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Let Me Show You the Truth

- on social movement as a response to political polarization -

Report from a Minor Field Study in Venezuela, April-August 2004

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to Galileo Galilei, who stood his ground

knowing it moved

Preface

There are all kinds of reasons to why people decide to travel to the other side of the Earth. I have personally developed a taste for regions that not too many tourists visit, a cause for fascination among my friends and fear among my family members. The road less travelled seems to have a way of being less travelled for a reason. After a year working as a volunteer in Colombia I became painfully aware of this fact. While living in Colombia and travelling around Central America I came to develop an interest in the political events occurring in the region. Watching the lives of ordinary Colombian citizens and how life could be turned upside down in a split-second gave me an entirely new view of the world. My interest came to focus on what people do to change their lives for the better. Thankfully, an application for an MFS-grant was accepted by SIDA, giving me the opportunity to visit Latin America in order to study these issues first hand.

Colombia experiences a situation not too far from civil war. As a result, I decided realizing my study in the neighbouring country Venezuela that also experiences a most interesting political reality (but without kidnappings and bombs). As presented in the chapter on method, the study experienced a few setbacks. My contact David Velásquez was on these occasions always helpful in all ways that he could assist me. I want to thank him and the entire Velásquez family for their warm help and care during my stay in Venezuela. The same goes for the professors and students of the universities UCAB (*Universidad Católica Andrés Bello*) and UCV (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*), who contributed to the realization of this essay; you know who you are.

While studying Red de Veedores I was helped on a number of occasions by the energetic José Louis Cartaya, a man who resulted being a great asset in my work. Also, the coordinator Ruth Capriles provided most valuable information. Great thanks to all the Red de Veedores members who made my study a pleasant one.

Quite a few individuals in Sweden have helped me in my work. Among those are my brother Karl, my sister Sara, my father Ingemar and my girlfriend Sofie, who probably contributed most to this essay simply by allowing me to spend so much time on the other side of the planet, and not worrying too much that I would come back. Hilma Holm provided me with valuable professional insights on matters of social movements, and she deserves my gratitude. Last but not least I would like to thank my supervisor Christer Lindberg for his commitment to my study and this essay. The help with the MFS-application, the struggle to get me back to Sweden when riots broke out in Caracas, and the discussions during the fall of 2004 are all issues that have been priceless in my work.

From the bottom of my heart I thank all those mentioned and not mentioned, who helped me make this essay come true.

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Introduction

Social movements hold their own position of the human society. They can be located in our closest surroundings and as part of great changes in history. Social movements truly have had great impact on the human being. As a result, there seems to exist quite a few definitions of the phenomenon. Francesco Alberoni offers the one that I have come to utilize.

Caracas is a place where political, ethical and philosophical opinions come to clash daily. The visitor rapidly senses the tension between people. Social and economic realities result in robberies, violence and political rallies. Because of the situation, many people from Caracas leave to study or even spend the rest of their lives in other parts of the world. Heavy violence is not uncommon. The political conflicts of Venezuela have reached a point that is close to polarization, if not worse. What can be done about the situation is clearly a topic for debate and for obvious reasons all actors on the arena seem to have their own, most personal solution for Venezuela. Politicians, NGOs, oil companies and churches all seem to reach for the same goal. What is problematic is the fact that they all seem to reach for this same goal in totally different ways, causing different interests to clash.

One organization claiming to have found a solution is the NGO Red de Veedores. In their search for neutral and objective powers in Venezuela they might have found a way to a better and more peaceful understanding. The viewer could however question if this is actually what is done. Many have already tried to reach the utopian society, and so few have actually managed. What should be the solution for the Venezuelan society is of great importance. How this is to be perceived by those experiencing it might be equally, if not even more, important.

Aims, questions, limitations and definitions

The aim of this essay is to give a somewhat overall view of the situation in Caracas from the end of April to the beginning of August in 2004. With this as a base, I then describe the work and expressions of Red de Veedores, an NGO based in the capital of Venezuela. The expressions of Red de Veedores are translated through the theories of the Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni, then focusing on the theories concerning *nascent state* and *institutionalization*. I believe it should be as clear as possible to point out that my empirical field work was exclusively centered to the capital Caracas, which means I have no personal experiences from any other part of the country. When referring to the entire country I do this based on information from television, news papers, books, internet sources or statements from informants.

The questions of this essay are treating the organization Red de Veedores, seen through the theories of Alberoni but at the same time as an actor in the social and political reality of Venezuela. Answering these questions could easily demand the production of quite a few books of thousands of pages. A complete understanding of the Venezuelan political situation, the works of Alberoni or Red de Veedores is absolutely impossible to manage in a small space such as this one. To do so is not the intention of this essay. The questions presented here are to be answered as such, using background information, research data and a critical perspective. What is not the intention of this essay is to present a full explanation of the social and political realities of Venezuela. There are aspects that have not been dealt with to a very

large extent, such as the information distributed by news papers or television. This has been left out for a number of reasons. One reason is that of time; another is that of space. However, these are issues that will be dealt with later on in this essay.

Questions that will be dealt with are:

How can the work of Red de Veedores be translated through the theories on social movements presented by Alberoni?

How has the present social and political situation of Venezuela come to influence the work of Red de Veedores?

Quite consequently I am utilizing the term "organization" when referring to Red de Veedores. At times, the words "network", "NGO" and "movement" are also used. Every single occasion holds within itself the reason to why the specific definition is chosen. For example, when talking about the structure of Red the Veedores I have chosen the word network to point out this specific aspect. On the other side, NGO or Non Governmental Organization, is supposed to be used quite identically with the term organization, where NGO points out the independent aspect of Red de Veedores, a fact I find irrelevant to point at throughout the entire essay. This difference in definitions should not be confused with the most fundamental difference between a social movement and a network. A movement is hardly to be translated as a network, and the other way around. These terms have been used with highest precaution and the reader should therefore be aware of the times they occur. Utilizing them is an indicator of movement and nascent state, or structured order and institutionalization. The term organization is meant to be as neutral as the circumstances can offer.

The theories of nascent state are to be applied on movements. Red de Veedores is an organization that might be perceived as a social or political movement. This essay makes no effort in distinguishing the two from each other. Whether or not a movement is political or social seems quite irrelevant for this specific essay, causing the question of the definition to be left without discussion in the analysis.

Theory

In his work *Movement and Institution* (1984) Francesco Alberoni discusses movements, institutionalization and "nascent state" in human societies. Seen with both an overall approach and a narrower one, he views the ways in which social movements emerge, function and become institutionalized, if not dissolved or extinguished.

Alberoni: nascent state and institutionalization

As defined by Alberoni, "The nascent state represents a phase of discontinuity from both the institutional and the everyday-life point of view".¹ The definition is somewhat vague but its essence can be found in key words like romanticism, solidarity, trust, community and passion. What some observers might perceive as its total opposite is institutionalization, a state that will be treated later on. What must be the issue of focus at this point is the structure of the nascent state and, specifically, the nature of its definition since it is a way of social change. In other words, one should be very careful about utilizing the term nascent state as it is merely a specific form of social change. Society can be changed for thousands of different reasons. Here Alberoni mentions organizational decisions and market influences. But also, he argues that "there is a specific pattern of social transformation which calls for the particular transition that is represented by the nascent state".² It is by creating an alternative solidarity that the nascent state unites active participants; a group of individuals who were previously independent. These small groups put in a larger perspective, forming a much bigger unity, is what forms the movement. What determines the success of the movement is how able its members are to present answers to the challenges of the moment.³ One can draw examples of this procedure from a range of situations in society, as well as over history. The early Christian community is a typical nascent state, a state that over time has come to be institutionalized.

The nascent state is a phenomenon that is quite unique. Those experiencing the nascent state tend to see it as a sensation causing willpower, love and emotions to be directed in a specific direction that is not necessarily good or even positive for the individual. That matters in the nascent state is the will of the common good, nothing else. The entire experience of being together is perceived as greater than anything else, not rarely causing the group to part itself from the outside world physically or by symbols. Objects of possession are such symbols that the group member is expected to be able to give up as they tie him to other structures. If the objects however do not bind the member, then he is free to keep them. Another aspect of the nascent state is that the group seeks the truth, and that there is only one truth. Members are totally free, but free insofar as they search for the truth in their own way.⁴ This sensation of group mentality may for example cause religious cults to commit mass suicide but it may also be transformed into positive experiences such as rebellion against an evil dictator. A triggering aspect for the outcome of a nascent state, or even the eruption of one, is therefore that of information. Members can by false or manipulated information, as suggested by Alberoni, easily be manipulated.⁵

¹ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 20

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 70-78

⁵ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 24f

Institutionalization is a state that in its overall expressions is fundamentally different from the nascent state. Its structure is much more hierarchic and generally seen upon as loveless and boring. Bureaucracy, routine and political parties are some aspects that have come to characterize the institutionalized state. It is characterized by differentiation, compared to the uniformity of the nascent state. The individual is more likely to be seen as the one of importance, compared to the nascent state's extreme group mentality that frequently generates the notion of "us" against "them". All institutions, Alberoni argues, "have the dual characteristic of extinguishing the nascent state and of assuring its continuity in another way"⁶. However, this does not mean that institutionalization and nascent state are the total opposite to one another. On the contrary, they have a wide range of aspects in common. For example, the entries towards the two are quite similar concerning the fact that they are both discontinuous phenomena. The basic difference between them in this specific aspect is however the fact that the nascent state moves from a differentiated situation to a uniform one, while the transition towards institutionalization is from a uniform situation to a differentiated one.⁷

In order to give an overall view of the issues I wish to explain the theory presented by Alberoni by using a country's social development as an example. We start at the bottom with a system everyone knows and is familiar with. Individuals go to work places and children go to school. This is the institutionalized state where life goes on in the way people are used to. But one day, a group of individuals choose not to be part of the ruling structures anymore, they gather more people to fight the system just like them and suddenly the country experiences a revolution. The revolution passes through the nascent state. This is when everything is changing, people are optimistic about the future, new laws are written and a generally romantic view of society is spread. History painfully teaches us that this nascent state never lives on, and the country passes into institutionalization in one of the two ways: either the new rulers' system works and it becomes the new norm after which everyone must live, or the new system doesn't work and another force leads the country into institutionalization. After a while history comes to repeat itself and the relationship between nascent state and the institutionalized system becomes full circle.⁸

I have chosen to apply these theories on the society of Venezuela, and specifically the actions of the organization La Red de Veedores. Alberoni would in this analysis draw a number of conclusions regarding the charismatic leader⁹, the mentality of the social movement¹⁰ and the historically logic following step after the occurring events.¹¹ The purpose of this study is not to investigate the reasons as to why Chávez is in power, or how the political party below his rule is structured. These issues have only been dealt with partly in order to give a background to the present situation. This essay deals with La Red de Veedores, an organization that might be perceived as a movement or nascent state, working from below in the society of Venezuela, partly against the rule of Hugo Chávez Frías. The theories of Alberoni will be the most frequently utilized throughout the essay, even though some other theories presented, partly by Marx, are to be highlighted as well.

⁶ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 172

⁷ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 166ff

⁸ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 8-19

⁹ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 12, 46, 145-150

¹⁰ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 126ff

¹¹ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 10ff

My theoretical frame mainly treats issues concerning social movements, using texts from Alberoni. The NGO I have chosen to study however had a number of characteristics that distinctly separated it from the definitions of Alberoni. This fact did not put me down but on the contrary gave me an even greater need to investigate the validity of the theories. In other words, I did not utilize Alberoni's theories as a guide for my work but rather as a frame; a frame to aid and give support and also a frame to be questioned.

United resistance

As will be defined at a later time in this essay, only two sides are visible in the polarized situation that is Venezuela. These are the chavistas and the opposition. While the chavistas are united to follow their leader Hugo Chávez, the opposition represents a grand spectrum of ideologies, interests and ideas. The opposition is a mixture of people who have few things in common apart from their unity in the struggle against Chávez.

Marxist theorists tend to refer to social movements or other forms of conflict as reactions in the clash between proletariat and bourgeois. For a long time, the general assumption when studying conflicts was precisely that of class. But when the study of conflicts reached the 1970s, a new era of the study came to be. Theorists coined the terms "new social movements" (NSM) and "resource mobilization" (RM) to point out certain aspects of the social movements that are perceived to be of relevance. Touraine, one of the first NSM advocates, argued that the conflict between capital and work was to be redefined, seeing new identities in today's society as a new factor to be dealt with. He saw the setting of the way of life, the forms of behavior and the needs of the individual as key points in that the person becomes "the actor" in a social setting.¹² Those advocating the RM theory would rather put the focus on the construction of "social movement industries" caused by "social movement organizations". These regard collective action mainly as interest groups played out by socially connected groups.¹³ Interesting in the matter is that NSM is claimed to have appealed to the Latin American intellectuals who came in contact with it.¹⁴ For this reason, the main emphasis in this essay has been put on NSM while finding a definition of social movement.

