COMMUNITY SECURITY IN CARACAS:
THE COLLECTIVE ACTION OF FOUNDATION ALEXIS VIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is divided into two arguments. The first part is an argument for community security: a community-based vision of human security, which conflates development and personal security. Social movements then animate community security, addressing local problems and creating endogenous solutions. Arturo Escobar’s work on post-development theory and Raúl Zibechi’s new social movements as territories in resistance best explains this phenomenon. At the community level, I utilize Stephen Schneider’s work on community crime prevention and organic mobilization as complex and difficult to maintain. With this lens, I establish an analytical framework for community security movements based on the themes of identity, praxis, constituency and autonomy. Examinations on gender relations, networks, violence and production are also weaved into the analysis.

The second part is an argument that a Caracas (Venezuela) based group is a community security movement and that this analytical framework is best fitted for understanding them. Though Caracas is among the most insecure and politically turbulent cities in Latin America, small pockets of peace exist in working class neighborhoods. This research focuses on one group in the western parish of el 23 de Enero (the 23rd of January). The group is the Alexis Vive Foundation. Their projects include crime prevention, endogenous development and self-managed
production. I ask central questions about the alternative they present: Is it effective? Is it inclusive? Is it autonomous? In this way, I show that crime and development, especially in urban areas, are not mutually exclusive. I also build on the contributions of scholars, such as George Ciccariello-Maher, Sujatha Fernandes and Alejandro Velasco that focus on the political agency of social movements in Caracas.
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Introduction

This thesis is based on the premise that social movements are engaged in development and physical security. This argument is twofold. First, I propose a framework of analysis based on my vision of community security in the context of social movements. This amounts to a vision of development seen through a social movement lens. This effort is meant to interlink various ideas of social organization, development and modes of resistance as a constellation of theoretical and empirical points. The result is a synthesis I call community security movements: social movements engaged in multifaceted struggles that feature active participation in endogenous development projects and community protection to varying extents. In response to Charles Tilly’s question *Do Communities Act?*, this thesis unequivocally exclaims *yes*, but also maintains his assertion that community organization as a tactic for engineering change is only likely to work under an unusual set of conditions, especially in urban areas. ¹ It is therefore the ambition of this thesis is to trace out those conditions for a particular trend of social movement, the community security movement.

The second argument, dives into a specific case study to test the utility of a community security movement analysis. This example takes us to a working class parish in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, the 23 de Enero (the 23rd of January). The neighborhood’s particular history has established it as a theater for community security movements, I argue. To drill deeper into this dynamic I focus on one group, Fundation Alexis Vive. This venture requires significant contextualization of Venezuelan society and politics, Caracas in particular. The goal here, however, is not to qualify the group in question as a community security movement or not.

Rather, the idea is to explore the terrain of this framework to inspire new questions and debates on community, development, security, resistance and ontology.

The qualitative research methods employed here include first person interviews, conversations and observations conducted in Caracas during the summer of 2014. I conducted four full-length interviews with community leaders in the 23 de Enero, two of which declined to sign a letter of consent. Information provided by them here is either integrated into the analysis or referenced under a pseudonym. Also included are a dozen informal conversations I had with people in the neighborhood and around Caracas. The spontaneity of those exchanges offer insight into everyday discourses and anxieties. During the course of my fieldwork, I was continuously surprised by people’s willingness to share their opinions and experiences with me, even if off the record. In conjunction, I triangulate secondary sources from scholars and various news media outlets. However, it was primarily through Facebook and Youtube that I became most acquainted with the nuances and influential voices of Caracas politics –knowledge that proved indispensable during my fieldwork. In this thesis, I also include maps and images to effectively convey space and discourse. The result is a diverse array of perspectives and knowledge on Caracas politics and society.

The fieldwork I conducted in Caracas, which was unfortunately limited to three weeks, was difficult to accomplish but highly valuable. Access to certain circles, privileged to me in such a short amount of time, was owed to both happenstance and the generosity of individuals in both Venezuela and the United States. My experience contrasted with many reports and accounts from other sources. Upon beginning my fieldwork, I had the impression these groups maintain tight, closed spaces where outsiders were firmly scrutinized. For this reason, I always proceed
with caution and respect. Not for fear I would be harmed, but for apprehension I would be rejected and my project lost. Alexis Vive, in particular, has a reputation for being hermetic and paranoid. But, that was not my impression at all. Jorge (pseudonym), one of the main spokespeople of the group, screened me before they would permit me to interview them. We spoke for about half an hour and I found him friendly and good humored. About fifteen minutes after our conversation, I received a text message from an unknown number saying, “We’re at your service” (estamos a la orden).

In the interest of background, it is necessary to establish some basic explanations and definitions of Venezuelan historical periods and political terms. This thesis discusses the Punto Fijo pact period (1958-99) and the Fifth Republic (1999-present) as distinct political historical periods. The Punto Fijo pact period, or puntofijismo, refers to the period following the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-58), in which the two major parties, Democratic Action (AD in Spanish) and the Christian democrats of COPEI, governed an exclusive representative democracy. The Fourth Republic is understood as the period of 1830-1999, beginning with secession from la Gran Colombia until the inauguration of Hugo Chávez. The Fifth Republic is a distinction coined by Chávez to distance himself from the past and emphasize a new phase of the national project, also know as the Bolivarian Revolution. Named for the nineteenth century American independence leader, Simón Bolívar, the Bolivarian Revolution is a diverse left movement and political process based on nationalism, popular participation and
social welfare, whose principle figure is the late president Hugo Chávez. However, the revolution cannot be reduced to his leadership alone.²

Chavismo, and its member chavistas, refers to a broad array of individuals, social movements, and political parties represented by the Great Patriotic Pole coalition. Steve Ellner further interprets chavismo as a vehicle of “social-based democracy” –which emphasizes education, job skills, ideology, transformation of values and empowerment, while promoting flexibility and avoiding strong institutions and institutional rules in order to avoid discouraging participation by those who lack organizational experience.³ The political center of chavismo is the dominant United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV is Spanish), whose antecedent was the Fifth Republic Movement party (1997-2007, MVR in Spanish). The political opposition, like chavismo, is also a loose amalgamation of many social currents and political parties, mostly represented by the umbrella organization the United Democratic Table (MUD in Spanish). The most sensitive aspect of this thesis is its treatment of radical groups known as colectivos (collectives), which Foundation Alexis Vive is one. Found in urban areas across the country, especially in the 23 de Enero, they have a reputation as political gangs and militias.⁴ But this reductive understanding tells us little about their context and dynamics. It is the desire of this thesis to explore those possibilities.


The first chapter of this thesis pursues *community security* as an analytical framework. Community security borrows from human security as a foundation of wellbeing, expanded to the community and animated through collective action, what I call community security movements. What does human security mean for communities? Why focus on the community? Next, I employ post-development theory to explore different ideas of development, security and how they conflict with top-down paradigms. Lastly, I examine how communities mobilize to pursue and defend their security. This is done by establishing a five-point framework of analysis based on the work of Arturo Escobar and Raúl Zibechi: territorialization, identity, praxis, constituency and autonomy.

The purpose of the second chapter is to construct a history of an urban territory of difference as a setting for community security movements. The urban territory of difference examined here is the western Caracas parish of the 23 de Enero (January 23). This broad analysis is guided by Escobar’s understanding of the production of place as an interrelated historical process. This chapter establishes the background, or soil, if you will, from which the community acts in the interest of its security while in resistance. Included in this chapter are a conceptual foundation, a concise history, and a broad look at the groups in the neighborhood.

The central argument of chapter three is that Foundation Alexis Vive is a community security movement, based on the conceptual and historical groundwork laid in the previous chapters. Building on the spatial history provided in the second chapter, we continue with a more focused examination of community security movements in flux to order to get at Escobar and Zibechi’s central point: the emergence of alternative politics, economics and culture exercised by
social movements. The conclusion summarizes the analysis and reinforces the arguments presented, while identifying remaining questions.
Chapter 1: An Argument for Community Security

In this chapter I argue for community security as an analytical framework. Community security borrows from human security as a foundation of wellbeing, expanded to the community and animated through collective action, what I call community security movements. It is first necessary to justify this re-imagination. What does human security mean to communities? Why focus on the community? Next, I employ post-development theory to explore different ideas of development, security and how they conflict with top-down paradigms. Lastly, I examine how communities mobilize to pursue and defend their security. This work is not meant to negate human security; rather, it is meant to enrich the human security debate, offer another layer of analysis, pull it away from the state and make it critical.

Over the past few decades, the international development sector has become increasingly interested in local knowledge and participatory approaches, seeking to build on established practices and empower beneficiaries. These conceptualizations often begin with state and NGO engagement from the top to engage the community below. Conversely, the community security argued for here begins with the community and considers relations with formal institutions from that perspective, a vision from below. This flipping of human security is the critical character of the analysis: to turn it on the greater society, social phenomena and researchers. This analysis requires an examination of social mobilizations, organic formations of individuals committed to

their own holistic security. With their ontological politics, they deploy various tactics to achieve their goals.

Human Security

The idea of human security began in the 1970s and 1980s as new concepts of security and development were emerging, such as cooperative security, comprehensive security, and environmental security, endorsed by the Brandt, Palme, and Brundtland commissions and their respective reports. But only after the Cold War did a more comprehensive vision of conflict resolution and development began to take shape. Today the outlining document for human security is the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, *New Dimensions of Human Security*. The report covers seven dimensions: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. At its most basic, human security is *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*. More recently, the 2005 World Summit Outcome emphasized human security as, “the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair”, recognizing that “all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential.”

Human security incorporates the following key points for Amitav Acharya. It is a vertical and horizontal expansion of national security, a multidimensional, people-centered approach to

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development and conflict prevention and resolution. Human security has also been influenced by the contemporary rejection of economic growth as the main indicator of development and an emphasis on the empowerment of people, e.g. the advent of human development indexes. This also includes the worldwide increase of internal conflict, the rise of globalization and transnational threats, like pandemics, and the post-cold war preoccupation with human rights and intervention.  

According to Newman, this conceptualization has resulted in four primary tendencies in human security studies. The first is development oriented and emphasizes poverty, disease, violence and environmental degradation as conceptual, ethical, and empirical starting points. This perceptive is most faithful to the original 1994 UNDP report and has been championed by countries like Japan. The second vision of human security is most concerned with armed conflict, weak and abusive states, and non-state actors. By focusing on victimization, displacement and violence against women and children, this view seeks to resolve conflicts, and explain and measure their impacts on humanity. The third tendency stretches human security to include “non-traditional” security issues, like disease, crime, terrorism, and human trafficking. Such hazards do inhibit development and certainly threaten personal safety, but this approach contributes little conceptually. Lastly, some scholars use human security to explore theoretical debates on the nature of security threats, responses to insecurity and discursive meaning. Kyle


Grayson, for example, deploys Foucault’s biopolitics\textsuperscript{11} to argue “human security is conceived as a complement to existing power structures, mitigating some of their most abhorrent effects, without actually attempting to problematize their constitutive relations or what makes these possible.” In other words, human security is a tool used to “justify the (in)actions of the current global biopolitical order,”\textsuperscript{12} and not as a point of critical analysis.

