organisational forms of participation and subordinates local decision-making to state agendas; reminiscent of Pretty et al.’s (1995) idea of functional participation. Critics of the Communal Councils in Venezuela put forward similar arguments with both pro- and anti-Chavez groups debating whether or not the Councils are sites for mobilisation or if they perform a restricted, technical role. For example Garcia-Guadilla (2008a), Gabriel (2008) and Escobar (2010) found that while government discourse points to the Councils as sites for empowerment and social change, there is a tendency for them to become planners and executors of government projects which, while empowering to an extent, ultimately

diminishes their potential to become drivers of social change. Many Council members saw their role as principally downloading government funds and satisfying local needs rather than as agents of popular power. Irazabal and Foley (2008) and Lerner (2007) also highlight accusations that Councils exploit volunteer labour.

Many of the people I interviewed did describe having carried out very similar projects concerned with infrastructural improvements such as street lighting, waste water and drinking water provision, repairing roads and rubbish collection. Many also said that their Communal Council was involved in helping to deliver government-determined projects such as “Barrio Nuevo Barrio Tricolor” to improve barrio housing. However, while their testimonies might suggest that the Councils are reduced to functional participation in pre-decided projects and/or participation for material incentives (Pretty et al. 1995), Ellner (2009b) stresses that the Communal Councils have carried out many important self-determined projects and argues that this marks a totally new achievement in Venezuelan history that gives people meaningful contact with the state and real decision-making power. Furthermore both Machado (2008) and Garcia-Guadilla (2008b) found that while it is true that many Councils implement similar projects, this is not due to control from above. The Council process provides space for the development of different projects tailored to local need and with varying levels of interaction with state institutions depending on the project. For example in terms of health, middle class areas have developed programmes dealing with vaccinations for the elderly whereas poorer districts have focussed on child nutrition. Finally, as one of the primary roles of the Councils is to satisfy local needs it is not surprising that in barrios marked by a historical lack of investment and development, projects in these first five years of operation are similar.

Many people I interviewed also described numerous projects that they had initiated that were specific to their own area and not connected to government projects. For example in December 2009 I interviewed Tony and Glenda from Catia, who are members of different Communal Councils. While Glenda’s Council was predominantly working within government projects to upgrade barrio housing, Tony’s Council was engaged in autonomous projects to build a new walkway and repair a playing area. Both felt that while they did collaborate with government agencies at times, the projects were a product of community decision-making rather than being imposed from above. Furthermore, while Council membership is voluntary, their ability to manage their own finances and implement their own projects also meant that, rather than exploit voluntary labour, they were able to generate paid employment in their communities. Similarly Jose, a member of

a Council close to Caracas airport, explained, ‘the community explores their situation and they select what are the priority needs and the form in which to solve them. And the money goes directly to the Council. We manage the Communal Bank: millions of bolivars. We organise everything including paying workers from the community. Now it’s not old institutions that sort things out but the community itself. The people decide. This is the new paradigm’ (December 2009).

In this sense the Councils are much more than a means of downloading resources, they are a means of becoming part of the state through the administration of their own resources, albeit at the micro level. Many people I interviewed argued that the Councils are the most important element of direct democracy in terms of being the grassroots basis for policy decision-making and implementation. Many used the Councils as an example when defining their new participatory, protagonist democracy in that people become the subjects rather than the objects of their own development. The Councils have contributed to increased self-esteem and local empowerment by mobilising previously excluded and passive citizens, allowing local communities to prioritise needs in their area and giving them experience of direct democracy by taking an active role in local decision-making and development (Coelho et al. 2010; Ellner 2009b); reminiscent of Pretty et al.’s (1995) idea of interactive participation whereby groups take control over local decisions. Examples of Council projects suggest a degree of autonomy of decision-making that challenges the idea of the Councils being mere conduits of government pre-decided projects, though so far decision-making *is* largely restricted to local level welfare provision with limited impact on power relations and decision-making at higher levels.

However, as Gramsci highlighted, the importance of the “war of position” is to exercise alternative democratic forms of organisation at the grassroots, in parallel to the “old” state, that enable people to develop a new hegemony based on co-operation and democratic organisation. It is this that holds the potential though not the certainty of being able to challenge and replace dominant structures and power relations. Machado (2008) concludes that the Councils are at the centre of new forms of participation that reflect an emerging protagonism that develops people’s critical consciousness and technical abilities that can *potentially* develop to higher levels of social and political decision-making. The next section discusses some of the obstacles that still need to be overcome to make this potential a reality.

7.3.3 Clientelism, corruption and elite capture or autonomous organisation?

Since the discovery of oil Venezuela has had a history of corruption and clientelism at all levels of government that still exists today (Canache 2007; Burbach and Pineiro 2007). There have been accusations from both Chavez supporters and opposition groups of corruption and elite capture within the Communal Councils at the local level and of corruption and obstruction at higher levels of the government and bureaucracy. Escobar (2010:16) argues that ‘the policies of the Chavez government have fostered a tremendous amount of popular organising’, however critics such as Garcia-Guadilla (2007a) question if the Councils are spaces for the real exercise of popular power or if they are spaces of political clientelism. Corrales (2009) says that Chavez has politicised social policy and used it as an electoral tool while Leon (2009:9) says that Venezuelan politics in the Chavez era is characterised by clientelism and vote-buying and that ‘the people support Chavez because he gives or promises them something’.

I found some examples of the mismanagement of funds at the local level; though this was much less prevalent than corruption and inefficiency at higher levels. For example Maura, a Chavez supporter and Mission Sucre student, UNEARTE, said, ‘there are many things lacking in ideological terms. In many areas they are involved in doing up housing but if you don’t belong to the Council you don’t get access to the resources. Do I have to be content that at least they are fixing things for a neighbour? No’ (February 2010). Similarly, my Spanish teacher who lives in Petare said that in February of 2009 she started attending public meetings because the community discovered that the local Council received funding to repair some roads in the area but had embezzled the money. The money was paid to a “contractor” who was actually the cousin of one of the Council members who then disappeared with the money. The community arranged a meeting with Fundacomunal to try and resolve the problem but Fundacomunal refused to take responsibility and said there was nothing they could do. However, importantly, the community began the process of revoking the elected spokespeople of the Council which illustrates that, while problems exist, people are actively involved in making sure their rights are put into practice. Furthermore, my Spanish teacher was very much anti-Chavez but became involved in her local community as a result of these problems; indicating that even staunch Chavez critics are engaging with the Council process.

Nevertheless these examples illustrate that the checks and balances that are meant to be in place to monitor the Communal Bank and the activities of the Council do not always work in practice and that, at times, funds are mismanaged. The 2009 revised Law of Communal

Councils reorganised local financial control under Finance Commissions rather than Communal Banks to try and increase transparency and reduce corruption at the local level. It remains to be seen how this impacts on local-level practices.

A more prevalent accusation levelled at the Councils at the local level was that they were vulnerable to elite capture and exclusion. I attended a cultural event in one barrio in September 2009, organised by community members and students, where a member of the Council tried to stop the event because it had been arranged without their knowledge. One of the event organisers explained ‘the Council members here act as gatekeepers into the process. It’s very similar to the way people organised under capitalism. They think that they should exercise power; that power should be exercised by one person or group. They want to be at the centre of the community and they want to resolve everything, do everything to embellish themselves. It’s not a problem of the Laws or the spaces that have been opened up by the government, but a problem of individuals’.

However, by far the main problem people expressed to me was a problem of corruption and inefficiency at higher levels of government and the state, particularly the mismanagement of funds. For example, Alfredo, a Chavez supporter and Communal Council member in a middle class housing complex, described the Councils as one of the key forms of protagonism in the revolutionary process but also identified problems with financing at institutional level. He said, ‘The Council that I belong to still hasn’t carried out any work because they haven’t handed down the resources. Because a fundamental problem of the process is that certain bureaucrats stop resources reaching certain Councils. This is a great error in the process; that the bureaucracy can prioritise need. In our case we have submitted to about six or seven organisations. We started to petition in October last year [2008] and one year later we still haven’t received anything. We have been waiting all this time because the mechanism to manage resources is totally broken and this endangers the work of the Councils’ (November 2009). Alfredo’s experience is not uncommon. This suggests that the non-transparent and complicated funding mechanisms leave the Councils open to clientelistic usage, bureaucratic blockages and corruption.

Similarly, in 2009 one Council in Cano Amarillo was engaged in a dispute with the Ministry of Planning over perceived corruption in the Ministry whereby allocated funding for a large housing project that had been approved via the Council project-planning process had not been received. The Minister for Planning, Diosdado Cabello, acknowledged their problem and offered Ministry workers to complete the project. The Council rejected his

offer saying that it was a Council project and should be carried out by the Council and their local contracted workers rather than government. In December 2011 I returned to Cano Amarillo for a month-long visit. The Communal Council had won their battle with the Ministry of Planning, the funds were transferred to the Council and work is currently in progress on the housing project, managed by the Communal Council. This illustrates not only the ongoing mistrust of state bureaucracy but also the level of empowerment in some local communities.

These examples illustrate some of the key problems that have also been identified in large-scale research into the Councils. Most argue that while there have been individual cases of mismanagement of funds at the local level: the main problem is the funding mechanism. For example, Machado's (2008) study found that problems were less a result of clientelistic practices and more a result of corruption, inefficiency and deliberate obstruction of the process in general by state institutions. The 2006 Law of Communal Councils allows for the direct management of public resources by local communities and Wilpert (2007a) estimates that in the first year 1.5 billion U.S. dollars was allocated to the Councils. Problems arise because funding comes from a variety of sources including municipal and state government, the Ministry of Popular Participation, PDVSA and FIDES (Inter-government Fund for Decentralisation that controls money from oil profits over and above nationally budgeted funding). The procedures for allocation lack transparency and are often quite bureaucratic, making Council financing very complicated and open to discretionary allocation by bureaucrats (Ellner 2009a; Lerner 2007). Garcia-Guadilla (2007a, 2008) for example found instances whereby known "Chavista" areas received funding with little difficulty whereas more middle class areas were faced with bureaucratic procedures and delays, as Alfredo's example illustrates.

However, most commentators argue that while local, State and National politics has been marked by processes of corruption, the Councils, especially given their small scale and local focus, have the potential to address corruption and increase transparency. The Councils are a process of learning and, as members gain experience in collective decision-making and self-organisation, they will be better able to hold the state and government to account. Even Canache (2007), a vocal critic of many aspects of the Chavez government, argues that the Communal Councils could be crucial in overcoming clientelistic relations and developing popular power. Most people I interviewed stress that Council funding is a right and not a means of buying support and that the Council process entails solving problems as a community, rather than individuals receiving state benefits on a clientelistic

basis. Overall, Machado (2008:50) found little evidence of a paternalistic culture and concludes that despite problems of corruption and obstruction from above, the Councils are ‘an excellent school to promote democratic culture’ and forge new relations between state and society. This opening up of space from above for the practice of counter-hegemonic alternatives from below distinguishes the Venezuelan process from purely top-down processes of social change and resource redistribution and holds the potential of realising more participatory, democratic impacts on power relations more generally.

Furthermore, just as Smilde (2009) found that the middle classes are not easily moulded by the government, Chavez supporters are not merely followers of the government line. Even if many Councils do support and actively campaign for Chavez, this does not prevent them from being critical of government when they feel that their interests do not overlap or from organising to pressurise and hold the state and the government to account when they feel that their opportunities to self-govern are not being met. For example, the relatively low level of Council mobilisation in the 2007 Referendum (Ellner 2009a) and the housing project in Cano Amarillo suggest that it is too simplistic to view the Councils as mere conduits of government control. Machado (2008) concludes that while there has certainly been an overt attempt to politicise the private and the social, this does not necessarily indicate clientelistic control or mean that autonomy is compromised. He points out that in most democracies people support the Party or leader that they feel will or does best respond to their needs. The Chavez government record on reducing poverty and fostering inclusion suggests that support for the Councils is based on overall performance rather than clientelism.

Nevertheless, the complicated finance system and lack of transparency leaves the Councils vulnerable to co-option and clientelism and needs to be reformed (Massey 2009; Lopez-Maya 2008; Lovera 2008; Canache 2007; Garcia-Guadilla 2007b; Lacabana no date). In particular the Council’s direct reliance on funding from the Presidential Commission for Communal Power, made up of unelected people appointed by the President, creates a centralised dependence that undermines autonomy (Leon and Smilde 2009; Garcia-Guadilla 2008b; Burbach and Pineiro 2007). This leads Canache (2007:19) to conclude that ‘as the Law is currently conceived, rather than people’s empowerment, these programmes promote clientelism’.

Ellner (2009a) points out that if the defeated 2007 constitutional referendum had been approved, the dependence on arbitrary and complicated Council funding would have been

reduced and this would have helped cut down on corruption and obstruction from above. Steps are now being taken to clarify and formalise funding procedures to make funding to Councils legally embedded along the lines of funding for states and municipalities. For example prior to a 2007 Law, 60 per cent of FIDES funding was allocated to states and 40 per cent to municipalities. Now 42 per cent goes to states, 28 per cent to municipalities and 30 per cent to Communal Councils and there are proposals to raise Communal Council funding to 50 per cent (Gabriel 2008; Ciccariello-Maher 2007a). Gabriel (2008) concludes that such measures to formalise and ensure greater consistency and openness on funding could foster wider participation and cut down on critiques of clientelism, allowing the Councils to achieve their full potential as sites for democratic engagement and self-determination. In general the idea that funding comes from a central source is difficult to overcome given that the idea is to distribute national resources to local communities. However it does seem clear that a Law of Regional Public Funding, that encompasses *all* sources of funding and not just FIDES funding, could clarify these financial relationships at the level of the Councils and of municipalities and states.

After around five years of existence the Councils movement is growing rather than losing its appeal and, in general, the Councils have resisted the historical tendency, both in Venezuela and more widely, of state-impulsed programmes to become mere appendages of the state. However, while funding allocation is being addressed, there have not been any changes in terms of democratising the Presidential Commission for Popular Power, despite calls to do so by the Communal Councils themselves. Until this happens accusations of a lack of autonomy and of clientelism will persist. As I highlighted in section 3.4.1, a key problem with many state-sponsored programmes for social change is that there is a tension between the pursuit of democratic social change through the promotion of grassroots participation and organisation, and the reluctance of states and governments to fundamentally alter state-society power relations as this would undermine their position of power (Luke 2000; Azevedo 1998; Archer and Costello 1990). While the Councils themselves offer opportunities to exercise democratic participation and protagonism, it is unclear whether the failure to impact at higher levels reflects bureaucratic blockages that might eventually be overcome via a Gramscian “war of position”, or if continued failure to democratise public institutions at higher levels reflects a lack of commitment by the Chavez government to fully implement their discourse of developing “thick” democracy and redistributing power as this would undermine their position of power. This raises questions as to the possibility of synergy between state-led reform and popular

mobilisation and requires further analysis of the extent to which measures that have been implemented from above decentralise or recentralise power in practice.

7.3.4 Relationship with municipal and state governments: decentralisation or recentralisation of power?

Debates surrounding the relationship between the Communal Councils and local government are highly polarised. Critics argue that the parallel Communal Councils are a means of undermining traditional representative government at the local and municipal level and that, rather than decentralise power to the local level, they have served to concentrate power centrally, especially as Communal Council proposals by-pass local government and go directly to the central, unelected Presidential Commission of Popular Power (Corrales 2009; Smilde 2009; Garcia-Guadilla 2008b; Lopez-Maya 2008; Irazabal and Foley 2008; Lovera 2008; Lander 2007). For example Smilde (2009) argues that while government policy from 1999-2006 focussed on engaging and expanding protagonist participation, there has been a recentralisation of power since Chavez's re-election in 2006. Leon (2009:9) concludes that 'the present government has not tried to create a chain of decentralised authorities but rather a direct relationship between the leader and the masses'. This is exacerbated by the failure to implement mechanisms for grassroots articulation with the state administration and municipal, state and national government via the CLPP and FCG.

However, as Ellner (2009a) stresses, the failure of the CLPP was more to do with the fact that both opposition and some pro-Chavez Mayors have been reluctant to embrace the Communal Councils as they see them as a threat to their power, rather than deliberate attempts to centralise control. There are also numerous examples of Council autonomy in deciding on projects without excessive centralised interference, as section 7.3.2 revealed. Furthermore as most projects remain localised and with project funding at around US\$14,000- 28,000 per project, the accusation that the Councils are usurping the roles of municipalities and states are exaggerated (Ellner 2009b). Most importantly, reallocation of funds directly to the Councils has the potential for by-passing very real inefficiency and corruption at municipal and state levels and putting resources directly in the hands of communities (Wilpert 2007a; Gonzalez-Marregot 2007).

Furthermore, Ellner (2009b) questions the fixation of some academics on absolute autonomy, arguing that past movements that were totally autonomous from the state gained very little. In contrast, he argues that the Councils have the potential to significantly

restructure state-community relations and that, while many projects are currently small-scale, the Councils are more than just spaces to manage community services: they are crucial in the construction of popular power. Critiques underestimate the importance of starting on a small scale to build confidence and capacity and overcome some of the issues that arose with participatory initiatives at the municipal scale such as the CLPP. Once people gain experience at the micro level they will be better placed to impact on higher levels. Smilde (2009), while critiquing certain aspects of the Councils, concedes that the strategy of state-impulsed programmes can generate considerable participation and power among excluded groups and that, unlike organisations that remain totally autonomous, linkages with the state can contribute to social and economic transformation; though the threat of the state turning this into a clientelistic relationship is ever present.

The debate over decentralisation or centralisation is complex with Heller (2001:132) pointing out that there is no reason why decentralised government will automatically be more democratic. In fact, as Blair (2005:932) points out, it may just empower local elites, as was the case in the decentralisation measures in Venezuela in the 1980s and 1990s and, to an extent, in some Communal Councils and local governments today. Mitchell (1998) found that decentralisation measures in the late 1980s led to the segregation of Caracas, with middle class areas such as Chacao being able to make use of their new powers of taxation to develop their own neighbourhood and actively exclude poor people such as market traders from entering the area. At the same time city-wide cuts in central infrastructural investment meant poorer areas with limited tax revenues went into decline and city-wide services such as transport networks lacked investment and co-ordination. Such tensions between local and central planning persist in the Chavez era. For example, there have been cases of NIMBYism where middle class Councils have used constitutionally guaranteed rights to try and block central infrastructural policies such as plans to build low-cost housing in middle class areas (Irazabal and Foley 2008; Lerner 2007). This overlap of responsibility between Councils, municipal government and city-wide government illustrates the difficulty of finding a balance between centralised development and decentralisation. Ultimately the constitutional commitment to state involvement in the provision of social services *and* the reallocation of resources directly to communities means that the tensions between centralised planning and development and decentralisation are difficult to resolve.

7.3.5 Scaling up?

I have highlighted that the Councils to date have mainly been concerned with very local projects and, while there is scope for autonomous decision-making, many projects are quite similar given the basic needs of many communities. While there is a general consensus that the councils have allowed for considerable input in self-management and have created the conditions for self-empowerment of the people, they still face ongoing problems in terms of scaling-up from the local level to municipal, regional and national levels (Garcia-Guadilla 2008a,b; Goldfrank 2008; Lander 2007; Raby 2006). Hawkins (2010a) argues that participation at any level is important as a means of empowering citizens by giving them power over their own lives and their own local development and has the potential to make government policy more representative and just. However, as Holst (2007 no page) stresses, ‘it is only when these experiences are expanded to a national level that their full potential can be realised and it is at this point that the character of the state itself- in whose interests it acts- becomes a central question’.

Escobar (2010) says that while the main role of the Councils may be improving local living conditions, their functions go beyond this. By enabling people to take over some of the functions of the state and play a protagonist role in the self-management of local services, they contribute to the reorganisation of power relations. However examples of how the Councils are currently impacting on wider state-society relations are less evident. This calls into question the extent to which reforms have fulfilled their promise to fundamentally restructure the state and transform power relations. While there is widespread agreement on the importance of the Councils as the nuclei of popular power, there is less consensus on how they will develop in the future. Debates centre on whether they will forge greater relations with local government and contribute to making the state more responsive to the needs of the people, whether they will continue to work in parallel with old state structures, or if they will eventually take over their roles and replace local government entirely (Lacabana: no date; Lerner 2007). A key question is how democratic participation at the local level can be scaled-up to impact on power relations at higher levels and whether or not, despite the rhetoric, there is a general reluctance on the part of central government to enforce the constitutionally guaranteed mechanisms to facilitate such interaction.