Resistance does not need goals which all parts have agreed upon, as long as the enemy is defined. The practice and rhetoric of the opposition in Venezuela has obvious links to the practice and rhetoric of the leftist movements encountering every year on World Social Forum. Also these movements have a defined enemy, united people, but original reasons for action which could not be further apart (for example South Korean trade unions and Brazilian soil occupants). Ideas and actions could show themselves in various ways between parts inside a single movement. Such actions in the leftist global movement are, for example, the struggle for education free from advertisement in the US, the struggle against privatization of fresh water in Bolivia, and the taking of abandoned homes in order to give shelter for homeless in Canada. But as long as the common foe is identified, movement participants stand together as one.¹⁵

¹² Edelman, Marc (2001) *Social movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics*, Annual Reviews, 288f

¹³ Edelman, Marc (2001) *Social movements*, 289

¹⁴ Edelman, Marc (2001) *Social movements*, 292

¹⁵ Ergon, *Rörelsernas tid*, 9-34, 87-105; This essay does not have any ambitions to go through with an analysis of these specific topics. The reader should however be aware of the situation on the academic field. For further information on these issues I recommend the publications of Buxton, Gills and Ergon.

It seems to be a widely spread notion that protesters must not always agree on certain issues as long as the foe is identified. Even so, one could question if the civil rights movement is to be seen with its clearly defined demands for social and political changes, or to be perceived to have an enemy as well. The struggle for a better society has involved individuals like Malcolm X and reverend Martin Luther King Jr. All who have participated have asked the questions concerning what people are really worth, and if there should be a difference between individuals based on the color of their skin.¹⁶ The civil rights movement asked questions that were relevant for the liberation of former slaves, but are relevant to groups of people all over the world. Resistance seems to work in a united manner, all over the globe.

Opposition forces in Venezuela seem to work very similarly. A factory owner and a communist have few ties in the theoretical area. On the contrary, taken from the situation of Venezuela these two fundamentally different interests would most probably be facing a clash of interest. It is however of great value to investigate the rhetoric of La Red de Veedores and compare it to other groups that might be perceived to be in resistance. Alberoni lifts up the notion that the group in a movement is formed on the basis of shared categories for analyzing reality and common experiences, or rather structures of experience. Communication in the group is in other words of value for it to keep functioning.¹⁷

Marx would probably, according to the texts provided in the book by Alberoni, interpret the development in Venezuela as a process of class consciousness.¹⁸ From this point of view it seems slightly odd for the working class to choose a leader from the military, a clearly defined bourgeois. This question can also be applied on Red de Veedores as its leader is clearly not working class: working as a professor at a private university, as she did, would be perceived as nothing else than upper class.¹⁹ This is however an issue of great argument. Also Weber's arguments surrounding the leader have flaws in that it only concerns small pieces of society.²⁰ This essay will not be having the leader as its focus. It is the movement and the questions of nascent state that are its main issues.

Yoon Youngmo, representing the trade union KCTU from South Korea, sums it all up in one sentence: "To acknowledge our differences and at the same time acknowledge that we cannot do everything alone, that is the condition for success."²¹ Perhaps this idea about the power of the group could be a reality in Venezuela; perhaps it is already implemented. What will be challenged in this essay is the validity of Alberoni's theories, confronted with the existing realities of the Venezuelan NGO Red de Veedores.

¹⁶ Goodwin & Jasper (2003) *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, 15-21

¹⁷ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 126-131

¹⁸ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 9f

¹⁹ Liedman, *Karl Marx: Texter i urval*, 125ff

²⁰ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 8f

²¹ "Att erkänna våra olikheter och samtidigt erkänna att vi inte kan göra allt ensamma, det är förutsättningen för att lyckas"; Ergon, *Rörelsernas tid*, 102

Method

Pre-understandings and arriving to the location

Since this field work was my first contact with the anthropological field I had very little knowledge of what to expect on scene as I arrived to Caracas. Neither had I been to Venezuela before. I did however have previous experience of the region as I had been living in the neighboring country Colombia, a place that's politically extreme landscape made me interested in the matters that later came to generate this essay. Colombia is however far from Venezuela in this specific aspect; the corruption and misuse of the Venezuelan economy can't possibly be compared to the drug traffic and the civil war that has been going on for more than two decades in Colombia. Venezuela intrigued me as its charismatic leader Hugo Chávez made himself famous worldwide after the astonishing victory in the elections of 1998, followed by the much debated events in April 2002. My interest mainly concerned the opposition against this regime, which was why I decided to study an NGO with a strong political stand point within this opposition.

Arriving on the scene I came to realize that the study that I originally intended to realize had problems based on the fact that the situation in the country was somewhat more complex than I primarily anticipated. The NGO that I meant to study was not cooperative and after a few weeks I was obliged to change the subject of my field work. Due to these problems I was not able to start my study immediately upon arrival. I was however lucky to encounter another organization named La Red de Veedores, with an amount of cooperative members; an NGO onto which my theoretical framework worked just as well.

Fieldwork methodology

The empirical part of this essay is primarily based on structured and unstructured interviews, observations and participant observations. This methodology has been utilized both in my understanding of the Venezuelan society and in my study of the NGO La Red de Veedores. I was never in need of any assistant or translator. In the beginning I was though helped by informants to comprehend situations which because of their complexity were hard for me to understand.

I attended different forms of reunions at Red de Veedores. Every Monday night the operative group had reunions which I attended almost every week. Other reunions involved a video screening and a handful of introductory meetings. All reunions were not too similar and some gave more information than others. Some reunions did not give any valuable information at all.

At an early stage I realized that the political situation of Venezuela was of relevance for a complete understanding of the existence of La Red de Veedores. Because of this, a great part of the colleted data had to do with president Chávez, the opposition and the political events that took place during my stay in the country. This research was performed in the same way as most Venezuelans receive their news: listening to people in the street and the television news²². News papers were deliberately almost never consulted since most Venezuelans don't

²² See the part "Information, disinformation, truths and lies" in the chapter "Present political situation" for a greater comprehension of these issues.

read these publications. Later on I could take great advantage of my knowledge in the political situation during interviews and in my general contact with informants. The questions for my interviews were later formulated based on this gathered information.

All qualitative interviews were documented on tape. During the meetings at Red de Veedores I constantly took notes of what happened, including small talk before and after the actual formal meeting. Many conversations and quotes at the organization were documented in this way. Almost all interviews were followed by short conversations where the informant would start giving much more valuable information than during the formal interview, statements I then had to document by taking notes. Quite a few would start criticizing the rule of Hugo Chávez immediately after seeing me turning off the tape recorder. I therefore tried faking turning it off, in order to get these statements on tape. Only once was this procedure successful.

One problem I had during my entire stay in Venezuela was that of trust. All informants were extremely open, never expressing in any way that a subject could be sensitive. At the same time I was told not to speak of politics on buses or other public spaces since this behavior could end up being dangerous. This paradox intrigued me and was something I never managed to fully comprehend. At one hand the political situation was very tense, that was obvious. But at the same time a person that I interviewed could express surprise if I was sensitive about the matter. My problem was if I could actually trust everything my informants said, as it could be simply politically correct nonsense or things they thought I wanted to hear for my essay. I had no possibility to stay for a longer period to study these issues. Neither did I have the intent to make this study a psychological one. As this is a study in social anthropology my intent is to reflect the individual's perception of reality rather than what science or common knowledge might perceive as the truth. Because of this I have chosen to trust what my informants said as real statements of what they truly believe.

Due to the present political climate in Venezuela I have chosen to neutralize big parts of this essay. Not only have I chosen not to write out names of individuals but I have also deliberately left out information such as age or number of children. This is done for the protection of my informants. However real or not, the violence of Venezuela is easily perceived as present at all times and informants who have helped me with information for this essay should under no circumstances fear for doing so. Because of this reason, the essay may seem slightly impersonal as the studied group is perceived as a grey mass with no individuals giving it color. Such a notion would be far from the truth. Not presenting individuals or their personal characteristics is merely a safety precaution.

A Methodological Breakthrough

Methodologically, one of the greatest things that happened in Venezuela occurred on the night of July 5th, when I was robbed. The robbery as such was very simple and I did not lose anything of greater importance. Neither was I hurt. The matter of great importance was the following treatment of the police and my informants' attitude towards this treatment.

Caracas holds more than ten different police forces, all with their distinct task. For example, every municipio²³ holds its own police force (with its own uniform), there is a Tourist Police

²³ Political districts; there are seven separate municipios in Caracas.

and a National Guard. When I went to report the robbery I went to the Tourist Police. This, I was told, was a mistake since I had spent more than a week in the country. My journey to encounter a report on the assault brought me to four different police stations all over Caracas, took me almost a month, included eight visits to the official authorities and was later on referred to, by one of my informants, as the Latin American version of *The Process* by Kafka. I would rather see it as a methodological breakthrough not very unlike the one experienced by Clifford Geertz on Bali.²⁴ In the same way that Geertz was accepted simply for participating in the cockfight scenario, my experience from getting robbed both came to open doors in interviews and was also in great use in my comprehension of the Venezuelan society.

My informants had always been very open with me, helping with all kind of information I requested. After the robbery they opened up even more. Some informants would give detailed descriptions of how they had been brutally attacked; some by police officers, while others saw police corruption and violence as a normal part of society. Many informants were chocked that I bothered to go to the police at all. The reunions at Red de Veedores occasionally turned into story telling nights where everyone shared their own story of how they lost something and the officials refused to help. One woman even congratulated me for becoming one of them, finally understanding what kind of country Venezuela is.

I apprehended how informants now would trust me even more. Dialogues could start by talking about the corruption of the police force and the problems Venezuela was having on a social and economic level. Suddenly the person could change the subject, taking a turn towards the political situation and the reason why they got involved in Red de Veedores in the first place. At these times, confessions of individual convictions emerged. The most valuable information that I ever got during my time in Venezuela was gathered in this way. This kind of dialogues is the reason why I came to the specific conclusion of this essay.

Attitudes of the informants towards the researcher

With the experiences I had from Colombia I knew that I was never going to be able to get away from the fact that I was a foreigner in Venezuela. This however resulted being overwhelmingly positive in my case. Just because of my appearance people would recognize and approach me in order to help in my research. I was many times approached by people who wanted to inform me of their own opinion just because they heard I was a foreigner doing an anthropological field work in their country.

This positive attitude was especially notable in La Red de Veedores where I was always greeted as a friend. My work was not questioned or obstructed and I was warmly welcomed and invited to a number of reunions and parties. I was quickly treated as a person in the group, getting my personal part of jokes and laughter. This also gave me the chance to see a great deal of grand arguments and heavy discussions that were clearly no politically correct nor staged situations. What I saw and experienced was perceived by me as the open reality of La Red de Veedores. The hospitality occasionally became slightly exaggerated as members of the organization told me of female family members in my age that had no boy friends. I was once introduced to one of these girls, a meeting she clearly found just as awkward as I did. Quite a few members of La Red de Veedores continually argued for the importance of my critical

²⁴ McGee & Warns (1999) *Anthropological Theory* (2nd ed.): Geertz, Clifford, *Deep play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight*, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, 496-516

academic work in order for the organization to be taken seriously as a neutral and objective NGO, something I believe was one of the most important reasons why I was helped to the extent that I was.

Socializing with the members of Red de Veedores in this way can clearly be a subject for criticism. Drinking beer, talking about baseball clearly has nothing to do with the NGO and its work that I was there to investigate. There is also the question of neutrality towards the studied subject. I choose to refer to the fact that this was an anthropological field work that's primary methodology is precisely that of participant observation. The utilized methodology gave me the possibility to obtain the data now collected, something I most probably would not have been able to do in any other way.

Though all my informants were most cooperative I did have a few problems in my work, especially concerning the interviews. I did however not see this as an attitude problem towards me personally. The problems I encountered mostly had to do with communication. Three interviews had to be canceled due to the informant's lack of presence and almost all other meetings and reunions were delayed from thirty minutes to an hour. This kind of behavior is more than common in Venezuela and I did not in any way see it as repugnance to cooperate with my study. It did however obstruct my work.