Other critics of human security more concerned with state-level analysis claim that without a concrete definition human security is effectively useless for policy makers and scholars.\textsuperscript{13} If human security encompasses so much, what is it not? Barry Buzan also contends, “reconstructing human rights as human security reinforces the danger that security is taken to be the desired end. Human rights is much better placed to support the idea that the desired end is some form of desecuritization down into normal politics.”\textsuperscript{14} Conceptually, what does human security do that human rights cannot? After all, does not the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights already cover the normative ideas human security attempts to establish? Furthermore, does the securitization of discourse draw us away from what Buzan calls the “normal politics” established by the legal and

\textsuperscript{11}Grayson defines biopolitics as “the identification, classification and management of populations in order to ensure that the dimensions of life, that are said to define them, are amenable to specific forms of governance, systems of belief and cultural propensities or what one might want to call ‘ways of life.’”; See Grayson, Kyle. "Human Security as Power/knowledge: The Biopolitics of a Definitional Debate." Cambridge Review of International Affairs 21, no. 3 (2008): 383-401, 384

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 395-397


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normative authority of human rights and international humanitarian law?

Moreover, the use of human security as a policy paradigm by countries like Japan, Norway, and Canada, has led some to see it as a manifestation of Western hegemony and liberal cultural imperialism, a rationalization for military intervention under the guise of wars against drugs and terrorism under neoliberal economic and political orders paradoxically in conflict with human security. Further elaborating this paradox, Newman points out, “[Human security] challenges the primacy of the state but is willing to concede the reality of state power and to work with the state to find solutions.” He thus argues for Critical Human Security Studies as a way for human security to be both critical and policy relevant. He calls for “‘going deeper’ into the layers of cause and effect, this conceptual development will also require that human security engages much more in debates about the ontology and epistemology of knowledge claims regarding the nature of security and insecurity.” Answering Newman, the community security argued for here drills down to local knowledge and organizational forms for contending ontologies, different ways of understanding the world.

Other scholars have also attempted to rework definitions and critical approaches. King and Murray argue human security should only include essential elements of survival, or elements

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17 As Busumtwi-Sam points out, human security discourses “distract attention away from the contradictions of contemporary neoliberal globalization that may be complicit in the generation of insecurities for vulnerable individuals and groups worldwide;” See: James Busumtwi-Sam. "Development and Human Security: Whose Security, and from What?" International Journal 57, no. 2 (2002): 253-72, 254


19 Ibid., 93
that are “important enough for human beings to fight over or to put their lives or property at great risk.”\textsuperscript{20} This foundation unambiguously points to human insecurity as a cause of conflict: people, whose security is threatened, will fight to defend it. The idea that people fight to defend and create their security leads us to examine conflict and forms of resistance. This puts people at odds with oppressive states and other hegemonic actors; thus, sharpening human security as point of ontological contention and power struggles where the community is often the center.

For this reason, the 1994 UNDP report emphasizes the importance of community, stating, “most people derive security from their membership in a group – a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values.”\textsuperscript{21} This idea is further elaborated in the UNDP 2009 report \textit{Community Security and Social Cohesion}, which understands the community as “a defined geographical area (community as a place) based on common ownership of resources of social, economic and cultural facilities (community as institutional structure) and where residents regard themselves as having common objectives, interests and needs (community as a process).”\textsuperscript{22} The report proposes Community Security and Social Cohesion (CSSC) as a “multisectoral programming approach to help ensure coherent interventions to enhance security and social cohesion at the community and national


level in crisis contexts.” Here threats to community security include violent crime, armed conflict, poverty, institutional weakness, and population movement through displacement due to violence or economic necessity.

While the Community Security and Social Cohesion report does well to focus on the community, threats to security and community-centered development programming, it does not understand the community as a subjective actor with its own discourse and praxis. In line with Newman’s critique, Hoogensen and Stuvøy also attempt to “criticalize” human security. They argue for a gender analysis of human security: flipping top-down conceptualizations to a bottom-up approach, emphasizing resistance and inclusivity. For them, considering difference is essential for understanding what human security means in a world of unequal and exploitative power relations. They also outline the tension between tradition security paradigms based on male domination and privilege, insisting security cannot be defined by dominant sources alone. For them, “security must begin with the individual, and security must be defined ‘as freeing individuals and groups from the social, physical, economic and political constraints that prevent them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do.’” Hoogensen and Stuvøy also agree with Buzan, who writes, “Human security removes ‘claims of both collective and non-human referent objects,’” and that “to focus solely on the individual removes the individual’s

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23 Ibid., 1


relationship to the community from the focus of analysis.” The goal of community security as defined by this thesis, in contrast, is to refocus on the community as a subject, its relationship with individuals and the state.

Post-Development

To further problematize human security, we look to post-development and the work of Arturo Escobar who critiques modernist orders as unsustainable, oppressive, colonial, and destructive. He points out that local resistance to universalist projects denotes the hegemonic character of Western development schemes that objectify human beings and suppress subjectivity, echoing Hoogensen and Stuvøy’s critique of tradition security paradigms. Escobar emphasizes post-development as non-Eurocentric and based on self-determination as a condition for life at odds with universalist modernities, focusing most of his energy ripping neoliberal globalization. Critiquing modern development he writes, “Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the ‘natives’ will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed by keeping alive the [premise] of the Third World as different and inferior, as having a limited humanity in relation to the accomplished European.” For Escobar, social movements and communities in resistance, particularly anti-globalization movements, are protective movements.


emerging not simply to regulate markets; instead, they question the epistemology of the market in the name of alternatives deriving from within and beyond the market system.\footnote{Arturo Escobar. "Beyond the Third World: Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-globalisation Social Movements." \textit{Third World Quarterly} 25, no. 1 (2004): 207-30.}

His insistence on the particular leads to the idea of a \textit{pluriverse}, or a world where many worlds fit: a seemingly infinite range of practices of concepts of development and the problematization of identities – we (the community) do not recognize ourselves in your project. These ontological conflicts are expressed in the world through competing notions of space, belonging, organization and purpose. In his work \textit{Territories of Difference} (2008), he discusses \textit{political ontology} as the defense of life and the perception of what life ought to be. One of the more prevalent ideas to emerge from this analysis is \textit{buen vivir}, which has its roots in \textit{quichua} concepts of harmony between social interaction and nature.\footnote{According to Escobar, “buen vivir questions the prevailing ‘maldevelopment’ highlighting the undesirability of a model based on growth and material progress as the sole guiding principles; displaces the idea of development as an end in itself, emphasizing that development is a process of qualitative change; enables, in principle, strategies that go beyond the export of primary products, going against the ‘reprimarization’ of the economy in vogue in the continent; broaches the question of the sustainability of the model; has made possible the discussion on other knowledges and cultural practices (e.g. indigenous and Afro) at the national level.” See: Arturo Escobar. "Latin America at a Crossroads." \textit{Cultural Studies} 24, no. 1 (2010): 1-65, 23} Thus, the concept of \textit{buen vivir} and its discourse opens space for a plurality of human security ontologies. He argues for post-development as the existence of alternative developments, constantly creating new realities and challenging universalist paradigms. This focuses us on the community, or small groups, and social movements as drivers of a development suited to their conditions based on their experiences.
Insecurity and Mobilization

As Escobar points out, social movements are increasingly active in a range of endogenous human security practices ranging from economic development to disaster response. Yet (post)development is only one part of human security. The other, *freedom from fear*, refers to direct violence to the body, or threat thereof. As the 1994 UNDP report states, “Perhaps no other aspect of human security is so vital for people as their security from physical violence.” This includes any type of violence from the state and non-state actors. Crime, in particular, can have a devastating effect on communities and their development. Moser and McIlwaine argue that crime and development are inextricably linked, focusing specifically on Latin America. They make this determination based on research conducted with participatory urban appraisals, which utilized direct participation with community members in Guatemala and Colombia. They also advocate for building social capital by strengthening formal and informal institutions (families, gangs, and community organizations).

Likewise, the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* and its report *Violence in the City: Understanding and Supporting Community*

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30 For a case of a social movement responding to a disaster see: Blachman-Biatch, Isadora, Keith Edgemon, Peter Hull, and Anna Taylor. *The Resilient Social Network: @OccupySandy #SuperstormSandy*. Falls Church, VA: Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Institute, 2013.


33 Moser and McIlwaine are fully aware gangs themselves are perpetrators of crime and violence that inhibit development and security. Their point, however, is to see gangs as a form of social capital with transformative and dynamic value. Gangs can also provide support structures and some level of security. Also see: Brian J. Osoba and Russell S. Sobel. "Youth Gangs as Pseudo-Governments: Implications for Violent Crime." *Southern Economic Journal* 75, no. 4 (2009): 996-1018.
Responses to Urban Violence\textsuperscript{34} also make this empirical connection between crime and development, showing that crime constrains community organization and wellbeing and making direct reference to the human security debate.\textsuperscript{35} The International Federation of the Red Cross further stresses this connection by stating “The destructive impact of violence – including the fear, stress, stigma, and health consequences – undermines the development of communities and societies; there is slowing of economic growth, eroding of individual and collective security, and limiting of social development – especially in low and middle-income countries.”\textsuperscript{36}

Insecurity, however, can also serve as a catalyst for social organization and broader development projects. Stephen Schneider calls this the perennial catch-22: these spatially concentrated social problems are instrumental in undermining and constricting a level of local mobilization that is necessary to address such problems.\textsuperscript{37} In other words, crime – as well as other inhibiting factors, like poverty, unemployment, family breakdown, and transience – impedes social mobilization while simultaneously being its cause. Schneider’s idea of community crime prevention (CCP) – a situational approach to crime prevention that is primarily concerned with reducing criminal opportunities – is along with Escobar’s work, the driving idea behind this thesis’s vision of social mobilization as a response to collective problems.


\textsuperscript{36} International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. IFRC Strategy on Violence Prevention, Mitigation and Response 2011-2020. 2011, 9

Tim Hope further posits that CCP paradigms have changed over the last sixty years according to perceptions of crime. He identifies two broad commonalities in the literature: the significance of horizontal (informal) relations and the importance of the vertical dimension of community integration with the state. Hope defines CCP as “actions intended to change the social conditions that are believed to sustain crime in residential communities”\(^{38}\) –his definition seems to be in accordance with Schneider’s. Hope broadly identifies this as the communitarian approach: a dense network of individual interdependencies with strong cultural commitments to mutuality of obligation.\(^{39}\) For him, the problem with the communitarian approach is that it is difficult to establish and even more difficult to maintain: near hermetic cultural or ideological bonds are required and the collective current must be strong enough to counter structural pressures. Undoubtedly, this points to a critically oriented community development approach.

Schneider also sees CCP as cyclical, revolving around collective action, informal social control, crime prevention, behavior modification and social cohesion. For him, CCP is rooted in social mobilization (proactive interventions) and is conceptually antagonistic towards criminal justice (reactive responses). While Schneider recognizes the threats of excessive vigilantism, repression and exclusion, he insists on the positive powers of community, cooperation, social justice and inclusion. I support his bold optimism. However, this also introduces a moral problem: are there good and bad forms of CCP and social mobilization? At times, the lines between CCP and abusive criminal behavior (gangs) may be fuzzy. Hope also suggests this paradox inherent in CCP: the problem of trying to build community institutions that control


\(^{39}\)Ibid., 66
crime in the face of their powerlessness to withstand the pressures toward crime in the community, whose source, or the forces that sustain them, derive from the wider social structure. Put another way, if we assume crime is rooted in local behavior (disorder), how can communities construct sustainable social institutions to prevent crime, while resisting broader social forces of poverty, transience and even state repression. Building on this paradox, groups may experience what I call a community security regression cycle, which describes the potential of local organizations for achieving certain community security gains, then regressing into criminality, resulting in the emergence of a new organization to counter the original group.

