# **The communal way in Venezuela**

Path, potentias[[1]](#footnote-1) and tensions

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## **Introduction: reinventing Democracy in the Bolivarian Revolution**

A Colombian author, William Ospina, after Hugo Chávez's death stated that although he was referenced as the father of 21st century socialism, he considered that he really was the father of 21st century democracy[[3]](#footnote-3). Certainly the Bolivarian Revolution (BR) meant a process of political refounding’s based on a thesis: participative and protagonist democracy where sovereignty resides untransferably in the people who exercise it directly through a set of mechanisms established in the national legal framework and that has been changing in a dynamic way[[4]](#footnote-4).

These have been the basis for the implementation of a new mode of redistribution of oil income for the promotion of a national project focused on five major historical objectives: national independence, socialism, development of productive forces, promotion of a multicentre and pluripolar world and the salvation of life on the planet -of a system that puts it at imminent risk-. That is the project validated by the majority of the population by electing Hugo Chávez at the time and later Nicolás Maduro.

We subscribe the idea that Hugo Chávez was the father of democracy in the 21st century, because on the one hand we question the really existing democracies of the West, but we also consider that in Venezuela the last twenty years have been going on a reinvention of democracy. Densifying certain bases of democracy for the repositioning of politics as interest of majorities:

1. The massification of political information through the mass media, like the public budget, the approval of projects, the explanation of government policies and programs, the evaluation of management, the central orientations in the framework of these programs, the analysis of the international situation and government positions in that context were some of the issues that were installed in the daily life of the population. Developing a culture of information and permanent discussion on the future of the country, generating a massive politicization and polarization in this regard.
2. The democratization and dynamization of electoral processes meant the massification of electoral centers in all areas of the country, with new ones in the most impoverished and excluded communities, including the right to vote. Apart from geographical inclusion, citizenship services were also expanded, as many did not have identification and were not part of the national electoral register. Let us say that the infrastructure was adapted to install a vigorous culture of election and consultation at the will of the majority.
3. Planning became a line of mass mobilization to the extent that socialization and awareness programs were developed on the Nation's Development Plan (NDP). And from 2012 the NDP became part of the electoral campaign[[5]](#footnote-5), enabling a period of debate and collection of contributions. Then we have referents such as participatory budgets at the local and regional levels, as well as the progressive inclusion of integral community plans and communal development plans[[6]](#footnote-6) as guidelines for the dispute over part of the public budget.
4. Popular organization and mobilization, although related, is a democratic base with its own and exclusive dimensions. We have had a historical journey marked by an enormous diversity of organizational forms with the participation of broad sectors of the population in different areas with the general objective of advancing the national project. A gross indicator of this process are 47946 Communal Councils (CC) formed in rural, urban and peri-urban areas of all the states of the country, many of them grouped in a higher level of self-government: 3115 communes[[7]](#footnote-7).

This inventory of referents of the densification of democracy in Venezuela has two central objectives, one is to illustrate the concretion of the principle of political refoundation through participative and democratic participation. The other is to provide us with a panoramic view of the different levels of massive participation in politics. For the purposes of this article, we have decided to focus on the ultimate basis of this reinvention of democracy: organization and popular mobilization, which we believe are the organic basis for the construction of People's Power (PP).

In this regard, we would like to highlight three issues: a) it has not been a linear route but rather one of ups and downs in a very dynamic national and international context, which is why we want to make the effort to draw a timeline; b) the organic instrumentation of the participation of the people generates accumulated, powers in the bosom of the BR that have undoubtedly been decisive in conjunctures such as the current delicate moment of blockade; c) Finally, we are interested in showing that the refounding of society inevitably implies the generation of deep contradictions between the new and the old, tensions between the organized people and the existing blocks of power and their hegemonic representations. This panorama of contradictions and tensions would be the closing point of this "blurred" radiography of what has been an unstructured route of construction of a communal way in Venezuela in the last two decades[[8]](#footnote-8).

## **Description: people´s organization path**

We dare to define the path walked by the different forms of organization and mobilization as a communal path because they have been a set of steps that have led to an expanded accumulation of capacities to do according to the common good and community control of processes. Such as territorial mapping, the diagnosis of needs, planning based on the resolution of problems, the design of common projects, the collective execution and management of community services and facilities, as well as the recovery and creation of means for the production of wealth. It is about the progressive strengthening of a collective social fabric with community logics and imaginaries that tend to dispute the redistributive forms of income, to defend the recovery of national sovereignty in the administration of the oil industry and to the construction of socialism as an alternative model of society to the hegemonic order of capital, a model where the care and administration of the common is under the control of the common.

