

*MISIÓN MADRES DEL BARRIO: A BOLIVARIAN SOCIAL PROGRAM
RECOGNIZING HOUSEWORK AND CREATING A CARING ECONOMY IN
VENEZUELA*

BY

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INTRODUCTION: Venezuela Leads the Way

This thesis began as a project about *Misión Madres del Barrio*; and it quickly transformed into a glimpse of the Bolivarian Revolution underway in Venezuela. *Misión Madres del Barrio* (MMB) is one of the pioneering social programs in Venezuela that is confronting the poverty that years of underdevelopment, debt crisis and corruption have left behind. *Misión Madres del Barrio* is best described as a short-term community directed public assistance program that incorporates poor mothers into political organizations, socio-political schools and other social programs that tend to basic primary care. Ultimately the Mission provides training and no-interest loans for the formation of small-scale cooperative businesses for mothers in extreme poverty. Nancy, Coordinator of the Mission in Caracas described the program as “a first step towards the implementation of Article 88” of the Venezuelan Constitution, which places value on housework.

The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution’s Article 88 is the first in the world to recognize housework as producing social benefits and economic value. This recognition led to the Global Women’s Strike, an international network of Marxist-Feminists and grassroots women to champion this advance as a victory in the struggle for wages for housework. A closer look at Article 88 and *Misión Madres del Barrio* makes it clear that MMB does not originate from the “wages for housework” ideology, but that it is the product of Venezuela’s particular, economic, social, and cultural history. The economic crisis stimulated by the debt crisis and neo-liberal reforms in Venezuela led to the recognition of unpaid housework as an essential

contribution to poverty reduction, especially among the many disproportionately poor female-headed households.

This thesis explores *Misión Madres del Barrio* and the recognition of housework as an integral part of the anti-poverty programs at the core of President Hugo Chávez's "Socialism of the 21st Century¹." My main thesis question is: Does *MMB* contribute to poverty alleviation or is it only symbolic? While some aspects of the program may be symbolic, the community organizing inherent in this program does serve to empower women. Before I examine the structure of the social program and testimonies of women involved, I explore the background on the national and international debates surrounding housework and provide the political context for this Mission.

This thesis is the product of eight months living and working in Venezuela. I spent October-March, 2006 in Venezuela, working with a Non Governmental Organization and doing independent journalism. I also participated in a delegation with the Global Women's Strike. These experiences laid the groundwork for my thesis research and created access to different women's and community organizations. In February and March of 2008, I spent two months interviewing and working alongside grassroots women who are the core of the developing political process. These women often work to get an income, do housework and childcare, and commit their lives to community organizing. This thesis explores social programs that are designed to recognize housework and pay poor mothers, and

¹ Socialism of the XXI Century implies that the process in Venezuela is different from the Soviet, Cuban, and Chinese model.

therefore provides many considerations that are useful to social movements, grassroots women, and policy makers as they explore strategies to fight poverty and gender discrimination.

Chapter One traces different theoretical approaches to housework by reviewing the literature of activist-scholars that used Marxism as a tool for examining housework while focusing on two currents of Feminist-Marxism. These two camps diverge primarily in their strategies; one advocates for the socialization of housework and the other demands wages for housework. While these histories inform the struggle for the recognition for housework in Venezuela, the chapter also incorporates a closer examination into the characteristics of the women's movement in Venezuela in the face of the debt crisis. I propose that Venezuela's distinct history with the debt crisis (in addition to the influence from the wages for housework campaign) have led to Venezuela's constitution as the first in the world to acknowledge housework as producing economic value and wealth.

Chapter Two places this research in the historical and contemporary political context of Venezuela, noting Venezuela's importance as an alternate model to neo-liberalism. The first section tells the story of how Hugo Chávez came into and stayed in power. The second section describes the elements of Bolivarianism, such as, nationalism, civil-military relations, an emphasis on education, redistributive efforts, anti-poverty missions, and Latin American regionalism. *Misión Madres del Barrio* is just one of many anti-poverty social missions in Venezuela, and it is a part of the larger Bolivarian project. While this section breaks down numerous elements of

Bolivarianism, I propose that this process is dynamic and has recently started moving towards “Socialism of the 21st Century.”

Chapter Three gives the background on *Misión Madres del Barrio*, using official documents and the Mission’s website to explain how the program was envisioned. This Chapter explores the legal and ideological basis of the social program, as well as the process and the phases of the Mission. This chapter explains the structure of a social program that was designed to pay, train, and organize poor single-mothers as an integral part of the anti-poverty Missions in Venezuela. *MMB* is the only one of the Missions that specifically addresses the feminization of poverty, and includes the recognition of unpaid housework as a means of combating extreme poverty.

Chapter Four is dedicated to amplifying the voices of the women who are participating in the Mission, highlighting their experiences with organizing committees, engaging in socio-productive work, mobilizing community members and their reflections on the successes and failures of the mission. In February and March of 2008, I interviewed over forty-seven women who participated in the programs, and whose insights have deeply enriched this thesis.

An in depth exploration into housework in Venezuela begs the question: compared to what? Therefore, Chapter Five offers a comparative approach to housework, examining Cuba and the United States. I compare Venezuela with Cuba and the United States because they are Venezuela’s most politicized trading partners and represent two extremes on an ideological spectrum, in relation to both women

and poverty. Despite large differences in Venezuelan, US, and Cuban societies, women continue to do disproportionate housework in each country. The women's movements in Cuba and Venezuela and the welfare rights movement in the United States have placed unwaged housework as essential in their struggles, however; they assert different strategies. It is within this context that I propose that housework's public counter part is community organizing. This comparative section illuminates the underlying debate surrounding strategies of poor women and the essential role that grassroots women play within social movements.

This thesis makes an important contribution to the literature on the struggle for recognition and compensation for housework, as well as the acknowledgement that grassroots women play an anchoring role within community organizing and social movements; I assert that these two things are related. Venezuelan women have led the way in the struggle for the recognition of housework; with careful and thoughtful reflections, which prioritize the voices and experiences of Venezuelan grassroots women, we might find the strength to organize ourselves and follow them.

CHAPTER 1:
The Roots of the Recognition of Housework in Venezuela

Introduction: From Theory to Practice

It is important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class.

-Silvia Federici²

The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela is the first in the world to recognize housework as producing a social and economic value; furthermore entitling housewives to social security.³ Article 88 demonstrates an approach to housework that is a product of specific historical circumstances in Venezuela. Despite the particular conditions that have led to the legal recognition of housework in Venezuela, the struggle for that acknowledgement is a part of a global feminist debate. Feminist-Marxist literature addresses housework by seeking to analyze women's unique relationship to capitalism, and the strategies for the liberation of women *and* the construction of a socialist society. In Venezuela, housework—as a theoretical issue—has transcended the bounds of feminist and Marxist circles and was transformed into a political matter during the debt crisis of the 1980's and 1990's. In the face of increased poverty and unemployment, as well as cuts in social services, even economists and policy-makers acknowledged the importance and value of unpaid housework in times of deep economic recession.

² Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in The Politics of Housework, ed. Ellen Malos (New York: Allison & Busby, 1980), p. 254

³ Social Security implies access to economic human rights such as access to food, housing, work, health, education, and the basic necessities to live a dignified life.

There are aspects of the analysis of housework in which Article 88 draws certain influences from the European Marxists. Furthermore, Venezuelan women's movements are also considered to have been notably more "Western" in comparison to other Latin American feminist movements. This difference has been attributed to the coinciding economic petro-boom of the 1970's and growth in global "Western" feminism within the same era.⁴ While Venezuela's recognition of housework has been shaped by its particular cultural, economic, political and historic conditions there are also clear relationships between the literature, theories and activism of European feminist Marxists and thus their work must be integrated into the following analysis.

There are three main characteristics of Venezuela's particular experience with housework that must be placed at the forefront. First, the economic boom of the 1970's advanced numerous legal reforms for women, which, especially after the economic crisis, were only enjoyed by upper-class women, therefore re-enforcing dissatisfaction among women with the "bourgeois" equal rights strategy of the Venezuelan women's movement. Second, the debt crisis placed the grueling labor of survival during a deep and difficult economic recession on the shoulders of women; re-focusing the national gaze on the importance of housework in sustaining Venezuelan families through a crisis. Third, despite a swallowing of numerous capitalist values during the petro-boom, Venezuelan society by and large never fully

⁴ Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, "Development and Economic Crisis: Women's Labour and Social Policies in Venezuela in the context of International Indebtedness," in Paying the Price: Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy, eds. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Giovanna F. Dalla Costa (London: Zed Books, 1995), p.110-111

bought into the capitalist construct of the nuclear family.⁵ Venezuela's popular classes have historically preferred informal unions to legal marriages, which resulted in high rates of female-headed households. Since female-headed households are both prevalent and disproportionately poor, housework has often times made its way into debates on poverty and the feminization of poverty. These factors, more than a Marxist-Feminist struggle, is why Venezuelan women are leading the way in the demand of the recognition of housework. While European Feminist-Marxist analyses provide important insights into housework as a productive activity, it falls short of a full-scale explanation of the strategy and recognition of housework in Venezuela.

This chapter will explore the theoretical background as well as the international and Venezuelan feminist activism that led to the inclusion of Article 88 in the Bolivarian Constitution. Section I will explore the theoretical aspects of the Feminist-Marxist analysis of housework through a comprehensive literature review of some of the most important works in framing the debate around housework. This will begin by defining housework in Marxist terms, and then demonstrating how Marxism became a useful tool for the analysis of women's oppression. The analyses led to two main strategies for social movements. One strategy followed the traditional Marxist line in the demand for the socialization of housework and the other proposed "wages for housework."

Section II will provide a brief history of Venezuelan women's movements; paying special attention to the impact that economic, political, social, and cultural

⁵ Ibid.

conditions have had on the framing of the debate concerning housework. This section will begin in 1974; the year the International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWHC) was launched and the first National Women's organization was formed in Venezuela; and ends in 1999 with the creation of the only constitutional article in the world to acknowledge and place monetary value on housework. The analysis will focus on above-mentioned factors such as characteristics of Venezuelan feminism, class divides within women's struggles, the debt crisis, and high levels of female-headed households living in poverty. In conclusion, I will introduce *Misión Madres del Barrio (MMB)*, which is the first social program in Venezuela to attempt to partially implement the groundbreaking Article 88 of the Venezuelan Constitution.

I: Literature Review of (Feminist)-Marxist Analyses of Housework Defining and Valuing Housework

While most women in the world have done housework, coming up with a definition for it can be challenging because the work is multi-faceted and often times not acknowledged as work.⁶ The interest in creating better theoretical tools to understand and analyze housework developed from the obvious contradiction between the perception that housework is not "productive" in capitalist terms and the lived experiences of the many women (and perhaps men) who, upon doing housework, know that they are working. In What Is a Wife Worth?: The Leading

⁶ Barbara Rogers writes, "a recognition of women's work as essential to subsistence...is almost completely lacking from the work of development planners. They suffer from a myopia of labeling women's subsistence work 'domestic' and therefore to be dismissed as trivial." Barbara Rogers, The Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies. London: Tavistock Publications, 1981. p. 170.

Expert Places a High Dollar Value on Homemaking, the authors Michael H. Minton and Jean Libman Block attempt to address this dilemma with irony.

No matter how many hours she puts in each week on the essentials of running a household, her pay at the end of the week is zero. Her pension rights are nil. Her sick benefits are non-existent. She has no days off with or without pay. Over-time? Forget it. Double-time for weekend and holidays, don't be silly. Unemployment insurance? Never heard of it. Disability benefits of workmen's compensation? Not even in small print.⁷

Therefore, despite the heady nature of Marxist discourse surrounding this debate, theories on housework developed from a "politics of experience" and in search of strategies for women's movements, which are committed to the construction of socialism.⁸

A common definition of housework might look like the following:

[Housework] is work done not with a view to exchange but in order to achieve a result of which one is, directly, the principal beneficiary. 'Reproductive' work, that is, domestic labour, which guarantees the basic and immediate necessities of life day after day - preparing food, keeping oneself and one's home clean, giving birth to children and bringing them up, and so on - is an example of this kind of work. It was and still is often the case that women are made to do such work on top of the work they do for economic ends.⁹

This definition uses the term 'reproductive' work to present a traditional Marxist analysis in which labor is separated into two categories as 'productive' and 'reproductive'.¹⁰ The following theories reject this division and furthermore reject Marxist analysis of reproductive labor on the grounds that it analyzes housework in

⁷ Minton, Michael H. and Jean Libman Block, What Is a Wife Worth? The Leading Expert Places a High Dollar Value on Homemaking. New York: William Morrow, 1983, p. 10.

⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practice in Solidarity. Durham: Duke U Press, 2003.

⁹ Andre Gorz, "Critique of Economic Reason: Summary for Trade Unionists and Other Left Activists," in Diologo Global Solidarity [electronic journal], January 2002 [cited March 12 2008]; available from <http://www.antenna.nl/~waterman/gorz.html>

¹⁰ Robert L. Heilbroner, Marxism: For and Against. New York: W.W Norton & Co., 1980, p.107.

relation to the laborer as opposed to in relation to capital itself.¹¹ Despite divergent views on housework's relationship to capital and production, 'housework' is a broad term that will be used throughout this paper to describe the work that is often (1) done in the private sphere, (2) treated as non-productive labor (and therefore unpaid) and, (3) generally work prescribed to and carried out by women.

Because housework is often prescribed for and carried out by women, many feminists have rejected the concept that domestic work is an expression of the feminine nature.¹² Despite a practical interest in addressing the disproportionate amount of housework that is carried out by and assumed to be the responsibility of women, Jane Lewis described feminists who opposed "financial rewards for mother's services" as "anxious to increase the status of motherhood."¹³ For this reason, in addition to the traditionally bourgeois aims of feminist organizations, housework as a platform for struggle was advanced by socialist feminists who focused on the limitations of Radical Feminism and Marxism in their ability to place unwaged housework as central to women's oppression within a capitalist system. Ellen Malos summarizes this point in the The Politics of Housework, "the new attempts to analyse the historical and contemporary complexities of the situation of women led to a rediscovery of the usefulness of Marxism, despite its gaps and findings."¹⁴

¹¹ Ellen Malos, ed., The Politics of Housework. New York: Allison & Busby, 1980, p.11.

¹² Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, "'We were the invisible workforce': unionizing homecare" in The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor, ed. Dorothy Sue Cobble (Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 2007), p.178.

¹³ Jane Lewis, The Politics of Motherhood. London: Croom Helm Limited, 1980, p.90.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.8

Housework and Capital: Literature of Feminist-Marxist Perspectives

While Marxists classify housework as “reproductive” or even “nonproductive”, associating biological reproduction and housework as a force for reproducing labor power, which is an essential commodity in capitalism, Marxist-feminists sought to develop theories of housework that placed unwaged domestic-centered work in relation to capital itself, as opposed to solely in relation to labor. Within their critiques, they place unpaid housework as central to the oppression of women within a capitalist system. From a theoretical perspective, this implies that women experience capitalist relations in distinct ways from men; and on a practical level, this carries implications for strategies for women’s movements and class struggle.

This debate is truly a discussion of strategy for women’s movements and the working class. The theorists who have presented their controversial and important claims within this field, have come to their conclusions not only from astute scholarship but also through personal experiences as political activists and members of feminist and socialist movements. The texts utilized in this chapter range from scholarly articles and books, to speeches made at political rallies and statements printed on leaflets. Although the styles, contexts, and audiences may vary, the message remains focused on unwaged housework as central to the oppression of women under capitalism and there are two main camps that evolve from this point, each proposing divergent strategies that stem from the particularities of their analyses.

In “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation” Margaret Bentson proposes that “the woman question” has been ignored in the analysis of class mostly because women’s unique relationship to the means of production has been overlooked.¹⁵ Malos analyzes the important contributions that Bentson’s work has made,

In locating this difference in women’s responsibility for domestic labour she laid the groundwork for a new analysis of “reproduction”, which could now be seen to include not only biological maternity but also the work done by the housewife in the home and its relationship to production under capitalism or any other form of production.¹⁶

After Heidi Hartmann published her provocative essay entitled, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more progressive union,” many feminists and Marxists were faced with the challenge of finding common ground between feminism and Marxism.¹⁷ Advancing a similar focus as Bentson on women’s relationship to the means of production, between 1972-1975 a number of new works were published that were critical of Marx’s division of reproductive and productive work. First, Selma James published Women, Work and Unions: What is not to be Done, which was mostly a response to the left and the limitations of employer-centered labor organizing as a strategy for the working class. Italian feminist Leopoldina Fortunati expanded the debate in L’Arcano della Riproduzione: Casalinghe, Prostitute, Operai e Capitale (The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework,

¹⁵ Malos, 1980, p.119

¹⁶ Ibid. p.11

¹⁷ Lydia Sargent edited a compilation of responses to Hartmann’s essay. Hartmann, Heidi, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” in Women & Revolution: A discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism, ed. Lydia Sargent (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981)

Prostitution, Labor and Capital) by proposing radical changes to Marx's concepts of labor and therefore; the working class.¹⁸ This perspective was also adopted by Mariarosa Dalla Costa who proceeded to co-author the pamphlet, The Power of Women and the Subversion in the Community, in which wages for housework as a strategy was proposed; which was defended and expanded by Silvia Federici.¹⁹

The essential point that Federici, Fortunati, Dalla Costa, and James agree upon is that orthodox Marxism, which sees patriarchy as "residuum of feudal relations" fails to truly address women's place within a capitalist system.²⁰ This is most clearly demonstrated through Marxian categorization of productive versus reproductive labor. Whereas Marxist view production of commodities as the creation of value and the reproduction of the labor force as work that does not create value, Fortunati claims that, "[w]hile production both *is* and *appears* as the creation of value, reproduction *is* the creation of value but *appears* otherwise."²¹ How Fortunati describes the *appearance* of reproduction is consistent with Marx's analysis of Capital. In other words, while Marx distinguishes productive from reproductive labor, stating that productive labor produces a commodity and reproductive labor does not,

¹⁸ This thinking is not unique to feminist critiques of Marxism, but is also relevant in how Autonomist Marxists and Anarchists of the same time period re-conceptualized the working class. Their vision includes housewives, students, children, the elderly, those with disabilities and others traditionally unwaged within a capitalist system and therefore marginalized by capitalism as well as traditional movements of organized labor. This theoretical restructuring of the working class is reliant upon the reinterpretation of how gender, age, ability, sexuality, race, and religion shape particular relationships to the means of production. See Midnight Notes Collective:
<http://www.midnightnotes.org/index2.html>

¹⁹ Federici, 1980.

²⁰ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004, p.8.

²¹ Leopoldina Fortunati, trans., Hillary Creek, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1995, p.8.

Fortunati rejects this division on the grounds that reproductive labor does indirectly produce a commodity and also that reproductive labor also produces for Capitalism without producing a commodity. Fortunati summarizes this point by stating

While production work is posited as being work involved in commodity production (wage work), reproduction work is posited as a natural force of social labor, which, while appearing as a personal service is in fact indirectly waged labor engaged in the reproduction of labor power.²²

The accepted belief that housework is a ‘natural force of (women’s) social labor’ relegates women to certain job categories in which the skills required to perform such jobs are not viewed as skills, but as natural or innate feminine inclinations such as cleaning, cooking, teaching, nursing, and care-giving.²³ Within these professions and within nearly all sectors in which women sell their labor, they are discriminated against, receiving lower pay than their male counter-parts.

In addition to challenging the concept which sees production of commodities as value producing and reproduction as non-value producing, Fortunati sees housework not as an act outside of capitalist production, as it is often understood to be, but as a central part of capitalist relations.²⁴ She views the primary economic arrangement of housework between housewives and capitalism, with (often times) male wage earners as the intermediaries. Fortunati writes:

It becomes clear that Marxian analysis describes only one half of the process of production- the production of commodities- and cannot be extended per se to cover reproduction; and further more, that an analysis of the entire cycle of production cannot be made until reproduction has been analyzed too. This

²² Ibid.

²³ Federici, 1980, p. 253

²⁴ Fortunati, 1995, p.9

later analysis can only be made if Marxian categories are not used dogmatically and if they are combined with feminist criticism.²⁵

Through a historical approach in which they map the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Fortunati and Federici reject Marx's division of productive and reproductive labor and claim that "the exploitation of women has played a central function in the process of capitalist accumulation, insofar as women have been the producers and reproducers of the most essential capitalist commodity: labor power."²⁶ By focusing on the transition to capitalism from pre-capitalist forms, the authors are able to evaluate how the process of 'primitive accumulation' was experienced in distinctly different ways for men and women. Mariarosa Dalla Costa proposed a slightly different perspective in which the "role of the working class housewife and her relation to capital" would represent the position of all women.²⁷ These analyses held strategic implications for women's movements and class struggle alike.

The Socialization of Housework versus Wages for Housework

The first public action for the IWHC took place in Italy on the weekend of International Women's Day in 1974.²⁸ This was two years after Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa published their provocative work, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. James and Dalla Costa revealed the many jobs that fall under the category of housework, writing in fiery prose about the physical, emotional, and sexual labor associated with work in the home. They also challenged

²⁵ Ibid, p.10

²⁶ Federici, 2004, p.8.

²⁷ Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, The Power Of Women and the Subversion of the Community. Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975, p.48.

²⁸ Leopoldina Fortunati, "The Housewife," in All Work and No Pay, eds. Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming (London: the Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall, 1975).

the concept that (waged) work outside of the home has freed women of the exhausting unwaged housework and they delved into inherent relationships between men's wages and women's work, therefore placing women in relation to capital as opposed to solely in relation to men. Leopoldina Fortunati gave an impassioned speech at that rally in which she elaborated on the significance of the campaign:

Half of the World's working population is unpaid-this is the biggest class contradiction of all! And this is our struggle, the struggle for Wages for Housework. It is *the* strategic demand, at this moment it is the most revolutionary demand for the whole working class. If we win, the class wins, if we lose, the class loses.²⁹

This excerpt demonstrates both a new interpretation of housework within the capitalist mode of production and a proposed strategy to reconcile Marxism and feminism. Wages for Housework is therefore not perceived by those who fight for it as an end in and of itself, instead it is proposed as a strategic campaign for which a women's movement can be built on truly revolutionary aims. Silvia Federici states these aims in her essay, "Wages Against Housework." She writes:

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. *It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.*³⁰

The Feminist critique within this work is not simply a theoretical critique but an experience within women's movements in which Wages for Housework is presented as the banner to march behind. Federici states,

²⁹ Fortunati, 1975, p.18

³⁰ Federici, 1980, p.257

[m]y interest in this research was originally motivated by the debates that accompanied the development of the Feminist Movement in the United States concerning the roots of women's "oppression" and the political strategies which the movement should adopt in the struggle for women's liberation.³¹

In the preface to Women, the Unions and Work or What is not to be Done, Selma James notes a similar sense of exploration for a new strategy. James describes the women's movement at an impasse in which "many people were unhappy with the equal rights perspective embodied in the four demands." James lists the 'four demands' as 1) equal pay, 2) equal education and opportunity, 3) childcare, and 4) abortion and contraception.³²

These four demands have been the basis of many Western radical and socialist feminist movements. And to a large extent, these particular demands have been met in Cuba.³³ However, despite these gains, which under the feminist and socialist agendas are the route to 'women's liberation', Cuban women often times are still left with the "*doble-carga*" or the double-burden. This is in reference to the housework that women must do after they have worked all day for a wage. In response to the enormous disparity between men and women in relation to housework, Cuba passed the 1975 Family Codes in which, by law, men must do fifty percent of the housework. Despite the enactment of a symbolic law, it has not changed much; the burden of housework still falls disproportionately on women, even in a country where so many of the feminist aims have been achieved.

³¹ Federici, 2004, p.7

³² Selma James. *Women, the Unions and Work or What is Not to be Done*. London: Crest Press, 1974, p.4.

³³ See Chapter Five for a comparative look at housework in Cuba, the United States, and Venezuela.

This dilemma pushes for a reexamination of the strategy of women's movements. As Fortunati mentions, whereas men have become liberated from reproductive labor and pushed into (waged) productive labor in a capitalist system, (waged) productive labor for women in no way liberates women from reproductive labor. Fortunati also points out the absurdity of the concept that women's liberation is found in a 'job'; she notes that no one claims men's liberation comes from working 16 hour days. In addition, Federici rejects the claim that women's inclusion and incorporation as wage earners for work done outside of the home, will better position them within a capitalist system. She writes "we must be paid for what we already do instead of being forced either to do another job-as if housework were not work-or to be stigmatized as parasites and dependents, and consequently abandoned to the alimony of the State or a husband."³⁴

Despite experiments in the socialization of housework, which is the approach supported by Bentson, examples like Cuba have left those who support wages for housework more convinced that the wages for housework strategy is the only means for truly abolishing the sexual division of labor and therefore women's super-exploitation.³⁵ This proposal deviates strongly from the more traditional Marxist proposal for the socialization of housework. Since this strategy is explored and analyzed by Bentson, Friedrich Engels in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, as well as On the Emancipation of Women by Vladimir Lenin, this

³⁴ Fortunati, 1995, p.7

³⁵ Malos, 1980, p.14

perspective will not be given the same attention as the wages for housework campaign which proposes not only a specific demand but a “political perspective.”³⁶

The wages for housework “perspective” also addresses the limitations that many women experienced when attempting to work within unions, and to organize women as waged-workers. James often found that union meetings were held in the evenings, when mothers often had parenting obligations, or that participation was short-lived by women whose employment was temporary or unstable, as they were often the secondary wage earners or would abandon employment if there was a family crisis, a pregnancy or a marriage.³⁷ These experiences dissuaded many women from seeing the workplace as a suitable terrain for organizing women. Instead, reframing housework, became the strategic route for which women could conceivably struggle for their work to be recognized, thus creating a platform to reject that work as an expression of the female nature.³⁸

Critiques, Campaigns, and Obstacles

While at an international level a few dedicated activists continued to campaign for the remuneration of housework, they lacked an actual functioning model for their demands and many organizations were critical. These criticisms could be seen in five main categories: 1) practical concerns, 2) feminist concerns of reaffirming women’s place within the home, 3) criticism of a single-demand 4) the

³⁶ Federici, 1980, p.253

³⁷ James, 1974

³⁸ Ibid, p.1

belief that housework should remain outside of market relations, and 5) the counter-strategy of the socialization of housework.