Donna Lee Van Cott further explains that the relationship between informal and formal legal institutions is more varied and complex than conventional wisdom proposes, often seeing institutional presence/strength in black and white terms. She analyzes informal justice institutions within two dimensions: contact with and coordination between the informal institution and the state, and the habit of informal and state authorities to adapt to each other. She concludes that legal pluralism (the idea that many legal orders can exist at once) advocates go too far to romanticize informal justice, arguing that informal justice is the result of institutional and judicial failures, and that informal justice can be flawed and abusive. Ultimately, she recognizes the value of informality in its context and supports connecting formal and informal institutions to provoke debate to correct both. Van Cott goes to the heart of community security

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40 Ibid., 24

movements: informal organization as a response to dysfunctional institutions or defense from repressive conditions that inhibit a safe and productive community environment.

Still, it is a big jump from CCP to Escobar-like autonomous post-development movements: a CCP group focused on endogenous development while resisting social and political structures and creating territories of difference through political ontological struggles. It seems Hope recognizes this tenuous progression in his critique of communitarian approaches: that they are rare and require very tight cultural and ideological bonds and, as I noted, may regress into criminality and abuse. Gangs and vigilantes are informal security groups that lack disciplined political orientation, a commitment to inclusivity and are primarily concerned with profit. Thus while the intension of many informal security groups is to provide some type of order, they contribute nearly nothing to sustainable security, development or collective wellbeing.

**Community Security Movements**

This tenuous conflation of resistance, community crime prevention and endogenous development brings us to social movements whose projects and praxis cover a wide range. Just as human security is a notion that may encompass too much, these groups and movements manage a wide variety of projects depending on their experience and knowledge. In Latin America, the most recent wave of popular sector movements, based in rural and urban communities forgotten or oppressed by state institutions, began to mobilize against neoliberal policies in the 1980s. Raúl Zibechi categorizes these movements into three broad tendencies: grassroots Christian communities inspired by liberation theology; indigenous insurgency, with its
non-Westerns cosmologies (as explored by Escobar); and the revolutionary militancy of Guevarism.\textsuperscript{42} Many of these movements have reached levels of sophistication and discipline described by Hope and Schneider as necessary to prevent crime and develop other projects, particularly concerning production and healthcare.

Zibechi finds seven common features of these movements. The first and most significant feature is *territorialization* expressed as the recuperation and defense of physical space. These spaces are homes to long-term organizations and projects that produce and re-produce life, while seeking alliances with other movements across class and ethnic boundaries. The next feature is *autonomy* from the state and political parties rooted in material and symbolic autonomy realized through projects of production and organization. The third is the *re-valoraization of culture and identity*. This is especially evident in women’s and indigenous movements, since they are often the most excluded from citizenship. Fourth, the appearance of *local intellectuals* through social mobility –and exposure to NGOs, I would add– produces new knowledge and facilitates organization. The fifth is the *changing role of women* facilitated by the frequent absence of men and unstable family units, which opens social and participatory space for women. Sixth is the *organization of work* and its relationship with nature. This refers to the conciseness of movements to transcend ownership of the means of production and create more egalitarian relations, a minimal division of labor, and new techniques of production that do not harm the environment. Finally, *self-affirming forms of action*, like strikes, roadblocks, and other tactics, press both formal institutions, reinforce the identity of the movement, and display discourse.

Zibechi also evokes the zumbayllu (a spinning top) as a metaphor, taken from José María Arguedas’s novel Deep Rivers (1958), for social movements’ inward gyrations and outward trajectory necessary for their survival.\textsuperscript{43} In much the same way, David Slater reasons that the connections between social movements and cultural politics should be expanded and rethought by incorporating spatial imagination.\textsuperscript{44} Central to Slater’s point is the binary themes of politics and the political. Here the political is understood as the antagonistic dimension that is inherent in all human society, taking many forms in diverse social relations. It is a living moment, the “magma of conflicting wills,” as he puts it. Politics, for Slater, is the rein of the political: the ensemble of practices, discourses, and institutions that try to establish order and to organize social life. Slater’s goal is to emphasize their interconnectivity by outlining the social movements’ transnational context, introducing three kinds of challenges they present to the territorial politics of the state: regional movements (Bolivia and Peru), armed uprisings (the EZLN in Mexico), and indigenous demands for territorial autonomy (Colombia). By simultaneously challenging and utilizing the politics of the state social movements churn, both outwardly and inwardly, underscoring Zibechi’s zumbayllu.

It seems the analysis of Escobar and Zibechi have much in common. They both emphasize resistance to neoliberalism (dominant structures), identity (political ontology, in Escobar’s case), endogenous production, horizontalism (more pressed by Zibechi), and most importantly, their understanding of space as territories of difference (or territories in resistance,


for Zibechi). Yet, they both miss something. Escobar, focused mostly on rural afrodescendant and indigenous cosmologies, neglects class-based movements and urban spaces as territories of difference. Zibechi, while interested in urban movements, struggles, as many do, to see threats to physical security and development in the same vein. If *buen vivir* comes closest to explaining this amorphous idea of wellbeing in resistance, Zibechi, while supporting the idea and recognizing its declarative value, sees it as unrealistic and unexciting.\(^45\) Furthermore, *buen vivir*, so often associated with environmentalism, does not capture physical insecurity as a catalyst and inhibitor of social organization, as described by Hope and Schneider, which is such a powerful reality for many popular urban sectors throughout the world. For this reason, I introduce community security not as an alternative, but as a way to understand alternatives created by communities. Therefore, community security, and its animated movements, is found where *necessity meets resistance*.

Miguel Díaz-Barriga’s work on gender in urban movements in Mexico City, for example, examines how social movements create contested spaces of difference.\(^46\) He focuses on the experiences of three women from different urban movements in separate *colonias* (neighborhoods) in the 1970s and 1980s, and how *colonas* (“poor women,” as he puts it) conceptualize participation and contextualize needs. Central to *colona* participation is his *borderlands concept* – a response to dominant ideologies and societies that attempt to order social

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experience into strict dichotomies (gender, in this case). The *colonas* blur distinctions between
domestic and public spheres, organizing to demand *and* provide services for the community, thus
challenging gender identities and the sexual division of labor. The moment for these challenges
is mostly in *lo cotidiano* (the everyday), which entails an understanding of politics as a struggle
to reimagine everyday life and create new forms of development and interaction. One *colona*
spoke of a community-run popular kitchen, library, production cooperatives, chicken coops and a
kindergarten. These struggles were also constantly at odds with the state, especially after the
Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968 and during the Mexican Dirty War (roughly 1968-1982) against
university students and left-wing activists. The concepts provided by Diaz-Barriga and the
pattern he describes—popular sectors organizing around development, identity, and politics—
gives us insight into gender relations in community security movements.

In Jeffrey Rubin’s *Ambiguity and Contradiction in a Radical Popular Movement*, he
analyzes the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI) of Juchitán,
Oaxaca, Mexico.⁴⁷ He contends that ambiguities and contradictions within and outside the
movement present a dual effect of exclusion and dynamism that animates movements. He strikes
common misconceptions of radical popular movements as homogeneous and emphasizes their
flexible spaces of conflict and complaint. Central to his piece are the tensions of difference along
lines of identity (indigenous Zapotec), ideology and practice, in particular the use of violence.
Moreover, COCEI’s creation of health centers, squatter settlements, and local markets, along
with their resistance to the dominant economic and political structures of the state (by asserting

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an expansion of democratic participation through official and unofficial strategies), identity-based discourse, and territoriality, make them an intriguing case for community security analysis. According to Rubin, the COCEI pushes the boundaries of non-violence, holding aggressive protests, occupying buildings, blocking highways, and utilizing violent discourse. They also make use of racist perceptions of the “savage Indian” to inspire mobilization and pressure the government. As Rubin states, “…[COCEI’s] manipulation of violent action and imagery, strengthened the movement’s ability to rally supporters and challenge the Mexican regime.” Thus violence, or threat thereof, became part of the movement’s repertoire, used strategically without actually committing to warfare or terrorism. Rubin also describes how the leadership’s militant stance and radical ideology (broadly Marxist-Leninist combined with indigeneity) often clashed with moderates in the movement and ordinary people in the community. However, these differences usually manifested in open debate and banter, developing close-knit, nuanced interrelations between community members – something not so apparent from the outside, magma of conflicting wills.

In Argentina, we see two contrasting community security movements. In her article on the Unemployed Workers’ Union (Union de Trabajadores Desocupados, UTD), in the municipality of General Moscon in the northern province of Salta, Ana Cecilia Dinerstein argues that the autonomy of social movements is rooted in their socioeconomic contexts, contesting and working with the state and the market. The UTD is a community-based labor movement created by highly skilled workers from a local branch of the formal state owned energy company,

48 Ibid., 147

Treasury Petroleum Fields (YPF in Spanish), who were laid off during neoliberal restructuring in the 1990s. Their purpose is to create collective solutions to community degradation as a result of unemployment and dysfunctional social services. Crime and delinquency are concerns of the UTD, but only indirectly. Instead, they center their attention on social projects, like recycling, refurbishing public buildings and houses, community farms, soup kitchens, volunteering at retirement homes, health care visits to the ill and disabled, the production of regional crafts, carpentry, and maintaining and repairing hospital emergency rooms and schools.

Autonomy, Dinerstein’s primary concern, is a tenuous pursuit for the UTD. Their projects are largely funded by the state, but the UTD regularly receives those funds by demanding them through protests (marches and roadblocks). Though, they began organizing to denounce corruption, clientelism and neoliberalism, they now employ protests as a way of obtaining resources for their social projects from the very same government. Dinerstein calls this “contested institutionalization” – autonomy active at territorial levels but the ethos and functioning of autonomous practices is encapsulated in the character of public policies aimed at communities—an and understands that the UTD risk falling into the same cycle of clientelism that they so fervently opposed. She also notes that though the majority of the UTD’s participants are women they are not represented in the leadership, which is all male. Additionally, the UTD’s practice of personalistic leadership, whereby leaders simultaneously accumulate power while encouraging endogenous development and popular participation, may create an uneasy practical (not necessarily confrontational) tension between authoritative leaders and the principles of democratic self-management.

50 Ibid, 362
In contrast with the UTD, the Buenos Aires based urban movement, the Independent Villera Current (Corriente Villera Independiente, or CVI), holds their autonomy above all else. As Zibechi describes, the movement was founded, like the UTD, out of the anti-neoliberal picketing movements of the 1990s and early 2000s in the historically rebellious popular villera (barrio or slum), Villa 31, located in the center of the city.51 The CVI participates in direct action (marches, rallies, hunger strikes, roadblocks, and occupations) throughout the capital demanding better social and public services, like sanitation and suitable housing (almost all Villa 31 is made up of informal shanties). The symbolic use of Che Guevara is central to their discourse of resistance and international solidarity. Their social projects in the villera include twenty outdoor eating areas, six community kitchens (one named for el Che), three work crews, a health clinic, an elementary school and a women’s center for victims of domestic abuse. Though they have not explicitly organized to defend against crime (gangs), the mostly female movement has formed a security group to protect women seeking refuge with them. The all-women security group, called “fighting women,” is trained in a two-month self-defense course.