Historical background to study

Ever since the colonial days, Venezuela and its Latin American neighbors have had a history pervaded by great changes. In the 4th of April in 1812, the great revolutionary and military leader Francisco de Miranda was proclaimed leader of a revolution that was supposed to end the reign of the Spaniards in Venezuela. It was to be as short as failed. Miranda was put to prison and his companions, among them Simon Bolívar, were forced to think up a new plan. This time the foundation of the revolution was thought through more than once and after a number of failed attempts to overthrow the Spaniards, Bolívar encountered the key to success in the plains of Venezuela. With aid from José Antonio Páez and the people of the plains, also known as *llaneros*, Bolívar liberated what is today Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and parts of Peru.²⁵

The Latin American experience is filled with examples of how the ideological leader has found a way of leadership in the actual practice of his teachings; not only in the theories of the same. Independently from the actual substance of the discourse, philosophers, politicians and revolutionaries have lived their own teachings. Many of these have come to mark their names in history while others have been less fortunate. Some of those who have come to be famous include Bello, Martí, Freyre, Alberdi and Sarmiento. This engagement is built into the Latin American comprehension of the world: to live your teachings is to actually believe in them. This is, for example, why the Marxism of Che Guevara should not be understood as a philosophical phenomenon, but as a phenomenon put to practice.²⁶

Che Guevarra, the Argentinean doctor who is probably most famous for his revolutionary aid to Fidel Castro in his taking power in Cuba, is far from alone concerning what he gave expression for. As a fighter for the people he clearly separated himself from contemporary theorists (such as Mariategui) and took action into his own hands. The economy of Cuba was in this time treated horribly and the United States used the situation for its own good, causing Cuba to be dragged into a situation easily compared to one as if under colonial rule. What Castro and Guevara did was to gather comrades who did not like the situation and after a while the support among the people was so great that the revolution could be realized. What must be stressed is that this revolution was not proclaimed as a socialistic one until the revolutionaries had taken control of Cuba.²⁷ In other words, the main focus of the revolution was not the own solution, but liberation from the former rule. One must not be able to present an astonishing option as long as the one presented by others is perceived as worse.

Revolutionaries have not had grave problems to address when gathering followers. On the contrary, the injustice of the colonial days has lived on to our days, and is very much alive in Venezuela today. Approximately 1/3 of the rural population is believed to have access to fresh drinking water. According to the UN, 1/3 of the urban population is poor, living in slum called *ranchos*, surrounding the cities. The government program for the crisis in the beginning of the 90s resulted in huge social differences. 20% of the population was unemployed in 1999, and marginalization and crime has increased drastically. The level of education is not extremely high, but school is free and in 1993 it was estimated that 89% of children in the ages 6-14 attend school. However, large numbers of children drop out of the educational system and merely half graduate from High School. Books and teaching keep a relatively low

²⁵ Flores Morador, Fernando (2003) *Från Columbus till Che*, Lunds Universitet, Lund, 105-107

²⁶ Flores Morador, (2003) *Från Columbus till Che*, 25-28

²⁷ Flores Morador, (2003) *Från Columbus till Che*, 163-166

class, especially in rural areas. Since the 1960s, the number of students on universities has risen in an explosively high rate, resulting in lack of efficiency and lack of competent teachers.²⁸

The cultures of Latin America can be traced back thousands of years. But what has actually stayed inside the Latin American culture until this day is for obvious reasons an endless source of debate. What must be stressed in this matter is that, on a most superficial level, the mentality of many Latin Americans and their leaders is characterized by strong solidarity with the weaker, culture relativism and a quite exaggerated idealism. These are all components that have come to be important due to the *pensador* Bartolomé de las Casas, an individual who lived during the colonial days and came to influence the entire philosophical world of Latin America.²⁹ To this day, idealism and solidarity with the weaker are key notes in order to win a political election, start a political movement or overrun a parliament by force. Quite a few such leaders have come to take their place in history as heroes. Books on their lives, often written by themselves, are distributed world wide, read by thousands, if not more.³⁰

Especially during the 20th century a number of coup d'états have taken place in Venezuela, particularly during the 1940s, and great riots also took place during the economic and social conflicts of 1989 and 1992. The most famous of these would be the events of 1989, also known as *el caracazo*, where the ruling president Pérez made changes in the constitution, proclaimed a state of emergency and summoned 10 000 militaries in Caracas for riots that were to result in approximately 300 deaths, 1500 injured and over 3000 arrests. In 1994 the country was in such a bad economic state that banks crashed and the International Monetary Fund demanded strict economic politics in order to help Venezuela by loans. The following politics, characterized by a grand lack of human rights, were badly received in the Venezuelan society. Heavy protests lead to a change in politic power after the elections of 1998. All candidates except for one were known for their malfunctioning politic agendas, so the choice of the people became an easy one. Former instigator of rebellion and military Hugo Chávez Frías was elected president. Chávez came to be seen upon as a savior by the many poor of Venezuela. His politics surrounding the leftist ideologies and his populist approach came to give Chávez 56 per cent of the votes. A great social reformation came to be conducted under the end of the 90s, leading to Chávez' even greater support among the people. During the elections of 2000, Chávez received almost 60 per cent of the votes cast.³¹

In April 2002 an attempt to overrun the democratically elected President by a coup succeeded. The incidents surrounding these events have come to be highly disputed, where on April 11 2002, 17 people were killed in clashes between Chávez loyalists and opposition demonstrators. The events resulted in the arrest of President Chávez, and the Government being replaced by an interim junta headed by Pedro Carmona. The Constitution was suspended the following day, and the democratically elected legislature and regional assemblies were dissolved. Only two days after taking power, on April 13, the junta collapsed as they were overpowered by troops loyal to Chávez. Venezuela was filled with cheering people, demanding the release of the democratically elected President and the restoration of the Government. Hugo Chávez returned to office the following day. He denied to have ever

²⁸ Ernst&Young, (1992) *Doing Business in Venezuela*, 111

²⁹ Flores Morador, (2003) *Från Columbus till Che*, 30ff

³⁰ Marcos, (2002) *Från sydöstra Mexicos underjordiska berg*, Manifest kulturproduktion AB, Avesta; Guevara, Che, (1968) *Dagbok från Bolivia*, AB Rabén & Sjögren, Stockholm; Edelman, Marc (2001) *Social movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics*, Annual Reviews, 292f

³¹ Buxton, *Regional surveys of the world*, 802f; Utrikespolitiska Institutet (2002) *Länder i Fickformat*, 9-15

resigned and the Government convened a number of committees to promote national dialogue and discussion concerning the newly enforced 49 laws. Interestingly, the only country in the world not to have condemned this coup is the United States of America. Consequently, allegations about US support for the coup has been both presented and seriously denied.³² However, US sources claim officials from the White House administration met several times with the leaders of the organizations that temporarily put Chávez out of power, at the same time as no attention was paid to the actual plots planned at the time. Though administration officials denied encouraging Chávez's ouster, they "did not hide their dismay at his restoration."³³ At the end of 2002, the people loyal to Chávez and their opposition both displayed great expressions of movement as activists collected signatures in order to hold referendums concerning the future of the Government.³⁴

³² Buxton, *Regional surveys of the world*, 803ff

³³ The New York Times, *Bush Officials Met With Venezuelans Who Ousted Leader*, April 16, Sect A, 1

³⁴ Buxton, *Regional surveys of the world*, 803ff

Present situation

*"In the absence of openly declared collective action, resistance has to be read as the ways in which peoples live their every day lives."*³⁵

It was the second day of the "Reparos" ("Repairs") and also my second day in the country. I tried getting used to the climate while observing the political happenings. My job was more than difficult. I could not really comprehend why I was always told different pieces of information, but with no overall view. Though I had access to cable TV with more than 50 channels I was constantly frustrated about this fact. Even the Repairs confused me as no one could really tell me what they were about. My friends told me their version, my host family told me another version, the private news channels told me a third version, the governmentally controlled Channel Eight ("Canal Ocho") told a fourth version, and the president himself told his version in his own TV show Hello President ("¡Aló Presidente!") that runs every Sunday afternoon. Soon I was to realize that I could start finding a similar pattern in the arguments. And it all had to do with one's personal conviction of being for or against president Hugo Chávez Frías. It was all polarization.

The president, his followers and the opposition

In the 1998 elections the Venezuelan people had very few choices. Those presidential candidates that were presented were, according to my informants, famous for corruption and generally malfunctioning political agendas. The only one who did not have a history in the Venezuelan political world was Hugo Chávez Frías, the military who failed in his attempt to overthrow the rule of 1992. Though being one of Venezuela's most famous criminals, Chávez and his political party MVR (*Movimiento Quinta Republica*)³⁶ gathered votes by traveling around poor areas promising people a brighter future. A cult surrounding Chávez emerged and his followers, dressed in red, were known as "chavistas". In many ways the elections became a question of being for this political newcomer, or being against him. A polarization was soon to emerge.

The political party MVR is in many ways not a political party at all. It is to great extents a political excuse to arrange huge rallies where everyone dresses in red, expressing their awe towards its leader. During my time in Venezuela I came to realize that the name MVR is almost never even used. The general discourse is that of president Chávez and if a person or politician is his follower or not. At political rallies and manifestations the expressions are extremely centered on the leader. Slogans such as "Chávez is the people" ("*Chávez es el pueblo*") and "Chávez won't go away" ("*Chávez no se va*") are much more utilized than any kind of political agenda. Posters covering huge walls and add spots show Chávez hugging babies, along with other political slogans. What the president has actually done for the people is given less importance than his personal charisma and promises of change in the future. This position became even more obvious as I spoke to chavistas who could not really point at anything the government had done during their almost six years in office.³⁷ Politicians with

³⁵ Gills, *Globalization and the politics of resistance*, 36

³⁶ Movement Fifth Republic

³⁷ Once, I managed to get an interview with a chavista on tape. During the interview I asked him on the matter of what Chávez had actually done for the people during his time in power. The fifteen-minute long reply included plans of what Chávez was about to do in the future. It did not, however, include the answer to my question.

MVR who are trying to become mayors or governors can in their political propaganda have a picture where they are shaking hands with the president. The politician's political agenda might even be totally avoided, only presenting emotional pictures and slogans. The personal contact with the leader is clearly given more importance than actual political competence or knowledge. MVR is simply based upon its leader, with no more specific political aims than that of making the country a better place for the poor. The children eating garbage in the streets is one proof that this idea has failed, at least during the first six years MVR has been in office.

The opposition against Hugo Chávez is not one unified force. On the contrary, it is a mosaic of individuals from different parts of society, including NGOs, factory owners, political parties and the Catholic Church. Neither does the opposition consist of generally rich people fighting against the chavistas who are struggling for the poor (a notion Chávez expresses in his speeches), a fact I had problems comprehending at first but became aware of as I met people who could love or hate the work of the opposition, coming from all social classes and with no obvious distinctions. I met rich chavistas and poor people sympathizing with the opposition, and the other way around. There are liberals, communists and conservatives within this politically shattered group. What unites these people is the fact that they are working against the sitting president Chávez and his way of ruling the country. This is also, sadly, the only thing that brings the opposition together. Even if the opposition had the support of a majority in the Venezuelan society (as they constantly tried convincing me that they were) they still would have problems putting a president in the presidential palace Miraflores. No politician in his right mind could possibly manage to unite the Church, communists and oil companies under one flag. In the case of a presidential election the chavistas only have one candidate while the opposition has at least two. And this situation is one the opposition is more than aware of.

All informants from the opposition expressed the same view on the subject of the leader. As there is no unifying force that binds the opposition to voting for one single candidate (except for the struggle against Chávez), I encountered quite strongly the feeling that fighting for the opposition was hopeless. The opposition as such can't possibly win any form of democratic elections as it looked in the time that I was in Venezuela. People that I spoke to expressed that they saw no one who could seriously challenge Chávez while representing this mosaic of opinions. The leader must in a sense gather the Venezuelan people by challenging the prejudice against opposition leaders. The notion that the opposition consists of generally rich white people coming from the political right, having contacts with the US administration, is something that seems to be quite widely spread especially within groups from the left. This critique must not go unnoticed as much of this opposition-White House contact is proven by neutral sources.³⁸ However, seeing the entire opposition as having the same political standpoint, wanting to end Chávez's time as president by a military coup, would be a mistake. Many of those who oppose the rule of Hugo Chávez are poor, black and politically oriented towards the left.³⁹

³⁸ For an example of leftist views on the contact between opposition leaders and the White House, see http://www.vansterpartiet.se/PUB_internation/219,22046.cs. For more information on the matter, see New York Times (2002) *Bush Officials Met With Venezuelans Who Ousted Leader*, Marquis, April 16; Dagens Nyheter (2002) *Kuppmakare fick goda råd av USA*, Carlbom, April 17

³⁹ A study on the participation in rallies and meetings against Chávez would clearly be more preferable than only to have my empirical experiences as guidelines. I have however not encountered any such study that has proven satisfactory.