This accumulation of communal force in Venezuela has not been a linear process nor much less ideal, on the contrary, it has been many times disarticulated and has been very marked by the diverse conjunctures, for that reason it seems to us useful to establish a sort of periodization starting from organizational milestones, that is to say forms or strategies that had centrality in certain moments, even when this does not limit its existence to those periods. On the other hand, this process has had the enormous strength to advance in two parallel lines, although quite asymmetrical, central policies and autonomous policies.

### On central policies

What we have called central policies refers to what has been centrally oriented by the instruments of RB leadership, more specifically state institutions and/or sometimes party structures. However, as the same route shows, none of these structures are monolithic, the policy impulse is not always consensual between the different groups that compose the instruments nor is its territorial implementation symmetric or proportional.

#### From Bolivarian circles to technical committees and roundtables 2000-2003

Since before taking over the government Hugo Chávez had been working on the idea of Bolivarian Circles (CB) as base cells for political participation and the project´s defense, it was the first general organizational line proposed from the RB in the territories[[9]](#footnote-9) and it meant an important test that reached more than two million people registered and international circles in more than 45 countries[[10]](#footnote-10), some of them even remain to this day. After the approval of the CESR, which democratizes the right to energy, water, telecommunications and land, community organization policies were initiated to develop diagnoses, plans, projects and comptroller's office with the perspective of co-responsibly realizing these rights. Thus, in 2003, the Water Technical Tables (WTT)[[11]](#footnote-11) and the community water councils were created to guarantee access to drinking water and sewage networks; in 2004, the Urban Land Committees (ULC)[[12]](#footnote-12) were created to guarantee the regularization of land tenure; in 2006, the Energy Technical Tables (ETT)[[13]](#footnote-13) were created to guarantee access to electricity networks; and in 2007, the Telecommunications Technical Tables (TTT)[[14]](#footnote-14) were created to guarantee the democratization of Internet and telephony services in principle.

#### From the institution to the mission 2003-2006

After the 2002 coup d'état, the era of "social missions" began to guarantee the population's right to health and education. The starting premise was that with the heavy bureaucratic structure of the State it was very difficult to achieve that education and health will reach millions of excluded Venezuelan folks, the mission is proposed as a "bypass" to the institution m to enable new institutional forms of cooperation with Cuba's solidarity, the social use of military force, the financial and logistical power of the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, recently recovered as a counterattack to the right-wing coup, and the participation of the people[[15]](#footnote-15). In the case of health, the Barrio Adentro Mission (BAM) is a model to be studied that implies a complex network of participation[[16]](#footnote-16): the community organizes a Health Committee that is in charge of supporting the doctors, in a first Cuban stage and later, over the years, Venezuelan doctors have been formed to relieve them, in tasks of diagnosis and lifting of community needs and establishment of three levels of work: i) primary care with community ambulatories, ii) specialized diagnostic centers and rehabilitation rooms and high technology centers and iii) rehabilitation of the network of pre-existing hospitals, this joint effort resulted in only the first two years in more than 100 million medical consultations and almost 30,000 lives saved[[17]](#footnote-17). In the case of education, Cuban cooperation with its methodology endorsed by UNESCO supported a method of video classes to erradicate illiteracy *Mision Robinson*[[18]](#footnote-18), primary education *Mision Robinson* 2, secondary education *Mision Ribas*[[19]](#footnote-19) and university education *Mision Sucre*[[20]](#footnote-20). The role of the organized community was to postulate professionals to serve as facilitators of the educational method, as well as a contingent of volunteers for the academic, operational and logistical organizational processes. Resulting in the eradication of illiteracy, the graduation of almost one million high school graduates, more than 200,000 university professionals and more than two million students included and included in university education[[21]](#footnote-21).