If viewed through the Leninist concept of “dual power” or Gramsci’s “war of position”, then the very criticisms levelled by detractors that the Councils might replace old power structures and organisational processes are actually potential strengths of parallelism. The

Councils have the potential to overcome the inefficiency of municipal and state-level bureaucracy (Ellner 2011). Lenin (1917b) warned that dual power can not be legislated but must be seized from below. While the councils were initially created from above via legislation, they are voluntarily formed, elect their own leadership and respond to community need much more than the old institutions by allowing people to directly manage public policy and projects from below. As in Cuba, there is a danger that the state may come to dominate but so far this has not been the case. Rather Venezuela represents a new form of dual power that uses the state in order to transform the state (Harris 2007; Dennis 2006). Although flawed, the Communal Councils provide opportunities for counter-hegemonic learning and allow popular social forces to build counter-hegemonic institutions that have the potential to challenge old state structures and modes of organisation and eventually develop institutional power.

It is important to note that most people still see a central role for the state in the delivery of public services. The difference is that they have a new conceptualisation of the state as a democratic entity subject to the control of the people. For example Pedro, a Cano Amarillo resident, said, ‘the resources of this country belong to everyone and they are just there to administer. We are the ones who decide how to use the resources to solve problems’ (March 2010). One important recent development is the Law of Communes (*Comunas*) passed in December 2010, which aims to develop municipal level governing bodies that merge smaller Communal Councils to form larger Councils or Communes. Furthermore, at a public rally I attended in February 2010, President Chavez announced the reintroduction of the Federal Council of Government to be made up of eleven Communal Council representatives, nine social movement representatives, each elected for one year, alongside Governors and one Mayor from each state. This body aims to give direct grassroots input into national-level planning and budgeting with the idea of eventually developing a Communal Parliament.

Many people I interviewed also spoke about the Councils as the fundamental building blocks of a new type of state; the communal state. For example Eduardo, an art teacher at UNEARTE and community activist in the Cano Amarillo area said, ‘I imagine that there will be a disintegration of the state as we know it. The colonial state is a model that was imposed on us but we are now implanting a vision where the majority has the control. The Comuna as an organisation has these characteristics’ (February 2010). Similarly Antonio, a retired lawyer and Mission Sucre student at UNEARTE, said, ‘we are co-creating new institutions where the participation of the people is the key; the population by the people of

public institutions. The Comuna will be the means of devising and creating our own politics, our own policies, our own Laws' (December 2009).

Ellner (2009a) says that scaling-up via Communes and Communal Cities has the potential to develop greater direct input on budgeting, policy-making and implementation. However it remains to be seen how these most recent initiatives impact on power relations, especially given the lack of implementation or ineffective operation of similar mechanisms in the past. While there seems to be considerable support for the idea of the Communal Councils feeding into the Communal State, exactly how this will develop in practice and how it will impact on "old" national, state and municipal government is an ongoing tension that is yet to be resolved.

7.3.6 Communal Councils: potential rather than realisation of power to the people

For Massey (2009) the Councils develop new power geometries by impacting on both the geographical location of power and the nature of spaces for the exercise of power, thereby creating a different power relation to representative democracy based on collective organisation. The Councils are a work in progress but overall the results are promising. Despite being created from above, the Councils have enabled people to develop democratic, participatory skills and practices at the grassroots and take effective ownership of local development. Historically the Venezuelan people were inactive and relied on paternalistic and clientelistic relations. To an extent this persists today, as illustrated by the number of personal petitions directed to the President in newspapers, in his weekly "Alo Presidente" programme and on his Facebook site. Nevertheless, people are mobilising on a large scale to take control of their own development and are starting to make wider demands. The Councils have been important in encouraging widespread community organisation among previously excluded and inactive sectors and increasing the self-worth of communities. Most commentators argue that the Councils have great potential and that as people learn how to plan, organise and execute projects they will increase their capabilities and become better placed to impact on wider state structures.

Despite these achievements, the experience of the Communal Councils in Venezuela illustrates general tensions between representation and participation, centralised planning and decentralisation, and between absolute autonomy and structural impact that are not easily reconciled. In general there is the sense that the Councils are a significant initiative in building popular power but also a sense of incompleteness that casts doubt on the willingness of government to fully implement measures to transform power relations. This

raises questions as to the scope for synergy between state-led reform and popular mobilisation as a means of reorganising power relations. De Souza Santos (2005:275) argues that broad participation can lead to the democratisation of the state and other institutions but this requires going beyond budgetary deconcentration to include decision-making powers. Only in this way does popular participation become popular power. While the Councils have been important in giving grassroots organisations direct input on planning and executing social policy and developing state-society linkages, there is still a lack of clarity in terms of funding allocation and in terms of how the Councils relate to state structures at various levels (Coelho et al. 2010; Ellner 2009a,b; Machado 2008).

Mohan (2001:166) argues that ‘local action must simultaneously address the non-local’. While the Councils are becoming institutionalised and have the *potential* to restructure state-society relations there is also a danger that in practice they are more a means of bypassing old state structures without impacting fundamentally on less democratic processes at higher levels. As Luis Lander (interview by Burbach and Pineiro 2007:193) says, ‘the challenges are many. The struggle for communal democracy is by no means guaranteed to succeed. Unless there is broad participation the councils could simply become one more bureaucratic layer, racked by political infighting and squabbling over the spoils of political office’. As long as the Councils are restricted to local level change without the institutionalisation of clear mechanisms to have input at regional and national level, these problems will persist.

There is evidence that some of these shortcomings are currently being addressed. The package of Laws passed in December 2010 promise to further develop fiscal, political and administrative decentralisation and scale-up the development of popular power in decision-making processes, though it remains to be seen how these develop in practice and if they are subject to the same obstacles as previous initiatives. For Smilde (2009:4) ‘the Communal Councils are controversial not for what they are but for what they could become’. At best they could become avenues for the exercise of Participatory Budgeting and at worst they could undermine local representative democracy and become appendages of the state like the Committees in Defence of the Revolution in Cuba. Examining wider mechanisms that exist for the exercise of participatory democracy and how they are developing in practice adds further insights into the possible future directions of the Venezuelan process, as I explore in the next section.

7.4 Participatory democracy

Burbach and Pineiro (2007:181) argue that ‘Venezuela’s originality lies in its commitment to participatory democracy; the exercise of power from the community level’. The discourse of participation is firmly on the Venezuelan agenda and, as I have illustrated, participatory democracy is evidenced in a range of government-introduced initiatives including the Education Missions and their community projects, the Social Missions more generally and the Communal Councils. This section looks in greater detail at local grassroots organisation beyond the Social Missions and Communal Councils to examine how wider government reforms have institutionalised new channels to participate and make demands and how these have been responded to. Tarrow (1989:7-8) says ‘unless we trace the forms of activity people use, how these reflect their demands and their interactions with opponents and elites, we cannot understand either the magnitude or the dynamics of change in politics and society’. This section undertakes such an analysis and concludes that while considerable progress has been made in enabling people to take control over decision-making and policy formulation in areas that affect them and at national level in terms of exercising direct democracy on a periodic basis via referenda and input on Laws, as with the Missions and Communal Councils, there has been less progress on fundamentally altering ongoing power relations at intermediate and higher levels of state and government.

7.4.1 Participation in ‘invited spaces’

Since Chavez came to power there has undoubtedly been a marked increase in social organisation (Garcia-Guadilla 2008a). One of the first initiatives was Chavez’s call in April 2001 for people to form “Bolivarian Circles” of 7-15 people to organise to defend the revolution, identify local problems and act as discussion forums. Raby (2006) says that, while the Circles were primarily a result of a call from the President, they had a spontaneous grassroots quality and were not controlled by political parties or bureaucrats, nor were they funded by central government. They had some success in encouraging people to organise locally, with an estimated 3-4 million people taking part, and were central in mobilising people to defeat the 2002 coup and vote in elections. However they generally operated outside the state apparatus and had limited impact on changing the way local organisations relate to the state. Since 2003 they have declined and been replaced by a variety of other forms of grassroots movements.

There has been a proliferation of grassroots organisations across the political spectrum since 1999 in response to new channels of participation being opened up that allow greater links with the state and more input on policy decision-making, most importantly Neighbourhood Associations, Urban Land Committees, Technical Committees for Water and Electricity and Health Committees. These Committees have proven highly effective in bringing state agencies, professionals and communities together, often for the first time, and enable local communities to deal with immediate needs (Escobar 2010; Garcia-Guadilla 2008a; Lacabana: no date).

The people I interviewed gave many examples of participation in these technical committees and for many this was their first opportunity to participate and to interact with state institutions. For example Marvela, who runs a small kiosk selling empanadas in Cano Amarillo, is a member of the local Technical Committee for Water that has formal links with the Ministry for Habitat and Housing and the state-run water company Hidrocapital. She explained that this state-opened space promoted effective interaction between the community and the state to decide local infrastructural policy and stressed that this was not possible prior to the Chavez era (December 2009). Similarly Garcia-Guadilla (2011) found that the Urban Land Committees have helped redefine state-society interaction by providing space for local policy-making and administration of new collective property rights in conjunction with state institutions. Such innovations lead Lopez-Maya and Lander (2011:74) to conclude that important steps have been taken in Venezuela to ‘open various levels of public administration to political activity’. Julio, a community activist from Cano Amarillo, said that these programmes are more than just exercises in participation that give local people more control over local development, they are also important in developing a new hegemony based on solidarity and collective organisation (March 2010).

While most of these programmes were initially proposed from above, Raby (2006:190) insists ‘they were created by the people themselves rather than any party or state bureaucracy’. She explains that with this comes a strong sense of community ownership that distinguishes the programmes from purely top-down populist projects. The Communal Councils have not replaced older forms of participation nor have they fostered a decline in other forms of autonomous community activity (Coelho et al. 2010). This suggests that spaces have been created for a wide variety of participatory practices, rather than the government trying to control both the nature and scope of participation via a single programme.

However, what became apparent in my research, as Coehlo et al. (2010), Ellner (2009a, b), Goldfrank (2008), Machado (2008) and Raby (2006) point out, is that mechanisms for the exercise of participatory governance beyond the very local level are less developed. The CLPP for example were only implemented in a few areas, the most notable being Julio Chavez's implementation of participatory budgeting during his time as Mayor of Carora in Lara State (Harnecker 2008). A few people I interviewed referred to their ability to impact on policy-making and budgeting decisions alongside government and state officials via the Parochial (District) Councils, Municipal Councils and State Councils, but the majority of people I interviewed were largely unclear on how to do so. They spoke mainly about their experiences of ongoing participation at the very local level and periodic participation at the national level via referenda, electoral campaigning, submitting proposals, and attending debates and consultations on new Laws and Constitutional amendments. Given that the most prevalent criticisms from the people I interviewed were inefficiency and corruption within government and state institutions, this lack of clarity as to the mechanisms to hold these institutions to account and have regular input on policy-making represents a serious shortcoming in the development of "thick" democracy and the reorganisation of power relations.

Again, the development of the Communes, Communal Cities and Federal Council of Government may hold the potential to overcome this problem, though as relatively new initiatives this remains to be seen. Overall to date, there has been an 'absence of mechanisms linking the state and civil society in ways that guarantee democratic governance' (Hellinger 2011b:341). However Schiller (2011:119) points out that discourse promoting the idea that "we are all the state", while not yet fully developed in practice, is important in that 'shaping how the state is conceived of and imagined can have real, practical effects on political action' and potentially on the reconfiguration of power relations. While still 'in gestation' the Council and Commune structure is the most important means to establish new links and relations between the state and organised society (Hellinger 2011b:341).

7.4.2 Autonomous participation

While the Communal Councils are key avenues for the exercise of direct democracy and community participation, many other examples emerged during my research of communities organising for change outside the Council framework or other government-sponsored initiatives such as the Education Missions and Technical Committees. Some of these groups pre-exist the Chavez era and are adapting to the new opportunities opened up

to them and others have emerged since Chavez came to power. I found numerous examples of active participation across the two areas in which my research took place, including community groups organising cultural events, communities coming together to petition government departments for change, communities taking over disused buildings for community use and mass mobilisations both in support of and against the government. While all of these activities emerge autonomously from the barrios, different projects have varying degrees of interaction with the state using the spaces that have been opened up for participation.

This section again argues that while space exists for autonomous organisation, the majority of cases I observed relate to the satisfaction of local needs. While this is an important means of practising democracy by doing (Dewey 1916) that is empowering in and of itself, more profound impacts on the overall dynamics of power are less evident. I focus on two specific examples of autonomous participation in the Cano Amarillo area to illustrate some of the activities currently underway in communities, before looking at some of the ways in which local organisation is beginning to have wider structural impacts. I chose these examples as they are in many ways typical of the types of activities that people are engaged in within their own communities and also to illustrate how organisations that pre-exist the Chavez era as well as new actors have made use of the new spaces for participation.

Firstly the Colectivo Montaraz is an organisation that predates the Chavez era. Some of the older members were on “lists” of socialist activists at a time when socialist or communist organisations were banned. Some were also involved in the armed guerrilla movement. Several of them had to flee Caracas because of this and the associated fear of assassination. One of the older members explained to me that they originally came together through a love of football and started organising sporting activities for young people in the 23 de Enero and Cano Amarillo area. They were also involved in the mobilisations to defeat the 2002 coup and in community policing of the area to tackle crime levels. They are currently involved in a range of social activities and their membership has widened to include younger members of the community. The internal organisation of the Colectivo is very democratic with meetings organised on a horizontal basis and decisions made based on member voting procedures. The Collective generates its own funding through member donations and fund-raising activities but also interacts with state institutions to secure funding for specific projects.

The first activity I observed was in October 2009 when the group occupied a disused building in Cano Amarillo and then successfully petitioned the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education to recognise their constitutional right for communities to occupy abandoned buildings. Much of the resources to renovate the building come from membership subscriptions, local fundraising and volunteer work but they have also petitioned relevant authorities for funding. They have received state funds to renovate the building and buy resources but the Centre remains in the hands of the Collective and wider community and has not been “taken over” by the state. The space is now a community centre offering children’s activities, education Missions and other educational activities and also a meeting place for community groups.

Alongside this activity the Collective was also involved in a range of community activities. For example they helped co-ordinate a city-wide Referendum in November 2009 to pressurise the government to call for a Latin American referendum on U.S. military bases in Colombia and to show solidarity with the people of Honduras after the coup. They initiated a reduced road speed on the main road outside the Centre in response to community concerns over speeding cars and, most recently, started an urban agricultural project. The Collective has also volunteered in government-sponsored campaigns such as replacing household light bulbs with energy saving ones. The Colectivo Montaraz in Cano Amarillo is a good example of the range of activities that autonomous groups engage in and of the spaces that have been opened up for such participation. While maintaining their autonomy, the group is able to interact with state institutions and also pressurise the government for change.

Secondly, Rosa and Julio are long-term residents of Cano Amarillo and both have become active in their community as a result of the changes that have been instigated. Rosa, alongside her voluntary community work, teaches science in the Bolivarian University and also in a High school in Petare. She is a member of the parochial council for the Capital District in which Cano Amarillo lies. Julio is a bus driver and community activist in various projects in his own community and in Petare. Rosa and Julio together with educators and administrators in a High School in Petare, set up a pilot project to try and tackle some of the problems with the youth, mainly boys, in terms of social exclusion and anti-social behaviour within and outside the school. The Foundation has a three-pronged approach: conducting workshops with students, educators in the school and parents. The main objective is to foster critical and collective consciousness and self-esteem among students and their families. Also, through her work at the Bolivarian University, Rosa has

organised a link between the school and the University to encourage students to go on to higher education. Students from the High School visit the University on Saturdays to take part in a range of sporting and cultural activities designed to encourage positive activities among the young people and also to combat the belief that Higher Education is not an option for poor people from the barrio. The project is entirely organised and funded from the grassroots including contributions from the local church, though the programme does not have a religious objective. The pilot project is currently being evaluated and the Foundation aims to present their evaluation to the Ministry of Education with a view to securing funding to scale up the project to city wide and eventually national level. They have had preliminary meetings with the Ministry and are currently arranging to present the results of the first evaluation. I was able to attend workshops in the school, activities at the University and also interview Rosa and Julio about the project.

Rosa explained, ‘the state facilitates with the tools, facilitates through the Laws that make things possible but ultimately it’s the decision of the community. It’s the community that has to build it, set it up. This is the culture, this is participation; protagonist participation to build a new collective consciousness: looking at how to improve society, to change the mode of governance, to replace the culture of individualism to one where everyone is responsible, everyone together. The idea of co-responsibility as stated within the Constitution’ (March 2010). Their example illustrates that spaces have been opened up for people to take an active role in community development. Furthermore their pilot project aims to have real structural impact and influence on policy decisions at the State and National level.

In section 2.3.3 I highlighted that in the Venezuelan context participatory democracy is closely linked to basic needs satisfaction through protagonist participation (MINEP 2008). These examples illustrate some of the spaces that have been opened up for people to take an active role in decisions that affect their lives. It is this that Held (2006) says forms the essence of participatory democracy. Participation has helped develop a sense of empowerment and also helped to address decades of social exclusion and inequality. Nevertheless government discourse stresses the project of “giving power to the people” and while these examples illustrate that many people now feel that they have the power to take an active role in the development of their own communities, they say less about how protagonist participation is impacting on wider structural relations of power. As Goldfrank (2008) highlights, participation has been implemented with much greater success at local rather than higher levels. However Pearce et al. (2010:270) importantly note that

participation in community development enables people to gain a voice and power in the struggle for social justice and in this sense the spaces that have been opened up for participation in Venezuela have proven effective. Furthermore they argue that such ‘action for change is a social process that politicizes’ and through participation ‘the power asymmetries become visible’ and this may catalyse greater pressure for change. Similarly Hellinger (2011b) argues that organising to resolve local problems gives participants the skills and confidence to become part of the process of taking power by the community.

There are some important indications that this is starting to happen in Venezuela. As I explore in more detail in Chapter 8, many people in Venezuela are starting to express frustration that increased opportunities for mobilisation from below have not been matched by more widespread changes at higher levels of government and administration and are starting to question the commitment of the government and the President to deal with bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption and crime (Hellinger 2011a). Furthermore there have been some important challenges to the government from below. Velasco (2011:158) outlines a ‘direct challenge to the hegemony of Chavismo’ that occurred in October 2004 when the newly elected pro-Chavez Mayor of Caracas announced that he was appointing his own choice for Parish Council leader. Local groups mobilised to oppose this decision and ultimately elected their own Council leader. Similarly the referendum defeat of 2007 and the grassroots revolt of the PSUV to secure the right to elect their candidates for the 2010 National Assembly elections illustrate the space available for the exercise of power from the local level to challenge decisions from above that has the potential to alter structural power relations.

7.4.3 Achievements in the exercise of protagonist participation

Examples of community participation show that many people feel that they are able to act as protagonists of change. Space exists for their autonomous participation outside formal state structures but groups do also interact with the state to pressure for change and secure resources. Buxton (2011: xviii) stresses that while many organisations such as the Communal Councils and Social Missions were initially created from above they display a ‘marked tendency towards independence’ rather than being conduits of government agendas. There is a real sense that people can take control of the direction of the process and that, rather than wait for the State to provide services, they can organise for change. Escobar (2010:15) concludes that ‘to this extent it can be said that the protagonist democracy has worked against the long-standing patterns of social and economic exclusion’.

This increased participation is evident among people involved in the Social Missions and those not involved, Council members and non-members and pro- and anti-Chavez groups, within and outside of government-promoted spaces. People do not passively accept opinions and decisions from above. People are aware of their rights and how to assert them. They have a clear idea of what participatory democracy means to them and use this knowledge to block authoritarian tendencies within the movement. Many people support the government when they feel it is fulfilling promises to extend and develop protagonist, participatory democracy, but also challenge government and state institutions when they feel their rights are not upheld. Pro- and anti-Chavez groups have mobilised on numerous occasions to petition relevant state and ministerial departments to demand their constitutional rights and push for further change.

There does seem to be a real commitment to change in Venezuela, with discourse and policy opening up spaces for participation and providing opportunities to increase capacity to make use of these spaces. The general picture for Chavistas, opposition and those with a more neutral stance appears to be that Venezuelan people are not passive recipients of change. Protests and petitions of government buildings, the proliferation of grassroots organisations and participation in election campaigning and voting all indicate that Venezuelan people take an active part in the processes underway in their country.