Living in Venezuela for more than two months made me realize that both those who work for the rule of Chávez and those who work against him seem quite confident that their specific group is in majority. No matter who I spoke to this attitude was sooner or later presented. The proofs for these convictions had a way of being just as vague for both the chavistas as the opposition. Chavistas constantly referred to the fact that Chávez was democratically elected; while those from the opposition claimed that the elections were based on lies, misconceptions and corruption. As everyone is aware of the other side and their personal convictions, the polarization becomes even more obvious. And because of this, the fear for political irregularities is even more justified. One might conclude this specific aspect by saying that the tension between political opinions is quite obvious in Venezuela.

Reparos

After being elected as president of the Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez spared no time in his struggle to change the country. Soon after assuming office in 1999, a new constitution was created, prolonging the president's time in power from five to six years. Other new features in this constitution were the change of name for the nation to "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela", and the possibility for a presidential referendum within the already existing six-year period. The only demand for this to occur was that the people of Venezuela collected more than 2 436 083 signatures of people who wished for it to happen. According to the opposition, more than 3,5 million signatures were collected and presented to the authorities. CNE acknowledged a few more than 1,9 million of these signatures, but said that more than one million were inadequate and needed to be completed. This is what the "Repairs" is about. For three days, during the weekend from 28th of May to 30th of May, some of those who had signed but were not acknowledged had the right to complete their act.⁴⁰

My first contact with the "Repairs" was the 28th, on my first day in Venezuela. I was interested in what happened so my friend and I went to one of the voting centers to see if we could get any smarter. Military had cut off all the streets around the voting center and only voters and officials could enter, but with my Swedish identity card from the university and some persuasion, we were allowed to view the process a little closer. A man working for an NGO that is part of the opposition immediately approached us, giving us his story for over an hour. The encounter was a minor chock for me, as the man spoke of his own opinion as the correct and objective one though he was so obviously in clear political opposition to the regime. On the other side, it was neither the first nor the last time that I would come across this behavior. People in my host family had already expressed similar opinions before, and I was to come across the conviction of having a neutral and balanced view of the world from people of enormously different political convictions. For the first time, I had been exposed to the polarization of political ideas in Venezuela. Later that very weekend I was to be exposed to its terrible results.

The privately owned news channel Globovisión broadcasted live from a range of different voting centers on the evening of the 29th. The lines of people were long, all secured by military personnel. In one place two men had not been allowed to repair their signing, as they were diseased according to the officials. In another place a woman was not permitted to repair

⁴⁰ Buxton, Julia (2002) *South America, Central America and the Caribbean*, Regional Surveys of the World, Europa Publications, London. Numbers are however an object of argument and details in the information presented by Buxton is questioned by Shachar (see Dagens Nyheter (2004) *Valmyndighet avvisar omröstning om Chávez*, March 1)

as she had an old cedula⁴¹ from before 1998 that doesn't say "Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela". Outside a voting centre some chavistas were passing, waving flags and provoking the voters. Lots of people were angered, screaming political arguments and cuss words. Some intellectuals were showing the constitution, trying to explain how the opposition is actually following the law while the chavistas do not. They were constantly attacked by a man who was screaming, trying to make them stop their explanation. All over Caracas people were shown in long lines, waiting to repair. Some claimed to have had been waiting for over three hours. During the entire evening very few chavistas were shown on Globovisión. Those that appeared were extremely aggressive.

The following day leaders of the opposition claimed to have won a victory for the people and for the democracy. They said that there had been sufficient signings and that there was to be a referendum. Ten minutes later the chavistas replied, saying that the opposition leaders were wrong and that the number of false cédulas encountered was proof of a rotten opposition. The official result from the "Repairs" did not become official this day, but a few days later. Meanwhile, former US president Jimmy Carter was in the country as an international observer criticizing that the counting of votes took such long time. Carter also expressed that the voting procedure as such had worked out in a good way and he congratulated the Venezuelan people for a well-done "Repair" process.

Violence came to be the answer when the results of the voting became public. During the afternoon of June 3rd, the private news channels started broadcasting live from central Caracas, a view that gave the impression of total war. As the reporter counted up to six burning cars, the camera panned over what looked like a battlefield in former Yugoslavia. There was smoke in the air and a few running people taking cover. Half an hour later people dressed in red were shooting towards a building where a governor was holding a press conference. The video clip was shown over and over again, with journalists throwing themselves to the ground while the windows were being scattered in the room. Rafael Marin, a politician from the opposition, was attacked in his car, taking a heavy beating to the head, leading to hospitalization. His daughter Antoineta told the viewers to fight against the chavistas who executed the deed and the camera panned over Marin's car that was covered in blood. The wife of Marin said "bandits" executed the deed with orders to kill. She expressed the opinion that Chávez must have ordered this to happen and said the president is the greatest bandit of them all. Both buses and cars were shown in flames all over central Caracas. In the night, TV established the number of burned cars somewhere around 22-25. Religious leaders Bishop Balthazar Porras and Rabbi Pinchas Brenner pleaded for people to stop the violence.

According to the NGO Súmate (of the opposition) and Jorge Rodríguez (president of CNE, *Consejo Nacional Electoral*), 2 569 584 votes were collected in total. In other words, the limit was passed by more than 130 000 signatures. There was to be realized a referendum, a fact the minister of information and Chávez himself acknowledged in a speech during the night.

People from the opposition saw the result as a victory for democracy. Television broadcasted from Quinta La Unidad, the center of the opposition, where people were cheering and waving with flags as leaders of the opposition held speeches. In many places people were showing their support for the result while singing, waving flags and honking their car horns. But it was impossible to establish how representative the celebration was. Channel Eight showed nothing

⁴¹ Identity card that allows the owner to vote

of the celebration and in the relatively poor neighborhood where I was living at the time, the streets were quiet. A neutral overview of what occurred was impossible to encounter.

Information, disinformation, truths and lies

Hugo Chávez Frías has done quite a lot during his six years in power. He has changed the constitution, started "missions" for alphabetization and education, and he has initiated projects for medical care in poor areas. But what these changes have actually meant for the Venezuelan people is another question.

Hugo Chávez is famous for holding long speeches. Every Sunday afternoon his show "Aló Presidente!" goes on for a few hours, drawing crowds from all over Venezuela. Mostly the president of the republic simply sits by his table talking into the camera, taking calls or explaining things on a whiteboard. Other times he might be traveling around the country, visiting military compounds and talking to people. Lots of the subjects Chávez likes to address are perceived to have minor importance to the individual person, and according to statements from a number of people (especially from the opposition) many of the things Chávez says are simply populist propaganda with no contact to his actual political reality. The show is also broadcasted without time limit, giving Chávez the opportunity to go on for many hours – once he kept going for 5 hours and 45 minutes⁴². Therefore, some people have grave problems seeing the show as they find it offensive and simply very bad. Many see the entire show in awe, seeing the president as a very intelligent man who deals with the most important issues of the country in a manner that has always been needed in Venezuela. If he actually performs the deeds he claims to be doing is a great subject of argument, and is one of the great things that divides the political landscape of Venezuela. The chavistas claim to be doing a lot, while the opposition argues that it's all fancy talk without action.

Occasionally Chávez holds rallies in central Caracas. Hundreds of thousands of chavistas then dress in red, waving flags and summon somewhere in the town centre where Chávez himself holds speeches. These events are extraordinarily well organized. Information about the event is spread all over the country and there is a wide range of entertainment, all in order to attract as many people as possible. Even a couple of hundred buses are chartered, utilized to ship thousands of people from all over Venezuela to the event. Later on, the reunion is to be used in the political propaganda, showing the masses of people colored in red, presenting them as if they had united spontaneously. I personally could not believe that the procedure worked this way and refused to believe that people were shipped to Caracas in busses. I was one day a witness to one of these reunions, and realized that what I had been told was the truth. Hundreds of buses sprayed with political messages stood parked in central Caracas, causing the traffic to turn into chaos. Chavistas dressed in red swarmed souvenir stores, taking pictures of the town. They could not have been clearer about the fact that they had just come for the day.

By law, the president of Venezuela has the right to hold so called "cadenas"⁴³, something Hugo Chávez apparently takes maximal advantage of. At a number of occasions I spoke to

⁴² Sydsvenka Dagbladet (2004) *Medierna har tagit stallning – för endera sidan*, Jonsson, Karin, 24 maj, A9

⁴³ "Chains", the right for the president of the republic to cut all broadcasting in the entire country in order to send his own messages. The use of cadenas has been highly criticized during the last couple of years, especially concerning the events of April 2002 when the opposition meant Chávez took advantage of this right in order to hide what news programs were trying to show. Some privately owned channels split the screen in two, only

people who told me of the shock they would have if they heard there was a cadena before Chávez came to power. The kind of circumstances that would cause a cadena would be extreme and according to my informants, everyone would pay attention at these times. Nowadays there are cadenas almost daily in Venezuela. An overwhelming amount of people I got to know showed great disgust over the amount of speeches that the president keeps giving, arguing that he should use all this time for actual political work instead. I met a lot of people who said they were ashamed of Chávez's politics and the way he ran the country. In this matter, they did not only refer to his overall ideological strategies but rather his way of speaking of change while not complying with these promises. The charm and charisma of Chávez is truly remarkable and is clearly something that is being used for political propaganda. As an example, I have turned on the radio at eleven o'clock in the night, hearing the president giving a speech. One can wonder if this amount of interruptions in television and radio can actually work in the president's advantage. Many people are following the daytime soap operas, and as a result, are missing out of their favorite shows as the president often has a way of broadcasting his cadenas at this time. I was personally affected by this on June 16th when Chávez held a cadena exactly when Greece was playing against Spain in the European Cup, and everyone in the university (where I was at the time) were furious. Grand parts of my informants sympathizing with the opposition argued that Chávez's use of the cadenas is illegal. I also heard this opinion a number of times at Red de Veedores.

Leopoldo Castillo is in many ways the similar to Hugo Chávez. They are both middle-aged men with dark hair, quite a belly, and they both scream to get attention. Castillo also takes up great amounts of television time (two hours every day, five days per week) in a show where he is sitting by a table while talking into the camera about his own political beliefs. Just like Chávez he invites guests who share these political beliefs and he takes calls from citizens who ask questions. Even the name of the show, "¡Alo Ciudadano!"⁴⁴ is similar to the one hosted by the president. One of the very few differences between the men is that Leopoldo Castillo is a man of the opposition, and it is quite obvious that he does not like Hugo Chávez at all.

An interesting aspect of Castillo and his show is that, according to some informants that are personally from the opposition, he has to win the political arguments at all costs, a fact that sometimes leads to him telling complete lies. This is from a man that many times spends his entire show presenting proof that Chávez is lying in his cadenas. "¡Alo Ciudadano!" many times turns into a forum for the opposition to spread bad news about the president. People call in, telling Castillo how great he is, and how badly Chávez has influenced their lives. As the call is over Castillo and his guests analyze what the caller said, a discussion that mostly end up in a conclusion that is positive for the opposition. The show also offers the possibility to send in text messages by mobile phone. These messages, of overwhelmingly negative nature against Chávez, are then shown on screen at the same time as Castillo and his guests are talking.

Not only are the opinions distributed by television split in this manner. The greatest newspapers such as El Mundo and El Universal are to a great extent part of the opposition and many articles criticize the government. Also a great number of books are published on the political situation of the country, many times with no intent to even get close to any kind of neutral point of view. One typical example is the journalist Pedro Llorens' book "Contra

presenting moving pictures without sound, of what occurred on the streets during the cadena. All in the name of the freedom of speech and to show the public the events that took place. This was seen upon as a crime and the transmissions were cut by authorities.

⁴⁴ "Hello citizen!"

Chávez”⁴⁵, that even in the title clearly indicates the lack of a neutral standpoint. Llorens’ book is meant to be read by individuals from the opposition, a fact not only implied in the title of the publication. Books have a very high cost in Venezuela. While salaries, clothes and food never reach much higher than 50% of the Scandinavian level, books such as the one by Llorens cost just as much as in Sweden. The individual purchasing this item must already be in agreement with the political standpoints of the author, and from the upper economic classes.

Information on the political situation is constantly given an angle in Venezuela, no matter in what part of society one looks. Surprisingly enough this extreme polarization is often caused by journalists such as Castillo and Llorens, leading to a society following the same pattern. One can of course discuss into infinity whether or not these opinions are products of journalists or the society they live in.