Unlike the UTD, however, the CVI refuses government funding for their social projects. They instead obtain resources through donations, volunteers, collective funding, raffles and parties. As one of the CVI’s members explains, “we don’t owe the government anything—everything is done voluntarily without expecting any compensation. And that’s what makes the movement clean.”52 This contempt for official politics and clientelistic relations with the state demonstrates an ontological conflict. While the CVI demands public services (water, electricity,  


52 Ibid.
housing, etc.) from the state, they reject any incorporation into official politics. They have a different vision of the world. Their gender-based projects, activism and democratic work management also contrast with the UTD, which in practice excludes women from its more hierarchical structure. Yet the UTD and the CVI are both community security movements born out of resistance against the dominant system and committed to collectively providing basic needs for their community. The UTD shows us how exclusionary leadership and “contested institutionalization” limit autonomous development by concentrating decision-making and creating dependency on the state for resources, even if inadvertently. The CVI, on the other hand, brings us to a major metropolis where state neglect is standard and the community must organize to improve their conditions and defend their territory of difference.

A Framework for Community Security Movements

With critical human security as a foundation for endogenous understandings of wellbeing, buttressed by post-development theory and animated by social movements, community security stands as vision of local praxis to satisfy needs and wants while in resistance. The idea is to wrench human security from the traditional security paradigms and flip it –answering Hoogensen and Stuvøy and Newman– as an empowering force for community-based movements. In this vein, post-development, with its political ontological struggles, challenges modern development paradigms as destructive and exclusionary. Political ontology, an idea Escobar sees as provisional and used to explain phenomena that can no longer be
explained with culture or other western concepts,\textsuperscript{53} is leveraged here to expand on ideas of being and understandings of the world: communities, located in different geographical spaces, under pressure for lack of security (physical, health, political, etc.), and in resistance to dominant power structures, produce and defend their own knowledge and projects.

Crime and physical security, topics recognized in the human security debate, were introduced to fill a gap left by Escobar and Zibechi: violence and crime are both inhibitors and catalysts for social mobilization, as understood by Hope and Schneider. But as Escobar insists on political ontology as the defense of life and the perception of what life ought to be, Hope and Schneider also insist that such mobilizations, with the goal of crime prevention, are rare and difficult to maintain. They argue, therefore, that such organization is often ephemeral: flitting moments of social conciseness packed with possibilities. Will a community security movement regress into criminality or emerge as a more enduring social, political and economic fixture?

Consolidating Zibechi’s seven common features the framework developed here emphasizes territorialization, identity, praxis, constituency, and autonomy. Gender relations, seen by Zibechi as the \textit{changing role of women}, is interwoven into the analysis since it overlaps features, particularly praxis and identity. Territorialization is inescapably linked to the historical context that created that space; therefore, history and territory are constructed together in this thesis, which is the topic of chapter two. Though, it is unclear to what scale Zibechi sees territorialization occurring: urban neighborhoods, geographic regions, agricultural zones, indigenous \textit{resguardos} (protected areas), city blocks or something less fixed. For this reason, I

prefer to apply Escobar’s *territories of difference* as a more concrete framework for a large scale. Although, I do use Zibechi’s territorialization for examining smaller spaces. Identity, the glue necessary for organization and collective cohesion—echoing Hope’s assertion that tight cultural and ideological values are needed for them to coalesce and sustain their praxis—includes culture and the reinforcement of difference, establishing a foundation for ontological politics.

The Argentine groups UTD and CVI, for example, identify as class-based movements. The UTD’s discourse emphasizes them as workers, producing and organizing. They are proud of their labor, which is inseparable from the community. As their website states, “We are a group of workers that began to organize to recover our labor and so that our people live better... Dedicated to defending what’s ours, from the UTD we struggle to reconstruct a culture of work and we demand an end to environmental degradation.”

The CVI is also a class-based movement, but not so much a workers’ movement. Instead, they are a movement of residents, neighbors and outside activists concerned with providing services to the community and less focused on productive labor.

Praxis, able to contain so much, incorporates Zibechi’s take on self-affirming forms of action, the organization of work, and the production of local intellectuals. Therefore, praxis may include violence, discourse, material production, organization, etc. For example, violence (or threats) can be integrated into repertoires of contention, teasing the limits of non-violence and official politics, as Rubin described about the COCEI. Violent discourse can be a tool of empowerment and cohesion. This is most visible in the use of weapons as symbols in logos and marches. The message to outsiders is “we are powerful, so respect our community,” even if their

capacity for armed combat is merger and impractical. Praxis also refers to the development projects created by the movement, such as self-managed factories, health clinics, community centers, events, and so on.

The constituency, not explored by either Escobar or Zibechi, allows us to examine another paradox of community movements: they are simultaneously of the community and apart from it. As Hayagreeva Rao, Calvin Morrill and Mayer N. Zald explain, “the scope of the form, that is, the goals, authority structure, technology and clients subsumed by the form, are outcomes of contending attempts at control and competing quests to impose a preferred definition of the identity of the constituencies that benefit from the form.”

The constituency, hence, represents those in the community the movement claims to serve and incorporate. Relations between the movement and its constituency may play out in a myriad of ways. As movements accumulate power, they become hegemonic entities within their space (territory) and quickly understand that to sustain their movement the community must support them.

This, in turn, may lead to the exclusion of other community members who reject the movement. As described by Rubin, the COCEI leadership’s militant stance and radical ideology often clashed with moderates in the movement and ordinary people in the community, creating nuanced interrelations between movement leaders and other community members. However, Enrique Desmond Arias and Corinne Davis Rodrigues’s myth of personal security based on studies examining relations between gangs and residents in Brazilian favelas, suggests that once a local group is too exclusionary, relations with the constituency become a precarious everyday

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Finally, autonomy from the state is important for community security movements, though total independence from the state may not be their objective. Community security movements are not separatists, like ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) or the IRA (Irish Republican Army), for example. Nor is their intention to overthrow the government. Instead, community security movements seek participatory space and perhaps support from the state within dominant structures to pursue their own security and projects. Community security movements are distinct from other strictly political social movements in that their endogenous development and security projects require sustained resources. If the community cannot supply these resources alone, they need outside assistance, and the use of formal legal and political systems can lead to substantial achievements. Dinerstein’s idea of “contested institutionalization” is a helpful way to understand these vertical relations: neither total cooption, nor absolute horizontal autonomy. As she describes, the UTD carefully dance around falling into the same cycle of clientelism they so vehemently opposed at their inception.

Considering the work presented, community security includes an exploration of power relations as they apply to difference, external pressures and relations with formal institutions. Violence is a particularly pertinent issue for community security movements, because these movements often mobilize in reaction to crime and state oppression. The argument for a
community security analysis is based on the idea that people organize to address needs and wants, particularly that of physical security and development. All community security movements are contextual: they organize at a moment in their particular histories, creating something new, while rejecting dominant systems. They emerge where and when *necessity meets resistance*. 
Chapter 2: An Urban Territory of Difference

Wealthy neighbourhoods provided with all kinds of services, such as exclusive schools, golf courses, tennis courts and private police patrolling the area around the clock intertwine with illegal settlements where water is available only at public fountains, no sanitation system exists, electricity is pirated by a privileged few, the roads become mud streams whenever it rains, and where house-sharing is the norm. Each fragment appears to live and function autonomously, sticking firmly to what it has been able to grab in the daily fight for survival.57

The purpose of this chapter is to construct a history of an urban territory of difference as a setting for community security movements. The above quote from Marcello Balbo could be about almost any city in the “developing” world, particularly in Latin America. His idea of fragmented “microstates” highlights differences in resources, services and life experiences in urban areas. These contrasts are particularly dramatic in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, a city where mega-barrios of thousands of informal shanties face middle and upper class residences a mere stone’s throw away. The urban territory of difference examined here is the western Caracas parish of the 23 de Enero (January 23), colloquially known simply as el 23. This analysis is guided by Escobar’s understanding of the production of place as an interrelated historical process, which will lead to a more focused use of Zibechi’s idea of territories in resistance as places of struggle and the creation of alternative forms of organization, production, culture and identity in chapter three. This chapter establishes the background, or soil, if you will, from which the community acts in the interest of its security while in resistance. Included in this chapter are a conceptual foundation, a concise history and a broad look at the groups in the parish.

The 23 de Enero is a densely populated parish on the western side of Caracas covering about 200 hectares, which are divided into eleven administrative zones. It was built in 1953-1957

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during the military dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1953-58) under the planning of the urbanist and architect, Carlos Raúl Villanueva. Today the parish is officially home to 77,344 people according to government numbers, but some estimate the population may actually be as much as 600,000. Known for its apartment blocks (ninety-eight in total: forty-two small blocks of four floors and fifty-six “superblocks” of fifteen floors), crime, state repression and civilian militias, it is only a few minutes walk to the president’s workplace, the Miraflores Palace.

The apartment blocks were constructed with a similar purpose and design as the Pruitt–Igoe buildings in St. Louis and the Cabrini-Green houses in Chicago – also large housing projects built in the 1950s, though since demolished – to provide standard housing for the poor only to become overt examples of racial segregation, crime, poverty, and urban decay. Today much of the areas between the blocks in the 23 de Enero are packed with informal ranchos (a colloquial term for shanty): rolling peaks and valleys of interlocking zinc roofs and cinderblock frames adjacent to massive modernist superblocks. Yet this labyrinth still offers more open community space than other large barrios in the city, like parts of Catia to the west and Petare to the far east.

Even though the 23 de Enero is a particular place where community security movements are most vibrant in Caracas, the neighborhood is by no means isolated from the rest of the city.

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60 Although ninety-eight blocks were constructed, there are only ninety-seven in the 23 de Enero. Block 8 was built in Cali, Colombia as an act of solidarity from Pérez Jiménez to the Colombian military dictator, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla.
That is why at times I extend experiences from other parts of western Caracas to the 23 de Enero. For example, histories and ethnographies conducted in other parts of the city can give insight into the general social and political climate. My intention is not to present the 23 de Enero as a homogenous area of rebellion. On the contrary, the parish has always been quite dynamic politically and culturally – a small magma sea of conflicting wills. In sum, this chapter argues that the 23 de Enero is an urban territory of difference, a theater for community security movements.
Conceptual Foundation

The goal here is to retool Escobar’s territory of difference for the urban world: unique place making and region making, ecologically, culturally, and socially where different ontologies
are involved. To do this I follow four of his six historical processes on the construction of place, excluding the other two as less relevant to the city, to frame a history of the 23 de Enero. The idea is to relocate Escobar’s analysis from Colombia’s rural periphery into urban space, allowing us to explore how these urban “microstates” come to be.

The thrust of Escobar’s argument is that “people mobilize against the destructive aspects of globalization from the perspective of what they have been and what they are present: historical subjects of particular cultures, economies, and ecologies; particular knowledge producers; individuals and collectivities engaged in the play of living in landscapes and with each other in distinctive ways.” He begins his analysis with place for three reasons. First, the observable connection local struggles – referring to afrodescendent and indigenous movements in the Colombian Pacific region – have with culture, territory and place: place-based, but not place-bound, struggles linked to body, environment, culture, and economy. Second, there is a philosophical link between culture and identity attached to one’s surroundings. Lastly, for Escobar the emphasis on place is a corrective push against scholarship that tends to focus too much on “the global,” which omits local perspectives.

Expanding on Escobar’s second reason, when writing about the 23 de Enero Jeremy Lester prefers the term space over place. Referencing Michel de Certeau, he explains, “While a ‘place’ is always ordered, proper, stable and ‘excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location’ (lieu), ‘space’ (espace) is instead full of different vectors, velocities and variables.