The range of programmes illustrates that participation operates on several of the levels Pretty et al. (1995) identified. These programmes have mobilised previously inactive sections of society and enable members to interact with government programmes as well as organise autonomously on local issues and to demand services from the state. There are examples of functional participation whereby people form groups such as Technical Committees to meet pre-determined objectives and of interactive participation whereby people have real input into decisions on public policy and resource allocation. While many projects were initially created from above, there are also examples of self-mobilisation whereby people develop contacts with state institutions for resources and technical advice but retain control over the projects and the way resources are spent. Wagner (2004: no page) concludes that ‘the essence of the new Venezuelan democracy is the ability of people to participate in what had previously been a “pacted” democracy’. In contrast to the neo-liberal idea of “rolling back the state”, the widespread community participation in Venezuela suggests that an alternative based on state-society collaboration is emerging and that autonomous organisation “in and against the state” is possible.

7.5 Conclusions: Redefining the state and state-society relations?

There is much debate over whether or not states enable or constrain associational activity. However, Cleaver (2001:37) highlights that discussions revolving around ‘collective action facilitated by and in opposition to the state’ are currently out of fashion in mainstream development. She calls for a renewal of the debate to develop a critical reflexive understanding of the underlying determinants of social change through exploration of the linkages between individuals and communities and the structures and institutions of society. The Venezuelan experience offers an arena in which to explore such debates and examine the degree of fit between the actions of leaders, government policy, processes of change in practice, and public opinion. Lenin (1917b:38) wrote that ‘the basic question of every revolution is that of state power’ and argued that it is not enough to change a government and state officials. Revolutionary change requires changing the structural characteristics of the state to create an entirely different kind of power. While most assessments highlight a sense of potential and incompleteness, the Venezuelan process along with other Latin American initiatives, indicate that the state is back on the agenda as a principal actor in social change. While there are ever-present tensions in the current process of state-led social change in Venezuela, considerable progress has been made. Spaces have been created and legal frameworks put in place to facilitate collective action that is stimulated from above but allows for organisational activity both “in and against the state”.

Article 3 of the Constitution (CBRV 1999:9) states that the essential purpose of the state is to develop ‘the democratic exercise of the will of the people’ whilst article 5 states that ‘the organs of the state emanate from and are subject to the sovereignty of the people’. While the state is very much at the centre of social transformation in Venezuela, the government has clearly begun a process outside the parameters of “thin” representative democracy through innovations that transfer decision-making power to the grassroots and programmes and policies that favour popular control and popular democracy (Ellner 2009a; Holst 2007).

The dual strategy of participation in the “old” state via representative and direct democratic means such as voting, referendums and recall combined with bottom-up parallel structures as the “6th branch of the state” is contributing to the development of a new consciousness that is challenging old practices and consolidating protagonist democracy and the exercise of self-determination (Burbach and Pineiro 2007). Certainly the testimonies and experiences of many of the people I interviewed suggest that this is the case. As one Petare

resident said, 'it's not the idea that we have to go to the institutions but that the institutions come from the community' (October 2009). For Schugurensky (2004a,b) experiments such as Participatory Budgeting can be a tool to address the shortcomings of representative democracy and develop active learning and citizenship. As yet, the Venezuelan process has not instigated widespread projects in participatory budgeting; largely due to reluctance by local, municipal and national governments to initiate such changes. Overall, the decisions people have input on is still largely restricted to the local level and the centralised funding mechanisms and lack of widespread participatory budgeting compromise the autonomy of grassroots organisations. A lot of progress has been made, though there is still some discrepancy between government discourse, on the ground initiatives and state/government responses.

These ongoing tensions between the state and government and organised communities raise major concerns for democratic participation in terms of what people participate in, how to integrate different levels of government and how to maintain and expand participation. Lack of more significant progress in the overall reorganisation of structural power relations casts doubt on the willingness of the government to instigate changes that fundamentally alter power relations and raises concerns that they are only willing to develop local level participation that does not impact or conflict with their position of power. Buxton (2011:xvi) for example points to 'ideological and organizational uncertainty at the highest level of the Venezuelan government' and says that, at times, the government has proven reluctant to give up power as evidenced by the repeated use of decree powers and the concentration of power in the executive. Hellinger (2011b:341) says that changes to date have allowed for 'significant experience with new forms of social organisation and participatory governance but the central government retains many of the features of the petro-state'. Nevertheless, there has been a strengthening of associational life in Venezuela and there have been some important examples that illustrate that the Venezuelan people are not passive recipients of change from above. Organised communities have mobilised to oppose changes from above that they feel by-pass constitutionally guaranteed rights to exercise democratic participation. Buxton (2011: xviii) therefore concludes that 'in providing a legal framework for social organisation, and in some cases financing participatory initiatives, the Chavez administration may have created serious long-term constraints on its own power'.

In December 2010 a number of new Laws concerning popular power were passed, including the Law of Popular Power, the Law of the Communes, the Law of Public and

Communal Planning, the Law of Social Control, the Law of Federal Government and the Law of State, Municipal and Popular Power. These Laws promise greater involvement in the evaluation and approval of budgets and in policy-making and also aim to clarify funding procedures and accountability mechanisms. Le Grand (2010) says that these Laws have the potential to further institutionalise and expand popular power, along the lines of participatory budgeting, by increasing the scope of grassroots influence and also strengthening mandatory rather than discretionary funding procedures; though a key question is if “old” municipal and state institutions will comply or if, as before, they will try to block the changes. It remains to be seen how these new Laws are responded to by the people and by government at local, regional and national level and whether they can overcome some of the problems identified with the process to date. What seems clear is that while there is the potential for further development of democratic social change, ‘the future remains open to contradictory tendencies’ (Lopez-Maya and Lander 2011:78). The next Chapter examines the ongoing tensions within the Venezuelan process through a focus on local people’s perceptions on how the process is developing in practice in order to draw overarching conclusions about the potential and future of the Venezuelan project.

Chapter 8: **Popular Perceptions: Synergy or Conflict?**

'Socialism in our sense, and what President Chavez talks about, is about bettering the whole country; where everyone is involved as equal protagonists in change. Not like before. The President has had some marvellous ideas and a lot has changed here but there are also infiltrators in the government and a lot still needs to be done. There are still people who only think of themselves. What's being done at community level, and things at government level are mostly great but problems remain. Also there's a certain level in-between where problems exist and this stops a lot of things getting done. That's why they created the Missions, the Communal Councils; to change this. We now have the education, we have the opportunities and the idea is that we will form the government of the future; we will control the administration. We need to keep on with this. A lot has been done in ten years but ten years is not a long time to change all of this'.

(Lydia: Mission Sucre student Petare 2009)

In Chapters Six and Seven I explored how constitutional principles of extending opportunities to exercise direct and participatory democracy have been put into practice and how they are experienced and evaluated by some of the people living through the processes of change. I argued that while considerable progress has been made, particularly at grassroots level, there are still ongoing problems that need to be addressed if the project to extend “power to the people” is to be realised. This Chapter explores in more detail how far the perceptions and desires of the Venezuelan people “fit” with government discourse as well as local evaluations of the achievements and ongoing challenges within the process to date.

It is important to note that my interviews are not a representative sample of the Venezuelan population and that the majority of my interviews and observations were with poorer people who tend to make up the majority of the Chavez government's support. While less problematic in terms of Chapters 6 and 7 where my focus was on examining how opportunities to exercise participation were developing in specific contexts that could perhaps shed light on how the process more generally is developing, this Chapter can only aim to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of the process as identified by a small group of mainly Chavez supporters. Nevertheless, I was able to interview several very vocal critics of the process and, as I have already highlighted, Chavez supporters ‘hardly represent an uncritical mass which endorses all the actions of its leaders’ (Ellner 2009a:2). By triangulating their testimonies with large-scale quantitative secondary research and other secondary sources such as media articles and academic research, I identify some of the crucial issues that impact on the potential of the process to develop popular power.

8.1 Satisfaction with democracy

The Latinobarometer (LB) reveals that Venezuelans show a high level of support for democracy and that this has, in general, increased steadily since Chavez came to power. There has also been a marked reduction in the number of people who feel that authoritarian government can be justified in certain circumstances as Table 5 shows.

Table 5: Support for democracy in Venezuela

	1995	1996	1997	1998	2000	2001	2002	2007	2008	2009	2010
Democracy is preferable to any other type of government	60%	62%	64%	60%	61%	57%	75%	67%	82%	84%	84%
In certain circumstances authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one	21%	19%	17%	25%	24%	20%	12%	14%	9%	7%	9%

Source: Latinobarometer.org

In 2008 and 2009 Venezuelans ranked highest in the region in their support for democracy and among the lowest in their belief that authoritarian government can be preferable in certain circumstances. Furthermore, in 2008, 85 per cent of Venezuelans felt that democracy is indispensable to development, the highest in the region, compared to a 50 per cent regional average. This had increased from 80 per cent in 2005. In 2009 85 per cent of Venezuelans said that they supported democracy as preferable to any other form of government, first in the region, and 90 per cent said that while democracy may have its problems it is the best form of government, again highest in the region alongside Uruguay. This indicates that Venezuelans are less inclined than other countries to support authoritarian regimes and strongly support democracy. The LB (2008:6) says that ‘support for democracy implies the legitimacy of the democratic system’ and, based on these figures, it appears that the majority of Venezuelan people have faith in the legitimacy of their democracy.

However, this says little about how satisfied the Venezuelan people are with how democracy operates in their country. It could be that such high levels of support for democracy and low levels of support for authoritarian government are because people feel that they do not live in a democracy and that Chavez is an authoritarian leader. While a high turnout in elections, as seen in Venezuela, is generally seen as an indication of faith in

the legitimacy of the democratic process, this section examines in more detail how satisfied the Venezuelan people are with the way democracy operates in their country.

8.1.2 Satisfaction with democracy: findings from the Latinobarometer

The LB (2008:6) says that their satisfaction statistics are ‘indicators of the efficiency of the system’. The LB reveals that in 1996 satisfaction with democracy in Venezuela was just 30 per cent, indicating that the majority of people were dissatisfied with the way democracy operated. This is conducive with the climate of the time whereby the pacted democracy of the Punto Fijo years had lost legitimacy, as I discussed in Chapter 4.

The 1998 LB poll took place between the 25th of November and the 3rd of December, just after legislative elections and just before the 6th December Presidential elections which Chavez won. This poll found that 45 per cent of Venezuelans were satisfied with democracy and this had risen to 47 per cent in 2009 and to 49 per cent in 2010. While this still appears quite low, satisfaction levels have increased since President Chavez and his movement entered the electoral arena and satisfaction levels have never fallen below pre-Chavez levels. The LB report states that Venezuela is a country with high levels of satisfaction along with Costa Rica, Uruguay and Chile. With accusations from the anti-Chavez people I spoke to and in both the domestic and international media that Chavez is a dictator and authoritarian, it is interesting that Venezuelan’s rate their satisfaction with democracy highly in comparison with many other countries in the region and that satisfaction levels have increased steadily since Chavez came to power.

When asked if they approve of the way the President and his government is leading the nation the LB findings were:

Table 6: Approval of the Government led by President Chavez

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Approval	51%	35%	43%	65%	65%	61%	48%	45%	47%	49%

Source: Latinobarometer.org

LB reports state that approval of the President and government often corresponds with indicators of economic growth or recession. In the Venezuelan case satisfaction is closely linked to the political economy of oil. The low figures in 2003 can be attributed to the coup and oil lockout of 2002-2003 and the subsequent economic recession. Higher figures in 2005 and 2006 came at a time of high oil prices and following large increases in social spending such as the Social Missions. Oil prices fell in 2008-2009 and this impacted on the level of government spending so this may have influenced approval ratings. With recent

increases in oil prices and signs of economic growth in Venezuela after a period of worldwide recession, approval ratings have also started to increase. Approval is still high in comparison with other world leaders and governments and given the length of time in office. It will be interesting to see how approval ratings change, especially in the run-up to the 2012 Presidential elections. While the government has taken steps to diversify the economy and stimulate endogenous development, ultimately, just as during the Punto Fijo years, this reliance on the oil economy is a crucial factor in the future of the current Venezuelan process.

When asked to rate civil and political guarantees in 2007, Venezuelans rated their country highly which again suggests a general satisfaction in the way democracy is operating. For example 70 per cent felt that their rights to political participation were upheld and 65 per cent felt that they had freedom of expression. 58 per cent felt that the Chavez regime showed solidarity with the poor and 56 per cent felt that there was a fair distribution of wealth, both highest in the region. Overall, Venezuela ranked highest in the region in terms of satisfaction with political and civil guarantees (LB 2007).

Furthermore, when asked to rate the level of democracy in their country, Venezuelans rate their country highly. In the 2005 LB, Venezuelans rated their democracy level at 7.6/10. In 2009 the rating was 7/10 and, of these, 36 per cent gave a score of 9 or 10 out of 10, indicating they saw their country as very democratic. This put Venezuela in third place in the region in 2009 in terms of how democratic they feel their country is. This figure rose to 7.3/10 in 2011. Interestingly the “satisfaction” ratings of Venezuelans appear lower than their rating of how democratic they feel their country is which suggests that while they feel that their country is by-and-large democratic, there is still room for improvement. This is also reflected in the interviews I conducted that I discuss in more detail in sections 8.1.3 and 8.4.

8.1.3 Satisfaction with democracy: grassroots evaluations of the President and government

The LB reports found a general tendency for people to rate their satisfaction with democracy based on their satisfaction with the President or government of the time. I found this to be very prevalent in the Venezuelan case. Many people I interviewed referred to President Chavez and his government when talking about democracy, both as a means to conceptualise democracy and as a means to express either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the way democracy operates in their country. For example, Carmen, a Chavez

supporter from Petare, said that ‘For me democracy is Hugo Chavez because the people decided and the majority are for him. What he does is for the people, for everyone’ (December 2009). Many people echo this idea that democracy works in their country because they have the President that the majority voted for and a government that they feel works in their interests. For example, Mischa, a Mission Sucre student in Campo Rico, said that ‘Venezuela is a democracy. You can’t say that Chavez is a dictator. He is the President we want. And the government work within our Constitution’ (October 2009). Similarly, Gilverto, a student activist from Campo Rico said, ‘On the question that Chavez is a dictator, that he has created a kind of pseudo-democracy, that he is driving the people of Venezuela like sheep, this is totally false. The people of this country recognise in Chavez an authentic leader. This is the government we voted for’ (February 2010).

Many opposition supporters also refer directly to the President and his government, but to express dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in their country, for example by likening Chavez to a dictator, citing restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and arguing that power has been concentrated centrally. One opposition supporter I interviewed who works in the Ministry of Justice said, ‘what we have here is a dictatorship. President Chavez wants us all to wear red shirts. This is not democracy’ (August 2009). Her statement is quite typical of the opposition supporters I spoke to. The majority based their assessments of the level of democracy in the country on their dislike of the President and the “Chavistas”.

Nevertheless, the consistently high turnout in elections as well as large-scale LB research suggests that the majority of Venezuelan people see their country as democratic. Even if views on President Chavez are extremely polarised, successive elections have shown that he is the President and his is the government that the majority of people want. Furthermore Smilde (2011:11) points out that ‘it would be a misinterpretation to think that “polarization” meant that the entire population was divided into pro- and anti-Chavez camps’ when in reality between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population support the Chavez government based on perceptions of government performance rather than, for example, class allegiance, as I discussed in section 4.3. He also points out that the percentage of people who positively evaluate the work of the Chavez government is routinely 20 to 30 points higher than the number of people who consider themselves pro-Chavez. The continued success of the Chavez government therefore has more to do with general support for government policies rather than the ‘uncritical messianism reported in the press’ (Smilde 2011:11).

The figure of President Chavez is undoubtedly very important for both detractors and supporters of the Venezuelan process; however, in reality, many people vote on policies rather than personalistic politics. Subsequent sections therefore examine in more detail critiques of and support for how the process is developing in practice beyond personality politics to look at how people view the way constitutional rights and freedoms have been implemented, the institutions and processes that have been put in place since Chavez came to power and the extent to which these evaluations might represent the development of a counter-hegemony based on principles of “thick” democracy.

8.2 The case of Beatriz

Beatriz is in her late 40s and lives in Catia, bordering Cano Amarillo. I attended classes in Mission Sucre with Beatriz between September 2009 and April 2010 and was able to have several in-depth discussions with her about the key changes she had experienced, her views on the process and hopes for the future, and the problems that she felt still need addressing. The following is an edited version of an interview I conducted with Beatriz in December 2009 and covers many of the themes already discussed in previous chapters as well as some of the strengths and shortcomings in the process that I discuss later in this Chapter.

‘Before everything was privatised. We had nothing. Under representative democracy the governments of the 4th republic imposed government upon us. We could not do things for ourselves. Now people have rights. Now we as a people have the right to speak out, to express our views and to act. Now we have a chance to play a leading role as protagonists in everything that we create and I give thanks for this because before there was no respect and I have no respect for a system that gives me no respect. I will not give my support to a system that leaves us oppressed. Before Chavez arrived I did nothing. I had no education, no work. I graduated high school in ’82 and never had the opportunity to study for a career because education was pretty much private; in principle no, but in reality you had to pay to register, to take an exam, to graduate. So it wasn’t free and we simply didn’t have the money.

But when Chavez came to power there were a whole number of opportunities and benefits for all the poor people such as the Missions. Everyone started participating and studying because we want to create a developed country. In my case I now have my own house—thanks to the President. I say thank you that I am here studying in Cano Amarillo. And there are a lot of people like me who give thanks because he has helped the poor a lot. I

now work a lot within my community and thank President Chavez for supporting these changes. I'm the social "controlador" [supervisor] for the Communal Council where I live. At the moment we are involved in the project "Nuevo Tricolor". It's a great project to fix up the houses in the barrio, to remodel the houses. It's not a present from Chavez but a community project. And for me this is socialism: everyone has access to opportunities for personal growth but as a collective.

But still there's a lack of solidarity. We lived for many years under Spanish colonialism, then capitalism and neoliberalism that had a huge influence on us so it's a question of, how do I say it, a problem of individualism. In reality people are still very alienated and lack consciousness. There's an egoism that others can't benefit unless I'm first. Another problem is the pure bureaucracy. Many people within the bureaucracy, within the Ministries, arrive with these traits of individualism, with these capitalist values, with old ideas of patronage, helping your friends, egoism. Of course we need to denounce them. We have the right to denounce and revoke but it's hard to combat it and it's hard to sanction them; sanctions aren't imposed when people are suspected of being guilty, when the facts come to light. At the very least we can not vote for them in the next elections but applying the Laws against them is hard. The Laws exist but it's hard to enforce them. And so to shift, throw off this quantity of factors that have menaced us for many years is very slow, very slow. Unfortunately I don't think it will be complete in my lifetime. I don't know how long- it may even take generations- but it is a necessary change'.

Beatriz's experiences, both positive and negative, are in many ways typical of the people I interviewed from the two barrios where I carried out my research. Many spoke about the hardships of the Punto Fijo years and some, like Ceny from Petare, reported how people were forced to eat dried dog food because they were so poor (August 2009). Many people also see a direct link to President Chavez and his government and credit them as the instigators of the positive changes in their country. While this suggests a commitment to principles of social democracy whereby the state predominantly takes control of social welfare, many people also express that they feel active participants in the process, by initially voting for Chavez and through their ongoing participation in the Social Missions, Communal Councils and other community organisations that allow them to take ownership of their own development. While people may say "thanks to Chavez" they also stress that services and opportunities to participate are a right.

Beatriz's experience reflects a wider consensus among the people I interviewed that the changes from above in Venezuela have enabled new social actors to enter the social and political arena and develop people's belief that they can have a real input in processes of change. While Beatriz talked mainly of localised participation, many other people I spoke to also talked about the ability to scale-up from localised participation and have an influence on policy-making, for example through the Comunas and via mechanisms of direct democracy. Beatriz also refers to ongoing issues of corruption and inefficiency within the Bolivarian state and government by the new "boli-bourgeoisie" and a lack of consciousness among ordinary people, that suggest a new hegemony based on principles of democratic participation has not yet been fully consolidated; all key themes that are put forward by both supporters and critics of the process and which are addressed in more detail in subsequent sections of this Chapter.