The practical concerns about what wages for housework might look like come from the challenge of measuring and placing monetary value on the tasks that fall under the rubric of housework, as well as a basic concern for budgetary crisis and an ability to implement such massive government spending.³⁹ Caroline Freeman questions the ability to measure housework in her article “When a Wage is not a Wage” and Ellen Malos also reexamines this question by clarifying what Marxists mean by a wage. Malos writes,

It is clear that for Marxists the wage is paid for a given measured amount of time during which the capitalist buys the labor power of the worker, or for a given measure of commodities which the worker produces in a piecework system. While it is clear that domestic labour can be measured and paid, it is not clear from attempts to measure the work of housewives whether privatized housework, in which the worker has an undefined work-day and almost limitless number of tasks and responsibilities, could be measured in this way.⁴⁰

Perhaps reaffirming how undervalued housework is, Shulamith Firestone objects to paying women for housework on the grounds that the bill might run as high as one-fifth of the GDP.⁴¹

Firestone also objects on the feminist principles that “to pay her [the housewife]...is a reform that does not challenge the basic division of labour and thus could never eradicate the disastrous psychological and cultural consequences of that

³⁹ Rogers, 1981, p.152

⁴⁰ Malos, 1980, p. 26

⁴¹ Shulamith Firestone, “The Dialectic of Sex,” in The Politics of Housework, ed. Ellen Malos (New York: Allison & Busby, 1980), p. 159. The Global Women’s Strike responds to this concern about the budget with their “Invest in Caring not Killing Campaign” in which they promote the diversion of military spending into social services, childcare, and potentially a wage for housework

division of labor.”⁴² After many years of organizing within feminist movements for equal access to work and pay, women of this era found it challenging to locate the struggle for women’s liberation as within the home. To many, it seemed to reinforce that division of labor. In Cuba, for example, Vilma Espin also suggested similar concerns about the “deprofesionalization of women” if they were to be compensated for housework.⁴³ In The Politics of Motherhood, Jane Lewis affirms the resistance against sexist notions of homemakers and motherhood: “feminists were anxious to increase the status of motherhood by securing a financial reward for mother’s services.”⁴⁴

The single-demand strategy, while Federici claims that it encompasses an entire “political perspective” has also alienated many potential allies. For example there are many Feminists and Marxists who share many similarities with the wages for housework advocates but simply do not want to struggle solely on the platform of one demand. The insistence on this point, which has been maintained by the Global Women’s Strike (formerly the Wages for Housework Campaign), often creates the image of uncompromising orthodoxy, which has not served their cause. Their single demand platform actually serves to erase the complexity and depth of the analysis

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Espín Guillois, Vilma. Cuban Women Confront the Future. Melbourne: Ocean’s Press, 1991.

⁴⁴ 1980, p.190. Up to this point I have made almost no distinction between women and mothers, nor single-mothers and mothers with partners. Although this is surely a point of divergence in relation to the types of tasks that housework includes (most obviously, childcare) I agree with Minton and Block who write; “Whether she lives alone, with a spouse or a lover, with or without children, with or without a job or a career, it is the woman who is almost always in charge of the home, the household, the nest, the pad.” (1983, p.9)

that was advanced by those who have agreed upon the strategic demand for wages for housework.

Another criticism is the proposal that housework become subject to market relations, or simply that it moves from what is generally seen as the ultra-private into the private or public spheres. In referring to the payment of housework Andre Gorz offers the following critiques

- it transforms domestic labour into work for economic ends, that is, into a domestic (servant's) job;
- it places domestic labour in the same category as socially useful work, whereas its aim is - and should be - not social utility but the well-being and personal fulfillment of the members of the community, which is not at all the same thing.
- By nature [the private] sphere is - and should be - exempt from social control and the criteria of public utility.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the sexist concepts that ‘a woman’s [only] place is in the home’ and that housework is an expression of an altruistic feminine nature still persist in many places, and thus also forms a basis for opposing wages for housework. And, as mentioned before, the socialization of housework is often more common demand in response to the unequal amount of housework carried out between the sexes.

While the advocates of the Wages for Housework engage with most of these critiques in their writings, the lack of any practical model or clear victories in their struggle has also significantly served to discredit them. This does not mean that no proposals have been made. For example, in Canada, Penny Kome proposed that “the income tax exemption for a dependent wife be phased out—since all it does is give him an exemption for work she does—and instead let the extra money the

⁴⁵ Gorz, 2002.

government collects be distributed to women as a kind of wage for child rearing.”⁴⁶

One of the campaigns that has received more attention on an international scale is the movement to include domestic work in the United Nations (UN) accounting of the Gross Domestic Product.⁴⁷ There has also been an advance in the creation of methodologies to count unwaged labor; most notably the study entitled, “Valuation of Household Production and the Satellite Accounts and Measurement and Valuation of Unpaid Contribution” which was tested by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and was published in 1995, to coincide with the International Women’s Conference in Beijing. Despite over three decades of scholarship and activism, the supporters of wages for housework have fought many uphill battles with few gains. “So it boils down to this,” Minton and Block conclude, “A lot of people have been thinking for a long time about monetary rewards for homemakers and mothers. Many of their proposals are interesting and ingenious. However, as in trying to square the circle, no workable solution has been found.”⁴⁸

Article 88: The Recognition of Housework as Creating Value

In 1999, after months of deliberation, a popularly elected Constitutional Assembly presented what would become the centerpiece of a new political project in Venezuela. Of the many pioneering aspects of this document, the 1999 Bolivarian

⁴⁶ Minton and Block, 1983, p.113

⁴⁷ Marilyn Waring, who is not a wages for housework proponent, has been a key activist in this realm. She has published Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth 2nd Ed. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1999 and If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1990.

⁴⁸ 1983, p.114-115

Constitution of Venezuela became the first in the world to recognize the work that is done in the home as socially and economically valuable; and furthermore entitles *amas de casas* to social security.⁴⁹

It is important to distinguish between the demand for wages for housework as presented by the Global Women's Strike and International Wages for Housework campaigns from the actual language of the Bolivarian Constitution. Article 88 of the Venezuelan (Bolivarian) Constitution states:

The State guarantees the equality and equitable treatment of men and women in the exercise of the right to work. The state recognizes work at home as an economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth. Housewives are entitled to Social Security in accordance with the law.⁵⁰

While the last line of this Article entitles housewives to 'social security' and thus an income, the line above recognizes reproductive labor as an economic activity that cannot be separated from productive labor; a similar thesis as that proposed by Fortunati, Federici, James, and Dalla Costa. The Article does not mention 'wages' and the use of the phrase 'social security' has created a linguistic problem for talking to US audiences who associate that term with a specific program for the elderly.⁵¹ Nevertheless, this short article was won through a long and persistent struggle of Venezuelan women that was influenced by the decades of activism by the wages for housework campaign. Article 88 of the Bolivarian Constitution became a platform for Venezuelan women to pressure President Hugo Chávez Frías to develop a social

⁴⁹ Housewives, female heads of households

⁵⁰ See *Ministerio de Comunicación e Información del Gobierno Bolivariano*

⁵¹ See Article 86, on p.83 for a definition of Social Security within a Venezuelan context.

program to remunerate women for housework. Falling short of full-scale implementation “*Misión Madres del Barrio*”(MMB) is the only social program in Venezuela that has some of its legal roots in Article 88 of the Bolivarian Constitution.

As is the case with all advances towards liberation, Article 88 was won through struggle. While the circumstances in which the Article was debated, supported, defended, and approved have made their way into the popular narrative of advances in women’s rights in Venezuela; what is less known is how housework had become a political issue in Venezuela prior to the Constitutional Assembly. Housework, as an important topic within Venezuelan society, among women’s movements, politicians and the Left was formed through particular historical conditions and economic experiences of working-class and poor Venezuelan women.

II: Women’s Movements and “Women in Movement” Venezuela, 1974-1999⁵²

Women have long participated in revolutionary movements, being active organizers or playing essential support roles, but their participation within these movements does not necessarily imply a feminist consciousness or politics. Sonia Alvarez makes this distinction as well, explaining “women’s movements pursue gender interests...[and] make claims on cultural and political systems on the basis of women’s historically prescribed gender roles.”⁵³ Sheila Rowbotham, on the other hand, describes ‘women in movement’ as “women acting together in pursuit of

⁵² *Misión Madres del Barrio* was announced in 2006; 2006-present day will be covered in the sections specifically on the program; Section III of this Chapter and Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵³ Sonia Alvarez as cited by Maxine Molyneux, Women’s Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond. New York: Palgrave, 2001, p.145.

common ends, be they ‘feminist’ or not.”⁵⁴ In the Global Women’s Strike’s article entitled “The Revolution has a Woman’s face,” the authors propose that there are many “women in movement” within the Bolivarian process. While feminist organizing (women’s movements) exists within the Bolivarian process, it should not be confused with its different history, context, strategy, and theory of popular struggle among the working class ‘women in movement’.

This section examines how housework was placed on the political agenda for women’s movements and women in movement in Venezuela. Many of the ups and downs in women’s organizing coincide with the economic growth and decline, and therefore must be placed within their historical and political-economic context. That is why this section begins in the era of the oil boom, which was a women’s rights boom, as well. I examine the particular cultural, political, and economic circumstances as well as the characteristics of the women’s movements in Venezuela between 1974-1999. I propose that the debate and recognition of housework in Venezuela, while drawing some inspiration from the European activist scholars mentioned in the prior section, is more closely a product of family structures, the limitations of ‘feminism’ to address the needs of working-class and poor women, and the debt crisis.

Women’s Organizing Petro-Boom

I begin in 1974 because three very important developments in that year set the groundwork for Article 88 and *Misión Madres del Barrio*. First, the Venezuelan oil

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Industry was nationalized, it has become the main source of revenue in funding Misión Madres del Barrio. Second, the *Comisión Femenina Asesora de la Presidencia* (COFEAPRE), the first national women's network and governmental commission was created in 1974. And, third on International Women's Day of that same year the International Wages for Housework Campaign was launched in Italy, bringing attention to the political issue of housework.

While Venezuela was at the height of their oil boom, women's organizing was on the rise. Sarah Wagner describes the relationship between the oil boom, and women's organizing in Venezuela.

The rise of the petroleum state and the rapidly growing economy also created jobs in the labor force, which women were called upon to fill. Amidst the increased access to education and professional opportunities, women united across class lines in what was to be known as the Strategy in Unity and Diversity, organized the first Venezuelan Congress of Women in 1974, and capitalized on their new found strength as a voting block to be catered to.⁵⁵

The fluctuations in the economy created a boom in women's organizing which sparked the articulation of a broader feminist politics within the existing two-party rule and social movements.

Despite an influx of cheap imports, general increases in living standards, and the proliferation of general capitalist values, the family unit in Venezuela was never successfully transformed into the nuclear unit of the capitalist world; especially in the *barrios*.

..[T]he key figure in the family was the mother, who was the only real reference point, while the father was an inconstant and unpredictable

⁵⁵ Wagner, Sarah, "Women and Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution," *Venezuelanalysis*, January 15, 2005- [cited March 1 2008]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/877>

figure...As a general rule, family and social roles in Venezuela...[were not] channels through which the social fabric could be rewoven according to the needs of that particular phase of development.⁵⁶

The female-headed households in Venezuela have historically maintained intricate webs of extended families in which the working classes have often opted for informal unions over marriages. For this reason, Silvia Chant argues that the focus on the household head, despite its prevalence in legal matters, is a “construct of patriarchal thought and practice.”⁵⁷ Culturally, the image of the Venezuelan family’s “mother-centeredness” has been one factor that has contributed to the “forms of autonomy and independence [of Venezuelan women] that had made them somewhat unique in the panorama of Latin American images of women.”⁵⁸ While autonomy may be a part of the female-headed households, so is poverty.⁵⁹ In Venezuela single-mother households experience high levels of poverty even in relation to other Latin American countries, Venezuela “is among the countries that has the highest number of women in poverty.”⁶⁰

In 1975, the UN organized the First International Women’s Conference- in which it was pronounced to be the “Year of the Women”.⁶¹ Women of Venezuela attended this conference and upon their return, they formed national networks of women’s organizations. Splits within the feminist movement were pronounced

⁵⁶ Dalla Costa, G.F., 1995, p.96

⁵⁷ Silvia Chant, *Gender in Latin America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers U Books, 2003, p.163.

⁵⁸ Dalla Costa, G.F., 1995, p. 99

⁵⁹ In reference to a general analysis of “the feminization of poverty”, Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes, “...while it is possible to state that there is a rise in female-headed households in the United States and in Latin America, this rise cannot be discussed as a universal indicator of women’s independence, nor can it be discussed as a universal indicator of women’s impoverishment.” (2003, p.35)

⁶⁰ Dalla Costa, 1999, p.98

⁶¹ This is also the year that the Family Code was passed in Cuba (See Chapter Five).

because many women at the forefront of these groups were from the two ruling political parties. Following a Western bourgeois feminism many Venezuelan groups advanced an equal rights perspective approach that did not incorporate race or class into the analysis, and was ultimately tied to the existing political power structure.⁶²

Working from within the ranks of the Socialist League, Nora Castañeda proposed that the women's movement focus more deeply on the feminization of poverty, realizing that economic circumstances and class oppression (as well as racism) affected women in specific ways. Working class women and committed female socialists were struggling within their own circles to integrate issues of women's liberation into the Revolutionary aims of their organizations. Meanwhile, some sects of the Marxist-Leninist branches, such as the Venezuelan Communist Party, the Socialist League and the guerilla movement saw feminism as a sectarian imperialist bourgeois attempt to divide the class struggle. While women within both of these groups continued to work within their own political structures, the formation of a national network offered opportunities for women to develop proposals, debate, strategize, and share information. With the formation of national networks and a presidential commission on women, feminists in Venezuela created visibility and space for other issues to be brought to the forefront. Working class and Leftist women were forced to negotiate their dual identities (or more), and therefore become

⁶² Venezuela was also experiencing an economic boom, which caused a massive influx in European immigration. Although research is lacking on this matter, it is reasonable to assume that Venezuelan feminist organizing was not only influenced by European and American feminist thought; but that European women immigrants were key actors in feminist organizing in the 1970's; further bringing a Western context to feminist politics which did not take into account Venezuela's colonial history.

‘a bridge’ between two movements. These divides heightened as the economy went into decline.

The Debt Crisis, Feminism, and Housework

The class divides within the women’s movements only increased as the economy went into decline. The advances that had been won by professional women for maternity leave, presidential commissions, and employment opportunities were not shared with working-class women who were struggling to meet basic needs in the face of economic recession and cuts in social services.⁶³ Poverty rates jumped by 60% and working class and poor women were forced to focus on their immediate needs; organizing with their male counter parts for wage increases, lower costs of food, basic services, and transportation. Maxine Molyneux notes that “ the struggles of low-income women over consumption needs” is common throughout Latin America. She explains,

These struggles gained a particular momentum in Latin America...In the 1980s during the period of economic recession, debt crisis and stabilization policies, women’s movements became an object of policy concern, as their potential as vehicles for the delivery of goods and services to those in need was realized.⁶⁴

Therefore the reframing of housework in Venezuela became a necessary response to crisis and could therefore “function as a handy substitute for the essential services being slashed from the public budget.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Dalla Costa, G.F, 1995, p. 112-113

⁶⁴ Molyneux, 2001, p.141

⁶⁵ Dalla Costa, G.F., 1995, p.112

Housework gained a new importance in Venezuela, not only to working-class women who had been left behind by the advances in ‘feminist reforms’ but by economists and policy-makers who were forced to acknowledge its importance upon asking how it is that people were actually surviving as poverty rates soared. The International Labor Organization, for example, noted,

Despite the importance of the theme and, on occasions, because as we have noted the housewife’s activities enjoy little social recognition, those activities have so far not been the object of systematic research in the [Latin American] region...The importance of unremunerated housework is particularly great in sectors whose monetary income, coming to a large degree from informal employment is insufficient to acquire the basket of goods on the market. This importance is growing and extending to other social sectors that are growing poor in a crisis such as the present one.⁶⁶

Therefore, the new ideology of housework in Venezuela did not develop out of a feminist-Marxist struggle but as “an aid to survival in utter poverty, and as an ‘adjustment’ factor against hunger.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, within the family structure, and especially for poor and working-class families, “the entire organization of the population’s reproduction rests more on the woman than on the couple,” which has served at least to recognize the housewife’s centrality in Venezuelan society, even if not always her housework.⁶⁸ These two factors, coinciding with ‘feminist’ reforms which were largely not enjoyed by working-class and poor women heightened the limitations of women’s movements and placed housework on the agenda for ‘women in movement’ who were increasingly skeptical of the feminist agenda.

⁶⁶ International Labor Organization, Mujeres en sus casas. Lima: ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1984.

⁶⁷ Dalla Costa, G.F., 1995, p.113

⁶⁸ Dalla Costa, G.F., 1995, p.106

El Encuentro: *The Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing, China*

The Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing was a very important step in bringing together women's movements and 'movements of women'. In "Analysing Women's Movement's" Maxine Molyneux notes that "as evident from the resolutions of the Beijing Conference... the important issue is how to develop a feminist politics which can also promote a general project of democracy and social justice."⁶⁹ The Conference was both an ideological *encuentro* (encounter) that placed a significant amount of attention on reproduction, housework, and economic inequalities as well as an important place for networking. Beijing has become an important marker, for Venezuelans, in the narrative of the origin of Article 88 and the *encuentro* between Venezuelan feminists in movement and members of the Global Women's Strike (formerly the IWHC.) For Venezuelan women's movements, the work that they had done in preparation for the Conference was just as significant as the resolutions.

The International Women's Conference brought together government representatives; however, a parallel forum of community organizations and NGOs was also held. Many of the women who were part of the ruling two parties were preparing for the official summit, which had around 10,000 people in attendance. Meanwhile, Nora Castañeda and other women were preparing for the parallel summit of non-profits and grassroots organizations and had over triple the attendance of the official forum. To prepare for the forum, women in Venezuela organized numerous

⁶⁹ Molyneux, 2001, p.161

meetings at local, national, and regional levels with the goal of attending the meetings with a rounded vision of women's situation within Venezuela and the world. The goal was to pressure the women within the party-structure rule to accept the proposals brought by the non-governmental and community-based women delegates.⁷⁰

Nora Castañeda, president of the women's development bank, notes that after several meetings, women came to the conclusion that "Human Rights of women are integral rights."⁷¹ In Beijing, Castañeda, an economist by training and long time activist in the Venezuelan women's movement and Socialist League joined an economic caucus that would address women's issues from an economic or class-based perspective. Some of the concerns addressed within this caucus were women's lack of access to land ownership and loans, the feminization of poverty, the gender wage gap, unremunerated housework and an international accounting system that views housework as an "inactive economic activity." The caucus also addressed racial discrimination on top of class and gender discrimination for indigenous and Afro-descendent women within all of these aspects. Upon her return to Venezuela, Castañeda proposed the formation of a Women's Development Bank, which had some support within *Consejo Nacional de la Mujer* (CONAMU). Although the Bank did not materialize until the Revolutionary period, many of the constitutional articles that relate to women have their antecedents in the themes discussed in the economic caucus in Beijing.

⁷⁰ Castañeda in Banmujer: instrumentos para la construcción del socialismo bolivariano, 2007, p.153

⁷¹ Ibid.

During the Beijing Conference, Castañeda became acquainted with the Global Women's Strike (formerly IWHC) which had always addressed women's oppression in the context of class. This was an important turning point for international feminism; and the first time that the recognition of (and possible remuneration for) housework was seriously placed on a worldwide feminist agenda. Molyneux describes this step, as well as other advances in the development of an anti-racist and class-conscious feminism.

Feminist theory has shown why the sphere of reproduction needs to be placed firmly within the planning process, not just to acknowledge women's invisible labours but to identify social needs more generally within conditions of racialized and gendered social inequalities.⁷²

While housework had already occupied a space on the Venezuelan national stage, due to the aforementioned factors, socialist feminists incorporated the analysis proposed by the wages for housework camp as a means of responding to some of the reactionary elements of the recognition of housework in the debt-crisis era. Therefore, the 'wages for housework' literature is an incomplete lens for viewing Article 88 or *Misión Madres del Barrio*; however, it has made significant contributions to the thinking of Venezuelan socialist feminists who applied aspects of their analysis to the specific Venezuelan experience and context. The Conference in Beijing both was, and represents, this point of *encuentro*.

The Struggle for Article 88

In keeping with his election promise; after Hugo Chávez was elected with 56% of the vote he called for a Constitutional Assembly to entirely re-write and re-

⁷² Molyneux, 2001, p.161

structure the political, economic, and social system. Many people, organizations, and movements were eager to participate and have a voice in shaping this process. Chávez had promised that ‘regular’ folks would comprise this Constitutional Assembly, and so Nora Castañeda, along with other members of her organization, ran for a seat. When the election results showed that the same traditional political class had won Susana Gonzalez, long-time community organizer and Leftist referred to this as “Chávez’s first betrayal.”⁷³

However, as a long time grassroots political organizer, Castañeda had organized a dual-strategy. On the one hand, they would run candidates for the Constitutional Assembly, and on the other hand they would develop their platform and continue to struggle for women’s rights within the constitution, independent of who won the elections. Every single-day during the four month-period while the Constitutional Assembly met, Castañeda along with a number of other women held rallies outside of the Assembly meeting. They demanded that women’s issues be taken seriously and that they be included in the new constitution. The fruits of their labor can be seen in the Bolivarian Constitution.

First of all, the language throughout the entire Constitution is non-sexist, referring to *niños* and *niñas*, *ciudadanos* and *ciudadanas*, as well as *presidentes* and *presidentas*. As this text has been widely circulated and remains the cornerstone of the Revolutionary process, many Venezuelans have become more used to

⁷³ While few ADecos or COPEiyanos won seats, many leftist politician types won seats, with the vast majority being men.

incorporating anti-sexist language into their writing and speech.⁷⁴ While the Constitution is easily the most progressive in the world, encompassing numerous economic, social, political, and cultural rights, I will focus on the three articles that specifically pertain to women and that furthermore can be clearly traced to the proposals that came out of the Beijing meetings.

In reference to land ownership, Article 14 gives preference to female household heads for land redistribution programs. The articles of the Bolivarian Constitution address gender mostly in economic terms, by proactively advocating for anti-poverty and redistributive measures that take women's unique historical and economic circumstances into account. The inclusion of Article 88 marked a clear victory not only for the Venezuelan women who fought for it, but for a feminist politics, strengthened from the Beijing Conference, that evaluated gender within the context of social inequality and social justice. Article 88 and its legal recognition of housework as producing economic value and social wealth became what Castañeda refers to as “a platform for struggle.”⁷⁵ The obvious next question was: when will this be implemented and how?

Conclusion: *Misión Madres del Barrio*

The advances that women in Venezuela have made in the last ten years in relation to the recognition of housework, among others, have their roots in Venezuela's particular history of women's roles and movements, the debt-crisis and

⁷⁴ This is particularly significant because the Spanish language is extraordinarily gendered and it takes effort, patience, and creativity to change this. Despite linguists arguing that it is just the way the language works, women are proposing alternatives.

⁷⁵ Castañeda, interview

the Beijing *encuentro*. Through participation in International Women's Conferences, Venezuelan feminists have been able to build alliances and draw insights from other feminist movements which offered an analysis of unremunerated housework that was more progressive than that which had surfaced during the debt crisis.

The Bolivarian Constitution is the first in the world to recognize housework as producing social and economic value, and has been referred to by many feminists as "truly revolutionary." For Venezuelan women, the next stage is implementing this Article. While *Misión Madres del Barrio* (MMB) falls short of full-scale implementation, it is currently the only social program that is loosely based on Article 88. Since MMB is taking place in the context of massive investment in social programs, its actual effects are nearly impossible to isolate; and instead, should be analyzed as a piece of an integrated process that aims to construct "Socialism of the 21st Century." The following chapter explores the conditions that have given rise to President Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution; so that *Misión Madres del Barrio* can be understood within its political and historical context.

CHAPTER 2: ***The Historical and Political Context for a Bolivarian Path***

Introduction: Eyes on Venezuela

This chapter sets out the historical and political context of *Misión Madres del Barrio* and the Bolivarian Revolution. The social mission has been launched within the climate of numerous anti-poverty and redistributive programs that have been funded by the Venezuelan government and administered through popular participation of the grassroots. It is impossible to accurately analyze *Misión Madres del Barrio* without first examining the political and historical context in which this program was birthed.