#### From the Committees to the Community Councils 2004-2006

Based on the experience of massive organization and community management of committees and roundtables for the development of projects and infrastructure works, as well as for the effective implementation of social missions. On the one hand, Chávez generates a public reflection on the importance of articulating all these sectoral efforts in the same territory and introduces the notion of community government. On the other hand (the practice demonstrates that the law does not determine the practice) the Communal Councils (CC) are launched as a strategy of articulation and promotion of the organization in the territory. With the Organic Law of the CCs (LOCC)[[22]](#footnote-22), what until now had been part of the political debate is implemented, structuring a complex community architecture with at least three points to highlight: i) the assembly of citizens of the community is the highest decision-making body of the CC giving it an idea of obediential power (Dussel, 2010); ii) the work is divided among units: (iii) the executive unit articulates committees and roundtables in all the necessary community areas, at least fourteen of them[[23]](#footnote-23), attempting to provide a legal basis for articulating the diversity of existing community organizations and promoting the organization of these where they do not exist[[24]](#footnote-24).

#### From the mission to the institution 2006-2010

After several years of advances in primary health care for millions and with the graduation of the first cohorts of primary, secondary and university students, the need arises to give legal and institutional bases to the missions as an effective strategy for the realization of the country project pushed by chavismo. At this moment, an inverse process of the initial "bypass" to the institution (bourgeoisie) begins. At this stage, the formal institutions of the State go through a route of absorption of the mission processes and in some cases, new institutions are developed as a base for the missions. There remains a balance, perhaps a Gramsci one[[25]](#footnote-25), on how much of this process contributed to the reproduction of the logics of the bourgeois State and how much the construction of revolutionary institutions in function of an alternative society project meant.

#### From Communal Councils to Communes 2006-2009

While CC multiplied by thousands in all regions of the country, a policy of financing community projects was developed that strengthened the already accumulated capacity of community management. But this process, far from being a point of arrival, was one of the steps in the construction of a greater architecture, where the guidance for the construction of communes is that they are the primary cell of the national project in the territories: socialism[[26]](#footnote-26). Five fronts for this socialist model in the territory: i) morality, as the awareness of social duty and humanism; ii) social, as equality of each according to his needs and of each according to his capacities; iii) political, as the construction of popular power, the concretion of self-government, a model of government of social control and self-management; iv) the economic, as means of production in the hands of the commune, social property as part of a new economic model; and v) the territorial, as appropriation of territory, disputing it against capital, against latifundismo and real estate speculation in the countryside and the city, to legislate on territory about social relations and nature[[27]](#footnote-27).

#### From Communes to Cities and Communal Axes, and the Laws of People's Power 2009-2012

When we refer to a larger architecture we are talking about a conception of socialism as a territorial system with different scales that was forged between debates, practices and laws. At the end of the debates, in 2006 the need to take another constituent step was raised, “five engines” to advance into socialism[[28]](#footnote-28), within them was elaborated the thesis of a new geometry of power as an alternative to the colonial socio-political division -that marked the modern Venezuelan state- and consequently a constitutional reform was proposed that included among other aspects a new territorial order where the Communal Councils were grouped in Communes and then these were added in major communal systems such as cities, federations, confederations and motor districts. In the practice proliferated initiatives of territorial aggregation of communes, experiences of communal cities[[29]](#footnote-29), passing through confederations[[30]](#footnote-30) and also axes or communal corridors[[31]](#footnote-31), although the constitutional reform was not approved that gave bases to this new geopolitical building that was actually developed in some regions of the country. In the term of the law, a set of acts were approved giving legal basis to *de facto* expressions and opening the way to the conformation of new and diverse expressions. This set was known as the compendium of "People´s power acts" approved in 2009 and included at least five organic acts: People´s Power Act, Public and Popular Planning´s Act, Social Control´s Act, Communal Economy´s Act, Commune´s Act and Communal Council´s Act[[32]](#footnote-32) (an update to the 2006 one).

#### From PP Acts to Presidential Councils for People's Government 2012-2015

After 2009 some laws were modified to adapt to the PP Acts and actually another ones were created, such as the Management of Competences and other attributions of the PP´s act[[33]](#footnote-33). This stage goes in a disjointed manner between debate, practice and law. On the one hand, laws are passed without necessarily being debated with concrete experiences, although this does not imply antagonism, but it does imply a separation between formal institution practice and expressions of popular power. Another sign of this separation is that few institutions adapted their policies and programs to this new legal system. In this regard, Chávez himself made public calls for attention to the leadership structures with an orientation that became the slogan "Commune or Nothing"[[34]](#footnote-34). During the first period of Nicolás Maduro's government, this guidance line was taken up again even with a proposal that sought to transcend in the implementation of instances of co-government between the expressions of the PP and the instances of the government constituted. The president defined this as a popular government´s system. So the stage of the Presidential Councils for People´s Government (PCPG) arose and they made progress in the formulation of sectorial diagnoses and strategical lines for the formulation of plans and public policies. However their level of implementation and evaluation for continuity was quite precarious they were conformed at least twelve PCPG[[35]](#footnote-35): communes, peasants, fishermen, women, indigenous peoples, culture, education, sex-diversity, youth, older adults, people with some degree of disability, health and workers, and promulgated an Organic Act for the Presidential Councils of Government with the People's Power[[36]](#footnote-36).