8.3 Satisfaction with opportunities for protagonist participation

In Chapters 6 and 7 I identified the range of means available for people to take an active part in the process and the ways in which these avenues have encouraged and facilitated the participation of previously excluded people. I illustrated that people generally believe they have opportunities to take an active role in the implementation of social policy and a real input on decision-making processes at both the local and national level. This section examines in more detail how satisfied people are with the institutions and processes that have been introduced to allow greater participation by ordinary people in policy-making and decision-making. Again, this adds to an understanding of how satisfied people are with the way democracy operates in their country.

In the first place many people describe how they were unable to participate in any meaningful way during the Punto Fijo years but now feel that their voices are heard and that they can play a real part in processes of change. They cite the new Constitution as the principle illustration of their new rights to act as protagonists. For example, Maura, a resident of Petare, said 'Above all it's about equality and inclusion. There was always a small group, the cream, who could participate and speak for everyone but now, no. Now everyone can participate' (September 2009). Similarly Rogelio, originally from Colombia and now a Venezuelan citizen, explained that 'before the President we didn't have our Constitution. We could elect someone and they took the decisions for us. We could vote; nothing else. They did a bad job and we had to accept it; we couldn't do anything. But now, with the new Constitution, we participate. We are active. The government does what we want not what they want. The government is the people. We are a living part of the

politics of this country. I believe that here in Venezuela we now have real democracy because to me democracy is when it's the people who govern' (December 2009).

Many people outlined the range of processes available at both macro and micro level to take a more active role in processes of social change and societal development. For example, Alfredo, a Mission Sucre student in Cano Amarillo said, 'there are many forms of and forums for participation; barrio communities, water committees, Communal Councils, neighbourhood organisations, condominium boards. All of these groups participate fundamentally in the co-management of the community. We also participate in the National Assembly where links exist between Deputies and representatives of the community: a conglomeration to participate and solve problems. There is participation at parochial and district levels because the state is not a single entity that should be preoccupied with these things; it is the people, united, because they know better than anyone the problems of their community. I am not talking about resources from the state; I'm talking about us administering state resources. This is not a present given by the state; this is our right. This is social power' (November 2009). This idea that protagonist participation is a right rather than a favour bestowed by government resonates with many of the people I interviewed who stressed the development of a different relationship between the people and the state, whereby people are, or should be, part of a communal state that is principally controlled by the people. Most saw a central role for the state in the administration and provision of social services but also as a facilitator of the rights and duties laid out in the Constitution, as I illustrated in section 7.3.5.

Supporters of the process that I interviewed cite a number of options that they can use to exercise this control and resolve conflict. As outlined in Chapter 7, many first refer to the Constitutional means by which they can hold elected officials and the state to account such as the right to revoke officials and the right to petition Ministries and other official organs. Many also referred to taking part in demonstrations and rallies to either support government-introduced changes or to demand change. The people of Venezuela have mobilized many times in support of President Chavez and the process more generally, at no time more markedly than in the days following the 2002 coup. As Nelson from Petare describes, 'in the 2002 coup nearly all the media and the wealthy people in this country came together to oust Chavez. They drew on Perez Jimenez's example and thought that they could throw Chavez out. But what happened? They forgot that the people eventually ousted Perez Jimenez and that's what happened this time as well; people pressure. The people had collective consciousness' (November 2009). Active participation is seen as

crucial in making demands heard and ensuring they are responded to and most people felt that the mechanisms were in place to do this and that their demands were, for the most part, responded to.

The two main avenues that I observed being used by those opposed to the Chavez government, or to particular policies or departments, were petitions and demonstrations. I attended numerous opposition marches protesting issues such as funding to Mayors and Governors and proposed or legislated Laws, and also to petition state institutions and the National Assembly. These marches went ahead without any obstruction from government. Those opposed to Chavez also used their Constitutional right to a recall referendum in 2004 and have consistently participated in elections at local, regional and national level. While many opposition supporters argue that Chavez is a dictator and that civil and political rights and constitutional guarantees are not enforced, these examples suggest that there are a range of avenues to freely register opposition and that opposition groups make active use of these opportunities in practice.

In general, my research supports LB findings that most Venezuelans positively rate their opportunities to exercise protagonist participation, that government discourse in terms of complementing representative democracy with direct and participatory democracy resonates with the Venezuelan people, and that the Venezuelan people actively put their opportunities to exercise alternative forms of democracy into practice. However, as I highlight in more detail in section 8.4, while people are active in exercising these rights, at times they express frustration that demands from below are not effectively responded to or are overridden from above.

8.4 Ongoing tensions and contradictions

While many people I spoke to have a clear sense of where they want to go and their ideal of state-society relations, they also reveal a sense that they have not yet created the necessary conditions to make this vision of the ideal state and ideal society a reality. While testimonies of the people I interviewed alongside secondary data suggest a generally high level of satisfaction with the Bolivarian process and the institutions and processes that had been introduced, nobody I spoke to said that they were totally satisfied with the way democracy operated in practice, be they pro- or anti-Chavez. Many were quick to point out the shortcomings of the process, including dissatisfaction with certain government, state and party officials, problems at the local level including elite capture and corruption and also with the practical workings of participatory mechanisms. This correlates with LB

findings on differences between how democratic people feel the country is and satisfaction with the way democracy operates in practice. This section examines the ongoing achievements, tensions and contradictions identified by the people I interviewed as well as what, if anything, the idea of socialism for the 21st century adds to their conceptualisation of democracy and the society they desire.

8.4.1 Sustaining participation

*‘The problem with socialism is that it will take up too many evenings’
(Reportedly remarked by Oscar Wilde)*

Many people say that the way to solve ongoing problems is through continued participation. However, many also acknowledge the difficulty in sustaining high levels of participation. While the number of people who said that they didn’t want to participate was very low among the people I interviewed, some did say that they didn’t have the time given their other commitments and a small minority said they felt excluded from participating or that the spaces available for participation were either corrupt or inefficient or vehicles to ensure support for a government they were not in favour of. Furthermore, as LB reports show, many Venezuelan people see a central role for the state in basic needs provision and feel that they should not have to participate actively if the state did its job properly.

Many people I interviewed spoke about the danger of “participation fatigue”; especially if people perceive that their demands and efforts are not responded to at higher levels. For example, Richard, a student activist studying in Cano Amarillo said, ‘People are starting to feel impotent. They are participating but energy is being wasted making Ministers and other officials uphold and implement Laws. There is a gap between Laws and practice. If people feel impotent they might stop participating. This could endanger the whole process’ (March 2010). So, while ongoing and increased participation is argued by people at the grassroots as well as academic commentators to be key to the success of the process, ensuring and motivating such participation is problematic.

However, as Held (2006) points out, participation levels are more likely to remain high when people are given the opportunity to participate in programmes that affect their day-to-day lives and where they feel that their participation is responded to and has real impacts. Despite ongoing tensions between local activism and the exercise of power at state level, most people argue that the Social Missions and Communal Councils offer such opportunities. The fact that these programmes are growing rather than losing their appeal,

as I illustrated in Chapters 6 and 7, suggests that despite some frustration with the degree of responsiveness from above, most people feel that they are able to participate meaningfully in their own development and that continued pressure from below can overcome ongoing contradictions from above.

8.4.2 Corruption, lack of accountability and unresponsiveness to demands at the macro level

The critiques of the process that I identified in Chapters 6 and 7 reveal that it is much too simple a dichotomy to label bureaucrats and local Chavez politicians as the “new bourgeoisie” and idealize the rank and file. Many people identify problems at local level and not just at higher levels of government and administration (Ellner 2009a). However, while people identified corruption and elite capture as ongoing problems at the micro level, most said that the *main* problems were corruption and bureaucratic blockages at higher levels. This is supported by the Americas Barometer survey of 2008 which found that 79.9 per cent of Venezuelan people perceived corruption as a major ongoing problem in the country. One of the key problems people express, as Beatriz’s example illustrates, is the difficulty in making the government and the state accountable when they do not put the discourse of transferring power to the people via participatory, protagonist democratic change into practice. Schonwalder (1997) argues that most projects to increase popular power will run into resistance from opposition groups and entrenched elites at various levels of government, and that often there is an apparent reluctance to take action against corrupt government officials to set an example: a conclusion echoed by many of the people I interviewed. This is one area where the arguments of both pro-Chavez and opposition critics coincide more closely.

In terms of those generally opposed to the Chavez government, many argue that the process has been a means for Chavez and his supporters to gain personal wealth and concentrate power in their own hands. While some said that this was not the case during the Punto Fijo years, the majority of anti-Chavez people I interviewed said that this type of corruption existed pre-Chavez and still continues today, despite government promises to break with the past. Deisy who works in a bodega in Cano Amarillo said, ‘All my life the governments have all been the same. A government should uphold the Laws; they have to do this. But this government doesn’t enforce the Law and people can do whatever they want’ (February 2010). Similarly, Alvino, who runs the other bodega in Cano Amarillo said, ‘Democracy here doesn’t work because all governments are interested in is personal

gain. This government doesn't want to protect the people. I'm not talking badly about just this government; I'm talking about all of them' (November 2009).

These feelings are echoed by many of the Chavez supporters I spoke to. The majority were generally supportive of the changes that have been put into place to date and cited a range of constitutional means available to make their demands heard, hold public officials to account and pressurise for further change. However, many also expressed dissatisfaction with accountability mechanisms in practice and with individuals within the Bolivarian process. For example, in a discussion with Evelia and Pedro, students in Mission Cultura, Evelia said, 'We need Laws to fight corruption' to which Pedro replied, 'but we have many of these Laws already. What happens is they don't abide by them and they don't get enforced' (February 2009). Similarly Yarixa, a Mission Sucre student in Campo Rico explained, 'the revolution could still fail. The government has done many good things to widen democracy but there are those who dress in red who are only interested in their own personal gain- the old *adeco* mentality- and it's we who have to fight against this. That's why political consciousness is so important. The people are with Chavez but not always the people around him' (November 2009).

Rosa, a Chavez supporter, spoke about ongoing problems within the judiciary saying, 'What happened before and what still happens today is that you see cases being dismissed because of flagrant complicity There have been corrupt deputies, narco-traffickers and the cases were thrown out because they pay. Even today we can see this and I'm not going to name specific cases but you see it because the judges are corrupt. The mechanisms now exist, the Laws, the structures, the institutions, but we have to work to make sure they function in reality' (January 2010). Many also blame the old state and the bureaucracy for many of the ongoing problems in the process. For example, one resident of Petare said 'A problem is that the government is for change. The state is not. The bureaucracy drastically slows down social change and the development of popular grassroots initiatives. We need to change this' (October 2009). So, while people across the political spectrum are generally aware of the options open to them to hold government and state bureaucracy to account, many feel that there is a discrepancy between constitutionally guaranteed checks and balances and the ability to enforce them in practice.

Some people also expressed frustration with certain instances when they have successfully exercised their right to vote out an unpopular candidate, only to see them given a key role in government. For example several people referred to the case of Diosdado Cabello who

lost the Governorship of Miranda to Capriles Radonski of the opposition in 2008, mainly due to widespread accusations of corruption from both opposition and Chavistas. He was subsequently appointed Minister for Housing and Public Works by the President. Others expressed frustration at the January 2010 Presidential veto of the new Law of Higher Education, as I discussed in section 6.5. These examples raise important questions as to whether the government is willing to enact its discourse of giving power to the people only insofar as grassroots demands do not conflict with its own agendas.

However, while many people did express problems in holding government to account, many also pointed to important advances that had been made. Several point to the importance of the Organs of Public Power and Social Control created in the 1999 Constitution, in particular the Office of the Public Defender, as important mechanisms for holding officials and state actors to account. For example I attended a rally of lesbian, gay and transgender activists in Caracas in August 2009. Several people at the event said that the Office of the Ombudsman had been crucial in their struggle for gay rights; including highlighting and addressing problems of discrimination in access to public health care, pressurizing the Ministry of Health to engage with gay rights and ensure that hospitals that discriminated on the grounds of sexuality were sanctioned and also pressurizing government to enforce equal rights in employment Law. 2010 saw the first International Conference on Sexual Diversity and Human Rights in Caracas and also the launch of a national education campaign on gay rights by the Ministry of the Comunas and Social Protection, again impelled via grassroots mobilization using the Organs of Public Power. Other general examples included people using the Ombudsman to settle wage and labour disputes with various Ministries and to denounce local mayor's offices that refused to engage with Citizen Assemblies in terms of transparency of accounts and meetings to discuss budgeting decisions.

In general, however, the testimonies of the people I interviewed reflect many of the problems of state-led change that I outlined in Chapter 2 whereby states resist change and elites are unwilling to give up their power. As yet it is unclear whether these problems indicate that the Chavez government, despite its discourse, is unwilling to fully instigate the changes needed to achieve protagonist democracy as this would result in a loss of its power, or if problems are more a result of entrenched elites within the bureaucracy and society more generally.

Nevertheless, their testimonies also reveal, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, that people are not passive supporters of the government. They show high levels of awareness of ongoing tensions and are very willing to openly discuss them and, importantly, most believe that problems can be resolved through continued mobilisation from the grassroots. While critique has generally not been levelled at Chavez himself, there are some indications that people are starting to question if the President is genuinely committed to tackling corruption within his own government. This suggests the development of a grassroots hegemony based on principles of democratic participation that is largely congruent with government discourse, but also has the potential of engaging in a “war of position” with the Chavez government if grassroots actors start to believe that ongoing problems are less a result of “old” state practices and more a result of government unwillingness to give up power; the potential of what some people I interviewed call a “revolution within the revolution” (Rafael 2010; Richard 2010; Nestor 2009).

8.4.3 Crime

LB (2010) statistics reveal that 64 per cent of Venezuelans see crime as the most important problem in their country. The Venezuelan Observatory of Violence (OVV) uses police sources and media reports and, though such data can be unreliable, they suggest a marked increase in crime rates since Chavez came to power. For example, in 1999 there were an estimated 4,550 homicides and in 2009 an estimated 16,047. The last official crime statistics in Venezuela were published in 2004, suggesting that the government is aware of their poor record on crime and is reluctant to release figures. While crime statistics both before and after Chavez came to power are unreliable, there appears to have been a marked increase in crime rates and for many people crime is a real threat, with 74 per cent reporting that they feel that the country has become “less safe” (LB 2010).

Many people I spoke to have little faith in the police force and feel that old practices of corruption persist. For example Deisy from Cano Amarillo said ‘what happens with the police is that the kids do a 3 month course and then they are police; they get a gun. And they use the guns, not to be the police, but for other things; to rob. This is the problem. So how can you have trust? How can you confide in a uniform when you don’t know if they are the same people at the corner robbing? People are afraid of the police and they don’t talk to them. There has been a big increase in crime. If a government does not carry out what they are supposed to then this is what happens’ (February 2010). This general mistrust of the police was prevalent among many of the people I interviewed. The International Crisis Group Report of 2011 argues that crime and violence, the lack of

impunity, as well as police corruption and brutality are ongoing threats to Venezuela's stability. Seligson and Boidi (2008) similarly conclude that perceptions of crime in Venezuela significantly affect democratic stability and government legitimacy and, given that most victims of crime are among the poorest people who make up the majority of the Chavez government supporters, could ultimately destabilise the government and thereby threaten the process as a whole.

The Chavez government has responded to these concerns; starting a series of public consultations and debates in 2006 to discuss strategies for tackling crime, reforming the police and ensuring greater police accountability through police-community collaboration. In 2009 the Bolivarian National Police Force (PNB) was introduced and in March 2011 the widely disparaged Metropolitan Police Force of Caracas was disbanded. Recruits to the new police force go through a police training academy that includes training in human rights and non-violent methods, with consultation by groups such as Amnesty International. The first recruits graduated in early 2010 and are currently engaged in pilot projects and the plan is to extend the PNB to a nationwide level. In his annual speech to the National Assembly on January 13th 2012, President Chavez reported a 21 per cent decrease in homicides and a 50 per cent decrease in robbery in areas where the PNB is operative, though as yet these official figures have not been corroborated by independent research. It remains to be seen how far the new National Police Force can address crime levels and how the Venezuelan people will perceive these initiatives.

8.4.4 The economy

A final area in which many people express dissatisfaction is in terms of the economy. While pro- and anti-Chavez groups have very different opinions on economic reform, there is a general agreement on the need to diversify the economy to reduce the over-reliance on oil. Debates on economic reform are starting to become more central for many people, suggesting that as basic needs are being met the people are starting to demand deeper and wider change.

One Cano Amarillo resident said, 'We cannot continue to rely on the state bureaucracy for work with no productive work economy beyond the oil industry. Our economy has to be about endogenous production. We need to create state industries here so that we can produce and use all our primary resources. This would be my constructive criticism because we have made great progress in terms of education and participation but we need to produce more things here' (March 2010). Nelson from Petare also stressed the need to

change relations of production, explaining, ‘here in Venezuela and in many countries in Latin America we, the poor, have always been slaves. And still we, the workers from the base of the structure, are the ones that work the most and gain the least. We have a President who is socialist but we still live in a capitalist regime. Why? The majority of the industrialists are anti-Chavez because they want to keep the profits for themselves. They want to profit from the grassroots because this is what they did before- it’s corruption. What we need is more state industry’ (November 2009). Similarly Yudanis said, ‘so what needs to happen now? This process needs to dismantle the old capitalist system. We haven’t done this yet but it’s not something that can be done in one, three or even ten years. It’s a process that takes a long time. Firstly, even now in Venezuela much of the economic power is in the hands of the opposition. But now our President is starting to change this. Through the Laws, through education, we are trying to dismantle capitalism by dismantling the capitalist ideology and building a socialist one. But, as I said, everything takes time and we need to continue to fight against all the oppositional forces that try to control the resources of the country and who try to block the process’ (February 2010).

The concerns and frustrations of some of the people I interviewed resonate with academic theorising on economic change in Venezuela, with most commentators arguing that while significant changes have been made, reforms to date have so far failed to fulfil the promise of developing a socialist economy. Both Ellner (2011) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2009) argue that, impelled by the defeat of the 2002 coup and employers’ lock-out as well as the momentum of electoral victories, the Chavez government has made important advances in the economic sphere that have reversed the neoliberal economic policies of the previous decade. In particular they point to the nationalisation of strategic enterprises in oil, gas, aluminium, steel, cement, food production and distribution, telecommunications and electricity industries. The government has also initiated agrarian reforms, including the expropriation of several million hectares of idle farmland, and has increased control over the financial sector. Wilpert (2007a) argues that as a result of these reforms the state is much less in the control of powerful private interests. The increase in state ownership, and associated increased state revenues, have allowed for increased investment in social programmes and for investment in large-scale projects to diversify industry and promote food sovereignty. The government is also slowly diversifying petroleum markets to increase trade and investment to countries like China, Brazil and Iran to decrease vulnerability to U.S. boycotts, as well as making strategic alliances to promote Latin American integration such as ALBA.

Furthermore Wilpert (2007a) points to important moves to transform the capitalist economic model through the expansion of co-operatives, and self-managed and collective ownership of key industries. For example, he reports that the number of co-operatives has increased from 762 in 1998 to over 100,000 in 2006, incorporating around 1.5 million people. The government has also introduced co-management of state industries including CADAFE (the Electricity Company for Administration and Development) and the aluminium plant Caroni Aluminium (Wilpert 2007a:77-79). He argues that while these initiatives are in the minority in comparison with private industry and state-owned companies, and while co-management has had mixed results in practice, they suggest government willingness to experiment with alternatives to the logic of capitalism and are a sign of 'probable future developments' (Wilpert 2007a:79). Finally, innovations in terms of international trade such as Petrocaribe (Caribbean Oil Alliance) that are based on solidarity and social justice rather than competition also represent a break with the logic of capitalism (Wilpert 2007b). Petrocaribe deals directly with member states rather than private companies and offers oil under preferential payment conditions and payments "in kind", such as the agreement between Cuba and Venezuela whereby Cuba provides Venezuela with doctors, medical assistants and medical training for Venezuelan students in Cuba in return for oil (Petrocaribe website).