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62 Ibid, 6

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of both movement and time” — this is not to say place and space are mutually exclusive, rather they are interrelated. The idea of “anthropological space” or, as Lester describes, a “practiced place,” agitated, explosive, and swarming, is more appropriate given the social density and conflicting wills of the 23 de Enero. In this way, spatial identity is directly linked to the space identity creates.

The six historical processes Escobar sees as essential to the production of a territory of difference are geological and biological formation, daily practices, capital accumulation, incorporation into the state, cultural-political practices, and the discourse and practices of technoscience. The first and last processes concerning geological and biological formation and technoscience are less relevant to urban space examined here. Therefore, in order to keep within the confines of community security in the 23 de Enero, I will only apply the remaining four historical process. He further divides these processes into two interrelated strategies: the localization of capital, the state, and technoscience by engaging in politics of scale that attempts to shift production of locality in their favor; and subaltern strategies of localization based on place that rely on the attachment to territory and culture, and network strategies that enable social movements to enact a politics of scale from below. These four historical processes set dialectically by opposing strategies are integrated into the following history of the 23 de Enero, demonstrating an urban territory of difference.

For this history I rely mostly on secondary sources while including my own experience in the neighborhood, interviews I conducted with prominent community organizers and


conversations I had with community members. I primarily follow the analysis of Alejandro Velasco, a historian of the 23 de Enero, while interweaving the work of other scholars. Velasco posits that the historical construction of the neighborhood revolves around three moments (pre-Chávez): the transition to democracy in 1958; the political and economic structural crisis of the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s; and the Caracazo massacre of 1989. Complementarily, George Ciccariello-Maher offers a broader view, one that emphasizes the constituent power of the proceso: the 1989 Caracazo and the 2002 coup d'etat that briefly ousted President Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) for forty-eight hours. These two moments, Ciccariello-Maher says, are historical moments of agency, “in which the Venezuelan people appeared in struggle as a constituent force, revealing itself as both the source of power and the feet of clay that prop up many of those who wrongly claim that power as their own.”

This history from below, one that sees Chávez not as a cause but as an effect of a historical process driven by the grassroots, is essential for locating the 23 de Enero in relation to vertical power and directly within Escobar’s interrelated strategies.

During my brief time in the 23 de Enero, I had the opportunity to speak with lifelong community organizer, militant of the community-based Simón Bolívar Coordinator organization, and now deputy of the National Assembly, Juan Contreras. Raised and still residing in the 23 de Enero, Contreras was instrumental in the neighborhood’s organizing efforts, particularly during the Caracazo.

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66 Fernandes defines el proceso (the process) as a “parallel and underground movement that defends the Chávez government but which has its own trajectory independent of directives from the central government.” See: Sujatha Fernandes. Who Can Stop the Drums?: Urban Social Movements in Chávez’s Venezuela. London: Duke UP, 2010., 5

Enero, Contreras is a trained social worker and graduate from the Central University of Venezuela, writing his graduate thesis on constructing local power in the neighborhood. He is what Zibechi refers to as a local intellectual – those who due to social mobility or other motivation appear in popular sectors armed with knowledge and the capacity for leadership.68

Contreras speaks of six elements that make the 23 de Enero a “space of resistance” (his term). The first is the French architectural model: the way the area was built allows for a vecindad (neighborhood bond) in which everyone knows each other – a reference to open community spaces and everyday interactions facilitated by the verticality of the blocks. The second is the fall of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship and, third, subsequently changing the parish’s name to commemorate his fall, a symbolic and discursive source of empowerment. Fourth, the armed struggle (1960-circa1970), born out of the nascent democracy’s exclusion of the Communist Party and influence of the Cuban Revolution, made the 23 de Enero one of its primary urban theaters. As Contreras told me, the guerrillas were in the neighborhood: we grew up watching clashes between the guerrillas and the national security forces, repression, forced entries and searches, street struggle and insurgency.69

Fifth, the occupation of the National Guard and Metropolitan Police in the neighborhood, which resulted in ceaseless abuses, including torture, extrajudicial killing, forced entry, and arbitrary arrests, causing long-term distrust and animosity towards law enforcement and the state. Finally, the close proximity of the 23 de Enero to Miraflores has privileged the neighborhood with the ability to articulate demands before the state more directly, making it “the mouth of the


69 Interview with Juan Contreras.
west of the city” and a reference point of popular struggles for the rest of the country and Latin America, says Contreras. With Escobar’s four historical processes set dialectically as the soil, Velasco’s historical moments as the structure, and Contreras’s six elements to nurture this analysis, we cultivate this history.

Figure 2 (Alejandro Velasco. Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela. Oakland, California: Univ of California Press, 2015, 6-7)


By 1950 Caracas, with an official population of 704,567\(^70\), was home to over 28,000

ranchos (shanties), which accounted for 25 percent of households, mostly in the hills surrounding the 20 miles long strip of planned urbanization flanked by mountains to the north and hills to the south. This prevalence of informal dwellings—usually made of cardboard, wood, and zinc metal sheets—in the capital was the result of rural to urban migration starting in the mid-1920s and ineffective urban planning in the 30s and 40s. Already, geographic divisions based on class and race were obvious: lighter-skinned people with resources lived in the planned sectors, while the darker-skinned population with less resources resided in the hills—a dynamic exacerbated by neoliberal policies in the 1980s and 90s.

In what was deemed the “battle against ranchos,” framed in the discourse of morality and national security, the government began forcibly removing thousands of ranchos in 1951 due to the so-called “threat” they posed to society, the individual and the aesthetic of the city. With the idea of creating integrated housing to promote “social education,” Pérez Jiménez, through Carlos Raúl Villanueva and the Workers’ Bank (the state institution that managed development projects, founded in 1928), conceived of a neighborhood of modernist apartment blocks and common


spaces. They named the area the 2 de Diciembre (December 2nd) to commemorate the General’s ascent to power, hand picked by a military junta evading democratic elections.

This militarized process of reconstituting space through the simultaneous demolition, construction and inefficient resettlement (return to the neighborhood could take months due to bureaucracy, while apartments lay vacant) without consent, spurred animosity amongst residents and began the gestation of Escobar’s two competing strategies over locality: those managed from above by capital and the state against those based on culture and identity driven by subalterns from below. As Velasco describes, “the dictatorship’s swift and uncompromising attacks on ranchos established a matrix of confrontation that closed off dialogue with the state, thus channeling even mild discord toward an only option of resistance.”

Even those who treasured the sudden improvement in living standards were swept up in the overall atmosphere of discontent and activism against the increasingly unpopular dictatorship. This seemingly contradictory attitude reflected the dictatorship’s precarious expectations: prosperity and development in exchange for absolute consent.

As dissent grew, the military began occupying the neighborhood in December 1957 leading to severe repression. The result was ninety-three deaths in Caracas and twenty-one in 2 de Diciembre, including nine children, at the hands of state authorities. This tacit exchange of prosperity and development (mandated from above) for consent was finally snapping. When Pérez Jiménez was ousted in a coordinated civilian-military coup on January 23, 1958 ending ten

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years of military rule, residents immediately celebrated and petitioned the city council to rename the neighborhood in honor of that day of popular force and return to democracy. But just as the 2 de Diciembre represented Pérez Jiménez’s illusion of popular support, the 23 de Enero would also come to symbolize the unrealized promises of the new democracy to come.

![Image of the fall of Pérez Jiménez](image)


In the immediate wake of Pérez Jiménez’s overthrow, thousands of people from across the city rushed to occupy empty apartments or began erecting ranchos between the apartment blocks built to replace them, swelling the parish’s population from 36,000 to 60,000 within a few
days. During the transition to democracy (1958-1959) new interrelations between vertical power and community mobilizations started to coalesce, both challenging and embracing the terms of the burgeoning regime. In the western sectors of the parish, Zona E, F, and Mirador, the power vacuum left by the fall of the dictatorship and the rush of new inhabitants opened space for a local radio broadcaster aligned with Pérez Jiménez, Diógenes Caballero Martínez, to assume authority over the area. With a militia of supposedly a few thousand, Caballero quarreled with other neighborhood organizations liaising with authorities, like the Junta Cívica Pro-Vivienda (Pro-Housing Civic Committee). This contrasted with the eastern sectors of Monte Piedad, La Cañada, and Zona Central, which created their own junta to coordinate the work of civic movements around social and educational issues. Meanwhile the Workers’ Bank, exercising more participatory approaches (surveys, academic studies and interviews) since the change of government, struggled to account for squatters, attend to the multitude of property claims and address the general needs and wants of the residents, particularly concerning failing infrastructure.

At the same time the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV in Spanish), reemerging since being prohibited in 1950, began actively campaigning in the parish, lionizing the neighborhood for its role in toppling the dictatorship and calling for the creation of groups to guide and direct dissident youth. Seeking support from the urban working class and a place within the new

\[^{76}\text{Ibid. 76}\]

\[^{77}\text{This was Venezuela’s second attempt at representative democracy following the coup against the democratically elected Rómulo Gallegos in 1948, which led to the rise of Pérez Jiménez.}\]

\[^{78}\text{Caballero was arrested for allegedly orchestrating violent protests against US Vice President Richard Nixon in May 1958, though evidence against him was insufficient and he was soon released without charges.}\]
democracy, the PCV joined in community demands for rent reduction and trash collection. The neighborhood would also show its might in July 1958, defending the interim junta government led by Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal against a coup attempt orchestrated by his Minister of Defense, José María Castro León. Junta Pro-Mejoras (Pro-Improvements Committees organized to coordinate demands) formed “Order Brigades” to erect barricades, patrol the area and prepare arms. The coup attempt quickly failed with support of popular sectors throughout Caracas and Castro León was forced to flee to Colombia. The 23 de Enero’s defense of the interim government and of Larrazábal in particular –repeated again in September during yet another, flimsier coup attempt– demonstrated the parish’s willingness to exercise force to protect their participatory space (even if imperfect) and the promise of democracy.

With the official exclusion of the PCV from the democratic system under the Punto Fijo Pact of October 1958 –which included Acción Democrática (Democratic Action, AD), COPEI (the Christian Democrat Party) and Unión Republicana Democrática (Democratic Republican Union, URD)– the radical left began to fracture. By all accounts their exclusion was achievable due to their slim electoral support, though, while the party remained legal, they continued to campaign in popular sectors and support sympathetic candidates and parties, like Larrázabal. In December’s congressional elections the PCV only received 18 percent of the vote in the 23 de Enero, while the center-left URD, aligned with the PCV, led with 46 percent. In the presidential elections, Larrázabal (URD), while receiving a dominant 70 percent in the 23 de Enero and 66 percent in Caracas, fell short to Rómulo Betancourt (AD) who won the presidency with 49
percent of the national vote.\textsuperscript{79} Violent protests led mostly by students immediately broke out in popular sectors of Caracas, including the 23 de Enero, clashing with police and damaging property. The violence led the new Betancourt administration (1959-64) to order the National Guard to once again occupy the 23 de Enero, foreshadowing decades of occupations and abuses in the parish during the era of \textit{puntofijismo} (1958-1999).