#### From the PCPGs to the Bolivarian People’s Congress 2015-2018

The PCPGs found their end in the promulgation of the law that regulates them, none of them returned to session, only perhaps the PCPG of the Communes, which was the first conformed and that had greater advances, still conserves some kind of dynamic, and achieved the formulation of an struggle program with an organic proposal in areas like economy, territorial planning, communication, territorial defense and communal justice[[37]](#footnote-37). This policy of the co-government councils was paralyzed and then replaced for a new formula called the Bolivarian People’s Congress[[38]](#footnote-38), which is made up of different social fronts and its character is more oriented towards the transmission of information to a masses united front of Chavismo, for mobilization in anti-imperialist struggles, debate of the national development plan, agenda for rectification and the re-impulse of the Bolivarian Government, among others.

#### From the Communes to the Local Supply and Production Committees 2012-2016

There is no doubt that the situation of the last six years in Venezuela has been marked by the imperial blockade that has diminished the supply and increased the price of food and medicines fundamentally. That is why in recent times there has been an emphasis on community organization to attend to the distribution of subsidized food to the most impoverished families. To this end, 32,000 Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP) have been formed to distribute food to nearly six million families[[39]](#footnote-39). From an organizational point of view, the two most outstanding elements of the CLAPs have been: i) its difficulty in decentralizing from subsidized distribution and developing communal productive capacities, as well as developing social control mechanisms that harmonize the community conflicts of a food distribution policy in an era of blockade; and ii) its disjointed origin of the pre-existing community tissues, the CCs and communes, which generates a situation of confrontation with the previous organizations. The CC and communes have election mechanisms and were submitted to the citizens' assembly, meanwhile the CLAPs have a structure by delegates of organizations.

## On autonomous policies

What we have called autonomous policies refers to all those initiatives coming from organized popular groups or sectors that implement the agenda without being organs of the State or the party, or more precisely of the central direction. Perhaps the most appropriate term would be decentralized or from bellow policies, so as not to incur in a false dichotomy between state-party and popular movement, not because there are no tensions, but because the course of these years has shown that their agendas are not necessarily antagonistic per se.

#### For all our struggles

From the years of greatest struggle with the national right, after 2003, a wave of mobilization was boiling within diverse struggle agendas of struggle which actually gained relevance: i) the community and alternative media were a banner of struggle that gained much strength from April 2002, when the coup d'état had as one of its central axes the total private control of the mass media, thus began a tour of hundreds of community -or alternative- radio stations plus some community television stations and other digital media which fights for develop a communal communication system that would control at least one third of the country's radio spectrum; ii) The peasant struggle against the landlords was one of the main political agendas that was pushed since 2001 and that generated the first coup d'etat against the RB, therefore once this first scenario was defeated there was a rebound in the struggle with the force of Ezequiel Zamora and that allowed an important land rescue campaign to be pushed, farms, estates, herds, and even underutilized or abandoned agro-industrial facilities that have progressively been some of the expressions that have raised the flag of the struggle for communal construction as a socialist strategy, involving the control of lands and means for production and for the defence of territory. iii) In this same measure, in the cities of the country, a silent battle began against real estate speculation, against what we could call the urban latifundio, from the barrio people that built the city for the rich and whose children work so that the capital circulates. This battle is to be recognized in their rights, to regularize settlements and transform the barrios -neighborhood-, and even to dispute the formal city. An army of overcrowded, leaned, leased and exploited families, recovered abandoned buildings and land that were in the process of "fattening", they have fought for the conditions that were always exclusive to capital to produce housing for use and not as merchandise, community equipment for sports, culture, production.