However, overall, while there have been important structural changes to the economy, Venezuela remains dominated by the logic of the capitalist economy and non-market based trade is still far smaller than traditional market exchange. How such innovations will be scaled up is still unclear (Petras and Veltmeyer 2009; Wilpert 2007b). For example, Lombardi (2003) argues that the continued dependence on the oil economy severely limits the government's ability to reconfigure Venezuela's economic model. Most profit is still generated by the oil industry and the country maintains a high level of imports. Wilpert (2007b:29) also points out that the 'vast majority of Venezuela's productive capacity is still either privately or publically owned and controlled' and that, overall, the country has not moved into a post-capitalist era in terms of the ownership of the means of production. He concludes that the government reforms aimed at using the state as a non-market based mechanism to redistribute wealth via land reforms, social programmes and subsidies for key productive sectors, 'do not break with the logic of capital as long as most exchange still occurs in a free market context as is still the case in Venezuela. As such, such policies are more social democratic than socialist' (Wilpert 2007b:31).

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 9, economic reform poses a challenge to the Chavez government for a number of reasons. Firstly, more radical reforms risk alienating the “floating” middle that have consistently voted for Chavez based on his more social democratic reforms, as well as alienating less radical elements within the Chavez coalition. For example, Lombardi (2003) points out that some members of the original Chavez coalition, such as PPT (Patria Para Todos: Fatherland for All) and PODEMOS (Por la Democracia Social: For Social Democracy), were unwilling to accept some of the Chavez government’s more radical economic reforms and abandoned the Chavista project to join the opposition. Secondly, such reforms risk further alienating economic and political elites who generally oppose the nationalisation of key industries and argue that Chavez is going to destroy private property. As I illustrated in section 4.4.2, business elites such as FEDECAMERAS, the private media and the Catholic Church hierarchy have tried various means to oust the Chavez government in the past, and Petras and Veltmeyer (2009) point to ongoing destabilisation attempts via politically induced economic problems such as planned food shortages. Such attempts are likely to gain momentum if the government pushes forward with more radical reforms. Finally, too slow a pace of change risks alienating core Chavez supporters. As I illustrated in section 8.4.2, many Chavez supporters are becoming increasingly frustrated by corruption, inefficiency and deliberate obstruction of processes of change by the bureaucracy and certain government elites or “boli-bourgeoisie”. Increasingly, as old elites have been ousted from positions of power, a new internal political elite has developed within the Chavista movement that defends its own interests and obstructs change (Gonzalez 2009). While the government has taken steps to nationalise key industries and promote endogenous development, instigate land reforms and promote alternative economic modes of production such as co-operatives, co-operative enterprise zones and worker co-management that resonate with many of the people I interviewed, for many, these ongoing problems with corruption and bureaucratic blockages from within the movement raise concerns about how economic reforms will develop and whether or not they will benefit new elites rather than the population as a whole.

Debates over economic reform are closely related to government discourse on building “Socialism for the 21st century”. While I return to the question of how more radical economic reforms to develop 21st century socialism might impact on the durability of the Chavista project in Chapter 9, the next section examines how far people’s ideas on their desired future society “fit” with government discourse on 21st century socialism.

8.5 Socialism and democracy

*“We have to construct a new socialist social model, a new socialist economic model, a new socialist political model, a socialist society”
(President Chavez at the World Social Forum 2005)*

President Chavez was re-elected in 2006 on a platform of “21st Century Socialism” with 63 per cent of the vote and a 75 per cent turnout which suggests widespread commitment to the socialist project. However, Latinobarometer research into people’s perceptions as to whether they are on the “left” or “right” of the political spectrum found that just 26 per cent of Venezuelans described themselves as left-wing, 37 per cent as in the centre and 26 per cent as on the right (LB 2008). The figures for those identifying themselves as left-wing appear low given the emphasis on building socialism in Venezuela and Chavez’s continued electoral support. This section explores in more detail how the Venezuelan people understand socialism and how far their conceptualisations resonate with government discourse.

The LB report itself states that in the Latin American region as a whole the left-right scale has ‘lost some of its explanatory power’ and that today’s left is not the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ of the past but a reforming left (LB 2008:77). This may mean that while people declare themselves to be in the centre of the political spectrum, they conceptualise the ideal society in ways that might, by conventional definitions, be considered left-wing ideals. The LB of 2010 found that 46 per cent of Venezuelans, the highest in the region, thought that the state could solve *all* societal problems and many Chavez opponents call themselves “right-wing” but still talk about wanting strong state services. This again suggests that conventional understandings of left and right may have lost their relevance. Finally, because Venezuelan discourse promotes a peaceful transition to socialism that is unlike past socialist revolutions in countries such as Russia and Cuba that started with violent means, supporters of the Venezuelan process do not align themselves with old definitions of the radical left.

This was certainly true of many people I interviewed. For example, one Chavez supporter from Petare said, ‘our process not like Russia or Cuba or China. It’s a mistake to call these others socialism. Socialism in our sense, and what President Chavez talks about, is about bettering the quality of life of the whole country; where everyone is involved as equals in change. Socialism is the integration of all society. It’s about rights. Many countries that we might call communist had more equality in education and health, but what we also have here is a strong sense of democracy and unity. It’s about us organising and planning; that is

socialism. That is what we want' (October 2009). Similarly Antonio, a retired lawyer and student of Art in Mission Sucre, UNEARTE said, 'Socialism here is a distinct social, economic and cultural system; one that draws on the roots of classical socialism but with a Latin American emphasis that draws on theorists such as Jose Marti, Simon Bolivar and a communal era that existed before socialism: the thought of indigenous peoples, the thought of black peoples in Venezuela. For example you cannot implant what happened in Russia in Venezuela. In Russia there was a centralisation of political power that dissolved almost all other political forms. That was a very different thing. Here we have a constitution that is participatory and protagonist, which encodes our rights. We participate fundamentally in the process of change' (December 2009).

Many people also gave practical illustrations as to how and why their brand of socialism is different to past socialist experiments; emphasising the importance of protagonist participation from the outset via various programmes such as the Missions and Communal Councils, rather than relying solely on change from above. This resonates strongly with the idea of prefigurative practice and constructing the desired future society within existing socio-political relations that I discussed in Chapter 2. For example one Cano Amarillo resident explained, 'Here we are in a state of transition. We find ourselves in a country in transformation, moving to another system that is much more humanist, much more participatory, much more protagonist; a system that has as its source the importance of participation, the importance of the people: a different ideology, a different socialism' (February 2010). Similarly, in a focus group of young students in Mission Ribas, Campo Rico, one student said, 'socialism is the people, the community. Socialism is having a communal kitchen in a barrio, a canteen in a school. Socialism is being in a Communal Council so you can help your community' and another agreed saying 'for me socialism means thinking about society and about the people; that the people have the power, not an authority from above mandating' (May 2009). Clearly many Venezuelan people have a vision of their ideal society as based on a type of socialism that puts the transference of power to the people and protagonist participation at its centre and they resist the idea of a vanguard party that can impose socialism from above. As Pedro from Cano Amarillo said, 'we're creating a Venezuelan socialism in line with our own idiosyncrasies. We can't compare it to other socialisms' (December 2009).

Some people I interviewed did initially define socialism in less radical terms as being primarily about social inclusion. For example, Mischa, a Mission Sucre student in Campo Rico said 'for me socialism is nothing more than people uniting to create a better society'

(October 2009). Similarly, Tony, a Mission Sucre student in Cano Amarillo said ‘for me what’s important in the word socialism is the word social. That means working collectively to satisfy needs and opportunities to develop. It’s a process of profound change, of inclusion’ (February 2010). However, importantly, many went on to explain that their idea of socialism was more than just addressing basic human needs and promoting inclusion and equality. They said that this could be achieved through social democracy and that what distinguished their brand of socialism were the opportunities for bottom-up participation and protagonism. For example, Gilverto, a student activist living in Petare, distinguishes his vision of democracy in Venezuela, what he calls democratic socialism, from social democracy in Europe. He said ‘with social democracy you are not talking about a democracy based on direct participation of the people in general. It is a democracy where you are represented by other people. This is not what is happening in Venezuela. Here the people are representing themselves. This is participatory democracy. The basic difference is that we participate in social activities in a real way. It really is the case that we as a people are constructing a new type of society. I’m not saying that we have, as yet, managed to achieve a participatory socialism, a participatory democracy in its totality, no, what I’m saying is that we are in the process of constructing it’ (February 2010).

Many people started to talk about socialism when discussing their conceptualisation of democracy and referred directly to the ideal of socialism for the 21st century, based on the redistribution of power and the ability to act as protagonists, when talking about their vision of a better society and the type of democracy they are constructing. This was before I specifically asked them what socialism meant to them. In fact the word “socialism” was used by many of the people I interviewed as a synonym for participatory and direct democracy. Even among people who did not use the word socialism explicitly, ideas of democratic socialism were very much implicit in their conceptualisations of their ideal future society based on active participation, social justice and inclusion. The testimonies of the people I interviewed again suggest that grassroots understandings and desires resonate with government discourse and also with wider academic conceptualisations of democratic socialism as the ultimate form of participatory democracy (Brookfield and Holst 2011; Poulantzas 1980).

Most people were well versed in the avenues for putting their idea of participatory socialism into practice, as I also illustrated in Chapter 6 and 7. For example Jose, a student in Mission Sucre, UNEARTE, said, ‘socialism is primarily shown in the modifications made to our Magna Carta, our constitution of 1999, in which we adopted for example ideas

of inclusion and rights. This is our road. This is socialism. Socialism is also giving participation to the community. Socialism is management of political and economic spheres via the Five Motors and Simon Bolivar National Plan. Socialism is where you can revoke a President, a minister, a councillor, a Deputy because they have lost the confidence of the people. Socialism is where the people, not the politicians, not the elites, have the right to establish their own norms and rules based on rights and duties as citizens; the horizontal participation of citizens in a self-governing commune' (November 2009). While many identified certain problems with putting these rights into practice, most also said that important advances had been made and that with continued critique and mobilisation they could make their vision of the ideal society a reality, as I discussed in section 8.4.2.

However, for some, the idea that there is no blueprint for socialism is in some ways problematic. While it allows for flexibility and debate as to what the future society should look like, the fact that many people talk about socialism but are less clear on how to achieve it, beyond general ideas of protagonist participation, means that they are less able to evaluate progress made to date and demand further change where necessary. For example, Maura from Petare said, 'Socialism? [She laughs] The situation at the moment is that there is no fixed ideology as to what socialism means and so many people don't really understand what socialism is. The reality is that people here who have the opinion that they have created socialism- it's a lie. It's something that is in the process of developing. There are many things still lacking, especially in ideological terms' (December 2009). It is here that socio-political education becomes crucial in developing people's theoretical knowledge to enable them to critique the process and develop strategies for change more effectively, as I explore in more detail in section 8.6.

Nevertheless most testimonies illustrate that the idea of socialism, defined as the right to participate as protagonists, resonates with many Venezuelan people and suggests that there is a synergy between government discourse and local conceptualizations and desires that conventional indicators of "left" and "right" do not capture. Poulantzas (1980) argues that a democratic transition to socialism combines a transformed representative democracy with democratic organs at the base that participate inside and outside the state to shape and control the state itself (Poulantzas 1980: 256-262) and this idea is reflected in what many people I spoke to said when talking about their ideal future society and their conceptualisations of democracy. Importantly, there was a real sense that these ideas were not imposed from above but, especially among older people, grew out of the lived experience of the Punto Fijo years. For example many critiqued in depth the impacts of

capitalism and neoliberalism during the Punto Fijo years and stressed the need to develop alternatives, as I discussed in section 8.4.4. Even some people I spoke to who identified themselves as anti-Chavez or as opposition supporters had an idea of socialism as equality and quality state services. One activist from Cano Amarillo expressed what many people I interviewed said when asked to define socialism, saying, ‘for me socialism is more than anything to do with the distribution of power and the distribution of resources. It’s a vision of social collectivity and I think socialism is closest to this idea’ (February 2010).

Overall, the Venezuelan people appear to have embraced a new conceptualisation of democracy based on direct and protagonist participation and, for many, socialism is integral to this vision. Most ideas on a desired future society stress equality, solidarity and human and societal development through democratic participation that have much in common with ideas of democratic socialism through popular hegemony that I outlined in section 2.5.1, even if some people do not identify it specifically as such. However, as I discuss in Chapter 9, section 9.4, as pressing social needs are met, new debates have emerged over if and how to pursue more radical reforms that move beyond democratic participation in social and political spheres to develop a socialist economy. With this, new tensions and divisions are emerging that could destabilise the Chavista project.

8.6 Ways forward: the need to build knowledge and consciousness

While many people cite positive changes in Venezuela in terms of opportunities for protagonist participation and direct input on policy decision-making, there are still ongoing problems that restrict the process of social change and point to a discrepancy between theory and practice; most importantly in terms of corruption, blockages and inefficiency at the meso and macro levels, and inconsistencies in the practical effectiveness of accountability mechanisms to tackle these problems and make both state and government receptive to and responsive to demands. Many people saw education as crucial in this ongoing struggle, both as a means of developing the critical consciousness needed to assess progress to date and formulate solutions to ongoing problems, and as a means of promoting the protagonist participation necessary to overcome these obstacles.

The majority of people I spoke to are generally optimistic that that with continued learning and mobilisation they can overcome ongoing problems and consolidate a new hegemony. For example, Rosa from Cano Amarillo said ‘yes, a lot remains to change and I don’t know if we will reach it in our time because we have a work of cultural change, of mental change. Imperialism has had years and years, centuries, to impose its hegemony. We have

to focus a lot on this because the difference from Cuba is that we are living with the enemy. When I say living with the enemy I'm not talking about the normal opposition, I'm talking about a group of people who control the media, the finance system, the economy and the colleges and Universities. It's a powerful way of thinking, the dominant thought. And there are two aspects; the thought of the dominant and the thought of the dominated who want to be dominated. It's this penetration by capitalist culture that people, even now, can't see that we have the power to educate, the power to take part, the power to act. So, one of the most important changes that we have to make is to make the ideological element more profound. It won't happen overnight' (March 2010). Similarly Rafael, a student activist and member of the youth wing of the PSUV said, 'What can I say? What needs to change? It's all about education, values. We have to deepen political education and make use of opportunities for political mobilisation. With education, if people know their rights and if they understand theory then they can see where things are going and act. Participation is going well. Pressing needs have been met but now people are looking more to the macro level. There is evidence this is happening. Communal leaders are emerging who can take the process forward and the people are getting educated to take on new roles. There are still problems, old power-seeking values still exist but new values and capabilities are emerging' (April 2010).

In this sense Gramsci's ideas of the important role of organic intellectuals engaging in counter-hegemonic struggle and organisation for change are central to an understanding of how many of the people I interviewed view their role in current processes of change. The general feeling of the majority of people I spoke to is that change from above and below is possible, despite the numerous problems identified, but that changing consciousness and building capacity within communities and in state institutions is vital. Again, this reinforces the central role of education in projects of social change.

Clearly, among the people I spoke to in Venezuela, a new conception of democracy does appear to be emerging: one that emphasises participation that goes beyond periodic voting to include ideas of direct input and influence in decision-making processes via direct and participatory mechanisms. This is coupled with a strong sense that elected officials and state bureaucracies are not there to represent and control but to respond to the will of the people. It appears that how many people define democracy and the means of achieving it and how people define democratic socialism do "fit" with government discourse and policy, though many people also see a dichotomy between discourse and practice that needs to be resolved for the process to realise its potential of giving power to the people.

Nevertheless, in 2010, 84 per cent of the Venezuelan people said that they were satisfied with their life in general (LB 2010) which suggests that while people are actively engaged in critiquing the process and mobilising for further change, they are generally happy with the way their country is progressing; suggesting that the critiques of dictatorship and lack of freedom put forward by opposition supporters and media do not reflect the general sentiments of the majority of the Venezuelan people.

At the moment there still seems to be a general belief that the government is committed to the changes it espouses but this could change if key ongoing tensions are not addressed and promises from above fail to live up to reality. In this sense the current process of change in Venezuela is best understood as a continuing process of counter-hegemonic struggle within which several hegemonies are vying for dominance. The development of critique from below suggests the development of an alternative grassroots hegemony that may ultimately challenge the hegemony of the Chavez government if grassroots participants start to feel that government actions fail to live up to the discourse of developing grassroots power. Grassroots activists in Venezuela are engaged in the process of imagining what the future society should look like and the means of achieving it, through their engagement in a variety of both state-impulsed and autonomous participatory activities, both within and in parallel to the “old” system, that resemble a Gramscian “war of position” in which the old society is not yet dead and the new has yet to be born. Whether grassroots participants will continue to see this society as achievable within the parameters of the Chavez project or whether they develop a counter-hegemonic project from within the existing process remains to be seen.

Chapter 9:
Conclusions
Petro-Populism or a new Hegemony?

'The tools are being built; the mechanisms are being raised up. It's like when you are constructing a building; first you start with the columns, the pillars, you build all the columns and the base but what still remains to do is to put in the walls, the bricks: and that is the work of the people. So the state structure and the Laws are put in place so that a society can function, in our case so socialism can function, but it's the people who have to do it; to make the walls, complete it and finish the construction and continue the construction. When we, the social actors, have the experience of organising, when people graduate from the Bolivarian education system with their thinking and their expertise, when they have positions in the institutions; then things will change. I think if we look at this process perhaps in 15, 20 years we will be able to say that we have something called socialism for the 21st century; that we have something concrete'.

(Julio: Bus Driver, activist and resident of Cano Amarillo 2010)

Massey (2009:22) highlights that power relations are a process and need to be analysed beyond policy statements and definitions to explore the 'socio-political practices of their realisation' and it is this idea of how policy is put into practice and the impact it has on structural power relations that my research has explored. Coronil (2008:4) concludes that 'no matter where one stands or how one views Chavez's Venezuela, few would dispute that under Chavez the nation is different'. However, while I concur with his conclusion, and as stated in my over-arching research question in Chapter 5, my aim was to explore the extent to which the state-led process of social change in Venezuela has fulfilled its promise of giving "power to the people" through the development of state-grassroots partnerships to promote "thick" democracy and transform power relations. This Chapter revisits the specific research questions I outlined in Chapter 5 and that I explored through my empirical research and secondary data, to draw conclusions as to the extent to which such structural transformation is evident in practice. Furthermore I discuss the implications this has for wider theorising on the possibilities and pedagogical dimensions of state-led democratic social change that I identified in the first part of this thesis.

I conclude that considerable progress has been made in terms of the reforms from above that have facilitated the creation of spaces for protagonist participation in line with government discourse (Q1) and that these discourses and reforms resonate with many of the Venezuelan people, though increasingly people are voicing critiques of the pace of progress made to date and are starting to question the willingness of state actors and government "from above" to fully implement their discourse of giving power to the people (Q4). Furthermore I argue that education has played a key role in the development of political awareness and grassroots agency based on principles of democratic, protagonist participation (Q2). However I also conclude that while there has been an increase in space

for autonomous or semi-autonomous popular mobilisation and participation (Q3) that has contributed to increased self-esteem and the power to take control of local development and have input on national-level policy, the impact on *ongoing* power relations between the state and society has been less marked. I argue that while this highlights inherent tensions in any process that aims for synergy between state-led reform and popular mobilisation, this does not negate the possibility of state-led processes to promote “thick” democracy and transform power relations. Instead I argue that, if viewed through a Gramscian lens, the Venezuelan process reveals the contradictions but also, importantly, the *possibility* of state-led counter-hegemonic projects to promote democratic social change. While still in a process of development “in and against the state” in which the old is dying but the new has not yet been born, the current Venezuelan process may ultimately lead to a transformation of power relations from the grassroots. Subsequent sections elaborate on these key findings in more detail.

9.1 Discourses and Reforms from above that frame the processes of social change

My first research question asked what discourses and reforms “from above” frame the processes of social change in Venezuela. This section argues that while reforms have facilitated greater protagonist participation, there are ongoing tensions between discourse and practice that remain to be resolved.

Venezuela’s new Constitution and various Laws have extended fundamental political, social and economic rights in favour of the poor and guaranteed the right to take an active part in policy and decision-making processes. The state apparatus remains powerful due to the high income from oil and is able to implement numerous social programmes “from above” whilst at the same time introducing a range of mechanisms and spaces to build capacity and encourage participation from below, including the Social Missions and Communal Councils. Not only do the Missions and Councils ‘promote the incorporation of marginalised sectors in the political and economic life of the nation’ they also ‘contribute to a sense of pride and empowerment on the part of formerly excluded sectors’ (Ellner 2009a:3-4). Social programmes have served to help reverse the social and political marginalisation of the Punto Fijo years. Many people feel empowered by these changes and importantly feel that they have a greater ability to participate in decision-making and influence the process from below. It is this level of participation that distinguishes the Venezuelan process from past social democratic or state-led “socialist” projects.