Hugo Chávez Frias's democratic election in 1998 was the beginning of what has been dubbed "the Pink Tide" in Latin America. Following him, numerous left-leaning presidents have been elected throughout the hemisphere, showing that the people of Latin America are looking for an alternative to the neo-liberal model of "development." While Chávez is often compared to Evo Morales of Bolivia, Nestor Kirchner and Cristina Fernandez of Argentina, Luis Ignacio "Lula" Da Silva of Brazil, Michelle Bachelet of Chile, Daniela Ortega of Nicaragua and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, he is, at the time of this writing, the only one of these political leaders that has become progressively more radical since taking office. This process of radicalization is described in detail by journalist, analyst, and editor of *Venezuelanalysis*, Gregory Wilpert in his recent book *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government* and provides a steady foundation for the following analysis. Wilpert argues that of the Latin American

“Pink Tide,” Chávez is the only one who is building a political project of “Socialism of the 21st Century”; clearly trying to break with a capitalist model and at the same time rejecting Soviet, Cuban, and Chinese models of socialism. He further notes that the conditions in Venezuela were particularly ripe for such an alternative because of Venezuela’s loss of faith in both representative (social) democracy as well as neo-liberalism. Despite the oftentimes-vague alternatives that Chávez proposed, the Venezuelan people were ready for a change and Chávez was elected in 1998, largely on an anti-corruption, anti-poverty platform that called for a constitutional assembly. Chávez called his political project “The Bolivarian Revolution”, after Simón Bolívar. His initial platform, however, was more reformist than revolutionary. John Lynch, a biographer of Bolívar classified the Liberator’s politics in a similar vein.

Bolívar did not promote a social revolution, and never claimed to do so. Land distribution, racial equality, abolition of slavery, pro-Indian decrees, were policies of a reformist—not a revolutionary.⁷⁶

Lynch is among many scholars who incorrectly view Chávez’s Bolivarian project as a static packaged deal, ignoring the particular conditions that have lead to the radicalization of Venezuelans and of Chávez.⁷⁷ Chávez’s anti-corruption, anti-poverty, Constitutional Assembly election platform was initially reformist and only after a series of attacks did his program become increasingly revolutionary. The following will explain what Wilpert refers to as the dialectics of Revolution and Counter-Revolution.

⁷⁶ John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University, 2006, p. 287.

⁷⁷ Leo Casey, “Venezuela Under Chávez: Some truths are not all that complicated,” in *Dissent* [electronic journal], Summer 2005- [cited 18 January 2007]; available from <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=220>.

While much of the middle class voted for Chávez in the 1998 election, a good proportion of them eventually sided with the elite in opposition to him.⁷⁸ After the 1999 Constitutional Assembly replaced the political class that had been ruling the country for forty years, the opposition launched a fierce counter-revolution, before the revolution had even begun.⁷⁹ The personal attacks on Chávez, on the Venezuelan poor, and the political project underway in Venezuela escalated to the point of violent confrontation on April 11, 2002 when the elite temporarily removed President Chávez from power in a US-backed coup, which also had support from some branches of the Venezuelan Armed Forces. When hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets in support of their President, the opposition could not reasonably continue to claim, as they had in the past, to be representing the “reasonable majority” of Venezuelans. This failure to topple Chávez only led to his gaining further popularity among poor Venezuelans, who were now prepared to defend the programs and systems of “The Bolivarian Revolution.” The opposition continued to launch propaganda campaigns through private national and international media, as well as to cripple the economy in late 2002- early 2003, with the oil *paro* (stoppage). The opposition lost credibility among the general Venezuelan population as a result of these actions. This also led to a further radicalize both Chávez and his supporters.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela By Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government*. New York: Verso, 2007.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁰ Marta Harnecker and Hugo Chávez. *Understanding the Venezuelan Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005.

In 2004, using the means set out by the new Constitution, the opposition called for a referendum to Chávez's presidency and mobilized through the use of media and funding from the United States in a campaign against Chávez. The government and supporters responded by pouring more money into social programs and calling on Venezuelans to self-organize into *circulos bolivarianos* to study, interpret and prepare to defend the new Constitution. This era (2001-2004), is analyzed extensively in Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization, & Conflict, edited by Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger. The articles highlight the structural causes, such as economic decline, political corruption and heightened class polarization that led to Chávez's overwhelming victory in the 2004 referendum. The highly undemocratic tactics utilized by the US-backed opposition have discredited them and allowed Chávez to almost entirely exclude the opposition from political negotiations. Their exclusion has opened up spaces and possibilities for radical transformation in Venezuela.⁸¹

This chapter will examine the political conditions that have made the Bolivarian Revolution possible in Venezuela, so that *Misión Madres del Barrio* can be understood within the particular context in which it was created. Section I will provide the political history of Venezuela from 1958-1998; highlighting the specific conditions that made Chávez's rise to power possible. *Misión Madres del Barrio* is one program among many that is working to eliminate extreme poverty in Venezuela.

⁸¹ Eva Golinger. The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela. La Habana: José Martí, 2005, p.25.

Since one of the key aspects of *MMB* is to integrate female heads of households in extreme poverty into the other social missions, a general overview of these programs and their role within the construction of Bolivarianism will be examined in Section II. By providing an historical context for and brief description of some of the transformations taking place in Venezuela, this chapter contributes to the growing analysis of “Socialism of the 21st Century.”

I: The Rise of Hugo Chávez

Since the beginning of the 20th century when oil was discovered in Venezuela, petroleum has not only shaped the economy but also the politics of this Latin American nation. After Bolivar’s triumphant struggle for Independence, Venezuela experienced the “Century of the Caudillo” followed by the rule of Juan Vicente Gomez, who centralized power, created a standing army and began exporting oil.⁸² In 1945, following ten years of a military dictatorship, Romulo Gallegos of the political party *Acción Democrática* (AD) instituted numerous pro-labor and educational reforms before being taken out by a military coup in 1948. This period came to be known as the *trienio* (1945-1948), representing a three-year period of progressive democracy between decades of military dictatorships.

In 1958, one year before the Cuban Revolution, Venezuelans rose up to overthrow dictator Perez Jimenez in a popular revolt that launched the oil-producing nation towards a seemingly democratic path. Many members of the political party

⁸² Ronald Schneider, Latin American political history: patterns and personalities. Boulder: Westview Press, 2007.

Acción Democrática, had been in exile during the preceding 10-year period of military rule, and returned to Venezuela to assume positions in the new government. Since Gallegos had been overthrown by an alliance between the military and members of the elite class, *AD* proceeded with caution; forming a pact with the Christian Democratic party (*COPEI*) as well as with the Leftist party *Union Radical Democrática* (*URD*).⁸³ The Punto Fijo pact was an agreement to peacefully share power between the two parties. The agreement had the goal of minimizing violence and maintaining the status quo with the petro-business elite establishing a political system at their benefit.⁸⁴

When the *URD* pulled out of the pact in 1961, it marked the complete marginalization of the left within party politics in Venezuela. Just as the US was instituting the economic blockade against Cuba, Venezuela was paraded as the democratic, non-communist alternative for Latin America. Many Venezuelans, especially the poor and leftists, were disenfranchised within this new “democracy.” Some joined the guerilla movement in the mountains around Coro, others joined the military; one of the only occupations for social mobility in Venezuelan society. Despite political dissatisfaction with the ruling elite, the new government was better than the military dictatorship and many Venezuelans didn’t object because they experienced an increase in their living standards as the oil-economy boomed. The military was bribed by oil money and corruption was rampant. Meanwhile *AD* and

⁸³ Daniel Levine argues that Reforms were sought too rapidly, and without Institutional support (primarily from the Armed Forces) thus leading to an inevitable coup. Daniel H. Levine, Venezuelan Politics: Past and Future Contemporary Venezuela and its Role in International Affairs. New York: NYU Press, 1977.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

COPEI shared power, only going through the motions of a nominally democratic process.⁸⁵

As Venezuela accelerated its oil exports, and petroleum prices rose, the economy suffered from what has been described as “Dutch Disease.” Venezuela exported petroleum, increasing the inflow of foreign currency and therefore fueling inflation. This resulted in cheaper imported products than those that could be produced domestically. As Venezuela concentrated on the oil sector, it also urbanized and disinvested in agricultural production.⁸⁶ All of these changes have transformed Venezuela into the only Latin American country that imports more agricultural products than it exports. In addition, only 6% of its GDP comes from agricultural production.⁸⁷

The economic growth led to rapid urbanization. As people flocked to the cities in the late 1960’s, looking for employment generated by the oil-boom, rural production was abandoned.⁸⁸ Up to one million Europeans as well as other nationalities immigrated into Venezuela, also looking to cash in on the boom.⁸⁹ This period also marked a transfer of power from the landed elite (*Godos*) to a new petro-business wealthy class. Many members of this class were recent European immigrants, Cuban exiles, as well as the traditional *Mantuanos* (Venezuelan Creole

⁸⁵ Michael Coppedge, Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

⁸⁶ Nikolas Kozloff, Hugo Chavez: Oil, Politics, and the Challenge to the U.S. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁸⁷ Wilpert, 2007

⁸⁸ While oil became the number one export from Venezuela in 1926, experiencing many mini-booms, “the oil boom,” unless otherwise specified refers to the early 1970s, especially 1973 when the Venezuelan currency peaked against the US dollar. (H. Michael Tarver and Julia Frederick, The History of Venezuela. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005, p. xxi.)

⁸⁹ Richard Gott, Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution. New York: Verso, 2005, p.201.

class). The elite groups, which were comprised of both the old money Creoles and the newly rich European business class, prospered greatly during this period while many poor Venezuelans also benefited financially from the boom in their economy.

Although the elite were profiting greatly, Venezuela did not invest a large portion of the oil revenue in industrialization. Most of the money went directly into the private bank accounts of the political and business elites and there was very little to no growth in productive enterprises. Most of the job creation that took place was in the service sector to serve the new ultra-rich who came to be known as “*miameros*” for their frequent trips to Miami to go shopping.

While the “partyarchy” did not represent true democracy, it was a significant improvement from the military dictatorships that had preceded it. As the ultra-rich prospered, Venezuela also experienced a birth of a middle class.⁹⁰ Despite political dissatisfaction, many Venezuelans went along with the process because they were experiencing an actual improvement in their living conditions. However, political dissatisfaction grew when neither politicians nor political parties would be accountable as the economy started to spiral downwards.

On February 12, 1989, just two weeks into his second term President Carlos Andrés Pérez agreed to a series of neo-liberal adjustments with the International Monetary Fund.⁹¹ This package, known in Venezuela as *el paquete*, increased petrol prices and taxes on public services, which led to the *caracazo*.⁹² In that same year,

⁹⁰ Hector Schamis, “Populism, Socialism, and Democratic Institutions” *Journal of Democracy* 17:4 (2006): 20-34.

⁹¹ Gott, 2005

⁹² Harnacker, 2005, p.16

the Berlin Wall came down, which marked the end of what Subcomandante Marcos of the EZLN refers to as the “Third World War.”⁹³ In Latin America, the 1959 Cuban Revolution inspired *Guevarista* guerilla movements in nearly every country in Latin America.⁹⁴ Venezuela’s guerrilla movements were active in the mountains in the 1970’s, but by the late 1980’s many had been infiltrated, repressed and dissolved. Throughout the 1980’s poverty, unemployment and inflation increased, setting the stage for a food riot or a popular revolt. Perez, who had served as President during the oil boom of the 1970’s ran for a second term on the platform of returning Venezuela to the days of wealth and prosperity. Once in office, he immediately signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund to restructure the Venezuelan economy through neo-liberal measures. In exchange, Venezuela would receive another loan.

According to neo-liberal logic, *el paquete* would have produced economic growth; however, in reality it crippled the economy leading to massive inflation, food shortages, and political instability. February 27, 1989 was the day that the gradual price increases would begin; however, the bus drivers union, wanting to pass the increased fuel prices onto the consumers, raised bus tickets two hundred percent in one day, and canceled student discounts.⁹⁵ Many people had not been paid and

⁹³ He notes that while this period is often referred to as “The Cold War”, more people in Latin America and Asia died during this period than in WWI and WWII combined. (Subcomandante Marcos, “La reestructuración de la Guerra,” *In motion magazine* [electronic journal], November 20, 1999- [cited 18 April 2008]; available from <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/auto/cuarta.html>)

⁹⁴ While the decades of the 1960’s and 70’s experienced guerilla movements and military dictatorships throughout the Southern Cone, Central American countries were engaged in insurgent-paramilitary civil wars throughout the 1980’s.

⁹⁵ Gott, 2005

business owners were holding back basic goods, anticipating price increases. This was the climate on the morning of February 27, 1989. Rioting began in Guarenas, Venezuela and quickly spread throughout the urban centers scattered in the north of the country. In downtown Caracas, thousands of people began looting the business district. Some people raided warehouses only to find that they were full of food, despite being told by the owners that food had run out. The uprising spread. The police, who had not been paid in weeks, were unable to take on the crowds so the military and the Secret Military Police were sent in to repress the people.

The repression was targeted towards students and the poor residents of the *superbloque* housing projects. Many of the rank and file from within the military had followed orders to shoot on their own communities. Being sent to do the dirty work of the elite class led to feelings of outrage among many members of the largely working-class military. Arias Cárdenas, a close associate of Chávez in the coup-plot stated how disappointed he had been that the military had not been prepared “to stand side by side with the people in a civilian-military rebellion.”⁹⁶ Cárdenas described his disgust at the way that the Armed Forces were being used by to repress the people:

I immediately gathered my troops together and said: ‘Hands up those who belong to the Country Club!’ I looked at their expressions of surprise, and saw that they all remained motionless and silent. I repeated my request: ‘Hands up those who live in Alto Prado, in Lagunita, Country Club, or in Altamira!’ Nobody moved. Then I said, well that means that we all come from the shantytowns and the poor parishes like this one. The people who live here are like us, they are our people, our brothers; that means that no one must fire without authorization; no one must shoot unless we are attacked.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Gott, 2005, p.46

⁹⁷ Gott, 2005, p.47

Despite hesitation from some members of the Armed Forces, the government ordered the death of thousands of citizens, erasing the *façade* of democracy in Venezuela. Subsequent Venezuelan governments intended to erase the *caracazo* from the collective memory of the people, only mentioning the incident when forced to do so due to the discovery of unmarked mass graves. While Chávez was sick during these events, his subversive *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario* (MBR) experienced a rapid growth in young, poor and working-class officers. Three years following the *caracazo*, Hugo Chávez would parachute himself onto the national stage.

On February 4, 1992, a young handsome military officer appeared on television announcing his personal responsibility for the failed coup attempt. Chávez, along with a number of young military officers in the MBR had successfully seized their post in Maracay, but had failed in Caracas. The people watched *Comandante* Hugo Chávez Frias, as he explained the objectives of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement. Venezuelans had become accustomed to corrupt politicians and they were relieved to see a leader willing to take responsibility for his actions. Chávez was sentenced to prison; meanwhile, he gained national notoriety.⁹⁸

Many leftists, scholars, supporters, priests and party-members visited Chávez when he was in jail. He used his time in prison to formulate a political strategy and continue working within the ranks of the Armed Forces. In an interview with Marta Harnacker, Chávez mentioned that The Army as an Agent of Social Change by Claus

⁹⁸ A second coup-attempt of the MBR took place just a few months after Chávez had led the February 4th attempt.

Heller was one of the most influential books that he read while he was imprisoned.⁹⁹ This book, along with a deep investigation into Venezuelan history and military history shaped Chávez's development of Bolivarianism. *Causa R*, a leftist party also conducted a survey in which they discovered that 70% of Venezuelans would vote for Chávez in a presidential election. Upon release from prison he began campaigning tirelessly.

During his campaigning Chávez ran on the platform of anti-corruption and anti-poverty while calling for a constitutional assembly. Gregory Wilpert succinctly describes the conditions that led to Chávez's rise to power in the following way; "...Chávez and his Bolivarian movement appeared in Venezuela at a very specific time in the country's history, in a context in which social democracy and neoliberalism were probably more discredited than in most other countries in the world."¹⁰⁰ In 1998 Chávez won the presidential election with 56% of the popular vote.¹⁰¹ Much of this support came from the middle classes, who had felt the crunch of the economic decline and despite the vagueness of his proposed political project were ready to support Chávez and his third-way.

The conditions that led to Chávez's election were rooted in the particular historic and economic context of Venezuela. However, Chávez's process of radicalization came from what Wilpert refers to as the "dialectic of revolution and

⁹⁹ 2005, p.24

¹⁰⁰ Wilpert, 2007, p.4

¹⁰¹ The Carter Center, Observing the Venezuela Presidential Recall Referendum Comprehensive Report. Carter Center, 2004; available from <http://www.cartercenter.org>

counter revolution,” mentioned in the Introduction of this Chapter.¹⁰² While the recent political history played an important role in bringing Chávez to power, the more distant history of the struggles for Independence and against tyranny shape the construction of Bolivarianism. Chávez and his active political base are transforming the nation under an ideology that is endogenous to Venezuela. This process is characterized by nationalism, a civil-military alliance, an emphasis on education, redistributive and anti-poverty efforts, and internationalism.

II: The Elements of Bolivarianism

Nationalism

Chávez, a military man and leader of a failed coup in 1992, draws on figures from Venezuela’s Independence Struggles (1750-1811) and the Federalist War (1858-1865) in shaping the ideology of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement (MBR)¹⁰³. He was not the first to credit the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, as the icon and inspiration behind his movement. Virtually every leader in Venezuela’s post-independence history, (as well as numerous leaders and movements of the Five Republics)¹⁰⁴ including tyrants Juan Vicente Gomez and Eleazar Lopez Contreras, claim to base their politics on the *Libertador*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Harnacker first coined this term, but it is also the framework for Wilpert’s analysis of the political changes in Venezuela. Wilpert also credits Herbert Marcuse (Counterrevolution and revolt, Boston: Beacon Press, 1972) for describing this process in the US and Europe.

¹⁰³ The MBR has now become the MVR (Movement for the Fifth Republic); because the National Election Commission (CNE) in Venezuela prohibits the use of Bolívar’s name in registering any political organization. (Margarita López-Maya, “Hugo Chávez Frías: His movement and His Presidency,” in Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2003) p.82.

¹⁰⁴ Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia are the Five Republics that Bolívar helped “liberate” from Spanish rule.

¹⁰⁵ Lynch, 2006, p. 304

One would be hard pressed to find a school in Venezuela that does not have a picture of the Liberator on the wall, or a town of any significant size that does not have a Plaza Bolívar.¹⁰⁶ Simón Bolívar is a figure that has been used by a wide range of political views to represent numerous ideologies; however, one point of convergence among Bolivarian movements is nationalism.¹⁰⁷ Consistent with Bolívar's fervent nationalism, he has been transformed into the centerpiece of Chávez's nationalist political project.

Benedict Anderson would most likely characterize Chávez as a "second-generation nationalist", which he described as those who "learned to speak for dead people."¹⁰⁸ The Venezuelan government is utilizing this process of "exhumation" to create symbolic images to represent the new Bolivarian nation. Simón Bolívar stands at the head of this process: his revolutionary fervor, military might, and dreams of a united Latin America are championed while his brutal treatment of the indigenous and non-fulfillment of his promise to fully abolish slavery disappear into oblivion. Echoing Anderson, Mauricio Tenorio Trillo sees this remembering and forgetting as an inherent part of national construction. Tenorio Trillo also notes that these images, constantly re-emerging, will always carry contradictory elements.

There is always a renewal of an old nationalism, or a new process, a new nation, and reconditioned national images. These phenomena enchant us with their liberating spirit, their authenticity and pureness, despite the hate-and-love inconsistencies inherent in any kind of nationalism.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Krzysztof Dydyński and Charlotte Beech. *Venezuela*. Lonely Planet, 2004, p.29

¹⁰⁷ Simon Daniel White Collier, "Nationality, Nationalism, and Supranationalism in the Writings of Simón Bolívar" *Hispanic American Historical Review* 63:1 (1983): p.38.

¹⁰⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origins and spread of Nationalism*, 2nd Ed. New York: Verso, 2006, p.198.

¹⁰⁹ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *El Urbanista*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004, p.14.

There is controversy over Chávez's use of Bolívar. Venezuelan elite highlight Bolívar's aristocratic background drawing parallels between the Liberator and George Washington. The Venezuelan Left is divided over the use of Bolívar. Many Marxists see him as "a typically bourgeois figure whose actions had only served the interests of the emergent imperial power of the time", while others see Bolívar as a leader in the struggle against tyranny.¹¹⁰ Chávez, however, is in the process of recreating Bolivarianism. Chávez's brand of Bolivarianism highlights Venezuelan nationalism and Latin American internationalism which harbors a "hatred of despotism and a belief in moderate constitutional government."¹¹¹ Despite parallels between Chávez and Bolívar's political visions, biographer John Lynch argues that the politics of Chávez and Bolívar diverge. Lynch responds to what he sees as a blatant misrepresentation of the Liberator,

...the new heresay [sic.], far from maintaining continuity with the constitutional ideas of Bolivar, as was claimed, invented a new attribute, the populist Bolivar...the socialist Bolivar. By exploiting the authoritarian tendency, which certainly existed in the thought and action of Bolivar...Venezuela claim[s] the Liberator as a patron for their policies, distorting his ideas in the process.¹¹²

Whether Chávez has portrayed Bolívar, or any of the other figures discussed in this chapter, with historical accuracy is not the focus of my argument. Instead, I will examine how Bolivar and other figures are used in the construction of Chávez's brand of Bolivarianism.

¹¹⁰ Gott, 2005, p. 93

¹¹¹ Lynch, 2006, p. 284

¹¹² Ibid, p.304

The use of Venezuelan nationalism in the construction of Bolivarianism is a rejection of colonial and neo-colonial impositions on Venezuela's economy, political system, culture, and self-perception. Venezuelans, along with many Latin Americans, have been instructed to look to other nations as models for development and culture: first, to Spain, then towards Britain, France and the United States and, within the last forty years, the city of Miami. Bolivarianism must be seen within this historical context, and therefore be understood as an anti-neo-colonial construction. The use of Venezuelan figures in the construction of Bolivarianism echoes this cry. For Venezuelans and for many who share their colonial past, these types of nationalist movements have the power of changing self-perception from subjects of a neocolonial power to actors in a new nation. No national narrative will ever fully represent a nation, as Tenorio Trillo argues, the most that can be expected of nationalism is that is be "inclusive, multicultural and rhetorically plural."¹¹³ Within this new nation, venues are being created for the inclusion of the most marginalized, the indigenous, Afro-descendants, women and the poor.

Civil-Military Relations

One of the defining characteristics of Bolivarianism is the civil-military alliance that was the root of Chávez's Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, when he attempted a coup in 1992, and it has remained an important part of Chávez's political project. There are many who criticize this civil-military alliance and fear it indicates

¹¹³ Tenorio Trillo, 2004, p.80

the dictatorial tendencies in Chávez's government.¹¹⁴ Therefore, numerous allegations that Chávez is not democratic stem from an uneasiness with his military past, militaristic performance, and governing style.

Hugo Chávez led a military coup in 1992 and after serving a term in prison. He emerged to win the 1998 presidential election. Keeping his electoral promise, he initiated a Constitutional Assembly and numerous reforms designed to incorporate the military in national development projects.¹¹⁵ Despite massive investment in social programs, Chávez's roots in the military have led to a debate over whether or not Chávez is "democratic." This debate is not taking place in a vacuum; Venezuela's rich oil deposits has placed them center-stage in the global politics play. While the Bush Administration and the National Endowment for Democracy continue to vilify Chávez as a military dictator, civil-military relations in Venezuela must be viewed through a more complex and less politically motivated lens.

Across broad political spectrums, there is a general interest in civil-military relations in Bolivarian Venezuela. I will briefly compare three authors' approaches to civil military relations in Venezuela. Richard Gott uses a Marxist lens, looking to examples like the Philippines, Peru, and Panama, where the Armed Forces played a

¹¹⁴ Harold A. Trinkunas, "The crisis in Venezuelan civil-military relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic" Latin American Research Review 37:1(2002): 41-78. Deborah L. Norden, "Democracy in Uniform: Chávez and the Venezuelan Armed Forces," in Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict, eds. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2003), 93-112.

¹¹⁵ One of the ways that Chávez has effectively built that support is through his vision for an alliance between civil society and the military. This alliance is the main focus of Plan Bolívar 2000 (PB2000). PB2000 is a government program that integrates the military into national development projects, especially in poor and rural areas. While there are obvious benefits of this program, many criticize this civil-military alliance, and fear that is an indication of the dictatorial tendencies in Chávez's governing (Trinkunas, 2002; Norden, 2003).

role in revolutionary struggle. Harold Trinkunas examines the changing role of the military within the nation, looking directly at constitutional changes. In pursuit of a viable model to characterize Chávez's style of leadership, Deborah Norden's examines civil-military relations by placing significance on the performance aspects of Chávez's militaristic image.¹¹⁶

Norden proposes that despite Chávez's rise to power through democratic elections, he displays characteristics of a military-coup leader.¹¹⁷ Norden also suggests that Venezuela's close ties with Cuba is sufficient evidence that Chávez is a "quasi-military coup leader" and due to Chávez's involvement in a 1992 coup attempt, his 1998 electoral campaign was most likely not democratic.¹¹⁸ These claims are not substantiated with evidence and are particularly unreliable in the face of numerous studies, which have deemed the 1998 Venezuelan Presidential elections to be "free and fair."¹¹⁹

Trinkunas examines specific reforms, which raise the salary for the military as well as gives them the right to vote in elections. He also pays close attention to crossover between the military and political office as well as the appointment of military officials into government roles. Despite Norden's transparent bias against Hugo Chávez's presidency, she and Trinkunas raise important questions about the consolidation of power, the use of the military in national development projects, and the proliferation of retired and active military personnel in the new government.