#### Attempts at platforms of unitary articulation

The years following the loss of the reform meant to some extent the re-launching of the agenda to socialism and were generating conditions for the necessary search for platforms of unitary articulation of struggle, there have been many attempts with some joint mobilization trials with slogans such as "for all our struggles" or "only the people saves the people," however these platform attempts failed to maintain stability over time or a majority weight within the diversity of Chavismo grassroots. In Caracas, some city corridors have had different moments of coordination based on conjunctures, and the spaces of coordination with state political directorates or political parties have not been the exception. As autonomous initiatives with strategic horizons, rehearsals have been very limited to circumstances, such as, for example, the *Popular Revolutionary Alliance[[40]](#footnote-40)* during Commander Chávez's illness from 2011, the *Popular Campaign Command Hugo Chávez[[41]](#footnote-41)* from the 2012 presidential elections (with the collaborative campaign *Cada Latido Cuenta[[42]](#footnote-42)* ) until the 2015 legislative elections, or *Chavismo Bravío[[43]](#footnote-43)* for the National Constituent Assembly elections in 2017. In recent years, articulation based on continental or global popular agendas has been a meeting point for unity, as has been the example of *ALBA Movements[[44]](#footnote-44)*, whose Venezuelan chapter has allowed maintaining minimal articulations between some of the actors that have led other initiatives.

#### Territorial colectivos

The most criminalized organizational referent are the territorial collectives, which are activist and militant grassroots groups that come together in the impoverished urban fabric, where what predominates is the circulation of income, therefore, are those who live on their workforce in commerce or services such as transportation, energy, water, security, among others. In Caracas and in the main Venezuelan cities, the founders are usually those who lived through the periods of struggle between the 70s and 90s for the rights of the community in services, education, housing, against speculation and the precariousness of life, and against the policies of segregation and repression of the bodies of the State. At present they tend to work on the inclusion of the most excluded young people in order to rescue them from being a cheap labor force for criminal networks. Their axis of action are usually: the territorial defense of the community against drug trafficking gangs; sports and cultural work; ideological political education and socio-productive entrepreneurship.

#### Regional articulations

In the previous section we mentioned the experiences of force building in a communal key and although they form part of a general policy, their practical development has flowed according to their own initiative. The communal corridors in Lara, Portuguesa, Falcón, Sur del Lago -of Maracaibo- and Mérida have been for years a particular reference, among other things because they tend to be the result of historical accumulations of struggle for land, for nature and insurgencies against the oppressive governments of the Venezuelan twentieth century. Once this mention has been made, it must be clarified that the other western states also have experiences of regional articulation, as well as in the center and east. All these referents in their different scales and developments have been focused on mutual support for production and supply among peoples. To this end, they have generated strategies for coordination, mobilization, training, communication and exchange.

## On the two policies

The way in which we divide this sort of timeline is artificial, we are talking about a history that it is not possible to dissect, even though there is no doubt that the processes within the framework of central policies have clear differentiations from autonomous policies. The central policies have meant up to now the massivity of the people and of Chavismo, they tend not to be alien to the sectors that have autonomous policies, in general they do not have problems for material sustenance because they feed directly on income, while their stability in time is highly volatile and their organic sustainability is very precarious because at the moment when the institutional priority changes the policy falls into oblivion and is susceptible of disappearing, unless it has a popular subject with interest and strength to sustain it. The autonomous ones, on the other hand, are not hegemonic in the people and Chavism, although they tend to have a revolutionary political quality and efficiency, many times they can use or push a central policy from their own line, although without a doubt their capacity for material sustainability is quite fragile; however, there is a range of self-management maneuvering that allows them to support their policies because their priority responds to the interests of a subject that is not going to "let it fall".

Just as there are differences there are important structural meeting points, we would emphasize at least five: i) until now, in this journey, Chavism has been the meeting point of the revolutionary forces of the left, progressives, patriots, alternatives in their multiple denominations or tendencies; ii) our strength comes from the weariness of parties and traditional ways of doing politics; iii) the ideas of Rodríguez (original invention project), those of Bolívar (geopolitical project of freedom) and those of Zamora (project of the people against the oligarchy) are still valid for the people[[45]](#footnote-45); iv) the route we have described is inscribed in different periods of the RB that have determined the displacements of the politics of organization, at least six periods we would distinguish: 1st. From the Constituent Assembly (1998 to 2001), 2nd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 2nd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (1998 to 2001), 2nd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004), 3rd from the coup d'état (2002 to 2004). From the triumph in the recall (2004 to 2006), 4th From the loss of the reform and the motors to socialism (2006 to 2009), 5th From the internal stagnation (2010 to 2012), 6th From the crisis and the blockade (2013 to date); v) the priority in the distribution of income has marked the passage from one organizational strategy to another and consequently the dispute for income has also been what has marked the confrontation between community organizations and these with the State and the party.