Though extreme political opinions can always be found in societies I have never seen any political landscape so extremely split in two. The question one must ask is to what extent Chávez himself is responsible for this polarization. An informant sympathizing with the opposition claimed Chávez has been destructive for the Venezuelan society in this aspect, as his speeches have spread hatred, causing people to turn against each other’s. This informant spoke from own experience. She could no longer live with her husband, who was a chavista.

Violence, corruption, lost hope

Though exporting enormous amounts of petroleum to mainly the United States, the Venezuelan public receives very little of the money obtained in this business. Some of the most visible signs that economic wealth stays in only a few places can be observed while around the neighbourhoods of Altamira or Parque del Este where people have pools, penthouse apartments and expensive cars. In the same areas street vendors and prostitutes have their work place and poor people are sleeping on benches. In this way the economic differences are evident not only in named neighbourhoods but all over Caracas. I actually came across very few areas where rich and poor did not live side by side. This became a paradox for me. People could live so close together while not showing any visible desire to help one another. On the contrary the environment could be close to hostile between neighbours from different social classes. I saw rich people who would see the same poor man sleeping on the pavement outside their home for long times, and still not even look at him while passing in their SUV. The homes of these rich people could involve high walls with electric fences. Quite a few would spend their spare time in exclusive recreational clubs, shopping centres and restaurants; all guarded by heavily armed security personnel.

Venezuela is a country where violence is present at all times. For example, glass doors to public transportations often have holes from gunshots and many political manifestations end up in riots with mortal outcome, between the National Guard and demonstrators. It is most unwise to walk outdoors after six o’clock in the evening and if you do, you must be very certain of where you are going. The crime rate is high and ending up in the wrong neighbourhood at the wrong time could be more than devastating. After eight or nine in the night one can hear gunshots, a quite often-heard sound during the night in Caracas. According to my informants it is most common to have experienced a robbery or other forms of violence

⁴⁵ Llorens, Pedro (2004) *Contra Chávez*, Debate, Caracas

first hand. One man claimed to have been beaten to unconsciousness for his necklace. A young man said thieves had robbed him three times by pointing a pistol in his face, and a woman said her relative had been shot for no obvious reason as the killer not even bothered to steal her jewellery. After the statements the informants would add their own personal view on what they thought of the police force. Some had not even reported the assaults as they said they knew it wouldn't lead anywhere, while others had been met by suspicion by the officials, being asked sensitive and insinuate questions. I did not meet one person who had received a report on their robberies.

Corruption in Venezuela is a problem that has grown far beyond control. Everyone knows that the government receives millions of dollars every year for the oil and yet so little actually comes to the people, of whom many literally are sleeping in the streets, eating from the garbage of others. All this money must logically end up somewhere. But it sure is not in the streets of Caracas. Informants have witnessed of the humiliation one can encounter trying to get a passport without a small bribe, and I personally became painfully aware of the insinuating questions police officers could ask after a while at the police station. The procedure of asking for money clearly was nothing unique and all informants I spoke to condemned this abuse of power. Still I found no general struggle against it and I never saw the television news reporting on the issue. Opposition propaganda though used the fact as an argument against Chávez. The argument could hardly be taken very seriously since politicians within the opposition according to informants are known to have exploited their power to an even greater extent.

All except for one of my informants said the police was corrupt. However, this informant said asking for money was just normal police procedure and could therefore not be perceived as corruption. In a way I am prepared to agree with him. The Venezuelan society is extremely individualistic, in many ways based on the notion that everyone must fight for himself or herself. This has caused many poor people to become criminal to earn a living. And the job possibilities for criminals are good; unless the individual you rob is a police officer or a very rich person with good contacts, you can get away with basically anything and for a very respectable salary. Most probably the police will not even care that what you do is against the law and if they do, an actual attempt to stop you is less than unlikely to occur. This is why no one reports a robbery, and the same reason why Caracas is filled with violence. Of course a more peaceful way of facing poverty is to beg. But as a response, I have heard rich people complaining that the poor should start working instead of doing nothing in the streets, a criticism that might actually have some foundation if there were jobs in Venezuela. There are none. According to one informant the district of Sabana Grande was the place to relax ten to fifteen years ago. Streets were filled with happy people of all ages and social classes who would be shopping, going to discos and sitting on cafes until late in the night. Sabana Grande today is filled with street vendors and very few people are sitting by the cafes. The area is known to be filled with criminals after six o'clock. I was personally never allowed to go there alone, not even in the middle of the day. This is no unique story; street vendors and other people desperate for money are filling up the entire city.

But not even people with a good education receive many job opportunities. During the European Cup I spent quite a grand amount of time in the UCV (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*⁴⁶) where I got to know some of the students in the department of history. I did not meet one singular student who expected good things in the future. One or two said they

⁴⁶ Central University of Venezuela

thought they might become teachers somewhere, and then they would laugh and look away, changing the subject.

There is a widely spread sensation of lost hope in Venezuela. Many of my informants expressed how they had nothing to fight for. This sensation was quite present at all times during my stay in Caracas, and it was explained to me by informants that this was no unique event. It was a reality everywhere. Nationalists that I encountered had trouble explaining why they loved their country, not being able to give good arguments for their cause. Perhaps this lost hope has to do with the fact that Venezuela actually has very few national heroes or other reasons to be proud. Simon Bolivar, the grand hero for large parts of Latin America, was born in Caracas. The country has also presented a number of beauty queens who have won the Miss Universe beauty contest no less than four times within the time span from 1952 to 2003.⁴⁷ These successes are well known and proudly referred to in Venezuela. They seem to be, however, some of the very few, if not the only successes. The corruption rate in Venezuela is known to be extremely high, if not one of the highest in the world. Transports do not function, violence has become normal and thousands of children are literally living in the streets, making their living by prostitution or begging.

An event of serious impact was the *Copa America* football cup, a tournament that finally was to show the world that Venezuela had a football team to be reckoned with. The national team, known as The Wine Reds ("*Los Vinotinto*"), had been seen in TV-commercials and news broadcastings, all displaying the fabulous message of success. This was going to be the time when Venezuela won a football title. Caracas was in excitement with thousands of fans dressed in the famous t-shirt. The Wine Reds lost two games and tied with Bolivia in the qualifying round. Not two weeks into the championship, the Venezuelan team was eliminated. The dream was shattered and a new nickname emerged for the team: The Wine Jerks ("*Los Vinotonto*"). No one in my surroundings spoke too much of football after that.

Seeing their own land ending up in a crisis has clearly affected many Venezuelans. They have transformed their lost hope into action, taking to the streets in demonstrations. Others have organized themselves in commitments to political parties or NGOs. It is women who primarily perform this work. All over demonstrations, rallies and whenever anyone is expressing a political opinion, there is always at least one woman present. Women have the role of caretakers and mothers in Venezuela. Therefore, an informant told me, it is an absolute necessity to be able to provide one's children with a bright and hopeful future. This has been lost. Because of the present situation with poverty, corruption and violence, women have taken it as their role to change society. The lost hope has found a way to be channeled, at least for a while.

Once during a meeting with La Red de Veedores, a woman started screaming. She stood up, screaming in the faces of the others that she refused to vote, arguing that there was no transparency, no legitimacy and no assurance that Chávez would actually leave if the elections resulted in a victory for the opposition. The others tried to calm her down but she was furious. It took quite a while before she would sit down and talk quietly. After the reunion I talked to some of the others who said the woman's behavior was completely irrational. It may very well have been irrational. However, what she gave expression for seemed to come from the heart.

⁴⁷ www.missuniverse.com/history

La Red de Veedores

*“The Red de Veedores is an organization whose mission is to maintain a watching eye on the aspects of public life. It is an organization that defends the diffuse collective rights of the Venezuelan citizens.”*⁴⁸

- Ruth Capriles, coordinator of Red de Veedores

What is Red de Veedores?

According to personal statements and the official homepage, La Red de Veedores (“The Network of Viewers”) has been functioning as a virtual community since 1998. It was registered as Asociación civil without financial gain in 2001 and has ever since been a melting pot of people of different ideas, political stand points, academic and economic levels, and geographic location. All these people are, still according to the homepage, united by general values and the mutual interest to work for the observation of public interests and rights. The commitment to the organization is personal, individual, voluntary and is an agreement with the values and principles that constitutes the dynamics of the network.⁴⁹

In the Veedores manual the organization defines the difference between the two words “veeduría” and “observación”, suggesting that the work of Red de Veedores is defined as “veeduría”; a continuing and more profound observation over a greater time span.⁵⁰ Since both of these definitions refer to the English word “observation”, this essay will maintain utilizing this phrase. The reader should however be aware of these separate definitions.

La Red de Veedores is a network in the true meaning of the word. The organization is structured in *nodos*, or knots, all with their own specific task in the network. These tasks are all related to or include observation in some way, but since the areas of observation are different, the work of the knots might be of changing character. Some of these knots are for example concerning education, juridical aspects, trade unions, politics, elections and the environment. All these knots are then united, mainly in electronic way. By sending information from one’s own knot to the others, at the same time as receiving information from these, all are informed of what is occurring at the moment.

An operative team holds meetings at least once a week. People representing the knots of the network are gathered at these meetings to discuss the latest issues with each other and the leader Ruth Capriles. These meetings rarely keep the same standards, so short reunions with little information can be the result one week, while other reunions might be packed with presentations, dragging out for more than just a couple of hours.

At a meeting with the operative knot

The Red de Veedores premises are located in the neighbourhood of Altamira, in the north-eastern part of central Caracas. The building is yellow, not very unlike any residence. An

⁴⁸ La Red de Veedores es una organización cuya misión es mantener la vigilancia sobre los asuntos publicos. Es una organización que defiende los derechos colectivos difusos de los ciudadanos venezolanos.

⁴⁹ www.veedores.org; August 13, 2004

⁵⁰ Veedores en la red (2002) *Manual del observador*, Caracas, 1

immense mango tree spreads its branches over the many cars parked on the driveway. It soon became quite obvious that a car was the ultimate transportation to these meetings. The place could also be reached by walking. No buses stopped close by and a taxi was out of the question for anyone with a tight budget. All but me had access to a car. Walking from the subway took me around 15 minutes in the burning Venezuelan sun. I developed a habit of sweating and drinking water like there was no tomorrow.

Inside the yellow house Red de Veedores disposes of a room that is not much larger than a Swedish student home. Some tables with computers are put by the walls in this room, and there is a whiteboard that was almost never used when I attended the meetings. There are some cuttings from newspapers, for example one entitled “Firmas Suficientes“ (*Sufficient Signatures*). There is bottled water, coke and snacks on a table. Occasionally the meetings could take place in other rooms of the building (and this would lead to even more consumption of snacks) but generally the Red de Veedores own place was utilized. Every meeting featured a new chocolate bar, potato chip or cracker that I had never seen in my life. I heard more than three of the members of the operative knot laughing about how they were convinced the organization would die out without chocolate. Jokes would treat the fact that many of these members are women, and a generally spread prejudice that mostly women consume chocolate.⁵¹

At some time in the meeting, the leader Ruth Capriles would take charge. She would hold a small speech concerning what had recently occurred in the network. She would also express her opinion on what to do in the future, something that generally lead the group into discussions concerning a range of topics. These discussions had a way of leading to the end of the reunions, with no clear finish. Individuals would simply start moving towards the door and slip out one by one.

The contact inside the organization

Information is passed in many ways between people in Red de Veedores. According to what I was told by my informants, the most utilized contact is the electronic contact over the Internet.⁵² Other means of communication were by mobile phone and real life meetings at the reunions. I soon came to realize that all these ways of communication were not functioning as well as one might desire.

The e-mail had quite a few problems that were never sorted out. Information is passed on by a list that goes out to all members of all the knots, a huge list where all members have the right to say exactly what they want and where the word is absolutely free. This of course causes problems since many issues are raised that have no relevance to the majority of the members. An informant once told me that he had seen someone trying to sell a bicycle using this list. Because of this quite grand perception of freedom of speech, the list often grows out of proportion, at times making members receive up to one hundred messages per day. This makes people erase the information that is sent to them. I heard three persons in the operative knot saying they never read the messages that were sent to them, but how they would rather read through the subject titles to look for possible interesting issues before they erased

⁵¹ All reunions that I attended featured a vast majority of females. These individuals will be studied later in the part named “Who is part of Red de Veedores?”.

⁵² This could be perceived as a sign that Red de Veedores is a social movement on the Internet. I have chosen not to go through with any such study, mainly because of my extremely limited access to the Internet.

everything. This procedure is of course based on what the author of the information writes as a subject and could as a result end up being devastating if a person with important pieces of information is bad at writing interesting subject titles. Once I even witnessed this procedure of extreme erasing. The man doing it was one of the most important members of the organization, working especially in the knot observing the elections.