It was in this context of repression, political exclusion and inspiration from the 1959 Cuban Revolution that large youth faction of AD left the party to create the \textit{Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria} (Leftist Revolutionary Movement, MIR) in 1960. By 1962 sectors from the MIR and PCV, the two primary historical trunks of the Venezuelan left, decided to take up arms. When asked why they mobilized so quickly Douglas Bravo, one of Venezuela’s most storied guerrilla leaders, simply states they were forced to.\textsuperscript{80} The 23 de Enero, among other urban areas, immediately became a hotbed of guerrilla activity (bank robberies, attacks on police, political kidnappings), particularly by way of urban Tactical Combat Units meant to complement the rural \textit{foco} struggle led by the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN in Spanish)\textsuperscript{81} and its political face, the Venezuelan Revolutionary Party (PRV in Spanish) – both founded by Bravo after a break from the PCV in 1966.

The relationship between residents and guerrillas in the 23 de Enero was varied and cannot be easily explained as interplay (adherence or rejection) with revolutionary struggle and


\textsuperscript{81} Some still proudly fly the FALN’s flag in the 23 de Enero today. See figure 11.
ideology. Instead, Velasco argues residents in the neighborhood likely saw insurgents as currents of student protest movements continuing the same fits of agitation seen years before than feasible campaigns to forcibly take state power à la Cuban Revolution. Although many residents openly reviled the fledgling democracy and aided the guerrillas, others began to find space in the new system and AD and COPEI grassroots organizing, undermining the guerrillas’ touted grievance of exclusion and thereby delegitimizing armed struggle. The main vehicle by which the official parties made inroads in popular sectors was through *comités sociales* (social committees), which emerged in the mid-1960s from the post-Jiménez *juntas cívicas* (civil councils). The social committees, unlike the civil councils, were legally sanctioned and supported by the Workers’ Bank to promote community development.

As the Punto Fijo parties leveraged state resources through the committees, they quickly became points of partisan clientelism and local patronage and clashes between committee members and guerrillas increased. Meanwhile, repression against the guerrillas and their supporters began to wear on residents. As former guerrilla leader Tedoro Petkoff explains, “by 1964 and 1965 we began to find that our urban combat groups were provoking rejection instead of solidarity from the population. While before many would stand in line to fire a rifle [at police], now they were hostile to these urban combats because of the police reaction they generated. After the guerrilla combatants fled the barrio, the police would come and crack down on everyone.”

This period highlights the failure of both the state and insurgents to address the everyday social needs of residents, especially concerning infrastructure and education. As

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83 Ibid., 71-72
support for the guerrillas waned, acceptance of the bipartisan democratic system increased and other forms of resistance were emerging.

![Figure 4: View from the Military Musesm, now the Cuartel de la Montaña (the Barracks on the Mountain) in the 23 de Enero. Block 14 is to the left; Miraflores is the large white structure in the center. (taken by author, September 2014)](image)

**Ñangaras and Tupamaros**

In the 1973 presidential elections, AD and COPEI finally claimed over sixty percent of the vote in the 23 de Enero, helping to elect the populist *adeco* Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979) –before then, the parish preferred a diverse array of third party candidates. By that time, groups exercising the simultaneous dual action of making demands before the state and organizing to
address local problems became more pronounced. These community-based social movements were not content with passively waiting for their demands to be satisfied through official channels; they actively created their own solutions, instead. In what Velasco calls a “pendulum between political and social activism” of the 1960s and 1970s, by the 1980s this nebulous dichotomy began to fuse more fluidly. In 1969, community groups like the Movimiento Social, Cultural, y Artístico (Social, Cultural, and Artistic Movement, MOSCA) in the Sierra Maestra sector, Como Gotas de Lluvia Sobre el Desierto (Like Raindrops in the Desert) in the Zona E, and dance groups from across the 23 de Enero, organized musical and theatrical events, held art and crafts workshops, and promoted health and drug awareness campaigns.

This refocusing to a more practical community security agenda marked the budding of what Sujatha Fernandes calls everyday wars of position –in which urban social movements engage in everyday struggles with cultural institutions, the private media, media regulatory agencies, and mining corporations, over issues of culture, access to media, the meaning of development, and visions of what democracy should look like.\(^8^4\) For example, the fiesta of San Juan, celebrated by the events of la Cruz de Mayo and el Sangueo de San Juan, rooted in the experiences of colonial slaves on the coast\(^8^5\), were adapted by barrio residents in Caracas to reflect their everyday struggles: asking for an end of state repression and the coming of better times –a mode of resistance and community cohesion, as Juan Contreras explained to me.\(^8^6\)

The state’s carrot-and-stick pacification strategy of repression and cooption –a policy


\(^8^5\)Ibid., 123

\(^8^6\)Interview with Juan Contreras
first pursued by Rafael Caldera (1969-74) of granting amnesty to demobilized guerrillas to reintegrate them into the official political system—did not succeed in eradicating the guerrillas completely. Instead, as it became evermore clear armed struggle was ill-conceived, smaller radical groups like Point Zero, which split early on from the PRV, and the Organization of Revolutionaries and Red Flag, both of which splintered from the MIR, continued to operate in the 23 de Enero. But it was the younger generation of these groups, the so-called ñangaras (trouble makers), that forged their own two-sided resistance through sociocultural work coupled with bank “expropriations” (robberies) and other tactics learnt from the guerrillas—Juan Contreras included. Local students (ranging from middle school to university level) also played a major role in these currents, often overlapping with clandestine revolutionary organizations.87 Their tactics initially involved setting up temporary barricades and throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at law enforcement, but by the end of Carlos Andrés Pérez’s first presidency, they extended to setting local stores and public transportation vehicles ablaze and exchanging gunfire with police and national guardsmen.88

Grievances by then, however, were no longer based on political exclusion, like the PCV and MIR before; nor were they fighting a principally ideologically battle. Instead, resistance was being rooted more in local demands (mostly related to infrastructure, waste management and education), and against structural violence (economic exclusion) and state repression. Contreras,

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87 This link between students and the barrio is crucial for understanding the emergence and prevalence of local intellectuals in the 23 de Enero. Chapter three will cover this more in depth. See: George Ciccariello-Maher. “Sergio's Blood: Student Struggles from the University to the Streets.” In We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution. Duke UP, 2013.

who grew up in Block 19 in sector La Cañada, recalls, “the least they would do is ask you for your identity card. They would teach you to get used to getting clobbered. At one point in my life I had a full head of hair… I had a huge Afro. The military would grab us by the hair and beat us. They would chase us into the elevators and beat us with their helmets.”

This almost seamless policy of repression, occupation, and cooption, since the birth of 2 de Diciembre through the guerrilla struggles of the 1960s to confrontations with ñangaras in the 1970s established the neighborhood as a different space with strong currents of resistance.

In contrast to Pérez, a rigid statist, the administration of Luis Herrera Campins (1979-84) committed itself to opening space for popular participation. During this time relations between the state and residents in the parish briefly improved, including community cooption with police and increased investment in education and sports programs. But the following year, optimism quickly gave way to the realities of economic crisis caused by mismanaged populist policies during Pérez’s first term and a sharp decline in oil prices. Herrera Campins’s policy of decentralization and privatization also led to numerous corruption scandals and worsened waste management in Caracas, especially in the 23 de Enero where violent student protests returned in earnest.

In December 1981, dissatisfaction came to a head when in an unprecedented action residents hijacked and held sanitation vehicles —until then public vehicles were only burned, not held— in Blocks 1 to 7 of the eastern Monte Piedad sector, demanding an immediate return to services after severe delays. The protesters succeeded within a few weeks, signaling an effective

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shift in tactics that leveraged the neighborhood’s organizing networks and traditions of resistance, most notably among women and the youth. As Earles Gutiérrez, a young militant involved in the hijackings, explains, “The only people who mobilized in el 23 were women, and the only men were militant youth. All the others were busy playing the ponies.”

This points to Zibechi’s idea of the changing role of women, stimulated by social organization and reimagination of everyday domestic life – also described by Diaz-Barriga’s borderlands concept in the first chapter. As Zibechi describes, “The instability of couples and the frequent absence of men means that women have become responsible for organizing in the domestic sphere and in the border tapestry of relationships woven around the family.”

This increasing trend of women actively participating in movements in the 23 de Enero (and Caracas generally) would continue to the present, but not without its limitations. Meanwhile, the hijackings – legitimized by fresh participatory space and the language of accountability emphasized by Herrera Campíns – showcased the neighborhood’s agency and shaped a new dynamic in the parish: a hybrid political consciousness that held direct-action tactics and loyalty to the founding premises (and promises) of liberal democracy as complementary rather than antithetical.

When the price of oil tumbled again in 1982 – down to $30 from $100 just four years earlier – the Herrera Campins government resorted to a drastic currency devaluation, commonly referred to as “Black Friday” (February 18, 1983). The repercussions were felt widely, as

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92 Ibid., 695
unemployment rose nationally from 7.1% in 1982 to 13% by 1984.\textsuperscript{93} As the deepening economic crisis brought more austerity and decentralization, crime was fast becoming a primary concern of residents in the 23 de Enero. In La Piedrita sector, an old squatter community comprised of ranchos and a favorite for drug dealers because of its strategic location at a crossroads, residents led by Valentin Santana began organizing \textit{Grupo de Trabajo La Piedrita} (La Piedrita Work Group, GTLP). Their dual approach, echoing strategies laid forth by activists years previous, involved organizing community programs, like fiestas and athletic events, and punitive action against criminals. Meanwhile, residents in Block 37 and Blocks 42-43-44 of the Zona E and F were also organizing self-defense brigades and launching anti-drug campaigns. Punitive action taken by these groups against criminals was typically simple: If we catch someone dealing drugs in our neighborhood… first they get a warning. If they show up again, they get a beating, And if they show up a third time…\textsuperscript{94} Lisandro “Mao” Pérez, a longtime dissent in the parish and the former chief administrator of the 23 de Enero, further describes, "When we find out about drug dealers selling around schools we immediately find them and we let them know very clearly that they must leave the area. If they don't leave in 48 hours, then we take them out forcefully."\textsuperscript{95}

But for many residents and groups like the GTLP crime and drug abuse, which began to inflame in the 1970s, was not simply a product of poverty. In fact, many saw it as part of a larger

\textsuperscript{93}Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) “DataGov.” 2013. Inter-American Development Bank. 03 May 2013

\textsuperscript{94}George Ciccariello-Maher. “We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution.” Duke UP, 2013., 78

state strategy to undermine dissidents. “It was the DISIP [state intelligence agency] who brought the drugs into 23 de Enero in the early 80s. We must put it this way: it was part of a state policy and it was a dirty war, a low-intensity war seeking to destroy the resistance which had developed in 23 de Enero,” explains Juan Contreras who by the mid-1980s, after participating in the vehicle hijackings a few years earlier, became president of his block’s neighborhood association.

Seeing it this way, anticrime efforts in the neighborhood were easily linked to greater political modalities of resistance against a conflated double threat: the police and drug traffickers. Around 1985, these amorphous groupings of community organizers and clandestine militias were being called by another name: Tupamaros. Borrowing from the urban guerrillas in Uruguay (Tupamaros National Liberation Movement, MLN-T in Spanish), the national intelligence agency DISIP –now known as SEBIN– began labeling all social currents in the 23 de Enero with that moniker to stigmatize them and cut their local support. The DISIP’s propaganda campaign, joined by corporate media outlets, was largely ineffective inside the barrio, however, and with time those slandered as Tupamaros would come to embrace the term, if not informally as simply Tupas.