## **Analysis: Accumulated potentias -in the communal way-**

In spite of the setbacks, the organizational tissues build collectivity, in the territories they build community, bonds of unity between commons for what is common cause to them. This *common-unity[[46]](#footnote-46)* is a base of material forms to produce and reproduce some aspects of everyday life, livelihood, with imaginaries and determinations that have been forged in these years, as well as organizational mechanisms that have been consolidated as ways to implement the determinations of the communities, orchestrate their power. In the journey we have summarized, the current period is one of crisis and blockade, it is one of the moments where these accumulated powers have developed to face the situation, where the *will to live[[47]](#footnote-47)* of the Venezuelan communities, to live in peace, are determinations that are translated into concrete facts, This is the case when life and peace are defended and maintained as hegemonic in a turbulent situation marked by attempts to generate street violence, sabotage of electricity systems, speculation and the increase in the price of goods and services, together with a growing commercial and diplomatic blockade.

### Agricultural production for sovereignty

To have an example, in a difficult year like 2015 the harvested area of cereals was just over 724 thousand Hs., of which more than 34 thousand Hs. were harvested in 164 productive communes[[48]](#footnote-48). This is equivalent to 5% of the production only in communes, financed in this cycle by the State, without taking into account neither the Communal Councils nor other productive organizations and networks of small producers.

The summary of these partial references is: Venezuela has respectable dimensions of agricultural production for consumption and within these, the popular organizations have a significant communal strength, which in the period of greatest difficulty of the country have made important contributions: i) in terms of guaranteeing family consumption through the resumption of family gardens, conucos and productive yards, this is a reconfiguration of lifestyles aimed at basic food security; ii) production levels are maintained in order to contribute to the local supply in the first order and then to the western and plain regions - where rural populations predominate - that have even helped to sustain the cities of those regions and of the central zone of the country; iii) the communal corridors and axes, as we mentioned previously, sustain their activities on the basis of the exchange of production, inputs, knowledge and means of distribution and processing; iv) the situation has also forced the configuration of a mode of production that guarantees the reproduction of seeds, otherwise the dependence on the import of the same and its high cost would make it impossible for small communal producers to maintain production, this has been reviving the initiatives of custody and protection of seeds as happens in other countries of the region, has also reactivated the struggle to defend the national legislation that prohibits the entry of transgenic seeds[[49]](#footnote-49).

### Recovery and social use of land

According to official figures, in Venezuela alone between 2008 and 2018, more than 300,000 rural land titles have been granted to small producers, adding up to more than 10 million hectares[[50]](#footnote-50), while by 2018, a total of 1 million urban land titles[[51]](#footnote-51) had been granted to popular communities in cities.

This whole process has been part of the process of popular organization in the form of committees, CCs, movements of urban dwellers and peasant fronts that have fought for land. And even though a more rigorous balance is needed on the scope of this, there is evidence of a communal force that rescues the land to guard it and use it to live and produce: i) We have already mentioned a little of the dimensions of rural agricultural production, in the urban and suburban zones such dimensions do not exist but nevertheless the national reality has led a good part of the population, organized or not, to plant in collective gardeners, flowerpots, patios and vacant lots[[52]](#footnote-52); ii) just as there has been a vertiginous process of social production of housing, the national housing policy has produced to date 2.6 million homes[[53]](#footnote-53) and of this total, 37% has been produced by organizations of people´s power under different modes of management; iii) undoubtedly those spaces that are not usable for housing or to produce food are used for other community facilities, such as sports, cultural, socio-productive, educational, health, among other uses[[54]](#footnote-54); iv) without a doubt this supposes people´s land control, which supposes logics of mutual support to solve common problems, such as health, food, and even services, recently before the sabotage to the electric system and the consequent health problems we saw entire communities organizing the collective collection of drinking water, sharing water tanks or in natural intakes and deep wells, identified by their own settlers as a result of years of organization.

### Democratization of service and infrastructure networks

Again citing one of the years of the blockade period, in 2015 the Federal Council of Government financed more than 10,000 projects to grassroots organizations, all of them for the construction or improvement of public service infrastructure, allocating one third of the budget of that institution to the direct execution of people's power.