¹¹⁶ Norden, 2003

¹¹⁷ 2003, p. 93

¹¹⁸ 2003, p.95

¹¹⁹ See Carter Center

Norden concludes that Chávez's style of rule is dictatorial, militaristic, and undemocratic, despite his rise to power through elections. Richard Gott quotes Chávez at length, supporting the idea of a revolutionary civilian-military alliance capable of providing the labor power to institute massive social reforms.

Chávez sees the *caracazo*, the 1992 coups and his election as one connected process in which relations between *el pueblo* and the military have been central. He said:

When Carlos Andres Perez sent the Armed Forces into the streets to repress that social uprising and there was a massacre, the members of the MBR 200 realized we had passed the point of no return and we had to take up arms. We could not continue to defend a murderous regime.¹²⁰

Chávez added that, "We always rejected the idea of a traditional military coup, of a military dictatorship, or a military junta... We agreed to issue decrees to convene a constitutional assembly, but of course we hadn't thought it out sufficiently."¹²¹

Chávez explained that after the two coup attempts the military was no longer a viable basis for organizing a rebellion because it had been successfully infiltrated and the main leaders within the movement were in prison. After Chávez was released, he began campaigning for the Presidency under the banner of Revolutionary Bolivarianism and he was elected democratically. President Hugo Chávez continues to be a controversial leader. His military ties and attempted coup have left many people skeptical of whether or not this popularly elected president is truly

¹²⁰ Harnacker, 2005, p.32

¹²¹ Ibid.

“democratic.”¹²² Many supporters of Chávez contest these claims by pointing to the numerous social programs to help combat poverty that have been enacted under Chávez.¹²³

An Emphasis on Education

In February, 2008 President Hugo Rafael Chávez announced that over 52% of Venezuelans were involved in some form of educational training: whether school, an educational social mission, or other programs. In July 2003 the Bolivarian government launched *Misión Robinson*, and shortly thereafter *Misión Ribas*, *Misión Sucre* and more recently *Misión Alma Mater*. Each of these social missions require local communities to designate and secure spaces for the classes, request materials, and find teachers and students. Sometimes the teachers come from within the communities and sometimes they are brought in by the government or volunteer their labor. The government also provides scholarships for students to attend these *Misiones*, making it more possible for people to take time away from work to participate in the missions.

Mission Robinson, for example, is a literacy program (modeled after the Cuban and Nicaraguan Literacy Campaigns) that was initiated in July 2003. Through the National Campaign, which brought teachers and literacy coaches into communities throughout Venezuela, numerous people participated in this “mission”. This program was so successful that by April 2005, over 1,406,000 participants had

¹²² However, since Chávez’s rise to power came from elections and not an armed guerilla movement there are a variety of avenues for participation within the political process that make some of the critiques of a military organization (from Nicaragua and Cuba) not applicable in the Venezuelan case.

¹²³ This is a classical debate stemming from differences between liberal versus social democracy.

learned how to read and write.¹²⁴ Mission Robinson is named after Bolívar's teacher, Simón Rodríguez, who also went by the name Samuel Robinson, inspired by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson and Crusoe*.¹²⁵ Simón Rodríguez was an important figure in Bolívar's life and an advocate for the inclusion of indigenous peoples and blacks in education and politics. Although he has contributed greatly to enlightenment educational theory and practice, he is barely known outside of Latin America and his works have not been translated into English.

Though Simón Rodríguez had a profound influence on Bolívar's thinking, there is far less known about him than about the Libertador, especially outside of Latin America. Simón Rodríguez was Bolívar's teacher and mentor from Bolívar's early years through the Independence struggles and beyond. After living and traveling together throughout Europe, Rodríguez returned to the Americas to hold educational positions in the newly liberated Republics. Rodríguez continued to open schooling to indigenous people in Bolivia and the elite often scorned him for his tireless advocacy for universal access to public education.¹²⁶ His works, which have never been translated into English, include important philosophical contributions to Spanish-American independence thought.

One of his more famous passages, which Chávez often quotes, states,

Spanish America is an original construct. Its institutions and its government must be original as well, and so too must be the methods, used to construct

¹²⁴ Chesa Boudin, Gabriel González and Wilmer Rumbos. The Venezuelan Revolution: 100 questions-100 answers. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 2006, p.69.

¹²⁵ Gott, 2005, p.102

¹²⁶ Pedro Orgambide. El maestro de Bolívar: Simón Rodríguez, el utopista. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2002.

them both. Either we shall invent, or we shall wander around and make mistakes.¹²⁷

Rodríguez argued for a break from the European model and a need to create an entirely new system. His words ring true for Chávez as he breaks from the neo-liberal development model and ‘invents,’ ‘wanders around,’ and ‘makes mistakes.’ Bolivarianism, as used by Chávez, is one of these inventions. And thus within the Bolivarian Project, Rodríguez rises from the dead to become the eternal teacher, not only of the Liberator, but also of Chávez and the millions of illiterate and disenfranchised Venezuelans. *Misión Robinson 2* is primary educational classes for adults (sixth grade equivalent.) *Misión Ribas* is a secondary education mission (equivalent to a GED) named after José Felix Ribas, an independence fighter that fought alongside Bolívar. *Misión Sucre*, provides a college education that could be compared to an Associate’s Degree in the US, also named after a trusted confidant of Bolívar. More recently Mission Alma Mater has been announced to make post-graduate study available to the Venezuelan masses. These educational missions are fundamental to the Bolivarian process and are arguably the most successful part of Chávez’s political project. While attempts have been made to advance redistributive reforms, they have not accomplished the advances that the educational missions have.

Redistributive Efforts

Up until 2004, all of the government land reform programs redistributed state-owned land. In 2005 the Venezuelan government launched the first land-reform

¹²⁷ Gott, 2005, p.106 “*O inventamos o eramos*”; which has also been translated into English as, “Either we innovate or we deteriorate.” (Boudin, Gonzales, and Rumbos, 2006, p.8)

program to seize privately held land and redistribute it.¹²⁸ The program was appropriately named “Plan Ezequiel Zamora”. This reform was applauded by the largest peasant organization, which also carries Zamora’s name, The *Coordinadora Agraria Nacional Ezequiel Zamora’s* (CANEZ).

Ezequiel Zamora was a general and peasant leader during the Federalist Wars and his name poses a symbolic threat to the elite. It is clear that the victors who wrote Venezuelan history would not champion this figure who proclaimed “land, free men, respect for peasants, general elections, and a disappearance of the oligarchs”.¹²⁹ For over one hundred years after Zamora’s defeat, Venezuela was ruled by *Caudillos*, and was eventually taken over by corrupt “democrats,” none of whom were eager to remind Venezuelans of the romantic peasant leader of their past. Zamora was occasionally given slight mention in textbooks, but nonetheless he lived on in folk and military songs, as well as in the popular history of Venezuelan peasants and revolutionaries. General Zamora, leader of numerous multi-racial peasant revolts is remembered not only for his struggle for land distribution, free elections, and racial and social equity but also for the deep fear that his ideals implanted in the elite; not only for what he fought for but also whom he fought against.¹³⁰ The fear that he inspired in the landed elite (*Godos*) is used as a tool to ignite similar sentiments in the oil-rich elites of modern Venezuela. No doubt, the white elite fears a similar type of mobilization of the country’s poor dark-skinned majority.

¹²⁸ Wilpert, 2005

¹²⁹ Gott, 2005, p.111

¹³⁰ Adolfo Rodriguez, Ezequiel Zamora. Caracas, Ministerio de Educacion, 1977, p.21.

Chávez has resurrected Zamora, noting him along with Simón Bolívar and Simón Rodríguez as the three most important figures in shaping the new Bolivarian nation.¹³¹ While Bolívar is credited as the Liberator in the time of Independence and Rodríguez is well known as the educator and visionary, Zamora holds the position of the militant peasant. Unlike Bolívar and his entourage, Zamora had been nearly erased from the mainstream history lessons of Venezuela, therefore leaving more room to recreate him in the image of Chávez's political project. The images of these three men, as well as other historical figures are found throughout Venezuela, and are deep within Bolivarian process.

Anti-poverty Social Missions

In this new nation, renamed the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chávez claims to be creating space for some of the most marginalized in Venezuelan society: the indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, the poor, and women.¹³² The most interesting character to have fought her way into the new nation is Hipólita, Bolívar's wet nurse, caretaker, and "slave." As is often the case, historical records of subjugated populations are challenging to uncover. Many historians have pieced together enough information on Hipólita, to position her within the life of Bolívar. What is known about this person, who is the most adored Afro-descendant woman (and former slave,) in Venezuelan history, is that shortly after Bolívar's birth she was purchased from the San Mateo *hacienda* by his family to serve as his wet nurse.¹³³

¹³¹ Gott, 2005; Aleida Guevara. Chávez, Venezuela & the New Latin America. New York: Ocean Press, 2005.

¹³² Gott, 2005.

¹³³ Carmelo Paiva Palacios. "La negra Hipólita, nodriza del Libertador." Boletín de la Academia

When Bolivar was orphaned at age nine, Hipólita became the sole caregiver of the infamously rambunctious child. Bolivar’s affection for Hipólita is documented in a series of letters that he wrote to his sister during and after the independence struggles. In those letters, Bolivar wrote, “I am sending you a letter from my mother Hipólita, so that you will give her everything she wishes...she nourished my life. I know no other parent but her.”¹³⁴ Bolívar also eventually granted her freedom.

Because there are limited historical records, Hipólita still lives in a fictionalized world, in which certain characteristics are ascribed to her. The most obvious of these characteristics is her perceived unconditional love for little Simón. Although, I will make no claims about how Hipólita felt about Bolívar, it is important to point out the irony that a woman who was “owned” by the Bolívar family is noted for her unconditional love as if it were entirely voluntary. Hipólita is often portrayed as a dark-skinned woman with a striking resemblance to Aunt Jemima, an icon of the enslavement of black women.¹³⁵ The use of Hipólita as a symbol places Venezuela’s legacy of slavery and slavery’s remnants, which are expressed through deep rooted institutionalized and internalized racism, on the national stage.

Mission Negra Hipólita was initiated on January 23, 2006. The government issued an official statement that included who the target groups of the mission will be:

Nacional de la Historia (Venezuela), 77:307 (1994): p.130-131.

¹³⁴ Richard W. Slatta and Jane Lucas De Grummond. *Simón Bolívar’s Quest for Glory*. College Station: A&M University Press, 2003, p.12

¹³⁵ The use of Aunt Jemima as a racialized cultural icon in the United State is explored in: M.M. Manning, *Slave in a box : the strange career of Aunt Jemima*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998.

We create a permanent presidential commission for mission Negra Hipólita, whose objective will be to coordinate, promote, and advise everything related to homeless children, adolescents, and adults, pregnant adolescents, people with disabilities, and the elderly living in extreme poverty.¹³⁶

Race in Venezuela, as throughout Latin America and the world, must not be seen in fixed categories, but as fluid and changing. How Venezuelan's racial identity is perceived (especially by North Americans) often times varies greatly from their own self-perceptions and from the complex racial categories that exist within Venezuela. Throughout Latin America, the Creole elite have historically laid claim to a "pure Spanish" or "pure white" blood, yet are often racially mixed.¹³⁷ This "dark" secret lives on in the psyche of Venezuelan elites and has also been adopted by the popular classes.

Hipólita represents this dark secret. Although it is contested that Bolívar himself has African or indigenous heritage, the common belief is that white blood runs through his veins whereas he was nurtured by "black milk."¹³⁸ This relationship points to Venezuelan discomfort with their African heritage.¹³⁹ The story of Hipólita, and her relationship to Bolívar, emphasizes a white, Spanish heritage while introducing an ambiguous role of Afro-descendants within the nation. The only thing that is unequivocally clear about the role of Hipólita is that she must unconditionally

¹³⁶ Venezuelanalysis, "Venezuela Launches Social Mission aimed at Helping the Most Vulnerable," Venezuelanlysis, [electronic journal], January 16, 2006- [cited March 20 2007]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news.php?newsno=1869>

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Kuznesof, "Ethnic and gender Influences on Spanish Colonial Spanish America" Colonial Latin American Review 4:1 (1995): 153-201.

¹³⁸ Gott, 2005, p.91; Lynch, 2006, p.7

¹³⁹ Early, James and Jesus "Chucho" Garcia, "Political Status of Afro-Venezuelans in the Bolivarian Revolution: Democratic Measure For Venezuela and a Hemispheric Imperative," in The Venezuelan Reader: The Building of a People's Democracy, ed. Olivia Burlingame Gombri (Washington DC.: Epica, 2005), p.55.

love and serve Simón, her white child and master. This is how the Bolivarian process has cast Hipólita as the person who does not give up on the poor, the desolate, and the naughty. *Misión Negra Hipólita* is the mission in which Hipólita's perceived compassion for the downtrodden becomes the dominant imagery for the program. Jorge Luis Garcia Carneiro, minister of the Ministry of Popular Participation and Social Development, stated "Negra Hipólita represents love and the generosity of Venezuelan mothers, equality, solidarity, and justice for a neglected Venezuelan group, who are filled with misery."¹⁴⁰

An article published by the *Associated Press* interviewed homeless people in the streets of Caracas nearly one year after the program had been launched. There were mixed responses. While some people noted that it helped them break drug addictions and find work, other's preferred not to feel "caged in" by the shelter systems. The article describes *Misión Negra Hipólita*,

The program guides the homeless to shelters and rehabilitation centers, offering them medical and psychological care. Those who join can receive a paycheck equivalent to \$65 a week for community service work like clearing weeds or painting murals with slogans like, "Say no to drugs, search for Christ."¹⁴¹

As of April, 2006 mission Negra Hipólita was one of fourteen social missions—all of which receive funding from PDVSA, the state-owned Venezuelan

¹⁴⁰ Michael Fox, "Venezuela Launches Primary Health Program for Extreme Poor," *Venezuelanalysis* [electronic journal], April 2006a- [cited September 2006]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1712>

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

oil company. According to *El Universal*, Venezuela is increasing the budget for missions by 70%, bringing it up to \$4.5 billion for the year of 2007.¹⁴²

In addition to racist imagery, discrimination and poverty remain as a part of the legacy of slavery. While the imagery is disturbing, and an important reminder that five hundred years of racist practices die hard. *Misión Negra Hipólita*, in combination with other missions and programs, serve a large portion of the Afro-descendent communities in Venezuela, which comprise an estimated 30% of the nation's 27 million inhabitants, but are disproportionately poor.¹⁴³ While Afro-descendants may have fought for a place within the Venezuelan nation, in which their economic demands are being met, *Negra Hipólita* stands as a symbol that within the new nation Afro-descendants still remain in a subjugated position. In fact, just as Hipólita was enslaved by the Bolívar family, her icon remains subjugated by that of Bolívar. The Liberator remains the corner stone of Chávez's political project, reinforcing patriarchal concepts of subordination.

While the use of the *Negra Hipólita* icon continues to reinforce racist and sexist notions of darker women being subordinates to white men, the program itself has opened real possibilities for Afro-Venezuelans to create an open space for political agency. This program addresses immediate needs such as housing, healthcare, medical, and rehabilitation care, job training, and access to education, which foster a greater ability to focus on issues of racial discrimination, as opposed to solely on survival. As this process takes place, Afro-descendant Venezuelans will

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Early and Garcia, 2005, p.51

organize to make further demands on the President and nation. This movement has already begun with the *Red Afro-Venezolana*, the *Fundación Afroamérica*, *TransAfrica*, and *Casa de la Cultura* in San Jose, Barlovento. Jesus Garcia, who is involved in all of the above organizations notes:

The Chávez government and the programs of the Bolivarian Revolution must distinguish their anti-racism policy agendas from the left progressive parties and governments that all too often have either failed to address or at times even failed to acknowledge racism and Afro-citizens in Latin America.¹⁴⁴

All of the figures discussed thus far were active during the century of Independence in Latin America. Benedict Anderson traces the birth of nationalism to this nineteenth century within the Americas.¹⁴⁵ As Bolivarianism is constructed in current day Venezuela, it draws on many of the original nationalists as its inspirations. The one exception explored in this paper is Guaicaipuro, an indigenous *cacique* who lived in the 16th Century and spent over a decade resisting Spanish colonization. Like many subjugated histories, there are huge gaps in Guaicaipuro's story. Guaicaipuro was a leader of the Caracas and Teques people who is championed as a brilliant strategist who defeated the Spanish on numerous occasions throughout the 1560's as he led offensives to protect the land and sovereignty of his people. He was subsequently captured and killed. Chávez often quotes Guaicaipuro's dying words:

¹⁴⁴ Early and Garcia, 2005, p.63

¹⁴⁵ Claudio Lomnitz. "Nationalism as a Practical System: Benedict Anderson's Theory of Nationalism From the Vantage Point of Spanish America," in The other Mirror: Grand Theory through the lens of Latin America, eds. Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando Lopes Alvarez (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 2001).

Ana karina rote amocon paporo i toto manto

Only we are human, here there are no cowards, no one surrenders, and this land is ours!¹⁴⁶

Nicia Maldonado, president of CONVIVE, Venezuela's national indigenous organization described this indigenous leader's legacy: "Chief Guaicaipuro preferred to die rather than give up his territory."¹⁴⁷

Guaicaipuro's incorporation into the nation stands as a powerful symbol for the incorporation of indigenous communities into the new Bolivarian nation. This is a complex and long project that is being built upon a foundation exploitation and marginalization. The initial violence of conquest and the subsequent centuries of exclusion and oppression of the indigenous populations under Spanish rule did not end with Venezuela's Independence. Bolivar himself took over the Capuchin Mission on May 7, 1817, slaughtering the Catholic missionaries (who had sided with Spain) and forcing the indigenous to enroll into his forces. He stole their grain and confiscated their land.

Indigenous communities, which are spread throughout Venezuela, with the highest concentrations in the state of Zulia, along the Colombian border and in the Amazonian state of Bolivar, have existed between a terrorized and a neglected state under all Venezuelan governments. The current policies and constitutional articles that relate to indigenous rights, sovereignty and relations with the national government stand alone, with nothing to compare them to. Prior constitutions barely

¹⁴⁶ Guevara, 2005

¹⁴⁷ Robin Nieto, "The Guaicaipuro Mission Part I: The Promise of Restitution of Indigenous Rights in Venezuela," in *Venezuelanalysis* [electronic journal], October 20, 2004- [cited September 2006]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1297>

gave mention to the many diverse nations that make up between 1-3% of the Venezuela's population. Within the new constitution, Chapter (8) outlines indigenous rights within the Bolivarian nation. However, while the new Constitution recognized 26 ethnic groups and over 11 languages as official languages of Venezuela, building a multi-ethnic nation that is inclusive and respects indigenous sovereignty is far more complicated.

On October 12, 2003, while the Continent was forced into commemoration of Christopher Columbus and the conquest of the Americas, President Chávez spoke outside of the National Pantheon, where Guaicaipuro's remains had just been transferred so that they might lay along side those of the Liberator. On this day, Chávez announced the initiation of *Misión Guaicaipuro*. *Misión Guaicaipuro* is the biggest, broadest and most complex Mission to date. Its aim is to bring all of the services from the other missions (education, healthcare, subsidized food, land titles, job training) into all of the indigenous communities through government-indigenous cooperation that is culturally sensitive and appropriate. No other government within the hemisphere has attempted this goal, broad in its vision and scope, and it comes with both promise and challenges.

As of 2004, when independent journalist Robin Nieto traveled to a variety of indigenous communities throughout Venezuela, the responses to the Mission varied. Dalia Herminia Yanez, a Warao leader was hopeful, "The Guaicaipuro mission is like a baby that is growing. And it will keep growing. It is now walking as it evolves, I believe it will be one of the best missions with our participation." Angel Montiel, a

Wayuu who is on the national coordinating committee for the Mission Guaicaipuro had already taken a census and survey of El Chiavaro, a Wayuu community and was certain that “potable water, sewage lines, housing as well as social services in health and food security” would be in place by the following year. Loreanny Sanchez, a member of the Añu community, who lives along Lake Maracaibo in traditional “Palafitos”¹⁴⁸ disagrees that their lives have improved: “The Guaicaipuro Mission has not arrived. We do not know what has happened, and we don’t have the resources to go to the capital to find out.”

Mixed reactions exist both among and within different indigenous communities. In Toromo, a Jukpa mountain community along the Colombian border Carolina Peñaranda, a high school student who studies at a newly opened school in her community noted, “We have a high school in our community that was opened by President Chávez. If it were not for this school many of us would not be able to study.” On the other hand, Carolina’s grandfather, Jesus Peñaranda doubts whether people coming from outside of the community truly have their interests at heart, “People come here to steal, to take from our culture, and what do I get in return?...I get nothing...look at the way I live”.

The Guaicaipuro Mission is an attempt to extend the economic, social, political, and human rights framework of the 1999 constitution into indigenous communities. While many champion this attempt (including Nobel Prize winner and

¹⁴⁸ *Palafitos* are houses built “on stilts” These are the original dwelling that the Spanish saw, which reminded them of Venice, and therefore led them to name the land Venezuela (little Venice.)

indigenous activist, Rigoberta Menchú¹⁴⁹) the process is slow moving and fraught with difficulties. Some of the difficulties include: lack of trained government workers who speak indigenous languages or can work in culturally sensitive ways; the location of indigenous communities, which are often in remote regions with either limited or no roads; community coordinators often live outside of the communities; lack of coordination among indigenous nations; and the ever present issues of corruption and bureaucracy. Some ways in which these obstacles are being overcome is through: the strengthening of indigenous networks; the training of members of the indigenous communities to serve on the government committees responsible for implementation; co-participation between the government and indigenous people.

As the Guaicaipuro mission advances, the issues of indigenous people have become more visible to Venezuelans and their diverse cultures have become a part of the nation more so than they ever have before. Despite Guaicaipuro's growing visibility, as an important figure in Venezuela, Chávez continues to ignore the indigenous protests the extraction of coal in the state of Zulia.¹⁵⁰

Chávez uses Guaicaipuro not only as a symbol for indigeneity, but also as an icon for those who stood up against the empire. As Venezuela comes under increasing criticism from the United States—the modern empire—Chávez often compares Guaicaipuro's resistance and disgust with the Spanish to Venezuela's contempt for the Bush administration and the Washington Consensus. Although

¹⁴⁹ Gott, 2005

¹⁵⁰ See the film "Nuestro petróleo y otros cuentos" for background on indigenous struggle against energy exploitation, pollution, and the contamination and threat of their lands.

Guaicaipuro should surely be honored and revered, the Venezuelan government's use of this historic figure reinforces the conquest narratives as a source for indigenous identity as opposed to depicting the current reality of the over 500,000 indigenous who live within Venezuela's borders. As the Venezuelan government continues to construct and reconstruct Bolivarianism, the government's relations with the indigenous communities who are the rightful inhabitants of the land will have to be pursued thoughtfully; for this, Bolivar is not a model.

The government's proactive approach towards combating poverty, while fraught with challenges, demonstrates a strong commitment to social services in the face of a dominant neoliberal model that has slashed social spending. As the political program in Venezuela becomes increasingly more anti-capitalist, identifying poverty as an inherent product of capitalism, the question becomes: Will Venezuela simply create a larger social welfare style safety net? Or might they try different approaches that work to abolish poverty through fully socialized services and the fulfillment of the 1999 Constitution's numerous Articles, which entitle Venezuelans to having all of their basic economic and human rights met?

Internationalism and Latin American Regionalism

Although Bolivarianism has largely been explained in nationalist terms, it also incorporates internationalist principles of regional cooperation, such as Bolivar's dream of a united Latin America. The Chávez government constantly refers to this dream, which is embodied in the ALBA (*Alternativas Bolivarianas para las Americas*) as well as *Telesur*, 'The Al-jazeera of Latin America.' In defiance to the

proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA in Spanish), a neo-liberal trade agreement backed by the US government under the Clinton and Bush administrations, Hugo Chávez proposed ALBA. Between 2001 and 2004, ALBA had been a poetic alternative to neo-liberalism, without any concrete proposals of how ALBA, a trade agreement sustained in genuine solidarity, would be implemented. Since then, it has developed into an actual political project, with institutions designed specifically to facilitate this integration. The integration that has taken place; economic, political, and cultural, has been advanced under the common struggle against US domination, and fostered a strong sense of solidarity and Latin American unity. The political and economic agreements signed by the Venezuelan and Cuban government are unique for two reasons; one, they are signed in the spirit of true cooperation, and two, they are based in the exchange of ‘human capital’—people.

On April 27th and 28th, 2005 Cuban and Venezuelan delegations met in Havana to draw up and approve a “Strategic Plan for the application of ALBA.” At this summit, 40 documents were signed. The Plan included:¹⁵¹

- The training of 40,000 Venezuelan doctors and 5,000 health technology specialists by Cuban doctors
- The training of 10,000 Venezuelan graduates of Mission Ribas (GED-equivalency) in Cuba, in the fields of Medicine and Nursing, (these students will live with Cuban families)
- Cuba will continue to support the *Barrio Adentro* Healthcare mission, through which up to 30,000 Cuban doctors and other healthcare workers are located throughout Venezuela

¹⁵¹ Venezuelan and Cuban Delegations, “Final Declaration from the First Cuba- Venezuela Meeting for the Application of the ALBA,” *Venezuelanalysis* [electronic journal], April 2005- [cited September 6 2006]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1433>

- In 2005, 100,000 Venezuelans with a variety of eye conditions will receive surgical treatment in Cuba.
- The plan also acknowledged over 15,000 Venezuelans who have traveled to Cuba for other medical procedures, and scholarships for University educations in Cuba, made available to Venezuelans.