What remained of the urban guerrillas by the mid-1980s were being overshadowed and shunned by many so-called Tupamaros who preferred to focus on combating crime and running

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97 Interview with Juan Contreras.
local social programs over dreams of armed struggle.\textsuperscript{98} Still, although it is unclear when or to what extent, some groups built relationships with regional armed actors and beyond. Another well-known local intellectual and principle Tupamaro organizer, Lisandro Pérez, readily admits that groups in the 23 de Enero have had active relations with guerrilla organizations in Colombia, like the FARC, ELN, ERP and M-19,\textsuperscript{99} while others claim they also had contact with the Shinning Path in Peru\textsuperscript{100}, and even the Cuban government.\textsuperscript{101} By the end of the 1980s, yet another dynamic was emerging with the Tupamaros: their propensity for achieving certain community security gains and then regressing into criminality, out of either material need or avarice.\textsuperscript{102}

The Caracazo to the Comandante: 1989-1999

The \textit{Caracazo} is the single most polarizing event in modern Venezuelan history: a moment of rupture that defines political identities and marked the beginning of the end of the Punto Fijo Pact era. After running a harsh anti-neoliberal campaign, Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989-\textsuperscript{98}George Ciccariello-Maher. \textquotedblleft We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution.	extquotedblright\ Duke UP, 2013., 79
1993) returned to the presidency for his second, non-consecutive term. At the time external debt was immense, the fiscal deficit was uncontrollable, there were food shortages and credit was almost impossible to come by. Upon assuming office, Pérez did an immediate about-face popularly known as the *Gran Viraje* (the great turn), ran to the IMF for assistance and implemented a deep economic shock program, otherwise known as the *paquetazo* (the big package).

Riots swiftly ensued in major cities throughout the country leading the government to set curfews, enact martial law and suspend constitutional guarantees. The Caracazo (February 27-March 3, 1989), as the riots became known, resulted in 300-3,000 civilian deaths including mass graves of as many as seventy victims. The Committee of Families of Victims claims 97 percent of the deaths occurred within the victims’ homes, suggesting targeted executions and indiscriminant gunfire perpetrated by state security forces. Margarita López-May, who puts the death toll in Caracas at around 396, argues that the violence of the Caracazo was due primarily to two factors: a violation of the “moral economy,” in which the poor feel they have the right to be protected by the authorities from the vicissitudes of the market and to be able to obtain at least the minimum resources necessary for their survival, due to the impact of years of neoliberal

103 The heart of the paquetazo was a major currency devaluation that reduced the value of the bolivar (currency) by two-thirds. As a consequence the economy contracted 8.9 percent and poverty increased by 20 percent, hitting popular sectors the hardest. Masses of peasants migrated to the cities, real wages dropped substantially, and the informal sector ballooned. According to Marta Harnecker, in three years 600,000 people migrated to the cities, the rural labor force shrank by 90 percent, and the proportion of workers in the informal sector rose from 34.5 percent in 1980 to 53 percent in 1999. See: Marta Harnecker. "After the Referendum: Venezuela Faces New Challenges." *Monthly Review* 56.06 (2004). MR Press; and Sujatha Fernandes. *Who Can Stop the Drums?: Urban Social Movements in Chávez’s Venezuela*. London: Duke UP, 2010., p. 69.


reforms, peaking with the paquetazo; and weak institutional links between the state and civil society, which could have allowed for mediation and an airing of grievances.\textsuperscript{106}

Some remember the riots as a moment of terror and mass looting, while others see it as a popular revolt that exposed inequalities and state repression. Poor and working class cerros (hills surrounding the city where multitudes of ranchos are located) abruptly violated previously insolated middle and upper class areas. In an instant Caracas’s dangerous “red zones” (high crime areas), normally confined to barrios, swelled and transformed “the urban topography into a single ‘bad area’ where nothing and nobody appears safe.”\textsuperscript{107} This was also, as Ciccariello-Maher aptly interprets, the “gaping wound in history that [Hugo] Chávez stepped,”\textsuperscript{108} un成功败地 attempting to overthrow the Pérez government twice in 1992 with assistance from still-insurgent groups in the 23 de Enero.\textsuperscript{109}

In some parts of the 23 de Enero repression was severe. One of Venezuela’s most prominent newspapers, \textit{Últimas Noticias}, described how the army “converted the blocks into colanders” with bullet holes, especially Block 22-23 in Zona Central where residents exchanged gunfire with the National Guard.\textsuperscript{110} In La Cañada Contreras describes exchanges with the local


\textsuperscript{110}See figure 5
police outpost, a longtime site of state abuse, located in an open area in front of Blocks 18 and 19:

The police arrived, the [police detention vehicles] arrived, shooting and so forth, and there was a strong attack by the police. There was also a strong attack, guns blazing, from the buildings toward the police, and the company captain goes down, dead. He falls dead, the police retreats, it was impossible for them to enter the Block, and from all over people yelled at them, from everywhere there are shots, and he falls dead.\(^{111}\)

Meanwhile, in other sectors like Mirador and Monte Piedad other militants set up barricades, prepared guns, Molotov Cocktails and other weapons to resist the military and police. But, residents not engaged in combating the army and police were also killed by authorities. In total, nine civilians died in the 23 de Enero during the Caracazo, including eight-year-old Francisco Moncada Gutiérrez.\(^ {112}\) Later the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found that, “The Armed Forces opened fire against crowds and against homes, which caused the death of many children and innocent people who were not taking part in criminal acts … there was a common pattern of behavior characterized by the disproportionate use of the Armed Forces in poorer residential districts.”\(^ {113}\)


\(^{112}\) Ibid, 240

\(^{113}\) Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Caso Del Caracazo vs Venezuela. San Jose, Costa Rica. November 11, 1999, 5
With time the Caracazo became, as Velasco points out, “an abstraction, a stand-in for the accumulated problems of the democratic system as a whole and emblematic of the broken pacts between state and citizenry that would eventually bring about the collapse of a once-vaulted political system.”\(^\text{114}\)

In popular sectors, this discursive deployment of the Caracazo is most visibly manifest in the collective agnomen *los hijos del 89* (the children of ’89).\(^\text{115}\)


the ashes of the Caracazo provide the historical and moral bedrock on which the Bolivarian Revolution is built: the structural marginalization and ruthless repression of the Fourth Republic set against chavismo’s promise of participatory democracy and social justice.

In 1993, President Pérez was removed by congress and imprisoned on corruption charges. At the same time, the nature of crime began to transform and criminal cultures began to intensify. In the early 1990s, for example, sneakers became a sudden source of violence in the barrios. As Patricia C. Marquez describes, “disputes over territory and over women… are mediated through shoes. Objects such as Nike shoes have become a form of dialogue and of violent exchange out of which new definitions of honor and life values are emerging.”

It is in this sociopolitical context that crime began to climb. In 1991 Venezuela’s official homicide rate was a manageable 13 per 100,000 people. Meanwhile, that same indicator skyrocketed in the capital from 13 per 100,000 people in 1986 to an astonishing 96 per 100,000 people by 1994.

By the mid 1990s, as the pacted democratic system and its links to civil society continued to crumble, new organizational formations began to sprout throughout Caracas. Neighborhood associations across the class spectrum engaged in decades-old struggles for autonomy began to evermore dislocate from the traditional AD and COPEI parties. In this backdrop a Caracas-wide Assembly of Barrios (1991-1993) was founded, bringing together over two hundred


\[\text{117} \text{ Margarita López Maya. Del Viernes Negro Al Referendo Revocatorio. Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2005.}\]

community leaders to articulate demands from land rights to infrastructure and strengthening citywide mobilization networks.\(^{119}\)

Meanwhile in the 23 de Enero, groupings of Tupamaros and residents were again reaching another phase of history. In the wake of the Caracazo, the *Asamblea por la Vida* (the Assembly for Life) organized in the neighborhood to make demands echoing that of the Assembly of Barrios, which led to the Brigade of Solidarity with the People of Antonio José de Sucre, whose first act was to lead a volunteer trip to Cuba. Inspired from the trip, the brigade founded on December 17, 1993 the Simón Bolívar Cultural Coordinator (CCSB in Spanish),\(^{120}\) meant to organize various Tupamaro currents and put a united sociopolitical face on their movements through cultural events and youth sports programs. The CCSB even received political and material support from then-mayor of the capital district Aristóbulo Istúriz (1993-96), whose very election as an opposition candidate from the leftwing the Radical Cause party was one of many death knells for the traditional parties. By this time Valentín Santana, who considers himself a founder of the Tupamaros,\(^ {121}\) and La Piedrita had already distanced themselves from the others. And soon, other divisions would materialize.

The first major fracture in the CCSB was the expulsion of longtime Tupamaro, José Pinto. According to Lisandro Pérez, Pinto was assuming leadership without authorization and


\(^{120}\)Besides linking the group’s nationalist sentiments vis-à-vis Bolivar, the name reflects the organizers’ solidarity with Colombian guerrillas (FARC, M-19, ELN, EPL, PRT and MAQL), who from 1987 to the early 1990s sustained the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board umbrella group.

generated further controversy when he accepted funds from the son of President Caldera (1994-1999), Andrés Caldera, under the guise of a beautification plan for the city called *Caracas Te Quiero.* Pinto, who apparently also flaunted a new truck around the neighborhood, was eventually banned from the 23 de Enero altogether. With time, conflicts around autonomy and loyalty between the groups would become violent, more than ever revealing a strong moral discourse amongst them. And on the horizon, yet another change would impact the parish and the groups that call it home: the Bolivarian Revolution.

Chavismo (1999-present)

When Hugo Chávez Frías was elected president in 1998 – carrying 62% of the Federal District – repression in the 23 de Enero effectively ended when he assumed office. When I asked Juan Contreras what Chávez meant to him, he summed it up simply: *la esperanza* (hope). But Chávez’s relationship with groups in the 23 de Enero was anything but simple. The late president understood well that one of his most potent bases of support lie in that most rebellious and dynamic of parishes a stroll away from Miraflores. The 23 de Enero is where he surrendered during his failed coup attempt against President Pérez on February 4, 1992; where he voted every election in the shadow of Block 30; and where he finally rests in his mausoleum, *el Cuartel de la Montaña* (the Barracks of the Mountain). No event made this relationship clearer than Chávez’s return to power following the coup that briefly ousted him for 48 hours on April 11, 2002.

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resulting in nineteen deaths. Many *chavista* ministers scattered to seek refuge in the 23 de Enero, while armed groups from the neighborhood confronted coup supporters and police and accompanied masses of Chávez supporters to Miraflores to demand the return of their democratically elected president. On April 12, those same groups prevented the pro-coup Caracas Metropolitan police from entering the 23 de Enero, possibly staving off what could have been a repeat of the repression that occurred during the Caracazo and other occupations.

Today these groups are commonly known as *colectivos* (collectives), which broadly refers to social movements and community groups committed to a certain purpose and support of the Bolivarian Revolution. This branding, however, informs little about the various purposes and ambitions of each group. As Ciccariello-Maher rightfully points out, “The term’s aspiration to reductive homogenization can be seen in how it is most often rendered with the definite article – *the* collectives.”124 This confusion can be blamed on generalizations from the government, opposition and international media. The government has stretched the term to encompass a wide range of civil society groups in an effort to dilute coverage of the more confrontational, armed groups with which it is tenuously aligned. While the opposition thoughtlessly smears all organized chavista groups with the term, like the ñangaras and tupamaros of the past. The result is an everyday negotiation of discourse in which some groups proudly wear the moniker, while others elude it. When I did my fieldwork in Caracas, I was recommended to avoid the word.