In this section it is worth highlighting at least two levels: i) the recovery of networks of road services, water, education, electricity, sports, health, environment, transportation, culture, citizen security, slope stabilization, among others, has resulted in the consolidation of some popular settlements and although without a doubt there are still many failures, at this time of crisis many popular communities have minimum conditions for life, which twenty years ago did not count; ii) The CFG is an example of some institutions that have been created in this time as an instrument to promote a model of decentralization that does not respond to the liberal thesis of capitalist decentralization but rather tries to collect the Venezuelan socialist doctrine to dedicate at least 30% of the national budget to be executed by the popular power under its various organizational forms[[55]](#footnote-55).

### New modes of Community management

Precisely as a result of the democratization of these service networks under direct execution of projects in the hands of the organizations of popular power, a whole set of practices is generated that provide experience to the organized communities that generate their own methods, their own codes, their principles for the conduction and execution of works and even transcend what is operative to give life to a communal architecture with detailed engineering maps for what was once only a legal proposal -positivist- of a new system of political-territorial organization: i) the organized community orients a work cycle where it diagnoses reality, builds plans and designs projects to later execute and evaluate them, rendering accounts to the assembly on the advances and perspectives; ii) other communities when articulating find themselves with the need to administer real estate and common services such as community aqueducts or local bakeries, gas supply centers and even new exchange systems[[56]](#footnote-56) are proposed among many others that in the face of the crisis are refined, the merchandise dissipates in the face of the crisis and gives way to the need, to the value of use; iii) without a doubt all these processes lead us to the core issue, it is about changing ways of life, it is about defining principles and agreements for collective life, dismantling the false western idea of individuality as a way of life, the need arises to formulate coexistence agreements and communal justice mechanisms; iv) and this opens the way to the need to establish the laws that regulate this new society of the commons, the communal spaces make the assembly space for the parliament of the commons, debate and build new laws that arise from practical reflection, aspirations for a new order and then need to be validated by the power of community consensus.

### Territorial aggregation and system of popular government

The non-linear sum of these powers undoubtedly lead to the construction of a territorial system with different scales, as Chavez warned the isolated local runs the risk of developing reactionary projects, so the fabrics are interconnected generating different expressions of the expectation of the people to give flesh to socialism as a concrete reality and this certainly some germs have managed to testify: i) We have already mentioned in a couple of opportunities the experiences of communal axes and corridors, in some cases as in the Andean region there have been proposals of regrouping of the territories of a state in function of the communal axes as a new socio-political base[[57]](#footnote-57); ii) in a general way, the "council-centered" experiences that bet on dual power[[58]](#footnote-58) formulas have been quite recurrent in Venezuela, perhaps one of the most relevant bets as an expression of integration of several scales of organization that have been woven for years are the PCPGs, they represented an exercise of self-government that for many shed light on how to implement a formula of government between the formal power of the State and the emerging People's Power in what Nicolás Maduro has called on several occasions a System of People's Government[[59]](#footnote-59); iii) In Venezuela, one of the last episodes of this period was the call for a National Constituent Assembly in 2017 which, as a political strategy, allowed the country to pacify itself through an electoral process that was sustained on the basis of an accumulation of diverse organization power built in these years[[60]](#footnote-60); it was an election where, for the first time in all the republican history, the Venezuelan people was able to elect constituents for each territory of the country but also delegates in sectors of struggle: community members, workers, women, youth, students, people with disabilities, worshippers, older adults among many others. In spite of the fact that after its colossal electoral victory, this effort lost its constituent impulse, its unrecognized power is still in force[[61]](#footnote-61).

## **Closure: contradictions and tensions -between the common and dispossession-**

During this hard stage of the BR, there are recurrent internal and external voices that question whether we are in the presence of a revolution in Venezuela or not. In our opinion there are many interesting ways to debate (we can subscribe the argumentation that Atilio Borón recently makes in front of this question raised from the European left[[62]](#footnote-62)). Hand in hand with the initial question we have the comrades who ask us to admit whether errors have been made in the BR or not.

We would like to take advantage of these two questions to provide some keys for the analysis. Venezuela is today the scene of a historic battle on three levels: i) for the need for an alternative to the dispute for global hegemony in the midst of a civilizing crisis of capital that is endangering the continuity of life on the planet, ii) for configuring a national reproductive mode that allows it to survive the strategy of Yankee colonial blockade, that is, to find a new material base for independence and iii) for recomposing an internal block with international allies for the retaking of the socialist horizon, communal centered on the strength of the people´s power.