Michael Fox, a freelance journalist formerly based in Caracas, has published a series of important articles clarifying ALBA. In the second article in the series of four, Fox writes:

Integration between Cuba and Venezuela has steadily increased...As a result, last year [2005], trade between the two countries reached \$1.2 billion. Venezuela currently sends 90,000 barrels of oil a day at preferential financing rates to the island, and is investing in the Cuban oil industry. In return, Venezuela has received support in its social and educational programs from the large “human capital” (Cuban doctors, and health and education professionals) that the island nation has built over the last half a century, and amidst a US-imposed economic blockade, which has forced the island nation to search for another road to development based on the resources at its disposal.

ALBA has advanced since then, with Nicaragua and Bolivia signing on as well as the creation of the *Banco del ALBA*; intended to be a counter-proposal to the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Inter-American Bank.¹⁵²

Conclusion: Socialism of the 21st Century

President Hugo Chávez first announced that Venezuela was following the path of “Socialism of the 21st Century” to a cheering crowd at the World Social Forum in Brazil in 2005. In the 1998 elections, Chávez represented a reformist “third-way” for a country that was particularly disillusioned with both social democracy and

¹⁵² Mark Weisbrot. “Latin America, the End of an Era” International Journal of Health Services 36: 4 (2006).

neoliberalism; however, the pressure from the political opposition sparked a subsequent radicalization that launched his movement towards revolutionary socialism. This process, is distinct to Venezuela and has not taken hold in other ‘pink tide countries’ in Latin America. (In most other “pink tide” countries in the region, left-leaning politicians must moderate their politics substantially once in office as well as negotiate with the traditional (elite) political class.) This opening in Venezuela has created space for Venezuela to re-invent itself, first through a process of building a Bolivarian Nation and now more recently, “Socialism of the 21st Century.”

While most of the world is being strangled by a neoliberal “development” model which shrinks the state by cutting social services, privatizing them, or in the case in which there weren’t any to begin with, encouraging the growth of (private) NGO’s as opposed to expanding state social programs, Venezuela is following an opposite trend. They are diverting billions of dollars in revenue from the state oil industry into educational, anti-poverty, and re-distributive social programs. These programs are often funded at a federal level but administered at a local level with grassroots participation. All of the Missions, although carrying a distinct focus, name, history, and goal, are interconnected, forming the foundation of the Bolivarian Revolution. It is not only the sum of each mission added together; it is the product of their integration that makes these social programs revolutionary.

Socialism of the 21st Century was described to me, by a Venezuelan friend who serves on the land committee for the municipality of Guaicaipuro. He said, “It is

not about absolute equality. For us, it is about social and economic development in which everyone has their basic needs met within the spirit of social justice.” As this process is underway, Venezuelans face many internal and external obstacles. In addition to the political opposition coming from the elite within Venezuela, as well as from the United States government, the Bolivarian movement has its own internal challenges to overcome. Wilpert notes the three main challenges as the patronage culture in the movement, complete dependence on Chávez, and “the top-down governance which undermines the creation of a participatory society.” While the civil-military relations in Venezuela reaffirm the top-down nature of the system, the community councils, Bolivarian circles, and citizen assemblies offer a genuine venue for political participation at a grassroots level.

As Bolivarianism—best summarized as “an emphasis on the importance of education, the creation of civilian-military unity, Latin American integration, social justice, and national sovereignty”—moves towards socialism the aforementioned obstacles continue to pose threats to this process.¹⁵³ When analyzing Hugo Chávez’s government and the Bolivarian Revolution it is important to trace the political and ideological developments that have shaped this dynamic and ever-changing process. Venezuela is a society in a process of rapid transformation; however, the first decade of the Chávez’s presidency could be seen as a process of moving from a reformist Bolivarianism to a Bolivarian “Socialism of the 21st Century. *Misión Madres del Barrio* was initiated in the “Socialist” phase of this development, and must be placed

¹⁵³ Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela*. England: Ashgate, 2001, p.16.

within this context in order to grasp how the program fits within the larger political project.

CHAPTER 3: **Misión Madres del Barrio**

Se ha considerado que el trabajo en el hogar le corresponde a las mujeres por naturaleza, por el hecho de ser féminas. Por esa razón, jamás ha sido reconocido y, mucho menos, remunerado. Pero el trabajo del hogar es tan valioso como cualquier otro...Tomando en cuenta que el trabajo del hogar debe ser retribuido, Madres del Barrio reconoce el valor de las labores que realizan las mujeres en el ámbito doméstico. La misión brinda atención integral a las mujeres y a las familias en situación de pobreza extrema, a fin de garantizarles acceso a sus derechos fundamentales.

Housework has been considered to be women's work by nature, for the fact that it is assumed to be feminine. For this reason, it has never been recognized and, much less remunerated. But, housework is as valuable as any other type of work. Taking into account that housework should be compensated rewarded Madres del Barrio recognizes the value of women's domestic labor. The mission brings integral attention to women and families in extreme poverty, by guaranteeing them access to their fundamental rights. (MMB website)

Introduction: Strategies in Combating the Feminization of Poverty

On March 8, 2001, President Hugo Chávez announced the creation of the Women's Development Bank, which would operate under the Ministry of Finance, and he named Nora Castañeda as the new President of the Bank (*BanMujer*). This bank, designed after the successes of the Grameen bank in Bangladesh, gives small low-interest loans, and training to collectives of women who can offer a proposal of how they will invest the loan to generate an income. Many of the women chosen to work within the Bank were socialists, feminists, and economists however; few had specific experience with micro financing. The employees hired to work with the Bank spent months in the attempt to set up an office space, to learn rapidly about micro-credit loans and to build a pioneering institution from scratch. One of the Bank's first proposals was the implementation of a program called *Misión Madres del*

Barrio, which would remunerate women for the work they do in their own homes. While Article 88 had been a huge advance in the legislated rights of women, it remained solely on paper, with no instruments or programs for its practical implementation.

In February 2006, with the help of the *Red de Usuarías y Aliadas del Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer* (Network of Users and Allies of the Women's Development Bank), a Global Women's Strike delegation comprised of over 70 women from around the world, visited with grassroots Venezuelan women; learning about the community work that they were engaged in. I participated in this delegation. We traveled to Los Teques, a metropolitan area 1 hour south of Caracas and met with community organizer Juanita Romero, also known as "*Madre*."

We visited health clinics, food kitchens, subsidized markets, schools, and a variety of organizing centers in which women were consistently the majority of the active participants. They were the ones doing the community work; and none of them were paid. Selma James, and other members of the Global Women's Strike asked what the implementation of Article 88 would mean to them. Most of them said that they would be able to leave their work in the informal market, a few joked that they would leave their husbands and all of the women stated that with a supplemental income they would be able to more fully dedicate themselves to the community projects in which they were involved. Some also mentioned that they would be more respected in their communities. These women's answers begged the question: when will Article 88 be implemented and how?

On February 6th, two days into this high-profile delegation, when we were touring a health clinic in La Pradera, along old train tracks on the outskirts of Los Teques, we were given the news of Article 88's partial implementation. Chávez announced the first social program in which women heads of households would receive an income in recognition of their work in the homes. The first 100,000 Venezuelan women would receive this 'pension' on the powerfully symbolic day of International Workers Day (May 1st). According to government statistics, another 90,000 women have begun receiving payments since then.

In direct response to Chávez's announcement of this program, the *Red Popular de los Altos Mirandinos* (Popular Network of the *Altos Mirandinos*) put forward a statement demanding input on how such a program should be implemented. In their "statement to our President Hugo Chávez from Housewives workers" they wrote:

In order to ensure that this economic recognition - which the women of Venezuela and the world have fought so hard for - is delivered directly to those entitled to it and doesn't stay in the pockets of bloodsucking bureaucrats who live off the politics business, and who discredit the government and corrupt any initiative that attempts to deepen the revolutionary process, we propose the following points:

1. We do not want the resources to pass through the town hall, the county hall, the parish or local councils, or other State institutions which divert or steal this money.
2. We do not want the parties to decide who shall be the beneficiaries of social programs because they use the Missions to buy votes.
3. We do not want the points of reference of grassroots organizations to be manipulated and displaced in order to impose on us civil servants and bureaucrats who know little about our reality.

4. Nor do we want the projects and initiatives to be stolen from community leaders in order to be presented by the councils or the county authorities as their own.

5. We do not want to be excluded with accusations that we are *escuálidos* [the term that refers to the pro-coup opposition] if we make any criticisms or point out something that isn't working that is the responsibility of a government institution or programme. Rather, we want to be respected as monitors of social expenditure and guardians of this Bolivarian revolution.

While the *Misión Madres del Barrio* has not achieved all of the demands listed above, it is the only social program in Venezuela that acknowledges and remunerates *amas de casas* under a framework that redefines housework as socio-productive labor. This chapter is dedicated to describing how the Mission has been conceptualized, and crafted. Therefore the following information is based largely on official government texts, websites, manuals, posters, and other materials about the Mission, as well as interviews with policy makers. Chapter Four will focus on how the Mission is working, from the perspectives of those who are participating in the Mission at the grassroots.

MMB has been criticized for not truly achieving the Revolutionary aims of Article 88 (or as being pure populism); it is nonetheless one of the important formulas of the Bolivarian Revolution which confronts poverty from the perspective and experience of women. Section I will investigate the legal and ideological basis of *MMB*, citing Constitutional Articles. Section II focuses on the process and phases of the Mission, as they have been envisioned. In Conclusion, I will re-examine the initial demands made by the Popular Network of AltoMirandinos, to evaluate whether

the program was designed in a way that was responsive to the demands of the popular networks.

I: Legal and Ideological Basis

Like many of the social programs and organic laws in Venezuela, *Misión Madres del Barrio* has a strong legal basis in the Bolivarian Constitution of Venezuela. The Constitutional Assembly, which convened for months to compose and debate different articles of the Constitution produced what Chávez and many of his supporters refer to as the *Magna Carta*. The Bolivarian Constitution, based on principles of equity, solidarity, and social justice, has made significant legal advances in the social, economic, political, and civil rights of Venezuelans. While the constitution is extraordinarily progressive, much of its contents remain on paper without any viable mechanisms for implementation or enforcement. For this reason, Nora Castañeda refers to the Constitution as “the platform for struggle;” meaning that it provides a framework for what to organize around and work towards. The official website of *MMB* notes that Articles 75, 76, 86, and 88 form the foundation and inspiration behind the program. The Articles are so revealing in of themselves, as to the ideology and vision behind the Bolivarian Revolution and *Misión Madres del Barrio* that I am going to quote each Article at length.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ministerio de Comunicación e Información del Gobierno Bolivariano (Venezuela), Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (non-official translation.) Caracas: Ministerio de Comunicación e Información del Gobierno Bolivariano, 1999.

Artículo 75. *El Estado protegerá a las familias como asociación natural de la sociedad y como el espacio fundamental para el desarrollo integral de las personas. Las relaciones familiares se basan en la igualdad de derechos y deberes, la solidaridad, el esfuerzo común, la comprensión mutua y el respeto recíproco entre sus integrantes. El Estado garantizará protección a la madre, al padre o a quienes ejerzan la jefatura de la familia...*

Artículo 76. *La maternidad y la paternidad son protegidas integralmente, sea cual fuere el estado civil de la madre o del padre...El Estado garantizará asistencia y protección integral a la maternidad, en general a partir del momento de la concepción, durante el embarazo, el parto y el puerperio, y asegurará servicios de planificación familiar integral basados en valores éticos y científicos... El padre y la madre tienen el deber compartido e irrenunciable de criar, formar, educar, mantener y asistir a sus hijos e hijas, y éstos tienen el deber de asistirlos cuando aquél o aquella no puedan hacerlo por sí mismos...*

Artículo 86. *Toda persona tiene derecho a la seguridad social como servicio público de carácter no lucrativo, que garantice la salud y asegure protección en contingencias de maternidad, paternidad, enfermedades, invalidez, enfermedades catastróficas, discapacidad, necesidades especiales, riesgos laborales, pérdida de empleo, desempleo, vejez, viudedad, orfandad, vivienda, cargas derivadas de la vida familiar y cualquier otra circunstancia de previsión social. El Estado tiene la obligación de asegurar la efectividad de este derecho, creando un sistema de seguridad...*

Article 75. The State shall protect families as a natural association in society, and as the fundamental space for the overall development of persons. Family relationships are based on equality of rights and duties, solidarity, common effort, mutual understanding and reciprocal respect among family members. The State guarantees protection to the mother, father or other person acting as head of a household...

Article 76. Motherhood and Fatherhood are fully protected, whatever the marital status of the mother and father....The State guarantees overall assistance and protection for motherhood, in general, from the moment of conception, through pregnancy, delivery, and the puerperal period, and guarantees full family planning services based on ethical and scientific values...The father and the mother have the shared and inescapable obligation of raising, training, educating, maintaining, and caring for their children, and the latter have the duty to provide care when the former are unable to do so by themselves...

Article 86. All persons are entitled to Social Security as a nonprofit public service to guarantee health and protection in contingencies of maternity, fatherhood, illness, invalidity, catastrophic illness, disability, special needs, occupational risks, loss of employment, unemployment, old age, widowhood, loss of parents, housing, burdens deriving from family life, and any other social welfare circumstances. The State has the obligation and responsibility of ensuring the efficacy of this right, creating a Universal and complete Social Security system...

Misión Madres del Barrio is one of the many social programs that is working to implement some of the aims set out by the Bolivarian Constitution, primarily in the protection of families through the extension of social security to housewives, parents, and eventually all Venezuelans. The clauses that especially include housewives, and mothers come out of a clear analysis of how sexism and capitalism work together to oppress poor women and mothers.

The official website for *MMB* clearly affirms this analysis. Under the heading; “Women, doubly exploited” the site states:

Si las mujeres pobres han heredado a través de siglos una doble exclusión: como pobres y como mujeres. En 40 años de democracia representativa las mujeres venezolanas, sobre todo las de más bajos recursos, han padecido las humillaciones de una sociedad machista y clasista que las excluyó del disfrute de todos sus derechos fundamentales. (MMB website)

For centuries, poor women have inherited a double exclusion: as poor people, and as women. In 40 years of representative democracy Venezuelan women, above all those with a low-income, have withstood the humiliations of a sexist and classist society that excludes them from enjoying all of their fundamental rights.

It is within this context that *MMB* functions. While there are numerous poverty-reduction social missions within the Bolivarian Revolution, *MMB* is the only one which specifically responds to women. The objectives of this mission fall into different categories, according to the website. The specific objectives are to “guarantee a permanent social security for mothers”, include mothers in extreme poverty in socio-political activities, encourage gender equity, provide primary

attention, and integrate poor mothers into the other social missions.¹⁵⁵ The general goals include, overcoming extreme poverty through the collaboration of community organizations and the government (website). The strategic objective however, clearly states that the Mission is to be a part of “The construction of a new social structure that advances the consolidation of the socialist state.”

The *MMB* Website also lists the four characteristics necessary for countering extreme poverty. These four characteristics are, 1) *Progresividad* 2) Inter-institutional cooperation, 3) A community-government co-responsibility, and 4) gender equity.¹⁵⁶ Within these categories; there is a strong commitment to work toward all forms of equity as well as an acknowledgement that wealth has been made from the exploitation of the poor so that everyone must pay “a large social debt that we owe to the most excluded populations.” This framework also acknowledges the deep-rooted structural aspects and effects of poverty and creates a vision of inter-institutional support from the government as well as popular participation on behalf of communities to take a multi-faceted approach to eradicating extreme poverty. *MMB* is a pro-active approach to addressing the feminization of poverty. The Mission is conceived under a framework that acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the struggle for gender equity and the abolition of poverty.

This analysis can clearly be tied to the factors, outlined in Chapter One that forced housework into the national debate about poverty reduction during economic crisis. *MMB* is a social program that has been developed within this framework, and

¹⁵⁵ Social Security, within this context, is explained in Article 86 of the Bolivarian Constitution.

¹⁵⁶ *MMB* Official Website:

is therefore part of a poverty-reduction strategy stemming from an acknowledgement of housework. There is very little within the language, structure, or design of the Mission that describes the program as compensating women for housework; however the program does both remunerate poor mothers and emphasize the importance of housework.

MMB does not take the radical approach of Article 88, which entitles all *amas de casas* to social security, it is one of the many anti-poverty social missions that are the core of the Bolivarian project in Venezuela. Since *MMB* has been instituted in a time of numerous revolutionary anti-poverty social programs, it is challenging to isolate this mission from the broader context in order to judge its effectiveness in terms of poverty reduction. Its further goals of empowerment are also not easily measured and therefore my focus remain on the vision, procedures, and practices of the Mission; however, women's sense of empowerment comes through in the testimonies in the following Chapter.

II: Process and Phases of the *MMB*

The strategy for accomplishing these goals is a process of co-governing with the committees and the municipal governments throughout the Four phases of the mission. These are; 1) the inclusion of mothers, 2) the organization of popular power, 3) integrated primary care and 4) socio-productive inclusion.

Misión Madres del Barrio utilizes pre-existing institutions and organizations of popular power, such as land committees, community councils, citizens assemblies,

network of users of the women's development bank or points of *encuentro* from *Inamujer*, to include some of the most disenfranchised people in Venezuelan societies; mothers in extreme poverty. Municipal coordinators of the Mission connect with pre-existing organizations of popular power to share information about how the Mission can be initiated. From there, the work is to identify who would qualify for the payment, and begin forming a committee. The Municipal coordinators visit the houses of those who have been selected from their own communities, interviewing the women and providing information and resources about forming a *Comité de Madres del Barrio (CMB)*.

In order to form a committee of *MMB*, women and community members form with a minimum of ten people, and a maximum of fifty. The committee must group together names, signatures and *cedulas* (id #s) and present themselves to the community assemblies or community councils. Two people are elected to serve as the principal and alternate spokespeople in the areas of education, health, nutrition, and culture of which they will serve this role on a rotating basis for terms of three to six months. The committee must also establish a structure for meetings, work and planning sessions as well as evaluations. A committee is considered official only after they have registered with the municipal coordinator of the *Misión* and had their paper work approved and returned.

The Committees are often comprised of an equal number of beneficiaries of *Misión Madres del Barrio* and women who are already involved in other community councils. This helps to truly make this an integrated mission which more easily

connects with health and education resources within the community.

There are three main qualifications for receiving the stipend. 1) Women who do housework, 2) they have children, elders, or adults with disabilities under their care, and 3) they have either no income or an income that falls below the basic “food basket” minimal cost of living. While many mothers in Venezuela fit this description, the Mission lays out other characteristics for the prioritization of some women. Some of these qualities are: if a woman is breastfeeding, if someone under her care is suffering from a chronic or serious illness, if the mother is illiterate or has not finished primary school, if she, or someone she cares for has a disability, if she has school-age children who do not attend school if she or someone under her care is incarcerated, if her family does not eat two meals a day, if she has more than four children, or if she is living in an “inadequate living situation.” These qualifications assure that the most vulnerable mothers in the community are prioritized through the selection process.

Each person within the Committee of *Madres del Barrio (CMB)* must also sign and agree to the following commitments. They must identify and propose women and families who are truly in the greatest need in the community and who are not already receiving cash assistance from any other mission. They must commit to being honest, and distribute the payment to the recipients, maintaining signed receipts of the stipend. They must also commit to fairness by avoiding favoritism in terms of friendship, family relations or political affiliations. (According to official *MMB* paperwork.)

The process of selecting women is done quite differently than just simply applying for public assistance. Since the *CMBs* are so localized most people in the community have a general sense of who is struggling and they nominate those women. After a woman had been nominated, she is interviewed. The committee then judges whether that woman meets the qualifications and if, beyond that she is especially vulnerable due to the above-mentioned characteristics for prioritization of the mission. While women can self-nominate, or make contact with the Mission coordinators, there is outreach done to women in need, as opposed to women having to search out the information and apply at some distant office. There are also a limited number of grants available, and each committee is then informed about the number that they will be allotted (based on the census.) So, in large and poor communities this funding is more competitive than in smaller poor communities.

Once the committee is formed and recognized and the women are selected, it may take months before they actually start receiving cash. One of the obvious reasons for this bureaucracy but another reason is in how the mission is actually structured. Funding for new Missions arrive with the fiscal year, so as women form committees; they will have to be preparing for the following quarter. If they miss this deadline, they will have to try again three months later. There are four classes each year, and they are numbered as battalions. This always slows down the process of the delivery of goods, and trainings in self-organized communities. This model, combined with the bureaucracy and inexperience of many of the municipal coordinators, and committee participants mean that there are numerous communities

in which there is a fully formed committee, with women selected but no payments have been made. For the communities that have formed committees, and begun to receive payments this is only the first phase of the mission.

The second phase is organization and popular power, in which the participants in the Mission take courses, workshops and training in the *Escuela Sociopolitica*, within the Mission. The aims of this school are to not only pay women for the work that they do, but also to politicize that payment so that it is not understood as charity. This is done through a series of workshops and classes on gender, capitalism, and socialism. I was fortunate to attend one of these classes, and the following information comes from the power-point presentation and notes taken in this class. The emphasis of this course is to break down the distinctions between capitalism and socialism, placing a special emphasis on women's roles within each system. In this sense, women discuss the (false) distinction between "productive" and "reproductive" labor, and how the housework that they do is simply not considered valuable (because it does not produce a commodity) under a capitalist system. One of the stated aims of the first workshop is to "...discuss what the mothers consider to be wealth and poverty, and to construct these concepts with them in order to make a better analysis about "*moneda social*" and other experiences."

The second workshop of the Socio-Political school within the *Misión Madres del Barrio* was focused on "Why socio-productive initiatives should be favored in the building of Socialism." The first slide gave a definition of poverty stating "poverty is a social condition generated by the economic dynamics of capitalism..." The

following slide offers a simple and broad definition of socio-productive inclusion: “one of the political strategies of the National State in the abolition of poverty.” The workshop then proceeds to discuss the values and practices of socialism, comparing them to capitalist ones. For example, socialism is associated with solidarity, collective benefit, social ends for production, and collective ownership whereas capitalism is selfish, for individual gain, production focused for an exchange value (as opposed to use value) and private ownership of the means of production.

The final part of the workshop is dedicated to coming up with general conclusions, such as;

We conceive socio-productive inclusion of women as a part of their integral liberation, we believe that the paths towards economic independence for women carry a great burden to achieve the empowerment of women, also it is important to say that we do not see socio-productive inclusion as a mechanical fact that to start a women’s economic project will immediately change their consciousness, it will be a dialectic process. For this reason, socio-productive inclusion will be accompanied by socio-political work leading to a change from values of selfishness for those of solidarity, for this workshop will reflect on how we see socio-productive inclusion as a strategic objective in a new consciousness for Venezuelan women.

The *Escuela Sociopolitica* plays an essential role within this mission, because it becomes the venue in which the ideological aims merge with the practices. This is to say that the school, beyond many of the other structures of this Mission, is what makes *Misión Madres del Barrio* very different from many other cash assistance programs.

The third phase of the Mission is one of basic primary care. This is where women from within *MMB* are incorporated into the education, health, and cultural missions. At this point, both the basic cash grant and the politicizing process of the

Escuela Sociopolitica as well as and their own lived experience have allowed many women to develop a political analysis in which they see the importance of having access to the services and goods necessary to live a dignified life. Many women are encouraged to join one of the educational missions. Learning to read and write, as well as becoming proficient in math and accounting are essential for women who will be forming cooperatives and running businesses.

While aspects of this mission acknowledge motherwork, the fourth phase demonstrated that the ultimate objective of this mission is to encourage women into “Socio-productive projects.” This phase would encourage women to join into cooperatives and receive credits and training from either the Women’s Development Bank or Mission Vuelvan Caras. This reveals a strong contradiction in the ideology of the Mission; on the one hand, it recognizes housework as socio-productive, and on the other hand, its progression towards working in a cooperative demonstrates otherwise.¹⁵⁷ Since *Misión Madres del Barrio* is a temporary program, (despite the demands of the *Red de Usarias of the Women’s Development Bank*) this progression makes sense. It is also important to acknowledge that it would be unfair to equate the progression with women being forced into employment; because in most cases they will not be “employed” but more likely will be collectively-employed in a self-managed cooperative.

I mostly make this argument based on the testimonies presented in the numerous interviews that I conducted while doing field research in Venezuela. Most

¹⁵⁷ The productive activities are all those that permit the attainment of the basic necessities.

of the women that I talked to were very excited about this part of the mission where they would choose a skill to learn in order to form a cooperative. The way that these socio-productive projects are explained however; also shows a strong commitment to a more humane and dignified workplace environment, that one might imagine would be more conducive to mothers.

[socio-productive] inclusion encourages the creation and consolidation of horizontal solidarity economy initiatives that favor endogenous development, that favors the protection of the environment, that imply individual and communitarian growth and that work in accordance with the strategic channels of the development of the nation.

The characteristics of the socio-productive projects are intended to embody a change in values from a capitalist system to a socialist system, in which there is potential for housework and other social work to be re-envisioned. According to the workshop given through the *Escuela Socio-politica* the projects must be based on relations of “solidarity, equity, cooperation, mutual aid, justice, and inter-relation with the community.” The aims of these projects extend far beyond economic independence of women and they attempt to “impede the exploitation of women by men and the commodification of human relations” as well as building self-confidence and self-development of individual and collective skills. Ultimately, these projects encourage a shift from a capitalist paradigm, which places emphasis on exchange value to a socialist paradigm that places value on usefulness. This paradigm shift is essential in the transformation of housework.

Ironically, this ideological and cultural shift creates an opening for housework to be acknowledged and valued even though; this stage within *MMB* clearly

encourages women to participate in cooperative small-scale enterprises, as opposed to being fulltime houseworkers. However; socio-productive projects are often times run out of homes, and are more complementary to mother work than seeking employment in a factory, for example. Many of the women who participate in this Mission note that the training, and resources for creating socio-productive projects is the part of the Mission that they enjoy most. Some of the stories of grassroots Venezuelan women are shared in the following Chapter.