What intrigued me was that a great amount of really important information every day seemed to be lost without anyone really giving it any attention. Relevant and important information is distributed by the information knot, a job that took some hours every day. All this information was received from a great deal of sources from all over the world and my informant from this knot told me she worked, studying news papers from all over Latin America and the United States, around two hours every day. Sometimes it could take even more time. If all this effort was actually lost, not even read by members of the operative knot, was never totally clear. When I asked them on the matter the answers could be obviously exaggerated or avoiding. Two informants confessed to having saved thousands of messages on CD. These messages were said to might be important, and were to be read at another time.

A dilemma in the Venezuelan socio-economic reality can here be encountered. Receiving up to one hundred e-mails per day demands a lot from an e-mail account. Few accounts available on the Internet can store very much information. For example, the much-utilized Hotmail account has only the possibility of storing 2MB,⁵³ a space quickly filled. As a result, the Red de Veedores member must enter her e-mail at least once a day in order to read and erase the received messages. Otherwise the account will be filled and she can receive no more information. The problem is that only rich and middle class people have daily access to the Internet. The service is far too expensive for an individual in the lower classes of society. A highly efficient excluding mechanism has thereby been created: The member who does not have a good economic position is left with the alternatives of not receiving information from her own organization, or not being part of La Red de Veedores at all. Later on, electronically obtained contact came to result in real-time interaction between the members, another indicator of the dynamics of the group. Concerning this issue, one member expressed his views in this manner:

“The best example was the weekend, when, you know, there were regional coordinators with whom I’ve been talking to over the phone for more than a year... sending them mail with orders as well as greetings and thanks, and I got to know them after a year, physically. But the contact is, lets say, eh... on a high percentage, forty or fifty percent electronical. All the information is sent electronically.”⁵⁴

The contact by mobile phone was, for obvious methodological reasons, never studied. The informants neither expressed any greater importance of the phone contact. Sometimes I overheard people talking about how they called someone for a reunion and later the person never showed up. These second hand sources were basically the only way in which this kind of study could be executed and it was therefore never followed-up.

During Monday evenings I was to study the operative part of Red de Veedores by participant observation. As already mentioned in the chapter on methodology, I attended other reunions

⁵³ www.hotmail.com, November 9, 2004

⁵⁴ El mejor ejemplo fue el fin de semana, que, fijate, que habían coordinadoras regionales en las cuales yo tengo un año hablando con ellos por telefono, eh... mandandoles correo, tanto ordenes como saludos o agradecimientos, y los conocí despues de un año, fisicamente. Pero el contacto es, digamos, eh... un por cientage alto, cuarenta o cincuenta por cientos via electronica. Toda la información recorre via electronica.

as well. The interaction between the people at these reunions became the primary target for my study. I came to find these reunions extremely interesting, as the façade created towards other people was an organized and structured one with overwhelming aesthetics. The home page is one example.⁵⁵ As I had anticipated back in Sweden, the reunions were not as ordered, nor as structured. I never even understood at what time the reunions were supposed to start. I could sometimes arrive around five and had to wait for over an hour before anyone came, and once I came at a quarter to six, when the meeting was almost over. If this had to do with me not understanding what they told me or if everyone (except for me) had been called by phone to arrange the time, was never totally clarified.

A reality I became quite used to face was the fact that the operative reunions of extraordinarily unstructured nature were perceived by the members as organized meetings. The way of arriving an hour later than scheduled, talking about other things while someone is having an important presentation and screaming to get attention were absolutely normal and in its order. These things occurred almost every single reunion and there was never any distinction in who did what. Both men and women from different parts of the organization could raise their voice, scream, slam the table, blow a whistle or ring a small bell to get the attention of everyone. The sound level sometimes reached very high. In addition to this, people would enter and leave as they pleased, talking on mobile phones, surfing the internet, cutting out news paper articles, passing around information, and there was always at least one man who came late, telling jokes to lighten up the atmosphere. After a reunion I once talked to an informant on the matter and he was stunned that I might see the reunions as disorganized. However, he later gave an interview expressing another opinion concerning the issue, and then giving it a gender perspective:

“It could seem to be an advantage that the majority are [sic] women, but it could also be a disadvantage that, that women are dispersed a lot. I think we men are more punctual, more skilled to take action, let’s say, we’re better at organizing ourselves, not all, I’m not talking about... but I see the reunions, suddenly, pss, they sum up something, it is trying. That could be part of... of, of the maturity of the team.”⁵⁶

This specific informant was however one of the most badly organized that I met in the entire group. His statement was actually quite a shock for me. He had a habit of arriving late to the reunions, interrupting people and disturbing the order in general. This attitude was however nothing unique. I encountered exaggerations and even obvious lies from more than one individual in Red de Veedores.

The theories of Alberoni are here only partly becoming realized. He discusses the communication within the group as something quite exclusive for the group members, as information and the sensation of the truth is supposed to stay as simple as possible. In order for a nascent state to erupt, one could argue that Red de Veedores faces a most problematic, yet positive situation when it comes to communication. It seems as if the group matters greatly for the members of the operative team. This specific group might be able to enter the

⁵⁵ The Red de Veedores home page is, in my view, a beautiful and well functioning internet site. My views on the work at the organization’s reunions are certainly not very compatible with the standards of the structured and organized home page.

⁵⁶ “Pareciera que es una ventaja que la mayoría son mujeres, pero podía ser también una desventaja que, que entre mujeres se dispersan mucho. Creo que los hombres somos mas puntuales, mas de acción, o sea, nos organizamos mejor, no todos, no hablo de... pero yo veo las reuniones, de repente, pss, concreten algo, como cuesta. Eso puede ser parte de... del, de la madurez del equipo.”

nascent state as the contact by phone and e-mail becomes more and more intense.⁵⁷ Since the movement is formed on the basis of shared categories for analyzing reality and common experiences, the communication of the group is of great value for it to keep functioning.⁵⁸

Who is part of Red de Veedores?

At my second meeting with the operative knot of Red de Veedores I was asked to make a presentation of myself. I told them what I thought they wanted to know concerning my study, my university in Sweden, and ended my speech by saying that I would be glad if they wanted to talk to me about the work they were doing. I was there, I explained, to know about them. Especially the men who were present perceived the last part of my statement as hilarious, and the civil status of all women suddenly became an issue of importance. Now everyone had to give a presentation, including profession, family and if they were married or not.

As the people presented themselves I became aware that this was no average group of randomly selected individuals. These people were professors, journalists and they held diplomas in a huge spectrum of academic fields, from Latin American and North American universities. Also, and this was something that stayed quite the same during all reunions, the vast majority were women. During this specific meeting there were ten women but only two men in the room as the reunion started. This structure of the reunions was nothing unique; pretty much all reunions featured the same kind of individuals, clothing and snacks, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. What should be specifically pointed at is still the socio-economic level of the participants. Almost every single member of the operative group wore jewelry that at least looked like gold and not one single individual had black skin, something that is a clear indicator for coming from lower classes of society. An extremely high rate of the members were white, an indicator for coming from the higher classes. I even visited some of these people's houses and they certainly seemed to have no financial problems at all. These were quite luxurious houses that were far over the normal living standards, even compared to Sweden. Expensive cars, eating in restaurants and wearing expensive jewelry is part of this lifestyle that I witnessed almost on a daily basis.

Who the individuals of the operative group really are was quite a tricky question. Since they all introduced themselves as neutral and objective, obviously intelligent persons, the anthropological fieldwork demanded quite some time in order to figure them out. After a while quite a few of them would though come up with statements that strongly contradicted the position of neutrality. For example, one informant confessed to being a member of a political party that is one of the most powerful in the opposition against Hugo Chávez. Another informant told me of the political landscape of Venezuela and said "Nosotros en la oposición" ("*We in the opposition*"), a statement he was quick to correct as a slip of the tongue. At another time, the leader Ruth Capriles told us at a reunion that she wished for Chávez to resign, and other members of the operative group agreed with her. An informant from the operative group once showed me a slingshot made from rubber and steel that he claimed was utilized "for protection against the National Guard". This dangerous and most professionally created weapon was shown to me as if it was no big deal, even though it was held in the hands of an individual who claimed to be neutral.

⁵⁷ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 74ff

⁵⁸ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 126-131

A friend of mine who followed me to La Red de Veedores a few times used to refer to the people at these reunions as “women who have nothing better to do“. His statement might very well not be too far from the truth. The interviews revealed quite a few indications that these persons, who were always a majority of women, had no direct ties to their families. Some were grand mothers while others had no children at all. Not even everyone was married even though they had all clearly passed the age of 30. This occurred in the social and religious climate of Latin America where family, marriage and children are absolutely fundamental parts of the notion of female success. The women of Red de Veedores did not participate in this structure. On the contrary, the network they set up was another; a political and social one.

In the middle of July I was invited to a party by the members of the operative group. The festivities included very pleasant food, drinks and entertainment. We played domino and talked of normal things besides the work of Red de Veedores. The party was also close to my birthday so there was a cake, champagne and small snacks. It was, in other words, an informal reunion where everyone could have fun. Since this took place in the residence of one of the members of the operative team, I came to draw quite a few conclusions on the social and economic background of the group individuals that were present. The house as such was a villa situated on a hill in southern Caracas. You needed a car to get there. There are no buses or other public transportations of any kind. The house had a big balcony with a majestic view over the city. Inside the villa was the quite normal type of decoration that many Latino Americans have come to embrace; furniture and ornaments that looked much more expensive than they probably were. People dressed quite exclusively. Even though looking more relaxed than when coming directly from work, clothes had expensive logos and the women had jewelry that looked like, or even was, gold. From my experience in Caracas, this way of living or consuming was not anything that everyone could do. On the contrary, this way of life clearly indicates the standards of upper middle class, if not simply upper class.

Quite a few times I was put in situations where people were supposed to tell each other about themselves. Occasionally someone would say that she was neutral⁵⁹ and the rest of the participants would laugh. I felt as if there was a silent understanding that they could not be neutral. This was absolutely not anything that I encountered only on Veedores meetings, but in the entire city of Caracas. In a society where no one is neutral and even journalists neglect an objective stand point, the search for personal neutrality must clearly be a difficult job. However, this problematic situation has clearly not been faced in the observer’s manual.

We are not actors but impartial and systematic observers.⁶⁰

[...] We are watching the voting process in defense of our rights as voters; therefore it is in our interest to observe the conduct of all the actors, including that of other voters who affect the process, precisely because the observer of the election has “taken part“ in the collective and diffuse rights whose respect for all the participants guarantee the transparency and legitimacy of the process.⁶¹

⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, only women even claimed they were neutral. I never heard a man saying these words. If this had to do with me having bad luck, if the men did not believe in neutrality or whatever the reason, I do not know and do not wish to speculate.

⁶⁰ “No somos actores sino observadores imparciales y sistemáticos.“ Veedores en la Red (2002) *Manual del observador*, 6

⁶¹ “[...]Estamos vigilando el proceso electoral en defensa de nuestros derechos como electores; por eso nos interesa ver el comportamiento de todos los actores, incluyendo el de otros electores que afecten el proceso, justamente porque el observador electoral ha tomado “la parte“ de los derechos colectivos y difusos cuyo respeto por todos los participantes garantiza la transparencia y legitimidad del proceso.“ Veedores en la Red (2002) *Manual del observador*, 2

These quotes are only two examples of the way that the members of Red de Veedores see themselves and their work. Given these statements and the empirical information gathered at reunions, I believe it is fair to say that the organization members emerge as a collection of somewhat ambivalent individuals. Torn between a polarized society and a supposedly neutral organization, the difference between what is done and what is claimed to be done causes the members to maintain a façade towards the surrounding environment. This quite thin surface is though rapidly penetrated. As already mentioned, my observations have revealed that quite a few individuals express highly political stand points that are close to radical. These statements would through the theories of Alberoni be translated as indications of a nascent state: a clear distinction between the group and individuals who are not part of the same⁶², and the overall mentality of the social movement.⁶³ These indicators do not however go without criticism, but this will be dealt with at a later point in this essay.

Why Red de Veedores?

“The work of the observer is complementary and seeks to contribute to the citizen’s judgment of legitimacy to the process of elections.”⁶⁴

La Red de Veedores is an organization founded on a few very simple ideas, all treating the issue of neutrality and objectivity in the Venezuelan society. The fact that the task of observation is the greatest one in the work of Veedores raises exactly the question of neutrality to the surface, during this kind of study. If the organization seeks objectivity, then this is probably something its members find to lack in society in general. And if the organization therefore distances itself from its surroundings in order to observe and criticize it, then what kind of legitimacy does it have when observing? La Red de Veedores clearly faces a tough challenge when seeking neutrality in a polarized society.