Veltmeyer (2006) outlines three basic modalities of democratic social change and political power; all of which can be seen in the Venezuelan case. Firstly, people engage in electoral politics and political power is contested by political parties; reminiscent of “thin” democracy. Secondly, the Missions are clear examples of grassroots social action in the direction of local development to increase social capital within local spaces; an approach generally favoured by mainstream development theory and practice. However, unlike mainstream approaches that tend to focus on localised self-help, there is also the sense of the need for and space for confrontation with the structures and agencies of political power through greater interaction with and demand-making on the state, in line with constitutional guarantees. Thirdly grassroots movements are engaged in the struggle over state power in the quest for social change. While they generally do not seek power for themselves, there is a clear feeling of the need to create a new type of communal state: one that is controlled by and responsive to the needs and desires of the people. As one resident of Cano Amarillo said, ‘participation is the most important thing. Not seeking power for power’s sake but developing policies and measures that will benefit everyone. This dynamic is what is different’ (January 2010). Many people also feel that, for the first time, they are visible in political processes and that the government is generally responsive to their demands; suggesting that change from above and below is possible and that Venezuela represents a new form of state-impulsed social change, albeit with ongoing tensions and contradictions.

Certainly at the level of government discourse and in the belief of many Venezuelan people there is the sense that democratic means can be used to fashion revolutionary institutional space, though most realise that this is a difficult process that takes time. Despite considerable progress in these areas there is also a sense of incompleteness that suggests discrepancies between government discourse and practice. Many people argue that while many of the mechanisms to consolidate their ideas of participatory, protagonist democracy have been put in place, there are still ongoing tensions between discourse and legal procedures on the one hand, and the effectiveness of the way these operate in practice on the other. Many also cite a continuing lack of consciousness at grassroots level and within the government and bureaucracy as key hindrances to the progress of social change. In addition, while people have a sense that they can now be active participants in the process of change, the decisions people have input on are still largely restricted to the local level via the Missions, Communal Councils and other forms of grassroots organisation and at national level via referendums and input on Laws. Many say that impacting on intermediate processes and structures at the level of municipal government, state and

ministerial bureaucracy has lagged behind. Whether this reflects an underlying reluctance at government level to fundamentally give up power or whether it reflects more general problems with bureaucratic blockages in projects for social change that might eventually be overcome through a state-grassroots impulsive “war of position” remains an open question. How people respond to these ongoing challenges very much depends on how opportunities for critical debate develop, and how far such critique is translated into strategies to promote and demand further social change.

9.2 Education, democracy and social change

My second research question asked what role education plays in the development of political awareness and grassroots agency based on democratic and protagonist forms of organisation and decision-making. This section argues that, in Venezuela, state-led education in general and the education Missions in particular have had important impacts in these areas, offering the opportunity to “learn democracy by doing” and develop counter-hegemonic discourses and practices that hold the potential, though not the certainty, of impacting on wider structural relations.

The notion of democracy, socialist or otherwise, includes the idea of democratic citizenship in which agents are capable of and have the opportunity to participate. This is both a political and pedagogical project that raises questions as to what is and should be the relationship between education, organised society and the state. Education may preserve the status quo but it can also be the site of struggle for change. In Venezuela both formal and informal education is viewed as important in the creation of a new hegemony, suggesting the possibility of state-supported education for transformation. Griffiths (2009:12) argues that ‘the Venezuelan case highlights the potential for substantial policy alternatives to neo-liberalism. Education is seen as both for and through protagonist and participatory democracy. Venezuela provides a unique space for both the radical expansion of education and for alternative pedagogies and curriculum practices to be debated and developed which may contribute to the transformation of contemporary capitalist society. Historical cases like this are rare’.

There seems no doubt that the programmes I observed have had a politically pedagogic impact and that education helps develop critical consciousness and an awareness of the need to translate knowledge into action. The Social Missions in general have extended access to basic social services for all socio-economic groups and the Education Missions specifically have significantly expanded access to education and facilitated the practice of

democratic forms of organisation and control. Education incorporates the very modes of organisation it seeks to enhance and people feel empowered by this inclusion. The Education Missions do help consolidate democratic values and encourage democratic participation. Testimonies suggest that joining the Missions is not only a means of participating in and supporting the process: they provide the theoretical knowledge and skills and space to engage in critical debate that is crucial for the development of critical consciousness and active participation in wider arenas. Through gaining access to the works of Luxemburg, Marx, Gramsci and Latin American theorists such as Gadotti, Rodriguez and Marti, students develop their own ideas of what participatory and direct democracy and socialism mean to them and they use this knowledge to critically assess progress made to date in their own process. Education, in this sense, is much more than securing conformity and loyalty to the existing regime: education promotes the very intellectual curiosity that Müller (2007) argues should be the main objective of state-led education.

People also feel that they have control over their own participation. The Community Project develops skills in problematising reality, decision-making and project organisation and implementation. While many projects deal with small-scale improvements to communities, the testimonies of the people I interviewed reveal that spaces exist for Projects to have wider structural impacts and that they encourage participation and organisation beyond the Missions, including interaction with and demand-making of state and government.

In general the Missions indicate the possibility of state-led education to promote social change. A key ongoing issue is that money comes directly from central government, bypassing regional and local government. However, given the opposition to constitutionally guaranteed initiatives that I highlighted in section 7.3.2, there was an obvious need to bypass the “old” state bureaucracy via direct financing and local control. There has been institutional development through the parallel education Missions that has had some impact on the core of the education sector, though the process of moving from a “war of position” to widespread change in the education system as a whole is still unclear. The permanence of the Missions is guaranteed in the 2009 Law of Education but there does seem a need for a specific Law of Education Missions to further institutionalise them and establish formal and transparent financing procedures, thereby reducing accusations of clientelism and patronage. Nevertheless, the overall picture from the education Missions is a positive one in terms of the impact on critical consciousness and organisation for change.

9.3 Change from above and below: possibility or oxymoron?

My third research question asked how much scope there is for synergy between state-led reform and popular mobilisation that impacts on the reorganisation of power relations. The Venezuelan case reveals that the strategy of state-sponsored participation can generate considerable power and participation among previously excluded sectors and promote new participatory forms as part of an overall project of transformation. President Chavez has certainly mobilised the poor majority behind a common project and there is evidence of the creation of new structures for their active participation. The Missions, Communal Councils and legislative reforms and initiatives more generally help develop human capabilities and provide space to enable people to organise, mobilise and take an active part in decision-making. The revolutionary possibilities of Chavez's regime are evident in the creation of parallel organisations and institutions such as the Social Missions and Communal Councils. Non-revolutionary change can be seen in the restructuring of existing organisations and institutions and through the incorporation of excluded sectors through mechanisms of popular decision-making.

I identified in Chapters Two and Three that state-led projects to impulse grassroots protagonism require two key strategies; increasing the capacity for collective action among poor communities **and** promoting public spaces and institutions that facilitate the active participation of grassroots organisations in public debate. The Venezuelan process has made considerable progress in these areas and educational programmes aimed at the poor and marginalised have played a significant part. Venezuela's Communal Councils and other avenues for protagonist participation and direct decision-making are still a work in progress, but so far, the results are promising. Many communities are mobilising, often for the first time, taking advantage of their new power to decide government spending and policies. Despite these advances, critics accuse President Chavez of pursuing a populist project that has done little to fundamentally transform power relations. Section 9.3.1 explores these accusations of populism, while section 9.3.2 looks beyond personality politics to examine the extent to which power relations have been transformed.

9.3.1 Populism or popular power?

Critics argue that the current Venezuelan process is characterised by populist politics, clientelist practices and centralised control (Harris 2007; Castaneda 2006; Corrales 2006). Parenti (2005) for example says that Chavez is pursuing a "petro-populist" project that uses the country's oil wealth to consolidate his own power. Ellner (2003) characterises

“Chavismo” as resembling classical redistributive, state-led populism, as I explained in section 2.8. Undoubtedly Chavez displays many of the elements of “classical” populism through his personalistic style, his incorporation of excluded sectors and his critique of elites. He has established mechanisms of direct participation such as recall elections and referendums and embraced the idea of a strong interventionist state by nationalising key industries and introducing a comprehensive range of welfare programmes. Chavez has exercised “special powers” allowing him to by-pass the legislature, remove old elites from key industries and reform the judiciary. Hawkins (2003:1137) concludes that ‘these populist qualities undermine the movement’s democratic potential’.

However, while these measures might be characteristic of classical populism, many can also be seen as necessary to fulfil government promises to break with the hegemony of the Punto Fijo years. Furthermore as Dorraj and Dodson (2009) highlight, while populism is a useful concept to describe processes that blend mass mobilisation of marginalised sectors with charismatic leadership, it is less useful in understanding why the wide range of instances that display such characteristics have had very different impacts on power relations. They argue that it is also important to examine the type of changes that are made by a populist leader and the extent to which these changes institutionalise new mechanisms for protagonist participation and demand-making. This necessitates looking beyond Chavez’s style of leadership to examine what is happening in practice.

Laclau (2005) says that in populist projects the “masses” lack political agency and the ability to determine their own futures. It is definitely the case that many people look directly to the President to solve their problems and President Chavez is undoubtedly the leading figure in Venezuela’s “Bolivarian Revolution”. The weekly show “Alo Presidente” (Hello President) reinforces the idea of a direct link between Chavez and “the people” and every day the newspapers and the President’s Facebook site contain personal requests to the President, for example, for a new house, a job or to intervene in a problem with the state. Many mobilisations in support of the process rely on personalistic ties with the President that are reminiscent of past populist movements. Harris (2007) cautions that this type of mobilisation can give people a sense of power without any real power in practice. He also says that populism can restrict the development of critical consciousness by closing down the space in which to disagree with a populist leader. As I highlighted in section 6.3.1, some people within the Chavez movement try to minimise critique by arguing that criticisms of the government provide ammunition for the opposition. I also

found a tendency to separate the President from the bureaucracy and government that may restrict meaningful critique and democratic consolidation.

However, my research illustrates that many people have developed a level of consciousness that enables them to critically evaluate the process and mobilise to make demands on state institutions, the government and the President when they feel that government discourse and constitutional guarantees have not been put into practice. Furthermore, while the President may use populist techniques, spaces have been opened up from above to enable the practice of direct and participatory democracy and the Venezuelan people are actively involved in making use of these spaces to shape the direction of the process from below and determine their own futures. So, while it is undeniable that there are elements of “Chavismo” that are populist, to label the process as purely populism underestimates the substantive political transformations that have taken place and downplays ongoing power struggles between state, government and organised society. For example, Motta (2010) argues that, unlike populism, the relationship between Chavez and the people is not one-way. Not only do people respond to calls from above, they also engage in influencing the process from below through protagonist participation and organisation.

One crucial example of this, as Ellner (2009a) highlights, is the grassroots revolt in 2009 over the decision of PSUV leaders to nominate candidates for the 2010 National Assembly elections. I was able to discuss this event with PSUV members who were at the meeting where the revolt took place. One said, ‘certain of the upper echelons wanted to produce their own list of candidates but this led to a revolt of the grassroots. The leaders pleaded not to hold the debate in front of the T.V. cameras - this is the attitude of some leaders. They try to stifle debate by saying it will benefit the opposition. Nevertheless the pressure from the grassroots forced the Party to announce that all candidates would be voted for from the grassroots’ (March 2010).

People have mobilised many times to support the President, for example during the coup, the lockout and the recall referendum, but they also maintain their own struggle. Protests and petitions, participation in election campaigning and voting, and the level of grassroots organisation in the Social Missions, Communal Councils and other community groups all indicate that Venezuelan people, both supporters and critics of Chavez government, are not passive recipients of change but take an active part in the processes underway in their country. Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter 4, anti-neoliberal, anti-elite sentiments and

the desire to construct a new hegemony based on equality, justice and greater protagonism pre-existed the Chavez government and were not wholly imposed from above. Ongoing support for Chavez is less a result of populist mobilisation and more to do with a belief that, at the moment, his views and actions coincide with popular opinion and desires. Latinobarometer findings reveal that the Venezuelan people reject the idea that authoritarian rule is acceptable in certain circumstances and show high levels of satisfaction with the way democracy operates in their country. This suggests that most people do not believe that Chavez has concentrated power in his own hands. As I established in section 2.8, populism as a technique *can* be a force for radical change. The mechanisms that have been introduced from above to facilitate participation, in some cases via Presidential decree and other populist techniques, and the way that they have been responded to by the Venezuelan people suggest that the current process is more than a classical populist project and that the process as a whole holds the possibility of fundamental social transformation.

Four key issues remain in terms of reducing accusations of clientelism and populism and consolidating popular power: the consolidation of institutions that can outlast President Chavez, the need to overcome the over-reliance on oil rents, the need for more effective mechanisms of grassroots oversight, and reform of funding mechanisms. I found a general awareness among the people I interviewed that the movement needs to institutionalise at every level to create institutions that can outlast Chavez. Many people believe that this is already happening and that even without the President the process will continue through continued participation, mobilisation and organisation for change from below. However while many, like Rosa from Cano Amarillo, say that ‘Chavez is not Chavismo, we are Chavismo. We are the process’ (March 2010), and that government responds to *their* demands rather than the other way round, many also worry that change has not been consolidated and institutionalised to the extent that it will definitely survive post-Chavez. Some also expressed concerns that Chavez’s populist or personalistic style has restricted opportunities for new leaders to emerge. For example Nestor, a Mission Sucre Facilitator and student activist in Cano Amarillo said that, ‘Chavez is just one man. What if Chavez died, if there was another coup? We need to be able to continue the process with or without the President. We’re not at that stage yet’ (December 2009). This is particularly salient given the President’s treatment for cancer in 2011.

Nevertheless while Hawkins (2003) says that the movement as a whole shows a lack of institutionalisation, Ellner (2005:169) argues that one of the main factors that distinguishes

Chavez from many populist leaders is that the structural change initiated under his rule 'is likely to have long term impact on Venezuela, regardless of how long he remains in office'. The new Party, the Missions and Communal Councils show signs of institutionalisation and suggest that Chavez and his government are introducing many of the very measures that Roberts (2007 no date) argues will secure against populism that I identified in section 2.6.

There have been moves towards nationalisation and endogenous development to reduce the over-reliance on oil rents but, while many people argue that this is the way forward, ongoing issues of corruption and inefficiency mean that nationalisation and the development of new state industries may simply reinforce the petro-state and do little to extend power and control over resources to the people. Such moves have also exacerbated social polarisation and alienated the middle classes and business and it remains to be seen if a sustainable state can work without their support. It is unclear how institutional checks and balances will develop, how corruption will be addressed and how far these structural reforms will contribute to the redistribution of resources *and* power in ways that are not subject to the whim of the leader but are enduring. As one resident of Cano Amarillo said, 'We need more direct access to government; we need to denounce more when there are problems. We need to hold the state and government to account. The people are the revolution and it's only with participation that we will move forward. The Communal Councils are important but we need more analysis of the problems of bureaucracy. This is why political education is important. It needs to be more widespread- in the Party, student movements and the community' (August 2009). The Comunas, Communal Cities and FCG can be seen as a response of government to grassroots demand for greater input at higher levels and greater ability to hold state and government officials to account. These are a work in progress and it remains to be seen how far they fulfil their potential in practice.

For the future, much depends on how funding mechanisms develop. Detractors argue that direct funding to the Missions and Councils concentrates power in the executive and undermines democratic procedures (Ellner 2009a). Such funding practices can develop clientelistic relations that compromise the autonomy of grassroots organisations and restrict the institutionalisation of clear, enduring funding frameworks. While the permanence of the Councils and the Education Missions are guaranteed by Law, critics also question what would happen if oil prices fell and programme funding was reduced or curtailed as a result, as happened in the Punto Fijo years. Moves are in place to institutionalise funding mechanisms along the lines of funding to states and municipalities

and increase funding transparency, which would help reduce accusations of clientelism and populism. As with new accountability and decision-making mechanisms, it remains to be seen how they develop in practice.

While Laclau (1977) argues that there can be no socialism without populism, it is only through the institutionalisation of effective and transparent accountability and funding mechanisms that the Venezuelan process can consolidate grassroots power and fulfil the promise of “21st century socialism”. The Venezuelan people have gained considerable experience in new forms of social organising but central government retains many of the classic features of the “petro-state”. However, as Ellner (2011) concludes, overall, despite ongoing issues that need to be resolved, it is too simplistic to dismiss progress to date as new forms of populism and clientelism.

9.3.2 Working “in and against the state” in practice

The Venezuelan process reveals many of the potentials and limitations of state-sponsored social organisation for participatory democracy (Buxton 2011). In Chapter 2, I discussed how a key ongoing problem with participatory democracy is that while there are numerous examples of democratic participation at the local level it is often not translated to higher levels, even in cases where governments show commitment to developing participatory, democratic forms of decision-making and policy implementation. This is apparent in Venezuela where, although people certainly feel empowered by the process and feel that they can take an active part in the process of change via stand-alone input at the macro level such as referenda and input on Laws, and ongoing localised participation at the micro level via the Social Missions and Communal Councils, opportunities for *ongoing* input on shaping political processes at municipal, state and national levels are less developed (Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Lopez Maya 2008; Raby 2006).

As in the case of Nicaragua, reforms and discourse have encouraged people to make demands on the state but at the same time people express frustration that their efforts to interact with municipal, state and national levels of government and administration and to hold officials to account are not always responded to. For example the parallel Missions and Communal Councils allow for democratic organisation at the grassroots and have facilitated interaction between the grassroots and the state, but so far they have had limited impact on radically restructuring state-society relations and institutional practices. State bureaucracy and modes of governance at higher levels remain undemocratic as I discussed in detail in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Lopez Maya (2008:169) concludes that ‘while the social dynamics of the revolution are characterised by their vital and open nature, in the sphere of politics there appears to be a sort of regressive evolution towards a closing of the space for participatory and democratic decision-making. Venezuela in this sense seems to be moving in the direction of a politically less democratic society’. Major challenges for democratic participation have been raised in terms of what people participate in, how to deal with serious disagreements, how to integrate different levels of government and how to maintain and expand participation. As Ellner (2010) points out, the Venezuelan experience reflects a general historical tendency for socialist nations to perform well on the social front but with less impact on power relations beyond the local level. He argues that while the Venezuelan process has created a strong sense of “power to” and “power with” that are crucial in the creation of a new hegemony, measures to address “power over” are still in gestation.

This is certainly a concern voiced by both supporters and opponents of Chavez that I spoke to. While many people are generally positive about the avenues available to exercise democracy and participate in the process from the grassroots, there is an increasing dissatisfaction that the pace of change from above has not been sufficient. For example, one resident of Cano Amarillo’s testimony is typical of many of the frustrations people expressed. She said, ‘many in the Ministries and elsewhere fear popular power and don’t want to comply. They still have the mentality of the old system, the fourth republic, they want to keep hold of their power and so block the process. Yes we have democracy, we have power but we need Laws to be enforced’ (March 2010).

When problems occur, many people use this argument that they are due to a “hangover” from the previous regime and to corrupt practices and bureaucratic blockages by individual counter-revolutionaries within government and the state. However, *some* people are also starting to question if the government project as a whole has no real desire to put discourse fully into practice because it wants to preserve its power. Again the grassroots revolt in the PSUV illustrates this. People are starting to make more fundamental demands in terms of the redistribution of power, especially given their increased knowledge of social theory as to why past projects of state-led transformation have failed.

For example, one resident of Cano Amarillo told me, ‘many people think the state is the government and this is a problem. We need to separate state and government and analyse progress on all fronts. Unfortunately it can be the case where officials do not fulfil their role and the organisms to hold them responsible like the Organ of Social Control don’t

function properly. There are spaces for creating autonomous movements but unfortunately some on the left have tried to consolidate a hegemony that does not permit critique and denunciations. The judicial sector is also subject to manipulation and seems unable to prosecute people with money- be they from the left or the right. So it's a transformation but a bit like a change of clothes; the same people but different clothes. I believe that we have to dismantle the paradigm of political power and that means building genuine power and control from below, not from above. This is the ideal vision. So how can we achieve it? It's only through the constituents, through building networks and greater integration-like the Comunas. We need to implant the idea that we are the state and we are the government' (September 2009).