There are also exceptions within the movement towards socio-productive projects. Although the grants last for six months, or potentially one year if the need is great, women can always request an extension from their Committee of Madres del Barrio, if they have extenuating circumstances. For example, exceptions are often made for mothers who have disabilities that prevent them from doing paid work or if they care for people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

Funding

The funding for *MMB* comes from two main sources. One is PALMVEN, the wing of PDVSA (the National Venezuelan Oil Company) that funds social missions, and the other is directly from community councils. As of 2007, the current budget is 373,300,000 VB F (Over 1,736,000,000 \$USD); 73.7% is funded by PALMVEN while the community councils fund the rest.¹⁵⁸ Within *MMB*, a Special Solidarity Fund has been created with the purpose of funding socio-productive projects. The payments to the beneficiaries within the Mission are distributed through the

¹⁵⁸ *MMB* Website

Venezuelan Institute for Social Security (IVSS) and the Mission itself is a “cross-ministerial program” involving the Ministries of Popular Power for Participation and Social Protection, as well as the Ministries of Health, Education & Sports, Tourism, Popular Economy, Food, Culture, Housing, Social Security and Work.¹⁵⁹

The Women’s Development Bank and the Special Solidarity Fund within the *MMB* will fund these cooperative projects in the areas of tourism, agriculture and livestock, textiles, industrial, services, and artisanry. (p.2 info sheet)¹⁶⁰ The group of women, (men can be included, but it must be a majority of women) will present their project directly to the *CMB*. In their proposal they must include; general information about the project such as who is involved, what they will produce, etc...; what the objectives are; what community needs will be satisfied through the production of the goods or services; who will be their clients and whether trainings will be required. The loans will be between 25.000-35.000 VB Fuertes (11,628-16,280 \$USD), which are intended to go towards buying equipment, training and technical assistance, and investment in start-up costs for the projects.

The newly formed cooperative must provide a proposed budget, a work plan which includes a section on labor distribution and projected costs for basic materials, space and training. This packet should also include a timeline for the project. The loans are at 0% interest, with a 6-month grace period from the last installment before the process of repayment begins. The cooperatives are given up to 60-months, past

¹⁵⁹ Mather, Steven, “Chávez Highlights Two of Venezuela’s Social Programs,” *Venezuelanalysis* [electronic journal], August 12, 2006- [cited March 4 2007]; available from <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/1883>

¹⁶⁰ They will not fund liquor stores, pawnshops, casinos, video and cd rental stores, (*Misión Madres del Barrio* paperwork) etc...

the 6-month grace period to pay back these loans. The ideology around these loans (unlike loans made by for profit banks) is that women are to succeed in their projects. As Nora Castañeda says, “A failure for any of these women...is one more hit to the many strikes women have had to take in their lives.” She added that “a failure for them is our failure.”¹⁶¹ As of 2007, 190,000 women were reported to be receiving benefits through *MMB* with the final goal of 2,000, 000 women being incorporated into the Mission.¹⁶²

Political Participation

Political participation, *protagonismo* and popular power are fundamental in *Misión Madres del Barrio* and Bolivarian Venezuela.¹⁶³ The 1999 Constitution proclaims that Venezuela is both a representative, and a participatory democracy as well.¹⁶⁴ Many different structures have been formed at grassroots levels to carry out numerous functions within the society. One of the original models for democratic participation and *protagonismo* were the *ciclos bolivarianos*, which were active during the 2002 coup, and served the role of mobilizing people at a grassroots level to

¹⁶¹ BanMujer, 2007, p.2

¹⁶² Ibid,

¹⁶³ Popular power or *poder popular* is a phrase that resonates with social movements throughout Latin America. The term implies autonomy from governments and an assembly or council style of governance that is often attributed to more “indigenous,” less hierarchical and more participatory and “bottom-up” forms of governance. This is a radically different model from the Cuban Communities to Defend the Revolution (CDRs), which were formed top-down and were created as instruments of the Cuban State. Popular power, as described by indigenous movements of southern Mexico, must maintain autonomy from Governments. The Venezuelan model is particularly interesting because the government is encouraging this type of governance, despite the fact that *poder popular* implies autonomy and perhaps even resistance to the government. As these institutions and organizations develop, it will be fascinating to see their relationship with the State. The fact that the Venezuelan government claims to support this type of popular organization makes the Bolivarian process unique from the behavior of almost all other governments.

¹⁶⁴ *Ministerio de Comunicación e Información del Gobierno Bolivariano, 1999.*

learn about the new constitution and provide an organized venue for popular power. Following the formation of *circulos bolivarianos*, communities self-organized into Local Public Planning Councils (CLPP).

In many communities, committees have been formed around specific topics such as land, education, water, and health. These committees are formed at a grassroots level and they work directly in partnership with the local governments to see that the Missions are implemented properly and that services are being administered fairly. These committees can also demand social audits, making government financing and accounting records public, upon request. Many of these committees would be incorporated into Citizens Assemblies, which serve as the broadest form of organization for popular power, and include committees, the social missions, cultural activities and they are the general spaces for communities to come together to get information, make decisions, file grievances, or initiate specific projects.

While I had intended on designing a flow chart that could break down the different organizations of popular power, and their relationships to government entities, it is nearly impossible to do so. Organizations of popular power in Venezuela, although they work closely with a variety of government entities, are by and large autonomous self-organized groups whose role within decision-making is not clearly institutionalized and often times remains unclear and varied. In other words, a community council could potentially be the most relevant form of governance in a particular community insofar as they are the main decision-making

body and distributor of government resources. While this may be the case, due to their successful organizing, there is currently ambiguity on how to institute the community councils' power. Therefore, while there are cases of more autonomous organizations for popular power, some of which are even adversarial to the government, most community councils are symbolic and offer opportunities for individual and collective empowerment for those who participate.

In April 2006, a new law, which laid out the structure for yet a new form of popular organization was passed. This new structure is the community council in which communities would bring all of the social missions, committees, and assemblies into the structure of the community councils, which receive direct funding from the national government and make decisions which are legally binding and trump those decisions made by mayors and municipal governments. The community councils have been growing throughout Venezuela with varied degrees of success and functionality. As of 2007, 30% of Federal funds that had previously gone to state and municipal governments were going directly to community councils.

The December 2007 Reform- which offered a packaged-deal of legal changes of over 69 formal laws, including the extension of Chávez's presidential term, strengthening the power of community councils, and "instituting socialism" failed to win electoral approval, delaying the formation of community councils. This defeat hampered the process of instituting the community councils deeper into the legal structures of the country. While campaigning for the Reforms, Chávez advanced the formation of the PSUV (*Partido Socialista Unida de Venezuela*) as he also

encouraged people to form community councils. The process of forming community councils has therefore worked both to establish its autonomy (in some cases) from municipal governments and also from the *PSUV*. In some communities, community councils are organs of the *PSUV*, in some they are very split, and in others there is firm autonomy from both the government and the party. Meanwhile, not all communities have formed community councils.

The particular point in time in which I went to do field research—following the defeat of the Reform—was a shaky period for the organization of popular power and many community councils were in the process of forming, dissolving, splitting, or establishing themselves. I visited numerous communities where the formation of Committees' of *Misión Madres del Barrio* had been stagnant due to the need to establish community councils (which the mission would then operate through), or because so many of the women who had been involved in the formation of *CMBs* had been campaigning in favor of the Referendum in order to work to build the *PSUV*. In the communities where the community councils were fractured and ineffectual many *CMBs* were at a standstill, paralyzed from moving forward due to the difficulties of the formation of the *Consejos Comunales*.

These avenues for popular power, with all of their problems, are examples of numerous explorations of the construction of participatory democracy in Venezuela. While these organizations offer some examples of a genuine direct and participatory democracy, they also offer opportunities for individual and collective empowerment, which is both symbolic and substantial in the construction of popular power. Despite

many of these mechanisms, the patronage culture, corruption and personality cult around Chávez remain as obstacles to true popular power. *Misión Madres del Barrio* has been envisioned as another program that will promote co-*pueblo*-government management and depends on the voluntary and unpaid participation of grassroots people to work in cooperation with the government to see that the aims of the mission are met.

Conclusion: Acknowledgement is not Remuneration

Misión Madres del Barrio is not an implementation of Article 88. As opposed to paying houseworkers for work done in the home, it is a social program designed to combat extreme poverty by providing cash assistance, political education, training and financing to female heads of households in conditions of extreme poverty. This mission has strayed substantially from the ideology of the wages for housework campaign and is a product of the poverty reduction strategies that emerged in the midst of the debt crisis. *Misión Madres del Barrio* acknowledges the added value that housewife workers produce through their labor and it characterizes that work in anti-capitalist terms, looking beyond pure exchange value and acknowledging housework as socio-productive.

Misión Madres del Barrio falls short of the demands presented by the *Red Popular de los Altomirandinos*. While, as the women demanded, most of the funding comes directly through community councils, instead of municipal and local governments; there are still issues of in-fighting, corruption, and inexperience that create real obstacles in the mission receiving the institutional support necessary for it

to achieve the goals that it states. While the committees have legal power to select beneficiaries and advance the mission through the phases, local communities are still left to wait on the municipal coordinators and bureaucrats before significant movement can be made.

CHAPTER 4: *The Voices of Madres del Barrio*

Introduction: Methodology

Government documents about *Misión Madres del Barrio* provide a helpful overview of how the program has been envisioned; the women who receive the benefits and work within the committees provide essential insights as to how *MMB* actually functions. The following chapter is based on a series of interviews that I conducted in Venezuela between February 13-March 20, 2008. Of the 47 women that I interviewed, 35 were actual beneficiaries of the *MMB*, either selected to receive or already receiving payment. The rest of the women were *Cordinadoras*, *Promotoras* or otherwise involved in the committees, but not recipients of the payment.¹⁶⁵

The locations in which this research was conducted varied greatly from small, semi-rural communities, to large, poor barrios. Despite some differences, all of the locales are within the 70 prioritized municipalities for the Mission, which are the areas in which extreme poverty is the highest. All of the communities are in or around the capital city of Caracas (Federal District) or, the urban center of Los Teques, two hours southwest of Caracas in the state of Miranda. Venezuela is a large country, with varied geography and cultures. The testimonies presented here offer insight into how the program is being applied in and around the northern urban centers, which is the most populated region of the country.

¹⁶⁵ I also conducted numerous more informal interviews with people regarding a variety of different work within their community councils, and within the revolution. The following interviews were all conducted in Spanish and translated by me. See Appendix 2 for an interview key.

Los Teques, which is part of the Guaicaipuro Municipality, covers a broad region in the Northern state of Miranda. Los Teques includes an urban center with a mid-sized University, and numerous informal housing settlements or “barrios” along hillsides. Some of these communities are very urban while others are built along mountainsides that have remained forested or where agricultural production remains. Many of the residents of Los Teques commute to Caracas for work, and since the new metro line was constructed between Los Teques and Caracas, Los Teques is becoming more of a “bedroom” city for those who have found work in the capitol. The communities that I visited were some of the poorest barrios, precariously placed along hillsides, where transportation was limited, if it existed at all and while many residents scrambled to find a source of income, most residents did not have a regular wage. The residents of these barrios are the working poor of Venezuela; some hold jobs with wages, but many work in the informal sector bringing home irregular and inconsistent incomes, if any at all.

The interviews were conducted in three different contexts. The first group were interviewed mostly in their homes, during a tour of eleven different communities with the Urban Land Committee of the Municipality of Guaicaipuro. I chose to work with the Urban Land Committee, because they had been the core authors of the statement to President Hugo Chávez, after *Misión Madres del Barrio* had been announced. After interviewing over a dozen women, it became clear that much of the money destined for houseworkers in extreme poverty was being stolen, and not a single woman in the municipality had received benefits. Government

officials that I met with assured me that the funds were on their way and that they were simply being held up in government channels.

The second group were interviewed during a gender-training workshop that I attended, which is part of the Mission Madres del Barrio socio-political course. This brought women from the western barrios of Caracas and provided an opportunity to speak at length with women who are receiving benefits. The third group of women were interviewed at the March 8th, International Women's Day March. Over 300 "Mothers" from all over Venezuela had a visible and enthusiastic presence during the official event. During the march I asked women to explain how the mission was working, how they viewed the payment and their work, whether the payment covered basic costs of living, and what their impressions were of the failures and successes of the Mission.

The different contexts for the interviews demonstrated how important factors such as how I was introduced and the settings of the interviews also played a role in the type of information that women shared. For example, throughout my time in Los Teques, I traveled to numerous small barrios with the Urban Land Committee. We slept on people's floors, ate simple meals (two a day, if we were lucky) of beans and *arepas*, and spent most of the day on foot—in the sun—in order to get to distant locations where vehicles could not reach. Living and working alongside many members of the Urban Land Committee helped me to gain more trust and in depth experience of their work and their lives. When they would introduce me to communities they would announce that I was an "*amiga internacional*" doing my

thesis work on the Mission Madres del Barrio. This introduction communicated a certain level of trust between me and members of the Land Committee and especially with *Madre*, who is well-respected throughout the communities that we visited.

While all of the interviews that I conducted provided valuable insights, the first group of women that I interviewed were in their own homes and were choosing to meet with me because I had been introduced as an ally by a woman that they trust and respect.

These interviews were, in general, more in depth, honest, and complex.

The gender training workshop was being led by two close friends, (from Mexico and Guatemala) who had invited me to take part in their program. I participated in the series of exercises and workshops, allowing myself to fully engage with the role-plays and discussions that followed the presentations. The climate of sharing our different experiences from our respective countries and meeting women within a framework that was not purely based on academic research aided in breaking down some barriers. Despite experiences in building solidarity through the training, the structure of the workshops did not allow for much private time or space for in-depth interviews. Most interviews took place during fifteen-minute breaks, after women had been sitting and listening for hours. They took place in the hallway, the bathroom, and the classroom, where the workshop was held. Often times there would be an “audience” or more than one woman would be speaking to me at a time. Most of the women were interested in me as well, so the interviews normally included questions where women would ask me what it was like “in my country.” Shyness was seldom a barrier to sharing for many of the Venezuelan women, more often than

not, they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to speak as the authorities on their own experiences and to make sure that I knew (especially as a *gringa*) how much they love their President.

My experiences interviewing women during the International Women's Day march was radically different. I went to the march alone, armed with a digital recorder, a notebook and a pen. My presence there caused numerous officials to ask if I was Press. When I stated that I was a student doing research for my thesis, many people's attitudes changed towards me and officials and the "mothers" were eager to introduce me to people that they identified as knowledgeable about the mission. While I was led to the Coordinator for the Federal District of Caracas as well as the National Coordinator of the Socio-productive projects, I wanted to speak to grassroots beneficiaries as well, so I simply walked up to women, introduced myself as a student from the United States, and asked if I could interview them about their experience with the Mission. While no one declined, a number of women were not especially comfortable with my digital recorder and a few women asked me what I thought of my government before they would agree to an interview. Many of these interviews were short, it is almost impossible to hear the recording (due to the background noises of chanting, music, and traffic on the streets of Caracas), and way more general. As an unaccompanied *gringa*, who was asking to interview women on the streets, many of the "mothers" felt it more important to communicate their general support for the process and contempt towards the policies of the Bush Administration than to give many details of their personal experiences with the Mission.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first, relays information about how women learned about the mission, became involved, and were selected. The findings are fairly consistent with the processes described in Chapter 3. The second section addresses what women's experiences with the Mission have been, whether the payment covers basic costs, how they see their work, this payment, and the successes and failures of the Mission. While this chapter provides much needed testimony from the grassroots about how this Mission is actually working- more in depth studies will be needed as this program continues to develop, and the Community Councils become more established.

I: Initiating the Mission

Most of the women that I interviewed who participated in *Misión Madres del Barrio* knew the basic aims, process and functions of the Mission.¹⁶⁶ When I asked women to loosely explain what *MMB* was, most of them said that this was a mission to support *amas de casas* in extreme poverty so that they may become involved in socio-productive projects and help build a socialist society. Hilda said “The fundamental point of the mission is to rescue the families that were excluded [from access to services and goods] in extreme poverty for the forty years before Chávez.”¹⁶⁷ Most women were also well aware of the phases of the mission, even if their experiences contradicted that structure. When I asked women how they came to know about the mission, the majority said “from President Chávez” or “*el*

¹⁶⁶ The following chapter will compare *MMB* with the United States but it should be mentioned that a great deal of the work in Welfare Rights organizing is looking up confusing and inaccessible laws to help inform recipients of their rights as well as proactively conducting Know Your rights workshops.

¹⁶⁷ Hilda. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

commandante.” These responses also demonstrate that while I interviewed many women about *MMB*, the lines between the specific social program and their general feelings on the political process and Chávez were difficult to separate.

The love that all of the women that I interviewed expressed for President Chávez was impressive. “Never before has any president ever worked to really help the poor” a number of women said. Many women expressed love and admiration for their President and felt hopeful that a brighter future lay ahead. Leonor said, “Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias, with the rage that he has, I adore him, he is bringing us forward, to have a better future.”¹⁶⁸ Clementina, a woman of Colombian nationality who has lived in Venezuela for over thirty years said that when Chávez became president he granted her and hundreds of thousands of other Colombians automatic and free citizenship; if it weren’t for that, she would be unable to be a beneficiary of the social programs, independent of need.

Alicia runs a Mercal (subsidized food market) out of her home and when she first heard Chávez mention *Misión Madres del Barrio*, she used her strategic position to tell community members about the Mission. Selling subsidized rice, corn flour, oil, milk, and toilet paper from behind metal bars on the side of her house, she called for people interested in joining in the committee to go to the Citizens’ Assembly meeting and from there a committee was formed. Alicia, reaffirming the role that community organizers are playing within this process, noted “without this

¹⁶⁸ Leonor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

government it would be impossible to do all that *we* are doing.”¹⁶⁹ This statement demonstrates the *protagonismo* that characterizes the participatory aspects of the political process in Venezuela. This *protagonismo* is essential within the design of *MMB*, which depends on cooperation between the government and communities.

After hearing President Chávez mention the Mission on his TV show *Aló Presidente*, Mercedes, took it upon herself to organize a committee to bring the mission to Aguas Frias (her community). Mercedes is the mother of nine children, and she has eleven grandchildren. She is active in her community council, and felt that she was already working on the *MMB* Committee, before it was formed. She described her years of visiting with people in her community, making sure there was enough food to go around, taking in children, and being a(n) [unpaid] “social worker.” Under Chávez, her work has accelerated. She is active in nearly every Mission and when *Misión Madres del Barrio* was formed, she did her normal rounds, visiting with those in the greatest need and encouraging them to attend a Citizen’s Assembly meeting to form a committee of the mission. They formed a committee of twenty people. Eighteen women were chosen to receive the benefits by the committee. Over half of the women on the committee are beneficiaries.

While many women heard about the Mission directly from Hugo Chávez, *promotoras*, like Mercedes played an essential role in spreading the word about forming committees. In Los Teques, a number of women reported hearing about the mission directly from Juanita Romero “*Madre*,” who works with the *Red Popular de*

¹⁶⁹ Alicia. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 24 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

los AltoMirandinos, the Urban Land Committees, and just about every other part of the Revolutionary process.

In the two weeks that I lived with *Madre*, I was astonished how after a full day's work in the office or the field, and before returning to numerous household chores that awaited, she continued to work as she trekked past sewage into the lower section of the barrio to where she lives. The twenty-five-minute walk (after two buses) was filled with questions and answers about when meetings will be, who to get in touch with about getting loans, and a million other things. It is women like her that have brought *MMB* into communities. They work tirelessly, and for free to make sure that communities are taking advantage of the numerous opportunities made available under the current Venezuelan system. In all of the interviews that I conducted, not one person mentioned that anyone from the government showed up, without first being contacted and invited in by a self-organized group or committee.

One of the women who *Madre* informed about the Mission was Leonor, spokesperson for communications within the Community Council of Romulo Gallegos (*parte abajo*). She helped form the committee in her community and accompanied the municipal coordinators of the Mission to join in doing home visits. The Coordinators conduct initial surveys of each woman selected by the committee and also inform a community how many beneficiaries they can choose, based on census data. Leonor spent a day with the facilitators, doing home visits and learning more about the specific conditions of each *Madre* selected to participate. She described her experiences:

We met with the Facilitators [from the Mayor's office of Municipality Guaicaipuro] at seven in the morning. We went from house to house, collecting all of the information, in the twenty houses of the women chosen. They asked how people lived, how they sustained themselves, who studies, who doesn't study. Who works in their houses, what types of food do they eat, what sicknesses do they have. There are many cases of special needs, children with special needs.¹⁷⁰

Madre also informed Yalitza, a single-mother on the Urban Land Committee about the Mission. Yalitza was twenty years old when she had her daughter. Although she lived with the father of her child for the first few years, she decided to leave him and return to the home of her mother, where she had been raised without a father. While Yalitza continued to parent her three-year old daughter, do waged work for the land committee, and study in *Misión Sucre*, she also became a promoter of *MMB*. She described her passion for the mission:

I am fascinated with *Misión Madres del Barrio*...to bring this type of consciousness to house wives: That it is not just to cook, iron, and wash, that you have this value, as a women. That you are important as a woman, not just as a mother and a wife but also for the desires and aspirations that you should have. For your children. This is important, because the husbands leave but the children stay, you have to train them so that they feel proud of their mothers. This is important.¹⁷¹

Every time the Yalitza would visit a community with the Urban Land Committee, she would ask, "have you set up a Committee for *Misión Madres del Barrio*?" She would take information about the steps to go through and she would be a point person for questions or to connect people on the community with the municipal coordinators. She did this work for free.

¹⁷⁰ Leonor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela. There is a clear correlation between *MMB* and the rights and social security for those with disabilities. This would be an interesting place for future research.

¹⁷¹ Yalitza. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

Nancy, Coordinator of the *MMB* for the Capital District of Caracas, noted the importance of the grassroots involvement within this process. “The committee plays a fundamental role because they are the ones that know the conditions of the barrio, what conditions the women live in, how they live, what they do. They are the ones that identify the need.”¹⁷² The process of identifying who is in need within each community, while there are murmurs of favoritism, was mostly described as fair and based on real need. One promoter said, “We are all poor, but we were taught to distinguish poverty from extreme poverty...and we know how people live in our barrio.”¹⁷³ The transparency was striking. There also didn’t appear to be much conflict between the municipal coordinators and the local committee members. Only in one case did someone mention the municipal coordinators challenging the selections of the local committee. Most committee members who worked directly with the Coordinators echoed the sentiments of Leonor who said, “I loved working with the facilitators. They would see that we know, in our communities, who is in real need.”¹⁷⁴

Many of the *Madres* that I interviewed had very similar stories about the initial processes in their communities, and those experiences were consistent with the designers of the program. All the committees were between ten and fifty people, and the groups of beneficiaries between nine and thirty-nine and consistently about half of the women on the committee were also beneficiaries. In Antímáno, a notoriously

¹⁷² Nancy. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁷³ Johanna. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁷⁴ Leonor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

impoverished neighborhood west of Caracas, the women who had been selected to receive the benefits were invited to attend a meeting with the citizen's assembly to discuss what their responsibilities would be to the community as participants in *Misión Madres del Barrio*. Liliana mentioned that when the women were preparing to go to the citizens' assembly meeting, bringing children in tow, many of them realized what a challenge it was to find someone to watch their kids, even for two hours, so they could attend the assembly and not be distracted by having to care for children.¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, when they discussed organizing and collectivizing some of the childcare, many women expressed concern about leaving. They live in a poor and somewhat dangerous neighborhood and many mothers expressed a desire to keep their eyes on their children at all times.

II: Results

When I initially set out to do research, I had a number of questions. How would the payment be administered? How would women be selected? How would this payment affect basic living standards? Would more women leave their marriages/partners? Would this change how housework is seen? Would the payment enable women to have more time to do community organizing? I was able to answer some of the first questions about process and procedure, but because the program had only been in place for a year in most places, it was nearly impossible to measure the other factors mentioned above. Nonetheless, I was able to hear the testimonies of many women on some of the issues of perspectives on housework, as well as how the payment impacts their living standards or access to basic goods. While *Misión*

¹⁷⁵ Liliana. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

Madres del Barrio is clearly designed to alleviate people from extreme poverty more than to remunerate women for housework, I was curious to know if the Mission has effectively changed how women see their housework, and how they view this payment. The main questions that I asked beneficiaries of *Misión Madres del Barrio* was how they viewed the payment and their own housework. I asked whether the payment, which is 60%-80% of the minimum wage actually covered their costs of living; and what the successes and failures of the Mission have been. The following sections offer results and insights into these questions.

Payment and Housework

While the Global Women's Strike has successfully campaigned at an International level for Wages for housework, the recognition of housework and the payment incorporated in *MMB* is by and large not seen as a "wage." Nora Castañeda, for example, is hesitant about marching under the banner "wages for housework." Although she has, on occasion used that language, she seems to struggle with advancing the concept that liberation is won through wages. Perhaps this is a difference in strategy or ideology that form the wages for housework campaign and Venezuela's particular history of housework, as a political issue in economic crisis. However, as opposed to wages, Castañeda advocates for this payment to be seen as both recognition of housework and also as an entitlement for poor people (women) based on need.¹⁷⁶

While Article 88 of the constitution refers to *seguridad social* (social security), the most common language used by the recipients of the payment was

¹⁷⁶ Castañeda, Nora. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2006. Caracas, Venezuela.