Spending time in Venezuela it soon becomes obvious that there is no neutrality. Taking sides is the only clear statement, being for or against Hugo Chávez. As already stressed, a neutral or ignorant stand point was quite impossible for me to encounter. A neutral and objective force in Venezuela is therefore easily perceived as an important aspect of society one has lost as is in need of finding. This I was told by both chavistas and people from the opposition. A grave problem everywhere in Venezuela is that of trust – it is many times seen upon as unthinkable to believe sources of information whose political stand point is not identical with ones own. This polarization has caused people not to listen to one another. Opposition rarely see Channel Eight news and chavistas rarely see Globovisión news. These different sources of information cause the shaft to widen between people, making confrontation harder and mutual understanding impossible. In order for democracy to work a dialogue must function. In order for a dialogue to function Venezuela is in grave need of objective and neutral forces that can unite a polarized people. This is the reason to why Red de Veedores exists.

La Red de Veedores holds workshops with voluntaries who want to become observers. These workshops generally take a few hours and are led by a handful of individuals from the operative knot. I attended some of these meetings, taking notes and talking to the people who

⁶² Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 166ff

⁶³ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 126ff

⁶⁴ “La labor del observador es complementaria y busca aportar criterios ciudadanos de legitimación al proceso electoral.” Veedores en la Red (2002) *Manual del observador*, 12

were present. What struck me during these workshops was the view of the own work as unquestionably neutral, impartial and objective. At least this was what was constantly pointed at as the most important features of the organization work. The workshops for the voluntaries are filled with these code words. One of the first discussions that are started during the workshops is initiated by the question of who the participants trust. The following discussion was concluded by the woman in charge, arguing for the value of honesty and transparency. She strongly implied that this was the role of Red de Veedores. I even heard people being welcomed to the organization with an explanation of the word neutrality. This identification of the problems of the Venezuelan society has evolved into becoming the task for Red de Veedores.

I was invited to a meeting with Red de Veedores to see a film. The film was supposed to be about the events that took place in Caracas on April 11th 2002 and the documentary made on the issue by a European film crew. This documentary, called “La Revolución no será transmitida” (*The revolution shall not be transmitted* or *The revolution will not be televised*), has won a number of prizes all over the world⁶⁵ and has, according to the man in charge of the reunion, been close to being nominated for an Academy Award in the United States. The essence of the documentary is that the 11th of April was a military coup against Hugo Chávez that went wrong because of the massive support Chávez holds in the Venezuelan people. The people therefore took to the streets and forced the leaders of the coup to surrender, leading to the return of Chávez only a few days later.⁶⁶ The film screened during the evening treated misleading information in “La Revolución no será transmitida” such as shadows, withholding information, pictures cut together (or cut apart) and simply general lies. It was not hard to understand that this was a product of the opposition. This was nothing strange as I believe it is the duty for any neutral organization to receive information from all kinds of sources and views. Though, two things struck me as quite odd during the evening. The first was how I was welcomed and the second how the discussion after the film turned out. It all had to do with one woman. The woman was a chavista and she was the only one present with this specific political conviction when I arrived. A woman from the operative knot greeted me, shouting out her excitement that there was a chavista in the group. After the film was finished and the discussion started, a strange polarized structure emerged when everyone congratulated the production crew for their fine work, expressing their disgust for the president and the events of April 11th. The woman, now flanked by her two adult children, had to defend her own political beliefs, her president and the documentary before even starting to express her opinion on the film. And she received no support from anyone else in the neutral organization.

⁶⁵ Jury Award - Best Documentary, Malaga International Film Festival (Spain); Needle Award, Seattle Film Festival (USA); Best Feature Documentary, Galway Film Fleadh (Ireland); Best Documentary, 3 Continents Film Festival (South Africa); (source: www.chavezthefilm.com)

⁶⁶ www.chavezthefilm.com

To face your demons

I once witnessed a quite bizarre situation where some of the Red de Veedores members were sitting in the organization's office. As usual the dialogue would treat normal issues such as the women's families, politics and so forth. A not very uncommon subject for discussion is the rule of Hugo Chávez and this day was not much different from any other. The president was quite heavily criticized. Suddenly a woman entered the door, introducing herself as a volunteer who would like to work for Red de Veedores. One of the women rapidly jumped to her feet, greeting the volunteer with a quick phrase followed by a statement about her organization that contradicted everything she had just been talking about: "...y somos neutrales." ("*...and we're neutral.*"). This was clearly nothing odd for her to say. She rapidly maintained a nice façade of the organization, one that was both overwhelmingly romantic and exaggerated. The woman could hardly believe herself that what she had just said to her friends, what she had told me in an interview and what anyone would see when viewing the entire concept of Red de Veedores, could be perceived as neutral. The constant arguments during reunions and the endless picking on the president were issues that were not to be shown towards the public. However, neither the woman nor the other present members of Veedores seemed to bother, the volunteer received the information that she needed and everyone was happy.

The home page is another example of this highly problematic feud between a nice façade and the conflicts behind it. The constant discussions, screams and fights that was part of my everyday Veedores work is never even addressed on this home page, simply displaying pictures of smiling people. I am not suggesting that the home page must feature such details of the organization work. Most social groupings encounter situations causing the parts not to agree. One could however question whether or not an organization that claims to work for neutrality should admit to having internal irregularities, different opinions on core issues or even worse. One informant saw the issue of neutrality as doing what the constitution says:

"It doesn't matter if you have to defend someone who is with the government or someone who is with the opposition, because the intention is that the public processes agree with the norms and the rules of the constitution. There, you have your neutrality. But since we are people of flesh and bone, each one has her subjectivity."⁶⁷

Large parts of La Red de Veedores are part of the opposition. It became quite obvious at the reunions with the operative group that its members did not like the president's politics at all and when I confronted them with the statements, some admitted to be part of the opposition. Others said this was a misunderstanding and that even though individuals might have personal convictions that were against the ruling government this was not to be mixed up with the work of La Red de Veedores. Individual opinions, sources said, is not the same thing as the opinion of the organization, and these could be separated. The problem still existed though, as an overwhelming part of the members I encountered in this supposedly neutral organization were in strong opposition to Hugo Chávez Frías and his rule of the country.

⁶⁷ No importa si tiene que defender a uno que está con el gobierno o a uno que está con la oposición, porque la intención es que los procesos publicos le lleven de acuerdo a las normas y a las reglas de la constitución. De allí, eso es su neutralidad. Pero como somos personas de carne y hueso, cada quien tiene su subjetividad.

Does Red de Veedores function the way it is supposed to?

As already pointed out, the reason why Red de Veedores exists and at the same time its gravest problem, both seem to be treating pretty much the same issue: There are grave social problems in Venezuela, problems treating polarization and the lack of neutrality. These issues need sorting out, but the problem is faced by individuals who are part of the very same system they are working to change. Individuals from all over Venezuela have come together in an organization that works to challenge the ruling structures of the country. They search for an alternative to hatred, violence and lies.

In theory, La Red de Veedores is an organization that works for a more objective and neutral society. Educated observers criticize the democratic process so that a more genuine debate can be realized. This challenge of the ruling order is, for obvious reasons, very problematic. One of the informants expressed her opinion on the matter in this way:

“For me, the Red de Veedores is a very important organization, because we can observe in a much more objective way, or we try to do so, some processes of elections, and other aspects of the national life that are important, like the education, the law enforcing power, what happens in the municipios, or in other words, there are so many places where the Red de Veedores can participate as an observer of all these processes that are important for the country.”⁶⁸

Just like in many other aspects of society, the theory of what one should do is hard to translate into practice. This chapter has already pointed out a wide range of aspects of the organization that indicate a clearly problematic situation. Malfunctioning e-mail distribution, weapon handling and screaming during meetings are just a few of the examples that have been presented. The theories of Alberoni have already proven to have quite some base in the example of Red de Veedores. If they actually function to the extent that we can begin to talk of a nascent state or institutionalization is however a great issue of discussion. These questions will be further addressed in the discussion presented in the following chapter.

⁶⁸ Para mí, la Red de Veedores es una organización muy importante, porque nosotros podemos observar en una forma mucho más objetiva, o tratamos de hacerlo así, algunos procesos electorales, y otros aspectos de la vida nacional que son importantes, como es la educación, el poder judicial, lo que ocurre en las municipalidades, o sea, hay muchísimos ámbitos en donde la Red de Veedores puede participar como observadora de todos esos procesos que son importantes para el país.

Discussion

Spending time in Caracas gave me a personal view of the political situation in the country, a situation already carefully described in the earlier chapters. It is obvious that Red de Veedores is a product of this system. In a country where disinformation, corruption and polarization are part of the every day life, Red de Veedores has come to form a structured resistance against this behavior. On this most superficial and theoretical level, the network holds its base firmly on a neutral and objective path. Sadly enough, one could question whether or not Red de Veedores is as impartial as they claim. However true or not, such an assumption might result being devastating for the entire organization.

A solution for Venezuela?

As has already been made clear, the Venezuelan society is split in two distinct sides: those who work for Hugo Chávez and those who work against him. Red de Veedores has highlighted this fact as one of its most important tasks to confront in its observation work. A society this definitely split is in great need of a unifying force that binds people together in constructive dialogue instead of confronting one another in violence. Confronting these problems with an urge for democratic solutions has caused Red de Veedores to receive members from different parts of society and, according to members of the operative group, in great numbers. What should be questioned is however if the organization's neutrality is as clear as one might desire from a supposedly objective group of individuals. The arguments and statements coming from these persons indicate a standpoint that is obviously far away from an impartial one. Criticizing power should be a self-evident part of any supposedly neutral organization, but one might seriously question whether or not this is what is realized by Red de Veedores and its members while expressing radical political standpoints. This issue will be treated later on while discussing "the human factor".

Problems of the Venezuelan society must naturally be challenged from the inside. Corruption, violence and polarization are issues that have come to be heavily criticized by a number of individuals, mentioned throughout this essay. Putting an end to these destructive structures would clearly be of great aid for the construction of a better future for the Venezuelan people. The question one rapidly asks oneself is what could be the solution in this highly problematic situation. A social movement that challenges the ruling structures by offering an alternative is not unlikely to be an answer quite a few individuals search for. If Red de Veedores, an organization that tries to maintain objectivity and neutrality, is such a force to be reckoned with, can however be the subject of debate. The group faces challenges that the members have not confronted with the desired seriousness.

In a way it is possible to define Red de Veedores as a social movement. It might even be possible to do so with a Marxist viewpoint, though highly problematic; the Red de Veedores member would in that case be considered bourgeois in comparison to the working class chavista who often originates from the poorer areas of Caracas. Using the theory of "resource mobilization" (RM), the construction of Red de Veedores would probably be considered as an interest group with an urge to influence the work of other interest groups, an analysis that is hard to follow in this specific case: The relatively wealthy members of Red de Veedores hardly have anything to gain from working in an organization where they seem to receive

neither money nor fame. A different analysis could be drawn from the “new social movement” (NSM) perspective, focusing on the identities of the individuals, based on a Marxist viewpoint. Whether or not the Red de Veedores member is to be perceived as bourgeois can clearly be discussed for a long time (especially with the diversity of the team), but the individual conviction is not improbable to be a key factor in identifying a social movement. If Red de Veedores is actually a social movement or not can therefore be translated as a question of definition on a theoretical level.

An aspect in Venezuela that is not to be forgotten is that quite a few of the characteristics displayed by MVR, Chávez and his followers fit very well into the description of a nascent state. Chavistas travel around the country, listen to their leader in awe and seem to see the success of the group as a much higher goal than the individual ones. Hugo Chávez is the charismatic leader who truly gathers his followers based on emotions rather than anything else. This might very well be a group going through a nascent state. Perhaps this is a solution for Venezuela. Perhaps the sensation that chavistas experience is the force that could take the country away from violence, corruption and general misbehavior. A nascent state expresses itself in a most extraordinary form and though seen from the outside, the observer could easily draw the conclusion that Chávez truly is the solution for Venezuela. Obviously, millions of Venezuelans have already drawn this conclusion from within the country’s borders. However, it is hard to reject the amount of Venezuelan intellectuals who are not agreeing with this standpoint. Thousands of professors, journalists and others display hard criticism towards the politics of Chávez, a criticism that must not go unnoticed. Whether or not a social movement going through the nascent state is to be the solution for Venezuela is clearly an issue of debate.