This issue of the ability to criticise is crucial. For example, in a June 2009 Conference of left-wing academics at CIM, several commentators brought up issues of state power, economic policy and the need for further change. PSUV activists who attended the meeting called for people who voiced concerns about where the process is going to be expelled from the country. This has stirred up a wider debate about the ability to constructively criticise the process in general or particular policies and individuals. Many people talk about the need for a "revolution within the revolution" but if the mechanisms to hold state and non-state actors to account are inadequate and open debate is restricted because organised groups are colonised and controlled by pro-government personnel, people may start to feel that they are unable to control the process from below and this could jeopardise the future of the process. Clearly there is resistance to ceding power and tackling corruption within the government and state apparatus at municipal and state level *and* at national level. There is also an ongoing reliance among many people on the figurehead of President Chavez and centralised government to enact change from above to tackle these problems. Without widespread debate into why change from above has lagged behind grassroots demands and without opportunities to influence the direction of change, it is difficult to instigate some of the fundamental changes that are still lacking in the Venezuelan process. Nevertheless there is evidence that centralised government does respond to pressure from below. For example, Chavez has respected the Constitutional Reform defeat of 2007 and the increased numbers of opposition Deputies in the National Assembly following the 2010 elections, and even welcomed the latter as an opportunity to promote more widespread debate (Ellner 2011). Grassroots pressure was also able to hold PSUV leaders to account and ensure their right to vote for candidates in the 2010 National Assembly elections.

The current process in Venezuela clearly illustrates the tensions between state power and autonomous civil society and many people are well aware of these tensions. However, most people I interviewed are optimistic that problems can be overcome and there is a real sense that this optimism is more than a naïve sense that “their” government will act in the interests of the people. Many recognise that it is only through continued pressure from the grassroots that their demands for a different kind of state and a more responsive government can be realised. Xiomara, a Mission Sucre student from Petare summed up ongoing tensions and possibilities arguing, ‘The state is problematic- we want it but we don’t want it at the same time. We need the state but we need autonomy as well. But we can make demands, make the state more responsive: because we have rights’ (October 2009).

The experiences of people in the two localities of Caracas that I researched suggest that there has been progress in the development of power from below in semi-autonomous and autonomous spaces that moves beyond mere state mobilisation. State reform from above has provided spaces for mobilisation and, while much of this mobilisation is within state-provided spaces such as the Communal Councils and Missions, there is also space within and outside these organisations for semi-autonomous mobilisation and decision-making that enables people to engage as protagonists in the process of change. Ongoing mobilisations and debates suggest that people do not passively accept government decisions and are willing to criticise and mobilise for change when they feel that decisions from above do not reflect their desires. The commitment to protagonist participation and the ongoing mobilisation and organisation from the grassroots that I have elaborated on throughout this thesis, suggest that the current Venezuelan process differs from past socialist experiments precisely due to this exercise of power from the community level. It is this ongoing participation that holds the potential though not the certainty of moving the process forward in a more democratic, participatory direction, thereby impacting on power relations in terms of “power over”. Roberto, a Facilitator in Mission Sucre, Cano Amarillo, explained, ‘it is possible to build popular power *with* the state. You can see it here. Problems exist but it is possible, it is happening. People take the opportunities given to them and move them in new directions’ (December 2009).

Clearly, among the Chavez supporters, who make up the majority of the population, a new hegemony is emerging based on protagonist participation and state collaboration, but within a new conceptualisation of the state as a communal state. There is a history of Venezuelan people looking to the oil-rich state for quick solutions but, as Buxton (2011)

stresses, there is more to the Bolivarian Revolution than just getting resources. People feel empowered by changes to date and the idea of “power to the people” is central in both official and grassroots discourse, even if there are certain shortcomings in putting discourse into practice. There is also evidence of institutionalisation of democratic mechanisms of decision-making and action, though the inherent tendency for centralised control persists. Hellinger (2011b:341) concludes that while mechanisms that effectively link the state and the grassroots have made some progress, the *institutionalisation* of democratic governance through protagonist participation ‘remains in gestation’. Nevertheless, most people I interviewed recognise these shortcomings and believe that future progress relies on continued education, organisation and mobilisation to enable people to critically evaluate progress to date and direct the process of change from below. As Escobar (2010:16) highlights, ‘the policies of the Chavez government have fostered a tremendous amount of popular organising in the sense that there have emerged many avenues to foster popular organisations and to incorporate popular power into the state’.

9.4 Sustaining support for the Chavez coalition: new fragmentations and class struggle

As I highlighted in Chapter 8, despite ongoing problems and limitations, reforms in social and political spheres have made important advances in developing democratic socialism that resonate with many people in Venezuelan society. However, I also highlighted that the realisation of 21st century socialism requires more radical reforms in the economy. This section argues that the sustainability of the Venezuelan process very much depends on the durability of the Chavez coalition, and that this, in turn, is dependent on how existing problems are addressed and whether or not more radical economic reforms are initiated. More radical reforms risk alienating the more moderate supporters of the Chavista project, while failure to further radicalise the movement risks alienating the core Chavez support. For example, Ellner (2011a) points to critiques from the left that progress has not been radical enough, at the same time as the right opposes those changes that have been made to date. Furthermore, increasing dissatisfaction with the emergence of a new elite within the Chavista movement could undermine core support. How these tensions will develop in practice is still uncertain.

As I highlighted in section 4.3, polarisation deepened in the run-up to the election of Chavez between the privileged sectors and the vast majority of the Venezuelan people who had been excluded from the economic, social and political model. This elite-mass polarisation has continued into the Chavez era as evidenced by the coup and economic

lockout and ongoing destabilisation attempts by old elites. Offe (1983), in his book “The Contradictions of the Welfare State”, argues that this is a key dilemma that progressive governments often face. On the one hand governments have to fulfil the wishes of the people who elected them, and on the other they have to appease the wishes of capital, otherwise they face a capital strike and economic crisis. These two aspects tend to pull in ‘diametrically opposite directions’ (Wilpert 2007b:35), as the Venezuelan example illustrates. Nevertheless, while the government has faced problems from capital interests, the Chavez leadership has been less dependent on the demands of private capital because of Venezuelan oil wealth, and has been able to maintain the momentum of social change over a considerable period of time. This, in turn, has contributed to continued electoral success and widespread support (Ellner 2011a; Wilpert 2007b). However, Petras and Veltmeyer (2009) argue that, as Venezuela moves into a new phase whereby economic reforms to move from a capitalist welfare state to democratic socialism take centre stage, new divisions and tensions are emerging. This section examines these tensions in terms of three key groups; the old elites, the “floating middle” and the core Chavez support. It argues that increased dissatisfaction among this floating middle, and/or among the core Chavista support, could jeopardise the process and bolster the opposition, and that class struggle is likely to become more prominent as the moves towards more radical reform develop.

Venezuelan politics to date has been characterised by social polarisation rather than class polarisation, based on anti-elite sentiments that cross traditional class divides (Gates 2010). Lebowitz (2007) similarly argues that community struggle based on anti-neoliberal sentiments, rather than class struggle, has been the most significant part of the process to date. So far, Venezuela has not resembled the classical picture of Marxism where the industrial working class rises up and takes the lead, particularly given that the working class in Venezuela is and was very small (Lebowitz 2007). However, as pressing social needs are met, economic concerns and dissatisfaction with new elites emerging within the movement are starting to come to the fore, and the question of what social forces will gain hegemony within the Chavez movement and in society more generally is becoming more prominent. This leads to questions as to the sustainability of the multi-class coalition that has so far largely supported the Chavista project.

While Chavez’s support may still be based in a quite broad cross-class basis, Petras and Veltmeyer (2009) point to a general resurgence in Latin America of class power from the right, given the election of left-leaning Presidents and governments. In Venezuela old elites

have continuously attempted to destabilise the Chavez regime, for example, via the coup and lock-out, and more recently, with politically induced economic problems such as planned shortages of food and electricity (Petras and Veltmeyer 2009; Wilpert 2007b). Castaneda (1994) said that the left can only win by making strategic alliances with the political centre and sympathetic parts of the business community. However, whether or not such alliances can be maintained in Venezuela, given government discourse on building socialism for the 21st century, is unclear. For example, while Wilpert (2007a) reports that Chavez was initially supported by large segments of the middle class and some sectors of the business community, it remains to be seen how they will react to the radicalisation of the process towards 21st century socialism. Furthermore, as I highlighted in section 4.4.4, the old elite has so far had limited success in capturing the centre (Smilde 2011), but this could change if ongoing issues are not addressed and/or if the centre opposes more radical changes in the economy. Finally, the emergence of different factions within the hierarchy of the Chavez movement, and increased frustration from the grassroots at the pace of change and at bureaucratic blockages and inefficiency from above, also mean that continued support from the core Chavista support base is by no means guaranteed.

These tensions and contradictions lead commentators such as Gates (2010), Gonzalez (2009) and Robinson (2008a,b) to argue that class struggle is likely to become more prominent in Venezuelan society. For example, Robinson (2008a:9) argues that while ‘Chavismo has opened up a remarkable space for mobilization from below’, and while Chavez has a clear mandate for the pursuit of 21st century socialism, as evidenced by his re-election in 2006 on an overtly socialist platform with 63 percent of the vote, many people are starting to complain that the process is moving too slowly, and that problems are grounded not only in resistance from old elites but also new internal elites. Similarly, Gonzalez (2009) says that the two main obstacles to the future of the Venezuelan process are the emergence of an internal political class that defends its own interests against those with a more socialist vision, and the fact that Venezuelan capitalists have so far not been seriously challenged. On an international level, he also points out that new trade and production agreements between the Venezuelan state and Russian, Chinese and European capital have similarly failed to break with capitalism. Robinson (2008b:347) argues that challenging global capitalism requires ‘a radical redistribution of wealth and power, predicated on the construction of more authentic democratic structures’. He stresses that as well as change on the domestic front, the process also needs a transnational counter-hegemonic project. While the Chavez government has taken steps to encourage endogenous development and has made important steps in the international arena via

initiatives such as ALBA, it remains heavily tied to global capital (Robinson 2008a). Furthermore, while considerable progress has been made in Venezuela on social and political fronts, ‘the challenge of any socialist-orientated revolution within global capitalism is how to establish a contrary logic to the law of capitalist accumulation’ (Robinson 2010: no page). Robinson (2010) therefore questions how structural transformation can go beyond the redistribution that has occurred to date in Venezuela when the bourgeoisie may have been replaced from political power but are still very much in economic control. He draws on the experience of Nicaragua to argue that ‘multi-class alliances generate contradictions once the honeymoon stage of easy redistributive reform and social programmes reach their limit. Then multi-class alliances begin to collapse because there are fundamental contradictions between distinct class projects and interests. At that point a revolution must clearly define its class project; not just in discourse or in politics but in actual structural transformation’ (Robinson 2010: no page).

Gonzalez (2009) argues that Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution is currently at a crossroads. While ‘further advances in defining and applying 21st century socialism in Venezuela are very possible’ (Wilpert 2007b:36), serious obstacles remain, especially given that Venezuela remains tied to global capitalism. My research, along with wider commentaries, suggests that new fragmentations are emerging in the country. The old ruling class remains intent on blocking fundamental change, and a new bureaucracy has emerged within the revolution that has developed in its own interests and risks alienating not only the middle class but the core Chavez support. To date the struggle has been framed as one of inclusion and exclusion within social and political spheres, but as advances are made in these areas, and debates over the means and ownership of production are taking a more prominent role, the issue of class seems likely to become more prominent, and people may start to see themselves more in terms of their class position rather than as “the people” or as “citizens”. This leads to questions as to what social and political forces will achieve hegemony in the anti-neoliberal struggle and what kind of project will emerge. The working class as an organised coherent group has so far played a marginal role in the processes of change but could well become decisive for the future of the revolution (Gates 2010).

9.5 What the people think: future prospects and ongoing tensions

My final research question asked how far government discourse and reforms resonate with the Venezuelan people and how far they feel that discourse has been put into practice. In sections 9.3 and 9.4, I illustrated that while many Venezuelan people feel that space has

been opened up for them to act as protagonists of change, many also identify ongoing discrepancies between discourse and practice that need to be resolved in order to consolidate the project of giving “power to the people”. In this section I explore grassroots perceptions of the Venezuelan process in more detail, before drawing more general conclusions as to the possibility of state-promoted democratic social change.

Latinobarometer statistics reveal that the majority of people across the political spectrum rate the level of democracy in their country highly, as I illustrated in section 8.1.2. In line with government discourse, democracy means more to people than periodic voting and people value highly their opportunities to exercise direct and participatory democracy. This is true of both Chavez supporters and opposition, who have used a variety of Constitutional mechanisms such as voting, recall, referendums, petitions and protest to make their demands heard. Many people I interviewed feel that there is a real commitment to change in Venezuela, with discourse and policy opening up spaces for participation and providing opportunities to increase capacity to make use of these spaces, and evidence of government willingness to respond to grassroots demands. Despite problems, Hawkins (2010a:35) says that government efforts to divert oil revenues to participatory projects are ‘without equal’.

Probably the most profound impression I had of the people I interviewed and observed is their feelings of self-worth and their belief that they are an important part of the processes of change taking place in their country. They firmly believe that they will never go back to a situation where they were excluded from participating in the social, political and economic life of their country. Buxton (2011) argues that these feelings of empowerment among ordinary people are just as important as the redistribution of resources. Similarly, Smilde (2011:2) argues that perhaps the most important aspect of the Bolivarian Revolution to date is ‘the development of new discourses, identities, networks and forms of association’.

Many people point to the fact that changes from above have enabled them to participate in spaces that were previously unavailable and with this comes a strong sense of empowerment at the grassroots. There is also a strong sense that people feel they have a real input in policy-making in terms of localised projects in their own communities and also at a national level, for example in terms of the participatory processes involved in formulating new Laws such as the Law of Education (2009), the Law of the Communal Councils (2006, 2009), the Law of Popular Power (2010) and the Law of the Comunas (2010).

However, while there appears to be considerable synergy between government discourse and grassroots desires that was not merely imposed from above, and general satisfaction with mechanisms for the exercise of protagonist participation that have been introduced, the main ongoing challenge voiced by many people I spoke to is how to consolidate and institutionalise the process of social change. The majority of Venezuelan people have high levels of confidence in their own electoral and democratic systems, but even the most avid supporters of Chavez and his government recognise serious shortcomings that restrict the development of grassroots democracy. Importantly, people are starting to critique certain discrepancies between discourse and practice. These critiques have emerged to an extent from the government's own discourse which has increased demands and expectations of more participatory and democratic modes of organisation, as well as from the increased knowledge, skills and practical experiences of the people.

The main critiques voiced by the people I interviewed were the need to scale-up from the local level, as I discussed in section 9.3, and the need for more effective mechanisms to hold state and government actors to account. While there is widespread awareness of the need to tackle corruption within Ministries, the state bureaucracy and at lower levels of organisation, as yet people do not have a sense that they have adequate mechanisms with which to do so. Since the discovery of oil in Venezuela in the early 20th century the country has had a history of corrupt governments, elitist and sectarian political parties and bureaucracies that serve the elite not the poor. Under Chavez clientelism and corruption in state ministries and bureaucracies is still an ongoing problem (Burbach and Pineiro 2007). Unless people perceive that their demands on government to tackle problems such as corruption, inefficiency and increased crime levels are being responded to, there is still a danger that the Chavez government could lose support and this could jeopardise the process as a whole. However there is also a general belief that, with continued learning and participation, continued reform from above to facilitate greater protagonist participation and the consolidation of a hegemony based on solidarity and justice, there is great potential for reinventing democracy from the grassroots.

As Arnaldo from Cano Amarillo said, 'for people to participate we have to transform the consciousness of the people; to put into action the will of the people. This is the theory and praxis of socialism. The Missions have served to provide essential basic elements and offer other possibilities for the management of state politics and policies. Through and beyond the Missions is the conscious mobilisation of will. Before, the people were demobilised at

an ideological level, at a political level. But now they have achieved huge mobilisation from the grassroots, some in opposition and some for, but the key is they are mobilising and this is a great basis that we have achieved as a country. With this new idea of power, comes the idea that we can control the administration of resources, that we can overcome the bureaucracy and the corruption. This is the way to consolidate our socialist society. We need to consolidate this control and management and organise ourselves; and not just in the management of resources, but in all areas' (December 2009).

Smilde (2011:25) says that 'whether the Chavez government controls the popular movement it has helped to mobilise or whether it is being supported as long as it facilitates them is an open question'. The testimonies of the people I interviewed suggest the latter; that participation is not simply controlled from above and that people are willing to support the government only insofar as they feel the government is putting its discourse into practice. This leads many commentators to argue that if the Chavez government fails to follow through on its promises, the grassroots it has helped to mobilise may become the very agents of the regime's downfall (Hellinger 2011b, Schiller 2011, Velasco 2011); suggesting that a new hegemony is developing from the grassroots that holds the potential of directing the process from below.

9.6 Democratic socialism through popular hegemony?

In Chapter 2 I argued that the Venezuelan process of state-led social change, certainly at the level of discourse, most closely resembles anti-authoritarian socialist traditions that aim to develop democratic socialism through popular hegemony. The Venezuelan process is conceptualised as developing popular hegemony and state-grassroots partnerships in a process of social change that aims to develop "thick" democracy. An assessment of how this is developing in practice forms the basis of my over-arching research question. Venezuela therefore offers an arena in which to examine how "thick" democracy and/or Socialism for the 21st century might be achieved. It offers the opportunity to examine how the Bolivarian Revolution has impacted on popular agency and organisation and whether or not it represents a process of radical change that favours the whole of society and which puts in place institutions and structures that ensure long term sustainable change that fundamentally alters power relations.

My primary research, alongside secondary studies, suggests that there does seem to be a new hegemony emerging that resembles principles of democratic socialism through popular hegemony. There has been an evolution in consciousness coupled with the

increased ability of the grassroots to shape this new hegemony rather than merely following Chavez's lead. As Irazabal and Foley (2010:98-99) argue, while the Venezuelan process is 'enmeshed with complexities and contradictions... one of the main achievements is to give people hope that a socialist alternative is possible' and with this comes the possibility of consolidating a counter-hegemonic alternative to neoliberalism.

All of the strategies that I identified as central to building democratic socialism through popular hegemony are evident in Venezuela. The Missions have provided people with the opportunity to organise within their communities to provide essential services whilst also providing educational opportunities so that they can fulfil these roles more effectively. The Constitutional guarantees of the right of recall and direct as well as representative democracy, Workers' Councils, Communal Councils, Missions and the new party (PSUV) represent the introduction of new spaces for participation that are based on grassroots, democratic foundations. Experiments with Workers' Co-operatives, Co-management, parallel structures in education and the economy are examples of alternative forms of organisation. Chavez's appeals to "the people" using "populist" techniques have served to galvanise the majority of Venezuelans behind "el proceso". This has been consolidated through the organisation and mobilisation of the "Chavistas" in response to opposition attempts to destabilise the process such as the lock-out and the coup and Chavez has displayed strong leadership in terms of re-structuring state institutions and in defence of "el proceso" in the face of external opposition.

The Social Missions, particularly the Education Missions, are seen to be one of the key processes to enable people to participate in the process and also to learn how to participate more effectively. The capacity for collective action among poor communities does appear to have increased and mechanisms have been put in place to promote public spaces and institutions that facilitate the active participation of grassroots organisations in public debate. The Communal Councils and other forms of community organisation do seem to be changing the nature of state-society relations and the package of Laws introduced in 2010 to develop popular power such as the Comunas and Federal Council of Government hold the promise, though not the certainty, of allowing great input on budgetary and policy decision-making at higher levels.

As in Cuba and Nicaragua, the Chavez regime has faced resistance from elements in the state apparatus that pre-date the Chavez government as well as from internal and external actors, particularly the U.S.A. The extreme polarisation between rich and poor that

characterised the Punto Fijo years continues today, only now it is the poor majority who feel represented by their government and the old elites who feel excluded and who are rising up in protest. However, because of its oil, Venezuela is less vulnerable to pressures experienced in both Cuba and Nicaragua and Chavez has also taken steps to form links with other sympathetic regimes such as ALBA in order to consolidate his position. While Chavez has adopted authoritarian measures to deal with opposition, so far this does not appear to have been at the expense of democratic participation. The emphasis remains on “new power geometries” that aim to change the geography of power relations to redistribute both power and participation more evenly as well as change the nature of these power relations themselves (Devine 2007; Massey 2009). It remains to be seen whether or not a degree of authoritarianism as a means of maintaining power will overshadow popular participation.