“*beneficio*” (benefit), or “*apoyo*” (support). Leonor’s statements show that housework is still far from being fully recognized in Venezuela: “the payment from the Mission is not seen as a wage, because sometimes what women do in the house is not seen as work. But we have to work: because washing, ironing, cooking...this is work done in the house, and if they do this in other [people’s] houses, this is work.”¹⁷⁷ Leonor makes an argument similar to that of many of the feminist and Marxists theorists examined in chapter one: if housework were outsourced, and placed within market relations, the labor would have clear value. Gilda described the payment as a combination, “this is a wage, but also assistance...before they did not recognize the value [of housework]- not even your family- this [*MMB*] benefits everyone. It is a support for everyone, for the community, most of all for the children.”¹⁷⁸

Mireyoc, from Candelaria also asserted that housework requires an enormous amount of labor. She said,

Housework is work, it is *más fuerte* than the work in the streets. Because you have to take care of children, you have to wash, iron, cook, clean the house, take the kids to school, pick them up, attend to your husband. This is the hardest work that there is.¹⁷⁹

Irma, who is also a beneficiary and committee member in Candelaria asserted, “I should have a wage, this is work.”¹⁸⁰ And Maria made clear that “work in the home is work, it is double and it remains to be unpaid.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Leonor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁷⁸ Gilda. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁷⁹ Mireyoc. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 24 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁸⁰ Irma. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 24 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁸¹ Ana Maria. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

Nancy, the coordinator of the Mission in Caracas was one of the few women to mention Article 88. She said,

The Mission[Madres del Barrio] is a first step of Article 88, that is to guarantee also, by the state the work of housewives, recognize the work of housewives that generates wealth. Ultimately providing social security; this is our socialist project.¹⁸²

However, as opposed to describing the payment as wages, she described it as “ a temporary economic assignation.” When I asked her about the contradictory nature of, on the one hand, acknowledging work in the home as producing economic and social value, and on the other hand, focusing the mission on socio-productive employment she responded:

For those who say that to give training and workshops to housewives is to work against valuing their work...well, not in any moment...because the mission will give her the opportunity to become qualified, as a woman, to be prepared.

While many women articulated that women, themselves have value, very few placed an emphasis on the valuing of their labor, and instead they emphasized economic need over compensation for value-added labor. Some women noted that the payment was simply “a support to those who are in need” or an “incentive so that they [recipients] better their situations in life, and they work on their own socio-productive projects.”¹⁸³ Teresa made it clear that she felt they payment “is not a grant, nor a wage, this is assistance.”¹⁸⁴

One of the possible reasons women were so reluctant to see the payment as a

¹⁸² Nancy. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁸³ Fabia. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁸⁴ Teresa. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

wage, in addition to the capitalist conditioning that teaches that housework falls into a separate realm of “reproductive labor,” is that the money is not sufficient to be considered a wage, and therefore is viewed only as a support or assistance.

“No Alcanza”

If the payment were a wage, it would be illegal. The cash assistance that is allotted through *MMB* only offers 60 to 80 percent of the minimum wage, therefore placing a relatively low monetary value on the work. Since many of the women and families who receive the assistance are living in conditions of absolute poverty, it is assumed that this payment would heighten their living standards. Despite the benefit not actually arriving to her community, Leonor, had high expectations about the odds and ends that she envisioned this payment covering.

This helps so much. If the husband is making minimum wage, it does not cover all the costs. You must try to keep half aside because at school they ask for pencils, they ask for notebooks, you have to buy a uniform. All of those things...I think at the least, what we are finding is that this “*sueldito*” is that they can *comer, comer, y comer*. With Madres del Barrio will, at least women who say ‘oh no, my shoes have broken’ can go out and buy shoes, because that money is theirs.¹⁸⁵

For the women who are currently facing the monthly accounting and rationing, they are finding that this benefit does not even cover all of the food costs.

In the particular period in which I interviewed many of these women the Venezuelan economy was suffering from inflation and food shortages. There are numerous factors that are fueling both of these phenomena, both economic, structural factors as well as political. This is creating a crunch, and of course, the poorest of the

¹⁸⁵ Leonor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

poor feel it the hardest. Maria, spokesperson for the nutrition committee in her community council in Aguas Frias stated “the benefit is not sufficient, it just helps you sustain yourself.”¹⁸⁶ She, along with many others, mentioned that nearly all of the money goes into food costs.

On International Women’s Day (March 8) of 2008, Karina stood in the Panteón Nacional, where Bolívar’s remains are held, and listened to the speakers at the end of a vibrant Women’s Day March. She wore a bright orange *Misión Madres del Barrio* T-shirt and enthusiastically spoke with me about the challenges of the program. Karina is a single-mother of seven children, one of whom is currently incarcerated. She hadn’t visited her daughter in prison for other a month because she couldn’t bear to show up empty handed and there hadn’t been enough money or food to bring any. She said, “Every month, I say: ‘with this payment, I am going to buy a mattress for my children. And, every month, I just barely get by paying for food—and my children continue to sleep on the floor.’”¹⁸⁷ Another recipient mentioned that “the benefit helps with some things, but you can’t say that this will cover the basic goods for one month. But it is a support for the necessities that you don’t have, it resolves that.”¹⁸⁸ Some women note that the payment does not even cover the basic costs of food. This is echoed by Gladys, who noted: “we see it as economic assistance, the amount isn’t sufficient...some days people eat, some days they do not.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Maria. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 26 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁸⁷ Karina. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁸⁸ Rosa. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁸⁹ Gladys. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

The general consensus is that this payment is not enough money to survive, however, many poor women use the resources around them to somehow make it stretch. Despite this fact, many women noted that they did not see the payment as the most important aspect of *Misión Madres del Barrio* and that it has numerous other important aspects.

Successes and Failures

The successes of *Misión Madres del Barrio* were visible during the March 8th, 2008 International Women's Day March. Many women's enthusiasm and sense of empowerment were evident in their interviews and their attitudes. Damelis, extended her arm to me during the march to show me the artisan-made beaded jewelry that she was wearing. "Look" she said, "this is my socio-productive work."¹⁹⁰

Many women felt a general sense of hope, not only about *MMB*, but also about the changes that were taking place under Chávez. Yalitza noted that it is not just the payment, but the recognition, value and training that are a part of this Mission. She said,

The important thing is not just that the state gives us money, but it is the importance that the President is giving us as our value, as women, as housewives. It is very important. We already have more rights and more responsibilities as women, the importance that women are according to the president.¹⁹¹

Yalitza felt like the Mission was designed in a constructive way, that incorporated necessary training. "The science was to give them support while they get training." Maria, a principal spokesperson in her community also agreed that the benefits go

¹⁹⁰ Lucira. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁹¹ Yalitza. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 20 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

beyond the economic aspects,

it is an integral support to the mother, not only the economic support. *MMB* goes beyond an economic benefit; it is not a grant, it is a common incentive to work in all of the areas; healthcare, education, recreation.¹⁹²

Despite the positive aspects mentioned in relation to participation in community activities and activities, the socio-productive projects were the highlight for most.

The Coordinator of the socio-productive projects for Caracas is a fiery woman named Claudia. On March 8th, she wore an orange and white T-shirt that read; “*Misión Madres del Barrio*: protection for she who protects everyone.” Claudia shared about numerous socio-productive projects that were in the works. She described to me,

The process of choosing what skills people want to learn is a joint process. Women in the Mission talk about what they want to learn, or about the skills that they already have. Then they present their ideas to the community councils of citizen’s assemblies. The community places input into their ideas and the community decides what kinds of services or goods are lacking. From there it is a collaborative process where the Madres decide to get training in an area that meets the needs of their communities.¹⁹³

Rebecca and Mari’s stories explain how this process works. After marching with thousands of Women on International Women’s Day, we arrived to the Panteón Nacional for a rally with speakers, music, and other cultural events. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw two women, proudly holding signs that declared, “I am a hard-working *madre* and now I have a cinder block socio-productive project. Thank you Chávez.”

Mari and Rebecca have been working with the Mission for over a year. They

¹⁹² Maria. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 26 February, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁹³ Claudia. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

received funding, training, and financing and now they, along with two other *Madres* have a cooperatively run cinder-block project that produces construction materials for their local community. “Originally we wanted to make jewelry,” Rebecca said, “but when we went to the community council meeting, community members said that we needed to locally produce construction materials for building new homes and schools.”¹⁹⁴ Mari mentioned that at first they were intimidated because no one had worked in masonry or construction. “We didn’t have any skills, but we said, it doesn’t matter: we already do the hardest work there is [mothering] so, we can do this.”¹⁹⁵ They attended months of training, and they worked to build their own workshop space. Many of the *Madres* rotated childcare responsibilities with construction and after six months, and a loan of over \$5,000, they began to produce cinder blocks for their community. “We are the only project like this [of cinder blocks] that I know of that is run by women,” Mari said. Rebecca added “And, we are not just running a business to make money, but we are serving a needs of our community and making our children proud of their mothers.”

Claudia, coordinator of the socio-productive projects, announced with pride, “showing women that they, with their own skills can generate an income for themselves in the Mission works in conjunction with the political and social formation too.”¹⁹⁶ Griselda made a similar point, combining the importance of the socialist values with the building of skills. Making a reference to the “new man” of

¹⁹⁴ Rebecca. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

¹⁹⁵ Mari. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela Rebecca.

¹⁹⁶ Claudia. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

Che Guevara, yet transforming the concept to form “the new woman: she said, “women are preparing themselves by taking courses, to gain the skills to be the new women that they are going to be.”¹⁹⁷

While economic assistance was not seen as the core of the Mission, especially because most women noted that it was not sufficient to live by, it is surely an important part, and in many cases, the money has simply not reached the communities. Damelis shared her disappointment about the Mission with me. Right after the Mission was launched, Damelis attended a citizen’s assembly meeting and proposed that they form a *Comité del Madres del Barrio*. They formed a committee, selected women to receive the payment and handed in their paper work. It was nearly a year before the Coordinators arrived in the community, and when they arrived, unexpected, they decided that if women were not in their homes to be interviewed, different women would be selected. The Coordinators selected an almost entirely new group of women than had originally been chosen by the committee. No one in their community has received any money from *MMB*, neither from the original group nor the later selections. When I asked what has happened to the money, Damelis responded. “It [the money] has not arrived. We don’t have any idea why is hasn’t arrived.” She added, “for us this is a huge disappointment, that its not working like our President suggested.” A fellow community member, Maria chimed in with a sigh of frustration, “we did what our President asked, we formed the committee, and the

¹⁹⁷ Griselda. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

funds didn't come.”¹⁹⁸

All throughout the northern part of the state of Miranda this story was repeated. With this experience it becomes clear as to why the statement of the Popular Networks were made to demand that money not filter through local governments. There have simply been no answers about the funding, and in Venezuela that often means that it has been stolen by bureaucrats and politicians.

While many people are feeling disillusioned about the funds simply not arriving, some women, like Hilda have reaffirmed their commitment to the process, despite some very serious problems: “even though the benefits haven't arrived, and all of us need them, equally we do this work to build the socialist project of our commandante Chávez.”¹⁹⁹ Leonor also tried to face the situation with humor, she noted that the Facilitators came in October and that the payments should have come in December but, “they did not say which year, of course!”

While the successes of *Misión Madres del Barrio* lay within the socio-productive projects, which incorporate the political formation from the schools, the obvious failure is that the funding simply has not materialized for numerous communities that have followed all of the laid out procedures for forming a mission. There is hope however, that through organizing, those committees will be able to acquire that which they have been promised.

¹⁹⁸ Damelis. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 1 March, 2008. Los Teques, Venezuela.

¹⁹⁹ Hilda. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

Conclusion: From *Amas de Casas* to *Madres del Barrio*

You see more *Madres del barrio*, we have a collective identity; not just as women but as *amas de casas*.

–Aidla²⁰⁰

Misión Madres del Barrio has produced mixed results, however, it has succeeded in bringing poor mothers and housewife workers onto the national stage and has aided in the creation of a collective identity that is far more empowering than previous images of the solitary housewife trapped in her domestic sphere. The National Coordinator for the Mission described *MMB* as a program that addresses “familial and collective poverty, not just individual poverty.” A part of this process is the visibility that *Madres del Barrio* have within their communities, councils, and the national political institutions. Poor women are no longer solely *amas de casas*, but they are now *Madres del barrio*; which identifies them as important protagonists in their communities. Sozeida, one of the participants in the Mission, expressed this sentiment by saying that beyond anything else *Misión Madres del Barrio* has taught her that “we are not alone.”

While the economic benefit is necessary so that women can have the support they need to participate in the training, workshops, and community councils, the payment is not sufficient and therefore is not even seen as the core part of this program. Murta stated this clearly. “We don’t see it as just a benefit...we work together, we work with the community, mutual aid is what we want.”²⁰¹ Another woman declared, “if they pay me, great! If not, I will continue to work for my

²⁰⁰ Aidla. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 2 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

²⁰¹ Murta. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

community.”²⁰² Olivia, however, noted “we don’t need help, but payment for our work.”²⁰³ Although she is one of the very few women who are actually receiving payment at this time, she makes it clear that, “this benefit doesn’t reach for anything, it is nothing. I work for my community.”

While the economic benefit may not be the core issue to many, the fact that promised resources have yet to materialize in communities that have self-organized, followed the guidelines, and been waiting for funding threatens the credibility of the whole Mission. Clearly, this is the largest failure of the program and many questions as to why the funding has not been forthcoming, and where resources have gone have yet to be answered.

Beyond the economic benefit, recognition of social worth for housewife workers is also taking place with the creation of a collective identity. As more women join the Mission and receive the training and financing for socio-productive projects many women who began as *amas de casas* are beginning to identify as *Madres del barrio*—seeing themselves in relation to their communities as opposed to solely in relation to their homes. The socio-productive projects are creating roads towards cooperative self-employment and therefore the recognition of housework “as an aid to survive in utter poverty” is one aspect of the Mission.

²⁰² Flor. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

²⁰³ Olivia. Interviewed by Cory Fischer-Hoffman, 8 March, 2008. Caracas, Venezuela.

CHAPTER 5:
Cuba, the United States, and Venezuela:
A Comparative Approach to Housework

Introduction: Comparing the “Doble Carga” and “Motherwork”

As Venezuela breaks new ground in the recognition of housework, there is need for a comparative examination of how the debate around housework is constructed in other places. This chapter will focus on how social movements within Cuba and the United States frame and respond to the national debate around housework as well as examining public assistance within those countries. Cuba and the United States occupy polar opposites when evaluating the political, social and economic institutions within these two countries. Despite radically different contexts women continue to do a disproportionate amount of housework in both countries.²⁰⁴

Women and mothers in the United States and Cuba face extraordinarily different circumstances and thus employ different strategies in relation to housework. While Cuban women have mostly achieved access to education, employment, abortion and contraceptives, and childcare (sometimes referred to as the “four demands”) women in the US still struggle for basic equal rights. Nonetheless, the incredible advancements made by Cuban women, have not freed them from doing a disproportionate amount of the unwaged housework. Due to demands originating from CDRs (Communities in Defense of the Revolution), Unions, and the FMC

²⁰⁴ Margaret Randall. Cuban Women Now: Interviews with Cuban Women. Toronto: Women’s Press, Dumont Press Graphix, 1974.

(Cuban Women's Federation), The 1974 Family Code was drafted to address social relations between men and women in the home.²⁰⁵ In the United States, in the wake of welfare reform, this debate has become far more hostile towards poor women. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act effectively ended poor mothers' entitlements to cash assistance, instead reaffirming that the only place for mothers is –not the home- but low-wage employment.

While women in the United States and Cuba are in very different situations, the political structures and rhetoric in each place have suggested that women's liberation comes from waged employment- not from remunerating housework. Women in Cuba, the US, and elsewhere have struggled to reframe this debate, noting that it is not work that women need it is money.²⁰⁶ Women continue to demand acknowledgement and compensation for the work that they already do. In Cuba, this debate has centered on what Cuban women refer to as the "*doble carga*" or the double burden, whereas in the United States the welfare rights and feminist movements more often use the term "motherwork," or increasingly, "caring work." In both cases women are talking about housework- unwaged caring, cleaning, managing, backbreaking labor that disproportionately falls on them. Out of respect for those at the forefront of those struggles, I will use the terms that they use in their speeches and writings. While the "double burden" and "motherwork" in Cuba and

²⁰⁵ The Family Code clearly addresses heterosexual relationships (including unmarried parents), trying to create a more equitable distribution of housework and childcare. The law does not connote a payment for housework.

²⁰⁶ Leopoldina Fortunati declared, "let's not mince words: it's not the work we need, it's the money" in "The Housewife," in *All Work and No Pay*, eds. Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming (London: the Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall, 1975), p.15.

the US will be the focus of this chapter, it should be clear that both of these ultimately fit under the rubric of housework.

I: Cuba and the Doble Carga

The 1959 Cuban Revolution marked a complete transformation in the political, economic, and social relations within the Caribbean island nation. Influenced by an ideology of Socialism and Cuban nationalism, political measures advanced to build greater class, racial and gender equity. Among many of these changes, women are guaranteed equal opportunity to work and education, as well as access to childcare, free contraceptives and abortion. These achievements, which are far from being realized in the United States or Venezuela, have led to greater equality of opportunity between men and women. Despite these changes, which mark a clear advancement in gender equity, housework continues to disproportionately fall on the shoulders of women. Cuban women often refer to this housework as the “*doble-carga*”: the double burden.

The Socialist ideology of the Cuban Revolution has emphasized a distinct path towards the liberation of women. This path, as described earlier by Selma James, is the “equal rights” approach, which encompasses “the four demands.” This approach posits that when women have equal opportunity to education and employment, access to obtain abortions and contraceptives, and comprehensive childcare, they will be positioned to compete (or cooperate) with men and their oppression will cease to exist. Influenced heavily by the traditional Marxist-Leninist doctrine mentioned in chapter one, Cuban officials advocated for the socialization of

housework (to a certain extent). Nearly 15 years after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution²⁰⁷, Fidel Castro, along with the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC), acknowledged that the oppression of women would not be eradicated solely by measures that would transform the public sphere, but that there would also need to be attention given to the private sphere, towards housework.²⁰⁸

The National Assembly, CDRs, Trade Unions and the FMC drafted the Family Code; and it is a clear example of the state's intervention into the private sphere.²⁰⁹ The law addresses housework and male-female social relations within the household. Articles 26 and 27 suggest that men and women should share equally in the housework, stating, "if one of the spouses contributes only through his or her work in the home and child-care, the other spouse must provide full economic support without this meaning that he or she will be relieved of the obligations of cooperating with the housework and child-care."²¹⁰ Despite the attempt to address the unequal housework and childcare responsibilities within most Cuban families, the law did not have a clear means of enforcement nor any hint as to what the punishment for its violation could be. In fact, "[t]here seems to be a general consensus that women in

²⁰⁷ This year is significant as the first international Women's conference in Mexico City, which was also the beginning of feminist networks in Venezuela that lead to article 88. This was also a year after the declaration of the International Wages for housework campaign. I would like to historicize this a little more.

²⁰⁸ Within the debate around wages for housework, some challenge the public versus private, dichotomy as a false concept (See: April Kathleen Ross, Woman's Place: The Cuban Revolution and Gender Inequality in the Home. Lawrence: The U of Kansas, 2003.)

²⁰⁹ Randall, 1974

²¹⁰ Margaret Randall. "The Family Code," in The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics, eds. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham: Duke U Press, 2003), p.402

Cuba still continue to do the majority of the household tasks, and that no one is thrown in jail for not sharing in home responsibilities.”²¹¹

There have been a number of studies subsequent to the Family Code, which explored changes in familial social relations by examining women’s role in the home, especially in relation to housework and childcare. Maxine Molyneux writes,

Cuban surveys show that ‘traditional sexual division of [labor] in domestic work’ remains virtually unchallenged by years of FMC efforts to raise awareness of the problem, or by the 1975 Family Code, with ‘women bearing the main burden, whether or not they are in employment.’²¹²

The Family Code did not truly address equal shares in household tasks, and while the *doble-carga* is widely acknowledged as a barrier to gender equality in Cuba, housework itself is not viewed as inherently productive. Vilma Espín addresses this issue with a concern about a loss of status for women if extended maternity leave or compensation for housework were instituted “We have been very careful all these years not to propose apparent solutions to women’s double-burden... Such measures... tend to perpetuate [inequality] by deprofessionalizing women.”²¹³

While employment remains the official venue for “productive” labor for men and women, many Cuban women who do housework find their domestic work marginalized, ignored or taken for granted. In April Kathleen Ross’s thesis entitled “Woman’s Place: The Cuban Revolution and Gender Inequality in the Home”, she

²¹¹ Margaret E Leahy. *Development Strategies and the Status of Women: A Comparative Study of the United States, Mexico, the Soviet Union, and Cuba*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1986, p.108.

²¹² Maxine Molyneux. *State, Gender, and Institutional Change in Cuba’s ‘Special Period’: The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*. London: U of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996, p.36.

²¹³ Vilma Espín Guillois. *Cuban Women Confront the Future*. Melbourne: Ocean’s Press, 1991, p.75.

cites a Cuban woman who was interviewed by Isabel Holgado. She describes her experience doing housework,

When it is not necessary to wash clothes, it is necessary to iron them, and afterwards to cook and serve the food, and later scrub the dishes and be sure that the children and the husband have clothes to wear, and keep the house clean, and...the story never ends. But no one pays these hours. Even worse, it is as if they didn't exist, as if all of this work was done [by...] a fairy.²¹⁴

While Cuban women have made substantial advances in gender equality in the public sphere, they face the “*doble-carga*” which expects them to labor at paid employment in addition to doing unpaid housework. Men in Cuba, despite the Family Code’s mandate that they share in equal amounts of housework, do not face the same double-burden, showing that household responsibilities continue to disproportionately fall on women. The Family Code does not attempt to redefine housework as productive labor, nor does it create a plan to remunerate those who perform it, instead the law addresses “...the regulation of family matters...with regard to the status of women, parent-child relations, and the functions of the family.”²¹⁵ Unpaid housework continues to be a widely acknowledged barrier for the achievement of gender equity in Cuba. Cuban women, despite equal opportunity of employment and education, access to contraceptives and abortion, and free childcare, continue to face the *doble-carga*. While the FMC places unpaid housework on the national agenda, there is a resistance to “deprofessionalize” women by creating more supports for them to perform housework as their work.

²¹⁴April Kathleen Ross, *Woman’s Place: The Cuban Revolution and Gender Inequality in the Home*. Lawrence: The U of Kansas, 2003.

²¹⁵Lisandro Perez. “The Family in Cuba,” in *The Family in Latin America*, eds. Man Singh Das and Clinton J. Jesser (Sahibabad, India: Vikas, 1980), p.245.

While the Family Code has not been able to assure shared responsibility of domestic tasks Giovanna Dalla Costa argues that women's movements demands must extend beyond. She notes,

Mere encouragement of a more equal distribution of housework between women and men is in any case a long way from responding to the demands for a smaller workload and more welfare expressed in the women's struggles. Above all, it sidesteps the demand being advanced with increasing strength for a wholly different type of development which would open up new life possibilities for both women and men.²¹⁶

Cuba's attempts to distribute housework more equitably and socialize childcare still fails to fully address the demands for more support for women. In the United States, without the legal and economic supports that Cuba has, the struggle to acknowledge housework has mostly been framed through the debate around welfare.

II: Welfare Reform in the United States

If I were President, I would solve this so-called welfare crisis in a minute and go a long way towards liberating every woman. I'd just issue a proclamation that women's work is work...I'd start paying women a living wage for the work we are already doing- childcare and housekeeping. And the Welfare Crisis would be over just like that.²¹⁷

-Johnnie Tillmon

(Former Chair of the National Welfare Rights Organization and mother of six.)

The phrase "Every Mother is a Working Mother" can be found on political bumper stickers and has even made its way into the mainstream. The statement comes from the Welfare Rights movement, which in the United States, have been the key force for the acknowledgement of motherwork. Vanessa Tait describes how

²¹⁶ G.F. Dalla Costa, 1995, p.116.

²¹⁷ Vanessa Tait. "Expanding Labor's Vision: The Challenges of Workfare and Welfare Organizing," in The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor, ed. Dorothy Sue Cobble (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p.205.

welfare rights organizing has reframed how housework, motherwork, and the welfare system are framed in the United States.

...Welfare mothers argue that their work should be socially respected and financially compensated, and they question why they are forced on to workfare program outside of the home when they are already doing valuable work inside the home. They draw on a long history of both activism and legislative history...these state-run programs...implicitly recognized care giving as productive work that should be supported by taxpayers' dollars.²¹⁸

Instead of only fighting for access to jobs and better wages, reframing housework became the strategic route through which welfare recipients and women could conceivably struggle for their work to be recognized.²¹⁹ This has been the case for some radical elements within the welfare rights movement within the United States; in which women have rejected the stigmatization of receiving public assistance; in which they have fought against being labeled as lazy over-reproducers; and, in which they have asserted that their public assistance should be understood as compensation for their “motherwork”. This struggle, although more powerful in the United States in the 1970’s, suffered a huge defeat with the passing of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. Welfare Reform- or the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act- ended the Federal entitlement program, placing the administration and regulation of what is now called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) at the state level, mandatory welfare-to-work [employment] program requirements, and in some cases life-time limits for receiving public assistance independent of need.