These three levels are absolutely and indivisibly tied, it is a battle against the civilizing crisis of capital, against the crisis of imperialism and against the crisis of the colonial rent-dispossession order; that is to say, it is the historical battle waged by the oppressed peoples who have been fighting for centuries in Our America and throughout the world, in the global south.

In recent years this battle has translated into a daily confrontation for life in all the oppressed and excluded territories, the central contradiction today is between capitalist civilization and the life of the peoples, the forces of dispossession vs. the forces of the common. In Venezuela this contradiction is suffered with intensity and the blockade has been a catalyst for the internal contradictions of the revolution and our biggest mistake has been not recognizing them in order to study them and develop the necessary capacities to confront them.

Our national project during these twenty years materialized on the basis of disputing the control of a higher level of income that would allow to avoid contradictions, but not to overcome them. Today imperialism has developed a strategy that has progressively cut off our ability to access income, therefore, our metabolism has begun to collapse and all areas of our project have been deteriorating to paralysis. The diseased and necrotic tissues of the languishing rent-depending metabolism threaten to infest the tender and living tissues of the communal metabolism that has been generated during these years, a blurred X-ray of the confrontation would account for -at least- five major tensions:

### Production for use, for livelihood vs. Circulation of income and exchange value

The communities dispute land and means to be able to produce houses to live in, food to eat, clothes to wear, vehicles to get to where they need to take their products or satisfy their needs, the organizational fabrics move under that logic. While the reproductive metabolism of Venezuela has been the circulation of income, land to speculate, companies to be able to get into debt, build to be able to access the income of the state and oil, import over produce. This contradiction today is manifested as an internal battle between the organized people and the intermediate bourgeoisie that has always managed the metabolism of income.

### Social Use and Communal Property vs. Latifundismo and Real Estate Speculation

The peasants dispute land in order to be able to produce, to live, they are interested in that community use and that the property of those who unite them is that common need. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie that lives from the rent of land and real estate speculation is only interested in having more and more land and real estate. Therefore, the battle at this moment is between those who believe that the landowning bourgeoisie guarantees the circulation of income and that improves the living conditions of those who do not have land and live off their work.

### New redistributive and management transfer mode vs. contractors, bidders and trade chambers

The organized forces of this time have been prefiguring a society where income is distributed directly to the people's power, as well as other means to continue transforming their living conditions. While there are sectors for which the administration of State resources consists of transferring the rent and the means to the contractors and suppliers, meaning that the public thing is the elites patrimony. It is a battle between those who want to re-edit a contractor bourgeoisie pact and those who want to socially control the distribution of income and manage the means of production and reproduction through self-management.

### Self-government vs. hegemony of political intermediaries

The organized forces have determined from their experience of these years that the best way to run society is by governing with the people and exercising self-government in the communal territories. While for the traditional political classes the correct order is the modern, colonial state, where they are the intermediaries of the people with the power they control to decide where the income is oriented, to decide on the common behind the backs of the commoners. It is a battle between those who consider that the blockade should be fought with self-governed territories and those who want to consolidate their clientele networks for the distribution of quotas that allow them to have feudal control of the communities that are increasingly disaffiliated from the parties and those traditional forms of political management.

### Communal state vs. bourgeois state

Two different conceptions of power, between those who want the power to command and decide from and for their groups and those who believe in the power to command obeying the collective, collective interests, communal power. And to that extent today we relive one of the debates of all these years, the crisis is the moment to advance towards the Communal State or on the contrary it is the moment to reinforce the bourgeois State until the situation stabilizes. This battle is decisive, because in modern republican history the State has been the space of income mediation between the national oligarchy and the transnational bourgeoisie, in the years of BR the State governed by chavismo was the space of mediation between the people and the oligarchies and transnationals, elaborated a redistributive mode that avoided contradictions. But in the absence of rent-income-, due to the blockade, this mode becomes unviable and it is up to the people to decide how to reconfigure the mediation. It is a question of returning to the role of the bourgeois state or taking a leap towards a communal state that puts the common in the hands of the commoners.

Today the challenge of the BR is, in our opinion, to recompose a block of forces on the basis of grouping its powers and formulating a program of struggle that starts from a consensual strategy on how to deal with internal contradictions, having as a central premise the interests of the commoners in the face of a scenario of multiple crisis where it is necessary to defend the common against dispossession, to continue building the alternative horizon against the capital´s civilizational crisis, to continue advancing on the communal way to socialism.

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