The human factor

What is being presented in the chapter on Red de Veedores treats, to some extents, the individuals who participate in the work of the network. The question of individuals is in my view critical for an understanding of the organization. While presenting themselves at reunions it soon became obvious that the level of education and salaries were generally on a relatively high level, especially in the operative group. These would clearly be considered, not least from a Marxist viewpoint, to be bourgeois.⁶⁹ With this in mind, the obvious commitment to the opposition can be analyzed as controversial. A grave problem has been identified in the fact that such a big group of opposition loyalists has formed a network in order to face neutrality and objectivity in a more organized way. With the Marxist perspective, it gets even more complicated. This situation is clearly problematic in that it does not seem to face any criticism from within. What one should question oneself is whether or not the factor of individual convictions could destroy the capacity of the neutrality in Red de Veedores. In this case, the credibility and legitimacy of the organization would undergo a crisis.

Poor people are excluded from the Veedores network. The statement might seem exaggerated but has proven to be a reality in the case of Red de Veedores. Individuals are claimed to be welcome to participate in events and observations, but the social and economic realities of Venezuela have caused individuals from low-income areas not to join the operative reunions. Due to not having cars or e-mail access in their houses, the excluding mechanism is quite strong. Socio- economic factors have further caused these people not to receive continuous

⁶⁹ See for example Liedman, *Karl Marx: Texter i urval*, 125ff

information by e-mail. It is hard not to see a growing problem. The procedure of excluding others could of course be perceived as the nascent state notion of “us“ against “them“, a view of the world that ties people closer to one another inside the group. If this is the case in Red de Veedores is however an issue of most improbable nature. Red de Veedores actively tries to gain more members, no matter their social or economic background.

Indicated throughout this essay, the average Red de Veedores member is an individual from the higher levels of society. Translated as elites, it is easy to compare the group with other elites in other parts of the world. Just like any other top of a hierarchical structure, the Red de Veedores member seems eager to primarily tie herself to others within this same elite, excluding individuals from lower classes, chavistas and so forth. If compared to the elite of the Congo, the similarities in expression are striking, but one main difference may however be observed. The ethnicity factor is of great importance in Congo while it seems to be of lesser importance in Venezuela. This is however an issue of debate since the elites of Venezuela consists of mainly white people; the same individuals whose forefathers ruled during the colonial days. If the elite consists of mainly one ethnic group, can you then automatically talk about ethnically based elite procedures? Can it be perceived as racist, even? What can be observed in Congo is an elite procedure where the elite displays certain characteristics such as gathering loyal partners or family members to gain more power.⁷⁰

A quite sensitive question that without question must be addressed is that of the gender perspective. There must be a reason as to why there are so many females in overwhelming majority in Red de Veedores. This essay can present no answer to this difficult question. What is presented is two possible options. The first possible scenario is that the females of Venezuela see it as their role to provide their families with a good future, and when they do not manage to do so in the home, they move to political expressions instead. Analyzed in this way, Red de Veedores is filled with a collection of females who are frustrated about society and want to make a difference. The second scenario is that Venezuela is filled with rich ladies who have nothing to do. In order to fill the void in their boring lives, they find excuses to socialize with other women who, like themselves, have no families to care for. This essay points to a wide range of indicators that imply that both of these theories might be right. Either way, none of the perspectives gives a satisfactory view of the “alternative solidarity“ that needs to be realized in a nascent state.⁷¹

Truth and to tell it

“The truth is reached by means of the absolute authenticity of the search, this total transparency whereby always and only one truth is told.”⁷²

The quote reflects the view on truth of a movement that finds itself in the nascent state. Believing that there is only one single truth or believing that this truth can only be reached by absolute authenticity from group members is however not totally unique concerning the nascent state. A similar worldview can be found in the most institutionalized church or political party. Who knows or represents the truth is therefore not quite a question of nascent state but rather a question of faith. Believing in what the group represents to such an extent

⁷⁰ Friedman, Jonathan (ed) (2003) *Globalization, the state, and violence*: Ekholm Friedman, Kajsa, *State Classes, The Logic of Rentier Power and Social Disintegration*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, 363ff

⁷¹ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 20

⁷² Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 70

that the group essence becomes the one greatest issue in the members' lives, is indeed to enter the nascent state. Letting life treat a range of other aspects as well is an indicator of institutionalization.

This is one way of analyzing the truth of Red de Veedores. On the other hand, one could see the expressions of Red de Veedores as clear signs of nascent state, and these arguments are quite strong. The code word *transparency* is a key used both by Alberoni and by Red de Veedores. Both argue that it is by transparency that the real truth can be reached and accomplished, even though Alberoni seems to be basing his arguments mainly on a theoretical level while Red de Veedores has found a practical use for the utilized rhetoric. The organization is clearly not talking about no abstract frameworks but of the actual events going on in their country. Other signs that Red de Veedores have come to enter a nascent state include the studied most extraordinary communication, the identification of a common foe and a group mentality based on the sensation of "we" and "them" and the overall notion of wanting what's good for everyone rather than what might be good for the individual. These are all examples that have been dealt with previously in this essay. What one still should be asking is to what extent these examples actually represent a nascent state. Is the nascent state to be found in Red de Veedores or are these examples simply vague implications of something that is not there?

Truth is a concept that is hard to grasp. Who knows the truth? Who can say that she represents it? The question easily becomes a philosophical rather than an anthropological one. A movement experiencing the nascent state would perceive the truth as the sensation of the group in its characteristic expressions, while the truth of Red de Veedores rather seems to treat a measurable truth that is not dependent of the group's expressions. For example, there is a great difference between acknowledging the existence of an election and its results, and sacrificing your life for a political leader who's words you take to your heart as if God himself spoke them. Members in the second category are totally free, but free insofar as they search for the truth in their own way.⁷³ It is crucial for the comprehension of this essay to differentiate between these two understandings of what truth is. Members of Red de Veedores act as individuals, not as a group tied together; they are for example also Christians and members of political parties. These individuals do not only find the group of Red de Veedores as their main source of truth, neutrality or, frankly, very much at all. They clearly do not believe in one single truth and even if they do, this truth is not believed to originate from Red de Veedores. The organization is though perceived to be a tool for the truth to come forth.

Perhaps the issue of believing in the one, and only one, truth is easier to answer than it seems. The truth that Red de Veedores is eager to obtain seems to be a superficial, easily grasped truth that can be understood by simple data. This is in no way a truth that is to be rejected, but perhaps not the one that a group experiencing the nascent state would agree to share. It seems as if the nascent state concept of truth is to be more fundamentally based, not unlike that of a religious conviction. Truth is not necessarily something you can find by following empirical data. Truth can, on the contrary, be perceived as a sensation only obtained by a way of life. In order to differentiate these two distinct definitions, the placing of institutionalization and nascent state becomes a crucial factor. It seems as if Red de Veedores comes in more contact with the first of these alternatives. Structured organization in a professional manner indicates a strictly institutionalized expression of the truth, implying that Red de Veedores is no movement experiencing the nascent state.

⁷³ Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*, 70-78

The fundamental problem

What emerges is a paradox: What Veedores is trying to do is to obtain neutrality because society is polarized. But since the members of the organization are part of this society, the struggle against polarization should foremost be fought inside the network before taking it to collective action for the entire group. All these members are holders of their own personal political conviction, a fact that in Venezuela imbues everything. Therefore, one should primarily observe and ask questions concerning this issue inside the network. Otherwise the supposed neutrality can be nothing but lost.

Whether or not it is possible to maintain neutrality concerning one single issue is in Venezuela rather irrelevant. The polarized situation can be recognized everywhere, not only in politics. From your choice of television channel to the color of your clothes is all part in it. Any statement in society, no matter the circumstances, can thereby be translated as a political one. Neutrality can, on a theoretical level, most probably be obtained. But even if this most unlikely event is to occur, the understanding of others will still be one based on the polarized society. Others will still perceive the neutral actor as one who is not.

It seems as if the typical Red de Veedores member can be identified as a highly educated woman who comes from the political realm of the opposition. This is clearly problematic. Being for a political fraction to the specific extent as this essay has highlighted can easily raise the question of one's neutrality and objectivity. It is therefore not only the dynamics of the group that one must observe in the matter of Red de Veedores but also the individuals who are participating inside the organization. Observing these individuals rapidly makes it clear that one is dealing with a group of educated women of the opposition. This is the absolutely fundamental problem. There seems to be disproportional amount of individuals inside the organization of Red de Veedores who share the same political ideas, coming from the same economic class in society. Facing problematic situations must be in the every day work for any organization. What Red de Veedores has not yet taken seriously is the fact that the situation gravely damages its chances of legitimacy in the organization's main task. Neutral observation can hardly be found with legitimacy without neutral actors.

The analysis of Alberoni here becomes a crucial one; the expressions of Red de Veedores imply on many fields that the organization experiences the nascent state. Such a situation would defend flaws in the professionalism of its expressions. It would for example give the answer to why a group of educated intellectuals so obviously have ignored the problematic situation of legitimacy connected to neutrality. Such an act of self-criticism, the nascent state group would argue, would be totally irrelevant since the group is the holder of the truth, an argument that falls back on the expressions of the own participants. But the argument that Red de Veedores in fact is experiencing the nascent state cannot possibly go without criticism. A range of indications imply the very opposite: Red de Veedores is a strictly hierarchical network. The economical level of the operative group and the excluding mechanism of the e-mail list are such indicators. Even the name, Network of Viewers, implies this to be true.

Conclusion

The fact that the Venezuelan society is as polarized as it is, functions as the very base for Red de Veedores. The situation causes the organization to exist. These specific individuals have come to see a need for objectivity and neutrality in Venezuela and therefore they have formed a network with others who share the same ideas. A group mentality can here easily be identified. But can we really talk of a movement? Can we actually talk of a nascent state, similar to political revolutionaries or early Christians? It is hard to define Red de Veedores as being in the nascent state. Neither is it fair to call the organization institutionalized. It seems as if Red de Veedores finds itself in a state of transition between the two stages; either towards or away from the nascent state. In which way the development is heading is hard to tell.

As already highlighted in the discussion part of this essay, the political situation and its problems results being the foundation as well as the very problem of Red de Veedores. Violence, corruption and a lost hope are the very corner stones of this infected situation. How can anyone try to be neutral and objective in a political landscape completely overrun by polarization and subjective information? Such a situation is most problematic and it seems as if Red de Veedores has not taken the situation as seriously as one might desire. The organization is exclusively searching for the truth, observing elections and trying to obtain neutrality. But the criticism towards the inner circle has obviously never been adequately presented. Another aspect is that in order to obtain legitimacy in Latin America, one must act out and live the truth that one is trying to spread to others. This is, for example, what has shown to be the reasons to why Marcos and Che Guevara have proven so successful in getting allies. Red de Veedores are not even close to having this sort of charisma, and it is not even a lived one.

The conclusion of this essay could very much be translated as Red de Veedores not being a social movement. Indicated by a range of sources, the expressions of the network can hardly be translated as such. This includes the definitions of Alberoni, but also others such as Marxist scholars. It would also be problematic to perceive Red de Veedores as located in the nascent state. The members of the organization do not fit into the frame of the nascent state person, who is more emotional and into the group thinking, than the intelligent but individualistic member of Red de Veedores. It seems as if the theories of Alberoni do apply on Red de Veedores in the sense that the theories could be applied on the scenario. However, the organization would probably be perceived as being in between the institutionalized and the nascent state.

As with many other societies, the Venezuelan society has created a resistance against itself. Groups struggle to destroy the ruling structures, in one way or the other. Red de Veedores tries to maintain the little democracy that still exists in Venezuela, by challenging the ruling notions of neutrality and truth. Whether or not Red de Veedores experiences the nascent state can hereby be translated as a question of truth, following the argument of the political situation in Venezuela. As Red de Veedores perceive themselves to be presenting a legitimate and impartial truth, a notion of nascent state is implied. However, the strictly static view of the truth as a positivistic reality proven by empirical data causes the analysis to move towards institutionalization.

A neutral criticism of the own members would be a good start if Red de Veedores really wishes to become a neutral and objective force in the Venezuelan society. Only then will Red de Veedores obtain the legitimacy it needs to fundamentally challenge polarization to its very core. Venezuela is in great need of neutral and impartial forces to raise their voices if and when the system does not work. Perhaps Red de Veedores can be that force, displaying neutrality. And to show you the truth.

Concluding remarks

This study is my first contact with the anthropological field. However limited, the results of this essay may serve useful for further studies on matters concerning social and political changes, issues on Latin America in general and specifically Venezuela. It could further be utilized when studying expressions of elites, opposition forces, democracy, legitimacy, truth, and violence. This essay may also serve as a base for further understandings on Red de Veedores, since aspects such as the electronically maintained contact and the gender perspective could be investigated to a greater extent. These are however questions I have chosen not to study too profoundly but could be found interesting by others.

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