The “Bolivarian Revolution”, in the Gramscian sense, can be conceptualised as a counter-hegemonic project of resistance to the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism by pursuing a new ideological project based on solidarity and social justice (Chodor 2009): a project that is still in the process of construction. Ellner (2009a) highlights that the process so far has had a “trial and error” approach that largely responds to the demands of the people and opens up the possibility of greater direct, active, mass participation in political processes. The new hegemony that is developing based on critiques of capitalism and neoliberalism and desires for more egalitarian and participatory forms of governance pre-dates the Chavez government and has developed from both above and below since Chavez came to power. The Venezuelan case is reminiscent of Gramsci’s “war of position” in that the Chavez government has taken control of the “old” state, whilst at the same time introducing parallel processes and democratic spaces within which grassroots forces can learn about and practice alternative modes of organisation that aim to construct a new kind of state based on popular power. These parallel structures help to develop participatory democracy at the micro-level that has the potential to be scaled up to higher levels (Burbach and Pineiro 2007). Chavez himself in a speech on June 2nd 2007 (cited by Maira 2007: no page) acknowledged the centrality of Gramsci to an understanding of the current Venezuelan process, saying, ‘we are in the middle of a true organic crisis, a true Gramscian crisis, an organic crisis. The Fourth Republic has not yet definitely died and the Fifth Republic has not been completely born’. Despite ongoing problems there is a real sense among the people I interviewed and from secondary research into the process that the creation of bottom-up parallel structures of political power hold the potential though not the certainty, as Gramsci stresses, to one day supplant the structures of representative

democracy and give agency to the people. It is this combination in the Venezuelan context that holds the potential for revolutionary change by eventually supplanting old state structures and giving power to the people (Ellner 2008:176).

Francisco, a Mission Sucre student from Petare sums up the sentiments of many of the people I interviewed saying, 'Socialism for the 21st century is something that is still up in the air. We still don't have it in our hands. No, it's a process that we are constructing. It's not a recipe that can be imposed; it's something that is constructed at Presidential level and right through to the smallest Communal Council' (October 2009). Nevertheless, in spite of considerable progress in these areas, the process could still fail (Lebowitz 2007); particularly if inherent tendencies to block the redistribution of power in the political arena are not addressed.

As Chodor (2009) concludes, at the very least there are radical and important changes underway in Venezuela, but the project has by no means gained hegemony: many of the institutions of state and organised society still work to actively undermine the revolutionary project and the country remains highly polarised. Authoritarian tendencies in government are reminiscent of Gramsci's organic crisis in which the old is dying but the new is not yet born. As I have illustrated, there is an ongoing dialectic between the aims of government who, at times, reveal an apparent reluctance to cede power and the growing consciousness and desire for change by the people that is promoted in and through the Missions and Communal Councils and other forms of grassroots organisation and mobilisation. How the struggle will play out in practice is still not determined.

Most conclusions therefore emphasize achievements and a sense of incompleteness. Nevertheless there is a real sense that with continued organisation and mobilisation ongoing problems can be addressed. Escobar (2010:19) summarises progress made to date in a way that encapsulates the experiences of many of the Venezuelan people who contributed to my research as well as the general conclusions of wider academic research into the "Bolivarian Revolution" saying, 'it might well be the case that all of the pillars of the process- endogenous development, popular economy and the new geometry of power anchored in the Communal Councils and other forms of popular power - should be understood as horizons guiding a different path rather than as fully worked-out alternative models'.

9.7 Theorising Social Change: Lessons from Venezuela

The examination of Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution" provides new insights for theorising social change based on "thick" democracy and/or democratic socialism through popular hegemony, as well new insights into the institutions and processes that might make such change a reality.

Firstly, the Venezuelan case adds weight to the body of theory that states that the benchmarks of liberal democracy are inadequate for analysing contemporary projects that aim to complement representative democracy with direct and participatory democracy within an overall framework of state-grassroots collaboration to transform power relations (Buxton 2011; Goldfrank 2011; Hellinger 2011b; Motta 2009; Shapiro 2003). Empirical evidence from my research reveals the need for new evaluatory benchmarks grounded in the discourses and realities of "really existing democracies", otherwise there is a danger of overlooking complex processes of social change that are taking place at, and between, state and community level. The Venezuelan case also reinforces current theorising on the need to re-establish the links between education, democracy and social change, including greater emphasis on the pedagogical dimensions of participation. It illustrates that to talk about education in the same breath as democracy and socialism is not 'hopelessly out of date' (Brookfield and Holst 2011:2). Rather education is integral to any project that aims to extend participatory democracy in the pursuit of democratic socialism. Overall my research emphasises that more expansive conceptualisations of democracy, democratic education and democratic processes are essential for understanding and evaluating democratic social change.

Secondly, using a research design based on extensive, in-depth fieldwork, I have demonstrated the avenues in which the Venezuelan case offers another context to reinforce theorising on working "in and against the state" in the pursuit of social change. Such analysis of the Venezuelan process adds weight to the Gramscian assertion that the struggle for state power is not necessarily incompatible with autonomous grassroots organisation. My research illustrates that a full understanding of complex processes of state-grassroots collaboration to transform power relations requires examining the institutions and processes that are introduced from above, how they develop and are responded to from below, and the ongoing tensions in finding a balance between change "from above and below". This has important implications for theorising wider projects of radical social change, including different types of revolutions.

On the one hand, my research reinforces the need to examine the processes of revolutionary change put into place *after* a revolutionary movement takes power, as Burgos (2002), Selbin (1999) and Cammack (1998) highlight. On the other hand it demonstrates that revolutionary success in terms of the institutionalisation and consolidation of a political *and* social revolution requires focusing on democratisation through prefigurative practice rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat. It thus demonstrates the shortcomings of a Leninist framework of revolution and the relevance of Gramsci's and Luxemburg's theorising on democratic revolutionary change.

Lastly, my examination of the Venezuelan case sheds light on practical approaches that can form the basis of a coherent alternative strategy. It reveals the tensions but also the possibilities of state-led counter-hegemonic projects that can inform struggles for democratic change in other contexts. For example, my analysis of the Venezuelan process provides valuable lessons as to the importance of prefigurative practice from the outset to ensure that the ends of a more democratic society are not compromised by the means of achieving that society. Furthermore, Venezuela's process of change reveals the importance and potential of "document-driven revolutions". A popularly mandated Constitution provides not only a legal framework for the process as a whole and for subsequent policies and processes, but also a starting point for participatory practice and reference point for wider grassroots struggles. In this sense Venezuela's ongoing "Bolivarian Revolution" can serve as a model for other struggles for revolutionary change. As the LB (2011:8) highlights, the current Venezuelan process is already seen as 'a model within the Arab world' that offers insights into how democratic social change might be consolidated and institutionalised.

More generally, with democracy protests in North Africa and the Middle East, global financial crises and widespread protest against current neoliberal policy, the Venezuelan example offers an alternative to neoliberal hegemony that can serve as a focal case study in the search for coherent alternative strategies based on more democratic forms of engagement that combine social change "from above and below" and that hold the potential of giving "power to the people".

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Websites for the Education Missions

Mission Cultura www.misioncultura.gob.ve

Mission Ribas www.misionribas.gob.ve

Mission Sucre www.misionsucre.gob.ve

Appendix 1: Interview Prompt Sheet

Introduction: myself, nature of research, consent

General

- 1) Could you introduce yourself- name, where you live, work etc.?
- 2) Could you say something about what your life and society was like before the Chavez government?
- 3) In which aspects (if any) is your life different now?
- 4) In which aspects (if any) is society different now?

Democracy

- 1) How would you define democracy? / What is your “ideal” democracy?
- 2) What does participatory democracy mean to you?
- 3) What guarantees of democracy exist in Venezuela?
- 4) How is democracy developing in Venezuela today? Is Venezuela democratic? Why? (what are the roles of state, government, citizen and what kind of institutions are emerging)
- 5) What is the role of government? (theory and practice)
- 6) What is the role of the state? (theory and practice)
- 7) What is the role of the citizen? (theory and practice)
- 8) What kind of state/government/ citizen relationships are developing?

Participation

- 1) What does participation mean to you?
- 2) What does protagonist participation mean to you?
- 3) What spaces exist for participation?
- 4) What institutions/structures/ laws make participation possible?
- 5) What form does participation take?
- 6) In what organisations/ what ways/ what sort of activities do you participate now?
- 7) Is that/ are they a government organisation or independently formed organisation?
- 8) Why do you participate/ not?
- 9) What is the role of your organisation (aims, activities, relationship with the state/government)?
- 10) How can you make demands of the government/ state and what type of demands do you have?
- 11) How responsive is the government/ state to your demands? Could you give an example (s)?
- 12) How is your organisation organised internally?
- 13) When you participate, what form does it take? How successful have you been in these areas? Any examples?
- 14) Did you participate before? If so in what way?
- 15) How is participation developing overall?

Education

- 1) Are you currently in any form of education?
- 2) Why?
- 3) Why is education important to you?
- 4) Why is education important for society?
- 5) How is education organised? (state/society/community)
- 6) If/How does education contribute/ link to participation?
- 7) If/How does education increase capacity to participate?
- 8) If/How does education contribute/ link to democracy?
- 9) Has education made you more active in your community/ in society? In what ways?
- 10) Does your education have an ideological aspect? If/ Why do you think this is important? (e.g. classes in socio-political formation)
- 11) What has been the impact of education (personally/society)?
- 12) Have you taken part in a community project as part of your education? What are your thoughts on the role of the community project? Has it lead to you becoming more active in your community or in society more generally?
- 13) How do you feel about the present system of education? Is there anything you would like to see changed?
- 14) Views on Socio-political formation and Community Project (both if/ if not in education Missions or other form of education)

Socialism

- 1) The government talks about building socialism. What does that mean to you?
- 2) How is the process of building socialism developing?

- 3) If/ How does socialism link to your understanding of democracy?
- 4) What are the links between education, participation and socialism?

General thoughts

- 1) Overall, how do you view the changes made to date? (progress and limitations)
- 2) What still needs to change?
- 3) What is your vision/ hope for the future for society and in your personal life?
- 4) What is your opinion of what the 'better society' should be?
- 5) What are the links between education, democracy, participation, socialism?
- 6) Any other comments?

Appendix 2: Overview of Data Sources

Location	Key Informants	Type of Data Collected	Data Collection Instruments	Date
Mission Sucre, UNEARTE, Cano Amarillo, Caracas	Co-ordinator: Jhonny Facilitators: Nestor, Arnaldo, Ephraim, Roberto Students: Mirna, Beatriz, Xiomara, Rogelio, Jose, Pedro, Alfredo, Antonio, Tony, Glenda, Marina, Maura, Richard	- 18 open-ended, semi-structured narrative interviews with students and facilitators	- Interview guide - Recording device	November/December 2009 And February-April 2010
	Students of Social Management	- Focus group with 16 students	- Guide on key points for discussion - Recording device	December 2009
	Students of Social Communication	- Observation of Community Project from preliminary diagnostic through to final presentation	- Camera - Video recording - Field notes notebook	September 2009- April 2010
	Students of Art, Social Communication, Social Management	- Observation of classes including academic/vocational classes, compulsory classes in Political Formation and classes on conducting the Community Project	- Field notes notebook - Camera	May 2009- April 2010
		- Informal conversations with students and visits with them to Communal Council meetings and/or other community events	- Field notes notebook - Camera	May 2009- April 2010

Mission Sucre, Fermin Toro High School, Capital District (bordering Cano Amarillo), Caracas	Facilitators: Roberto, Gabriel Students: Josefa, Cruz, Jose, Jaime, Belkis, Zurimary plus 4 other students of Environmental Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 open-ended, semi-structured narrative interviews with students of Environmental Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview guide - Recording device 	October- December 2009
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observation of Community Project from preliminary diagnostic stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Camera - Video recording - Field notes notebook 	September 2009- April 2010
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observation of classes including academic/vocational classes, compulsory classes in Political Formation and classes on how to conduct the Community Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook 	September 2009- April 2010
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal conversations with students and visits with them to Communal Council meetings and/or other community events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Camera 	September 2009- April 2010
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marches, demonstrations and Street Parliaments, including those to debate the new Law of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Camera 	September 2009- April 2010

<p>Mission Sucre, Leonardo Infante High School, Campo Rico, Petare, Caracas</p>	<p>Co-ordinator and Assistant Co-ordinator: Cesar, Gilverto Students: Ceny, Olga, Francisco, Nelson, Lydia, Carmen, Marianne, Julia, Derixa, Mischa, Ed, Leidy, Magdalena, Yahira</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20 open-ended, semi-structured narrative interviews with students of Tourism, Electrical Engineering, Public Administration - Focus group with 8 students - Observation of academic/vocational classes and compulsory classes in Political Formation - Informal conversations with students and visits with them to Communal Council meetings and/or other community events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview guide - Recording device - Guide on key points for discussion - Recording device - Field notes notebook - Field notes notebook 	<p>September- December 2009</p> <p>June 2009</p> <p>May 2009- April 2010</p> <p>May 2009- April 2010</p>
<p>Mission Ribas, INCES, Campo Rico, Petare, Caracas</p>	<p>Coordinator/Facilitator: Deisy Students of Mission Ribas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 semi-structured interviews with Facilitator and 12 students - Observation of various classes including how to conduct the compulsory Community Project - Focus group with 25 students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview guide - Recording device - Field notes notebook - Guide on key points for discussion - Field notes notebook 	<p>May 2009</p> <p>February 2009- October 2009</p> <p>May 2009</p>

Mission Cultura, INCES, Campo Rico, Petare, Caracas	Facilitator: Dagmar Students: Carmen, Trina, Pedro, Yudanis, Evelia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 open-ended, semi-structured narrative interviews - Observations of classes - Focus group with Mission Cultura students and Mission Ribas students during a Mission Cultura cultural event - Informal conversations with students and visits with them to Communal Council meetings and/or other community events, including La Suissa, Petare to observe Yudanis's ongoing Project with local Councils and squatter communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview guide - Recording device - Field notes notebook - Guide on key points for discussion - Recording device - Field notes notebook - Recording device - Camera 	
UCV, Ciudad Universitaria, Caracas	Facilitator: Jose Leonardo Students of Education (undergraduate level)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observation of classes - Observation of Community Project final presentation with 6 students and the local Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Field notes notebook - Camera - Video 	<p style="text-align: right;">April 2009</p> <p style="text-align: right;">April 2009</p>
UBV, Ciudad Universitaria, Caracas	Students of Environmental Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observation of the final Community Project at coffee co-operative La Carlota, near Los Teques - Informal interviews with students and co-operative members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Camera - Field notes notebook 	<p style="text-align: right;">March 2010</p> <p style="text-align: right;">March 2010</p>

Cano Amarillo and Petare	Local residents including Rafael, Alvino, Gilverto, Rosa, Julio, Eduardo, Eduardo M, Deisy, Dexanira, Raise, Avva, Agosto, Carmen, Marvela, Adriana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30 open-ended semi-structured narrative interviews with local residents (including 5 self-labelled “opposition” supporters) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview guide - Recording device - Field notes notebook 	May 2009- April 2010
	Members of local Communal Councils, Urban Land Committees, other Technical Committees and other Community Organisations including the Colectivo Montaraz: Chuo, Matute, Terapaima, William	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal conversations with residents, debates in the street about politics, visits to Community Council meetings and/or other community events, demonstrations and marches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Camera - Recording device 	May 2009-April 2010
Various locations and events across Caracas including:	Pro-Chavez and Opposition Supporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews with government officials e.g. in Ministry of Education and HE (Celi, Maria, Carmen, Luis Bigott) and Hector Navarro (May 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Recording device - Camera 	May- June 2007 And January- April 2010
	Pro-Chavez marches / Street Parliaments/ Opposition marches/ Petitions of Ministries and other state departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informal conversations with participants - 3 semi-structured, open-ended interviews with self-labelled “opposition” supporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Interview guide - Field notes notebook 	
	International Miranda Centre, Bellas Artes, Caracas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information from presentations and debates - Informal conversations with participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Field notes notebook - Camera 	

Appendix 3: Key Themes

Key Areas of Focus	Emergent Key themes
<p align="center"><u>Education</u></p>	<p>Organisation of education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - access to education - inclusion/ exclusion - municipalisation - community participation in setting up programmes - role of the state/ relationship with the state - role of participants - internal organisation - Law of Education <p>Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community organisation/ participation in setting up programmes - democratic internal organisation - learning by doing - curriculum co-construction - socio-political formation - community project - links to wider participation - critique/debate <p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education (Missions) as a means of practising participation - organisation and mobilisation in and through the Missions - socio-political formation and links to participation (in theory and practice, linking critique to action) - Community Project: participation in practice - wider participation <p>Democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning about democracy - Practising democracy <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visibility - self-esteem/ confidence

Democracy

Conceptualisations

- Constitution
- Inclusion
- Voting
- Participation/ Protagonism
- Socialism
- Government discourse
- Government reforms
- Representative versus participatory democracy
- Direct democracy
- Participatory democracy
- Relationships between the state/government/society

Framework

- Constitution
- Government discourse and reforms
- Election processes/ Voting
- Social inclusion
- Participation
- Government discourse and reforms
- Laws e.g. Law of Communal Councils

Democracy in practice (positive evaluations)

Direct democracy

- voting
- referendums
- street parliaments and popular consultations (e.g. Law of Education, Law of Communal Councils)
- Communal Councils
- Other forms of community organisation
- Conceptualisations of the state/society
- Ability to make government accountable
- Responsiveness of government to demands
- Opportunities for participation
- Role of and links between state/ government/ citizen
- Communal state

	<p>Participatory democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education Missions - Community Projects - Communal Councils - Other forms of participation (technical committees, autonomous organisations) - Ability to make government accountable - Responsiveness of government to demands - Opportunities for participation - Role of and links between state/ government/ citizen - Communal state <p>Democracy in practice (negative evaluations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authoritarianism - Populism - Centralised power - lack of accountability - exclusion - corruption - clientelism - unresponsiveness to demands - inefficiency - bureaucracy - new elites <p>Satisfaction with democracy (as above and also including secondary statistics e.g. LB)</p>
<p><u>Participation</u></p>	<p>Conceptualisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - links to democracy - links to education - links to socialism - role of state/government/citizen - links with government/ state

	<p>Participation in practice (positive evaluations)</p> <p>Direct participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - voting - referendums - street parliaments and popular consultations (e.g. input on Laws: Law of Education, Law of Communal Councils) - Communal Council - Demonstrate at public buildings - Take petitions or demands/proposals to government buildings - Attend government/ opposition rallies - Communal Councils - Other forms of community organisation - Conceptualisations of the state/society - Ability to make government accountable - Responsiveness of government to demands - Opportunities for participation - Role of and links between state/ government/ citizen - Communal state <p>Participatory democracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education Missions - Community Projects - Communal Councils - Co-operatives (economy) - Other forms of participation (technical committees, autonomous organisations) - Ability to make government accountable - Responsiveness of government to demands - Opportunities for participation - Role of and links between state/ government/ citizen - Communal state - independent grassroots organisations/ meetings - Party
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	<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links between participation and democracy - Links between participation and education - Links between participation and socialism - Participation in practice (examples) <p>Participation in practice (negative evaluations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authoritarianism - Populism - Centralised power - lack of accountability - exclusion - corruption - clientelism - unresponsiveness to demands - inefficiency - bureaucracy - new elites - economy
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Socialism</u></p>	<p>Conceptualisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - links to participation - links to democracy - links to education - Constitution - Communal Councils - Communal state - Economy - Difference from 20th century socialism <p>In practice (positive and negative)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - links to participation e.g. Communal Councils - links to democracy - links to education - Constitution - Economy

<p align="center"><u>Limitations/ Critiques</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authoritarianism/ populism - Centralised power - Scaling up? - lack of accountability - exclusion - corruption - clientelism - crime - unresponsiveness to demands - inefficiency - bureaucracy - new elites - economy
<p align="center"><u>Ways Forward/ What still needs to change?</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - education (knowledge and consciousness) - state (Comunas, communal state) - scaling-up - economy - crime - new elites, corruption (revolution within the revolution) - opposition critiques - sustaining participation - pace of change - maintaining support - opposition