²¹⁸ Tait, 2007, p.204

²¹⁹ James, 1974, p.1

Although money is still being transferred from the state to poor mothers through TANF, the ideology behind welfare in the United States does not recognize the “motherwork” that women do as creating social and economic value. The meager cash assistance keeps families in poverty, while the welfare-to-work programs hide the family-centered labor that low income parents do, forcing them into employment, no matter how low-paying or exploitative. The irony of this model also places many women in low-waged undervalued caring professions in which they care for other people’s children or the elderly; while placing their own family members in substandard childcare or nursing institutions. This ideology devalues motherwork (housework) and throws women into the low-wage workforce with few safety nets or options for advancement. Welfare Reform emphasizes “welfare- to work programs”, “sanctions”, “life-time limits”, and the recreation of a stigmatized “welfare mom.” In fact just two years before Welfare Reform was enacted, the Unremunerated Work Act- HR 966 was proposed to US Congress. This bill proposed valuing unwaged housework in the Gross Domestic Product. While the bill did not pass Congress, the commentary on the bill had clear ties to the creation of the ‘Welfare Mom.’ Jennie Lazor wrote, “counting women’s work as a valuable national resource will help put to rest once and for all the specter of the ‘welfare mom’ who ‘refuses to work.’”²²⁰ The very core ideology behind the “welfare to work” programs is that housework and

²²⁰ Jennie Lazor, Wages for Women’s Work. Philadelphia: Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1994.

motherwork are not work and that emancipation from poverty will come through employment only.

Welfare recipients, activists, and scholars have responded to these attacks by deconstructing and challenging the overt racism, classism and sexism that are the core to the recreation of the “welfare mom”. The racist stereotypes of the welfare mom tend to characterize African American women as lazy parasites, forever producing babies to live off the handouts of a benevolent state.²²¹ The newly placed emphasis on welfare-to-work programs, is interpreted by Barbara Ehrenreich as an absolute assault on the working class and the unpaid housework of many women; “Stigmatizing unemployment- or, more accurately, unpaid, family directed labor- obviously works to promote the kind of docility businesses crave in their employees.²²²” The attacks on welfare moms, who are often portrayed as lazy over-producing African American women, is not only sexist, racist, and classist but it is also a clear assault on motherwork itself.

With the emphasis on employment, poor women are faced with accepting any employment- on their bosses’, or the state’s terms, in order to subsist. This flow of relatively desperate and coerced workers surely lowers the wages, and working conditions of all workers across the spectrum. Women of color- especially black women- struggle against the racist discourse and stereotypes of poor women that were perpetuated throughout the 1990’s and the debate around welfare. Women in general

²²¹ Mimi Abromovitz, “Still Under Attack: Women and Welfare Reform,” in The Socialist Feminist Project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics, ed. Nancy Holmstrom (New York: Monthly Review, 2002), 216-227.

²²² Barbara Ehrenreich, “Preface,” in Welfare Reform, Poverty, and Beyond: Lost Ground, eds. Randy Albelda and Ann Withorn (Cambridge: South End, 2002), p. ix.

have seen this Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act as gender oppression at its worst. The overall effect of this legislation is that poor women and children - especially people of color and the working class as a whole - have been devastated through this reform.²²³ There is another victim of this legislation; the invisible work of so many women, housework. Welfare reform has managed to reassert the ideology that employment is the secret to women's liberation, though as Leopoldina Fortunati argues, "no one would ever claim that men's liberation rests in a job- they only say this to us because we are women."²²⁴ Women from within the welfare rights movement have rejected this assault on their work. They have proclaimed that "motherwork" is work and pushed for a paradigm change so that cash assistance should not be seen as a hand out but instead, it should be an acknowledgement of their work. Furthermore, women demand that motherwork must be acknowledged and remunerated, instead of ignored, mocked, and sanctioned.

Vanessa Tait describes strategies from within the welfare rights movement:

...Across the nation, welfare rights activists are organizing as workers both outside and inside the home. Women are prominent in the movement's leadership...using tactics borrowed from traditional unions, as well as strategies drawn from the women's and human rights movements...activists have...challenged notions of who is a worker and what sorts of work should receive monetary compensation. In several states, poor women have brought the struggle full circle by organizing for legislation explicitly recognizing their work in the home as caregivers and allowing welfare payments to be used to support this work.²²⁵

²²³ Willie Baptist and Mary Bricker-Jenkins. "A View from the Bottom: Poor People and their Allies Respond to Welfare Reform," in Welfare Reform, Poverty, and Beyond: Lost Ground, eds. Randy Albelda and Ann Withorn (Cambridge: South End, 2002), 195-210.

²²⁴ Fortunati, 1980, p.14

²²⁵ Tait, 2007, p.197

News of the political changes in Venezuela, in which housework was acknowledged and would be remunerated had direct impacts on welfare rights organizing in the United States. Monica Peabody, former community organizer with the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition (WROC) wrote,

Nora Castañeda, President of the Women's Development Bank (Banmujer) of Venezuela, wrote a book called *Creating a Caring Economy*, about their part in revolutionizing Venezuela's economy. She describes how Banmujer is providing a path-breaking framework for building a movement which is creating an economy at the service of human beings. Castaneda is an advocate of Article 88 of the Bolivarian constitution which recognizes housework as an economic activity that produces wealth and welfare: "the most important work humanity does." WROC will be celebrating this victory in Venezuela at May Day... We will also be marching behind the banner "EVERY MOTHER IS A WORKING MOTHER."

WROC's 2006 Mother's Day card also included a paragraph about Article 88 in Venezuela, showing a distinct connection to the demand that motherwork be valued in the United States. In 2007, when due to internal changes, Olympia WROC dissolved to form a new Organization: POWER (Parents Organizing for Welfare and Economic Rights) the valuing of caregiving work was placed at the forefront of their vision statement. POWER's vision statement reads "we envision a world where children and caregiving is truly valued, and where the devastation of poverty has been eradicated." No doubt, based on their clear reference to Article 88 in Venezuela, welfare recipients and low-income mothers have- come to place the valuing of their caregiving as a strategic demand in the abolition of poverty and women's exploitation. This is similar to the analysis that led to the International Wages for Housework Campaign, the Global Women's Strike, and the Venezuelan's women's movement to demand the remuneration of housework.

Caring for others is accomplished by a dazzling array of skills in an endless variety of circumstances. As well as cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundering, planting, tending, harvesting for others, women comfort and guide, nurse and teach, arrange and advise, discipline and encourage, fight for and pacify. Taxing and exhausting under any circumstances, this service work, this emotional housework, is done both outside and inside the home.²²⁶

In the face of the Welfare Reform Act, which is an extraordinarily regressive piece of legislation, poor mothers demand that their motherwork be valued and paid for. Despite this effort, welfare reform in the United States has left low-income parents more vulnerable, leaving them to ultimately focus on surviving without a safety net. While proposing a vision of a world that welfare rights organizers are working to build, they are confronted with organizing around harm reduction and the ever shrinking safety net, which now has gaping holes as state and federal money gets filtered into the military and away from much needed social programs.

III: Neoliberalism and the “*Triple Carga*”

In comparing Cuba and the United States, as well as Venezuela, some obvious differences arise. The United States is a “First World” country, while Cuba and Venezuela, despite social welfare programs and oil deposits, belong to the “Third World”. While there is no doubt that the United States has many more resources than Cuba or Venezuela, placing the US in a better position to fund housework- poor mothers in the US have faced what many poor people throughout the world are facing: Structural Adjustment. While Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) are most often associated with prescriptive measures for economic growth in poor

²²⁶ Cory Fischer-Hoffman. “Women’s Unwaged Caring Work,” *Zmagazine* April, 2006.

countries, as mandated by the International Monetary Fund, welfare reform is an example of self-imposed Structural Adjustment. Welfare reform stems from the same neoliberal ideology that impoverishes many poor families and countries around the world by encouraging cuts in social spending, privatization and austerity programs. So, while there is a clear economic divide between Cuba and the United States, welfare mothers represent the “Third World” within the “First World.”

Welfare mothers in the United States are therefore better positioned to build alliances with women in poor countries, because they too face Structural Adjustment Programs that cut much-needed social services. Although the FMC in Cuba, BanMujer in Venezuela, and POWER in the United States offer examples of organizations establishing an agenda to value housework, they face many challenges in making this a mainstream demand.

The activism that Venezuelan women are involved in, through various community councils and education and land committees, has led many women to re-define their unpaid labor. As opposed to the double burden, women are increasingly referring to what they see as the triple-burden, which includes “revolutionary community work” or volunteer-service work in addition to employment and housework. A statement released by the *Red Popular de los Altos Mirandinos* (a grassroots Venezuelan women’s organization) proclaims:

...women housewives workers in the home who have become community leaders and defenders of this revolution, this participatory democracy. We are the women who are doing the work of carrying forward this revolution. We work for free...they [the state bureaucrats] take advantage of us by using our work to project themselves politically.

Although women in Venezuela are very active in many of the community councils, education, land and water committees, men still tend to occupy leadership positions. While Sujatha Fernandes notes that this is changing, she adds, “[b]ut along with this leadership there needs to be a change in the gender division of labor, so that women do not end up bearing the triple burden of housework, wage work, and activism.”

Further more,

That they include the recognition of revolutionary community work as productive work that should be remunerated. It is not right that we the women who, as our President has said, are the foundation of the revolution, have to depend on the charity of our partners and relatives in order to carry out our revolutionary labour.²²⁷

The dilemma of where volunteer work/activism fits within the burdens that are placed on women is also addressed in relation to Cuba. “Indeed, because women have on so many occasions been required to engage in volunteer labor, they sometimes face a triple burden of housework, paid work, and volunteer work” (D’Amato). Nancy Folbre also addresses this triple shift in her book, The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values. Folbre explores what she calls “the invisible heart”, the caring work that is often unacknowledged and a necessary supplement to “the invisible hand” of the market. This caring labor takes place in employment, with traditionally “female” jobs such as nursing, elder care, teaching and childcare, as well as through housework and volunteer work. Folbre posits that, while the emphasis is on the invisible hand, anyone who participates in non-market caring work is seen as a

²²⁷ Fernandes, Sujatha, “The Gender Agenda of the Pink Tide in Latin America,” Znet [electronic journal], October 2007- [cited 8 February 2008]; available from http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=13958§ionID=1

“sucker,” creating a disincentive for the much-needed volunteer work that is the basis of many civic and community institutions.

Margaret Prescott of the Global Women’s Strike in Los Angeles once mentioned how women active in the black liberation movement who received public assistance were thus enabled to organize for better education, breakfast programs and transportation. She further noted that the attack on welfare mothers and their portrayal as lazy black women was a direct assault on the black liberation movement. Therefore, the attack on welfare mothers is also an attack on housework, and the social movements that many poor women are active in. As mothers face this assault on their housework and their activism, they are pushed into employment, where the “invisible hand” is supposed to solve their problems. As Folbre mentions, however, it is often the “invisible heart” that makes sure that communities are being provided and cared for.

While unpaid housework has been addressed by women’s organizations and movements in Cuba, the US, and Venezuela, there is a push to consider the “triple burden” of volunteer community work in addition to employment and housework. In Venezuela, poor women are unpaid grassroots organizers in the majority of the social missions. In Cuba, unpaid community volunteer labor is expected, especially of women, who are thought to be naturally inclined towards caring labor. In the United States, the attack on welfare mothers has a clear correlation to the attack on the movements to which they donate their labor. By compensating housework, women will have more time and resources to commit to activism and volunteer-service work.

In fact, in Venezuela, women are demanding that their “revolutionary labor” be counted and acknowledged as well.

Conclusion: “Caring Work” as a Strategy for Women Workers

In Venezuela, Cuba and the United States, despite varying steps towards support for mothers, women continue to do a disproportionate amount of housework. Although Cuban women achieve “the four demands” and institute the Family Code, they still face the “*doble carga*” of balancing unpaid housework with paid employment. While women in the US lack the support that Cuban women have won, they too find themselves being pushed into employment, while their housework is unremunerated. Welfare reform has reinforced this by pushing for welfare-to-work programs, which define work as employment and penalize mothers for wanting to stay home to provide care for their children. While Venezuela’s *Misión Madres del Barrio* also has an end goal of bringing women into paid employment, as opposed to being compensated for housework, the Mission promotes self-employment in cooperatives as opposed to low-wage employment. Article 88 of the Venezuelan constitution has also created a strong legal framework for a more expansive program that provides social security for all houseworkers.

In light of political changes in Venezuela, the United States and Cuba offer important comparative examples of the political economy of housework. By comparing the political economy of housework in Cuba, Venezuela and the United States, we can conclude that the equal rights approach for women’s movements (as seen in Cuba) does not free women of the majority of the housework. We can also

note that the US's welfare-to-work program, reinforces the false belief that work is synonymous with employment, and that housework is far from being acknowledged or compensated in the US. Furthermore, it is apparent that the caring work that women do in the home, which is often seen as "the private sphere" has a "public" counterpart such as activism or volunteer/service work, and that this caring volunteer work is increasingly becoming acknowledged as an essential part of the debate around caring work.

Focusing on caring work as opposed to housework creates an umbrella for low-wage (mostly female) domestic work, unpaid housework, and unpaid community organizing- therefore creating possibilities for women to unite and organize as careworkers. Molyneaux argues that "an analysis of the social relations of carework, are perhaps more useful starting points than essentialist notions of 'woman the carer.'" Some of the struggles of careworkers are against the "non-acknowledgement of skill or its obfuscation as a product of gender socialization rather than formal training."²²⁸ A challenge that careworkers face is that "before caregivers [are] even able to bargain for higher wages, benefits, and better working conditions, they [have] to see themselves as workers and fight for such recognition from the public, the state, and the very users of their services."²²⁹ In the neoliberal era this is *the* new strategic demand.²³⁰

²²⁸ Boris and Klein, 2007, p.178.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ In reference to Leopoldina Fortunati, who declared in 1974 that wages for housework is "the strategic demand."

CONCLUSIONS:
Steps Towards Creating a Caring Economy

Women in Venezuela have made important legislative advances in the recognition of housework, and while no social program fully implements the far-reaching ambitions of Article 88, *Misión Madres del Barrio* recognizes how unpaid labor in and out of the home plays an essential role in meeting the basic needs of poor families and communities. The ideological foundation of the recognition for housework in Venezuela originates from practical necessity due to economic crisis; however, *MMB* borrows elements from Feminist-Marxism by defining labor and poverty in Marxist terms and using feminist analysis as a tool for analyzing the disproportionately poor female-headed households.

The overtly anti-capitalist elements of *MMB* set it apart from other public assistance programs because the program re-defines labor relations, emphasizes the value of unpaid domestic work, and provides the skills, training, and financing for poor women to become self-employed in small-scale cooperatives, as opposed to low-wage employment. *MMB*'s emphasis on socio-political formation, political enfranchisement, basic primary care, and training and financing affirms that the cash assistance is only one element of the program. *MMB* does not actually remunerate women for housework, more accurately it is a complex poverty reduction program that examines the root causes of the extreme poverty of female-headed households and proposes a multi-faceted strategy for addressing it. This exploration brings the

issue of unpaid housework to the forefront; and creates a popular consciousness that unpaid housework is (hard) work and valuable.

Since *Misión Madres del Barrio* is still in its infancy and is taking place within the context of numerous anti-poverty programs, and economic and social changes in Venezuela my research yields inconclusive results in terms of the specific role that the Mission plays in the alleviation of poverty. However, the Mission has other positive effects such as empowering women to become more active in their communities. While it is impossible to measure this empowerment, the testimonies provided by many of the participants in chapter four demonstrate a sense of enthusiasm and involvement that has been made possible—in part— by the support that Mission Madres del Barrio has offered.

Cash assistance alone, no matter the amount, cannot be the only strategy to reducing poverty. *Misión Madres del Barrio* reaffirms that social programs designed to alleviate poverty and empower poor women must incorporate an acknowledgement of housework. While there is still no clear consensus of what a system of remuneration for that housework might look like, there are now models of forming cooperatives and doing community organizing as a part of individual and collective empowerment in poor communities.

As this unpaid domestic labor becomes increasingly acknowledged and associated with unpaid volunteer “revolutionary labor” (or community organizing), the debate around housework moves out of the homes and into a public sphere where there is potential for organizing working-class and poor women. The strategy of

moving away from housework and towards “Caring Work” allows women’s movements to draw connections between unpaid community organizing, unpaid domestic work, and low-waged work relegated to women. This framework proposes that women organize as female workers to reject the de-valuation of their labor in all realms and to propose and implement strategies for the construction of a caring economy. Nora Castañeda supports this in her assertion that the economy “should be at the service of human beings instead of human beings at the service of the economy.”²³¹ This transformation can be seen in the movement towards building cooperatives throughout Venezuela. *MMB* contributes to this change through the socio-productive projects, but there are also numerous other opportunities to receive training and funding through the Women’s Development Bank, *Misión Vuelvan Caras* and *Misión Che Guevara*.

Venezuela’s advances in creating actual programs from which to analyze, reflect and learn provides tools for grassroots women, social justice movements, and policy-makers to construct concrete ways to acknowledge housework and change the conditions that create poverty and devalue women’s work. The greatest challenges to *Misión Madres del Barrio* is the continuation of corruption and bureaucracy that is preventing resources destined for community councils from arriving. Combating this corruption will require autonomous organizations of popular power to demand accountability for those resources. However, the genuine construction of popular

²³¹ Nora Castañeda and el Banco de Desarrollo de la Mujer de Venezuela, Creando una economía solidaria. London: Crossroads, 2006, p.3.

power and a participatory society is threatened by the patronage culture in Venezuela and the top-down authoritarian tendencies of the Chávez government.

Misión Madres del Barrio offers a window into the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, especially as it begins to define itself in overtly Socialist terms. As the program advances there will be need for follow-up research that can measure changes in living standards, attitudes, distribution of housework and marriage rates as well as the results of the socio-productive projects and the overall project of which this program is a small part. Actual functioning programs and institutions of socialism of the 21st century pose a strong ideological threat to neoliberal tyranny—and provide concrete counter-capitalist examples that offer hope, vision, and tools to movements that are working to create a Caring Economy—where we are all truly valued.

Appendix 1 Map of Venezuela



Northern Central Venezuela.

Source: <http://www.weather-forecast.com/locations/Losteques>



Map of Venezuela

Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/south-america/venezuela/>

Appendix 2

Interview Key

Group 1: Los Teques

All interviews in this group were conducted between February 18- March 2, during home visits with the Urban Land Committee of the Guaicaipuro Municipality in Venezuela. Each interview was conducted in the communities listed beside the women's pseudonyms.

Pseudonym	Description	Location
Alicia	Single mother, runs a Mercal (subsidized food market)	La zuisa
Leonor	Single mother, communications director of her community council	Romullo Gallegos
Yalitza	Single mother, works for the Urban Land Committee of the Municipality of Guaiacaipuro	Las Adjuntas
Virgilia	Single mother	La Arenita
Mercedes	Single mother of nine children	Aguas Frias
Maria	Spokesperson for nutrition in her community council	Aguas Frias
Mireyoc	Mother of six	Colina de Matica
Irma	Single mother with a chronic illness	Colina de Matica
Damelis	Single mother, spokesperson for MMB	Colina de Matica

Group 2: - MMB Gender Training Workshop

All of the Interviews in this section were conducted on March 2, 2008, during a gender training workshop at the MMB Office in the *Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Participación y Protección Social*, in Caracas, Venezuela.

Pseudonym	Description	Location
Liliana	MMB beneficiary, single mother	Antimano, Caracas
Gloria	Student and single mother	Candelaria, Caracas
Fabia	Principal spokesperson in her community council	Candelaria, Caracas
Iraima	Single mother	Candelaria, Caracas
Carla	Single mother of six	San Bernadina, Caracas
Inés	Mother of four	Petare, Caracas
Gladys	Spokesperson for her community council	Petare, Caracas
Teresa	Single mother	Maizeta, Caracas
Aidla	Mother of three, one with dissability	Antimano, Caracas
Táis	Mother of five, one with a disability	Catia, Caracas
Johanna	Promoter of MMB	Catia, Caracas
Jaqueline	Spokesperson of MMB	Catia, Caracas
Olivia	Mother of eight children	La Vega, Caracas
Paula	Single mother	La Vega, Caracas

Group 3: International Women's Day March

All interviews in this group were conducted on March 8, 2008, during the International Women's Day March.

Pseudonym		Community
Gabi	Single mother, hair stylist	Krayak
Sozeida	Single mother	Krayak
Hilda	Single mother	Maracay
Clementina	Colombian national and single mother	San Juan
Griselda	Runs a "casa de alimentación"	San Juan
Claudia	Coordinator of Socio-productive projects	Macacao
Ayari	Single mother	Macacao
Nancy	National Coordinator of the MMB	La Pastora
Karina	Single mother of seven children	El Valle
Alaida	Single mother of nine	El Valle
Murta	Single mother	El Valle
Rosa	Single mother, spokesperson for community council	Valencia
Mari	Single mother, works at a cement co-op	San Juan
Rebecca	Single mother, works at a cement co-op	San Juan
Flor	Single mother	Valencia
Rosita	Mother of four	Maracay
Ana	Single mother	Candelaria
Ayari	Single mother	Candelaria

Additional Interviews

Name	Title	Date	Location
Juanita Romero	Coordinator of the Urban Land Committee, Municipality of Guaicaipuro	February 4, 2006 March 3, 2008	Los Teques
Selma James	International Coordinator of the Global Women's Strike	February 6, 2006 March 5, 2008	Caracas
Nina Lopez	Coordinator of the Global Women's Strike	February 6, 2006 March 5, 2008	Caracas
Nora Castañeda	President of the Women's Development Bank	March 2, 2006 February 8, 2008	BanMujer Office, Caracas, DF.

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

What community are you from?

Do you work with *MMB*?

Do you have children? How many?

Are you a member of the Comité de la Misión Madres del Barrio?

Are you a beneficiary?

How does the program work?

How were women in your community selected?

How many women comprise the committee?

Of the committee members, how many are also beneficiaries?

When was the committee formed?

Have you worked with the Municipal Coordinators?

Have you (or people in your community) begun receiving the payment?

Have there been courses, training or workshops?

What has the socio-political school been like?

How do you see the payment?

Describe how you spend your day? What is housework? Do you think it should be waged?

How much money do you (or women in your community) receive? Is it sufficient?

What kinds of costs do you have?

What are the successes and failures of Misión Madres del Barrio?

Appendix 4
Poverty Rates, 1997-2005²³²

TABLE 1
Venezuela: Poverty Rates, 1997-2005

Year	Time Period	Households Below Poverty Line (%)	People Below Poverty Line (%)
1997	1st half	55.6	60.94
	2nd half	48.1	54.48
1998	1st half	49.0	55.44
	2nd half	43.9	50.40
1999	1st half	42.8	49.99
	2nd half	42.0	48.69
2000	1st half	41.6	48.31
	2nd half	40.4	46.34
2001	1st half	39.1	45.51
	2nd half	39.0	45.38
2002	1st half	41.5	48.13
	2nd half	48.6	55.36
2003	1st half	54.0	61.00
	2nd half	55.1	62.09
2004	1st half	53.1	60.15
	2nd half	47.0	53.90
2005	1st half	42.4	48.80
	2nd half	37.9	43.70

Source: Venezuela's National Statistics Institute (INE, República Bolivariana de Venezuela)

²³² This table is reprinted and explained in the following Issue brief: Mark Weisbrot, Luis Sandoval, and David Rosnick, "Poverty Rates in Venezuela: Getting the numbers right." Center for Economic Policy and Research. May 2006 – [cited 12 May 2008]; available in http://www.cepr.net/documents/venezuelan_poverty_rates_2006_05.pdf

Appendix 5

Descriptions of Social Missions

The social Missions in Venezuela are funded through Venezuela's National Oil Company (PDVSA). Below is a description of Missions mentioned throughout this thesis as well as a table of PDVSA's Annual Social Development Expenditures.²³³

Mission Barrio Adentro- a healthcare program that brings free basic primary and preventative medical care directly into poor communities.

Many of the doctors are Cuban.

Mission Robinson (I & II)- A literacy (I) and primary education (II) program which utilized a "Yes I Can" audiovisual program designed by Cuba.

Mission Ribas- a secondary education program (similar to a Graduation Equivalency Degree GED)

Mission Sucre- a higher educational Mission that prepares students for college through tutorials. This program has been compared to an Associates degree from a Community College in the US.

Mission Alimentacion- a nutritional program which includes the subsidized food markets (MERCALS) as well as the *casa de alimentación* (soup kitchens)

Mission Identity- a push to get all Venezuelans, foreign nationals, and indigenous people personal identification cards and numbers as well as registered to vote

Mission Vuelvan Caras- a program that provides training and credit for the formation of cooperatively run businesses.

Mission Che Guevara- a newer program that is similar to Vuelvan Caras but incorporates socio-political school and socialist values into the process of forming and operating cooperatively run businesses

Mission Negra Hipolita- an anti-poverty social program aimed at homeless and "vulnerable" communities.

Mission Zamora- a land redistribution program which seizes unproductive land on large estates and redistributes it to cooperatives that have proposals on how to use the land for "social ends"

Mission Guacaipuro- a general attempt to bring all of the social missions into indigenous communities in ways that are culturally appropriate and sensitive

Mission Madres del Barrio- an anti-poverty social program that pays female heads of households in extreme poverty a monthly stipend while they attend socio-political school. They are also provided training and credit in order to form socio-productive cooperatives.

PDVSA's Annual Social Development Expenditures
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2003: \$249 million

2004: \$1.24 billion

2005: \$6.91 billion

2006: \$13.26 billion

²³³ Source: Venezuela Information Office, [A Mission to End Poverty: State-sponsored Social Programs in Venezuela](http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Social%20Missions.pdf), 2007- [cited 10 May 2008]; available in <http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/downloads/Social%20Missions.pdf>

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