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Groups regarded as colectivos range from local cultural organizations, to LGBT movements, animals rights organizations, community media groups, street artists, skateboarders, armed militias, and what I describe as community security movements. As Fernandes notes, “Urban social movements in Caracas are extraordinarily variegated and heterogeneous. There are militant cadre-based groupings that have roots in the guerrilla struggles of the 1960s, as well as collectives that operate through assemblies and mass actions, and cultural groupings based in music, song, and dance.” Again, most opposition and international media do not make these distinctions. Tamara Peterson adds that to demonize the colectivos is to demonize the grassroots: the aim behind inventing this idea and demonizing Venezuela’s social organizations is to dehumanize activists, delegitimize the revolution (faults and all), and justify

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any current or future violence or repression towards us.\textsuperscript{133} Human Rights Watch, in their report on the opposition protests of early 2014, also understands that colectivos are not synonymous with violence.\textsuperscript{134} In sum, colectivos in Venezuela are a decentralized network of sociopolitical currents with varying links to the state and each other.

![Figure 6: Blocks 7, 6 and 5 (left to right). (taken by author, September 2014)](image)

Breaking from the chronological structure of the previous sections, here I give an overview of the relations between radical groups in the 23 de Enero with the Chávez and Maduro


\textsuperscript{134} Human Rights Watch. \textit{Punished for Protesting Rights Violations in Venezuela’s Streets, Detention Centers, and Justice System}. May 2014. 12-13
governments. Approximately a dozen larger, well-organized groups operate in the parish, though smaller currents and overlapping movements also exist. Some of them are members of the umbrella Revolutionary Secretariat of Venezuela group, which amalgamates over a hundred colectivos across Caracas and was formally headed by the late Juancho Montoya.\textsuperscript{135} We can see the relationship between the government and groups in the 23 de Enero through three overlapping lens: institutionalization, mobilization and contention.

These three articulations are expressed interdependently to varying degrees depending on the group. These relations can also be intimate: President Maduro and the first lady, Cilia Flores, began their political careers in the grassroots movements in Caracas and still maintain those connections to some extent, for example.\textsuperscript{136} Other government officials with personal connections to these groups include former Mayor of Libertador Freddy Bernal and current President of the National Assembly Diosdado Cabello, among many others. Institutionalization refers to the incorporation of neighborhood militants and activists into formal state bodies like the police, political parties and ministries. Institutionalization should not necessarily be confused with pejorative cooption; rather, it should be understood as official space in which various individuals and currents make their stake for resources and influence. Mobilization signifies the autonomous organization of groups to defend and deepen the Bolivarian Revolution –mostly regarding direct political participation and local production. Lastly, contention describes the seemingly paradoxical friction between the government and groups that remain skeptical of the


state. These articulations laid out along horizontal relations revolve around a moral discourse, solidary and confrontation, are elastic, pulled and snapped at a moment. Institutionalization of radical groups in the 23 de Enero dates back at least to the first Caldera administration’s strategy of pacification: repression and cooption. Even then, many former guerrillas wound up in the military and police forces, the same institutions combating them. This also included the clientelist cooption of social committees (later neighborhood associations) mostly by the Democratic Action party, particularly in Block 31 of Zona E where residents typically shied away from anti-establishment protests and guerrilla activity. But it was former Libertador mayor Aristóbulo Istúriz in the early 1990s that first began to incorporate the purported Tupamaros into his administration and support the CCSB.

The arrival of the Bolivarian Revolution had the effect of opening space and deepening divisions as resources became increasingly available and many vied for their place in the new political landscape. Chávez’s earliest attempt at absorbing these varied movements was the Bolivarian Circles, which were designed in 2001 to spur local political participation but faded by 2003 due to varying degrees of “incapacity, neglect, exhaustion, and evolution.” José Pinto, however, went on to create his own Tupamaro Party while others founded a wide variety of armed and unarmed groups. Many old Tupamaros were also integrated into law enforcement, such as Juan “Juancho” Montoya (deceased, Colectivo Leonardo José Pirela and Grupo Carapaica), José Miguel Odreman (deceased, Colectivo 5 de Marzo), José Tomás Pinto (Partido

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Tupamaro), and Alberto "Chino" Carías (Movimiento Revolucionario Tupamaro) – all former municipal police officers and officials in the greater Caracas area.

Gradually, those opposed to the state security apparatus for decades found themselves more and more integrated into to it, beginning with the administration of former the Mayor of Capital District, Freddy Bernal (2000-2008). By the end of his term, former chavista Metropolitan Mayor of Caracas, Juan Barreto (2004-2008), allegedly employed over 7,000 activists serving as everything from police officers, bodyguards and campaigners. But relations between neighborhood militants and law enforcement are complex and often competitive, not collaborative as is often thought. Some armed groups have also participated in extra-legal policing and repressing opposition protesters. Furthermore, the fluidity of the groups, their secretive nature, and integration into deeply corrupt law enforcement bodies has led


141 This is a reference to the rash of opposition protests in early 2014. Human Rights Watch reported that armed groups of government supports were responsible for attacks against protesters and video footage released by the Venezuelan periodical El Universal, revealed that members of at least one colectivo from the 23 de Enero clearly fired on protesters. Other attacks were also blamed on colectivos, such as the murders of Robert Redman and Daniel Tinoco Carrillo. However, very few confrontations can actually be attributed to colectivos, according to David Smilde. When I asked people involved in grassroots left movements and colectivos about clashes with protesters, many told me individuals of various political and social tendencies participated in violence on both sides. Another point made to me was that if all armed colectivos and other groupings did in fact “activate,” there would have been far more violence. In sum, the participation of some colectivos in repressing protesters is undeniable, but far less than the opposition and media often attribute to them. See Smilde’s comments here: Kyra Gurney. "Venezuela's Leftist Collectives: Criminals or Revolutionaries?" Venezuela's Leftist Collectives: Criminals or Revolutionaries? November 24, 2014. Accessed August 7, 2015; See El Universal’s report here: Francisco Olivares and Joseph Poliszuk. "Fue Una Encerrona." EL UNIVERSAL. February 23, 2014. Accessed March 12, 2015; and Human Rights Watch. Punished for Protesting Rights Violations in Venezuela’s Streets, Detention Centers, and Justice System. May 2014.
some from within and outside the proceso to wonder who are criminals and who are sincere revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{142} Another wrinkle in this nexus is the Venezuelan government’s Workers Militias. Conceived as a way to safeguard from another attack on Chávez’s presidency following the 2002 coup and to horizontalize the national armed forces, the Workers Militias are one of the revolution’s most controversial initiatives. It has drawn criticism from human rights organizations\textsuperscript{143} and has spurred dissent from within the traditional military apparatus.\textsuperscript{144} Since most groups see themselves as defenders of the revolution in some form, it is not surprising that some from the 23 de Enero have enlisted in the militias, allowing for greater access of weapons and political influence.\textsuperscript{145}

Other modes of institutionalization include participatory mechanisms, like communal councils and social missions. Although communal councils –created officially in June 2002 to manage local development projects and open local participatory space– already existed in the 23 de Enero and around the country long before the revolution in the form of neighborhood councils and popular assemblies. The communal councils do, however, provide means for which state resources are delivered directly to the community. In the 23 de Enero the result has been various projects operated by the communal councils and colectivos that include health clinics,


\textsuperscript{144} Ciccarillo-Maher speculates that the creation of the civilian militias led to the defection of one of Chávez’s most loyal military leaders, General Raúl Baduel. See: George Ciccarillo-Maher. “We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution.” Duke UP, 2013., 248

community gardens, small factories, veterinary clinics, computer labs, community radio stations and other services. The social missions, first launched in 2003 with the purpose of providing a wide range of social services, also operate extensively in the 23 de Enero with government sponsorship but under local management. As it should already be clear, decades of community organizing in the parish prepared residents for the state’s participatory development projects. The soil was already rich.

Also obvious by now should be the neighborhood’s capacity for autonomous mobilization, both in support of and in contention with the state. Within that well-nourished soil, residents have been organizing to address local problems since the inception of the parish and the fall of Pérez Jiménez. But during the Fifth Republic, autonomous mobilizations have challenged and influenced the central state with distinctive potency. In ways similar to Herrera Campíns’s commitments to participatory democracy and accountability, the chavista state is pushed from below by the same hybrid political consciousness of direct action and representative politics awakened in the early 1980s.

In 2004, to defeat the opposition’s presidential recall referendum, Chavez’s Fifth Republic Movement (MVR in Spanish) party called for the formation of community-based Electoral Battle Units (UBE in Spanish) of less than a dozen people, which were instrumental in driving working class votes against the recall. The UBEs’ subsequent success in that year’s October regional elections, however, quickly produced a competitive climate between official chavismo and the UBEs, both seeking to be the primary conduit of popular power. The result was the marginalization of UBEs from state resources and their exclusion from running against official chavista candidates. The answer from the UBEs in the 23 de Enero was to create a
separate electoral committee leading to the United Popular Front 23 de Enero campaign, which came in third behind MVR and PCV in the neighborhood in local elections in August 2005.\textsuperscript{146}

Autonomous mobilization in the 23 de Enero also takes the forms of vigilantism and endogenous production. As mentioned in the first chapter, Donna Lee Van Cott tells us that informal justice is a response to dysfunctional or repressive institutions that inhibit a safe and productive community environment. In the 23 de Enero, the answer to repression and criminal violence has been armed vigilantly groups that control sections of the neighborhood. Groups like Colectivo La Piedrita, Foundation Alexis Vive and others employ various methods to mitigate security threats learned from past experiences, including the dual strategy of social projects, e.g. youth sporting events and cultural workshops, and punitive action. Through these methods, groups have achieved substantial levels of physical security in their areas in comparison with other places in the 23 de Enero and Caracas.

This ethos of community-base security and vigilantism, however, raises others concerns, such as lack of accountability, an absence of due process (not even informally, as Van Cott describes) and possible expansion into criminal activities. In one instance of erroneous aggression, a young member of the community media group \textit{Barrio TV}, Walner Darbeau, was severely assaulted by a group of thirty people between blocks 1 and 2 mistaking him for a local thief.\textsuperscript{147} Moreover, colectivos in the 23 de Enero do not exercise total control in the neighborhood by any means and their principle threats continue to be criminal gangs and corrupt

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police. In particular, Zone E and the small area of Cristo Rey have been sites of many violent confrontations between colectivos and drug gangs.\textsuperscript{148} Meanwhile clashes with law enforcement, often seen as corrupt, also occur though not nearly as regularly as during the fourth republic.\textsuperscript{149} Expansion into criminal activities is frequently referred to as the “double face” (\textit{doble cara} in Spanish) of colectivos, which describes a dynamic in which they run social programs publically while participating in drug trafficking, extortion and kidnapping to enrich themselves and obtain weapons.\textsuperscript{150} The double face allegation would be a plausible continuation of trends set in the 1980s. Without reliable and precious information, however, it is beyond my knowledge to attribute criminal activity to any specific group or individual.

Endogenous production refers to the clusters of goods and services groups in the 23 de Enero provide with varying degrees of support from the state. As mentioned previously, community members operate a wide array of such services. And while the state funds many of those projects, management and organization are the responsibility of the community. Furthermore, some projects, like communes (see chapter three) and community radio stations\textsuperscript{151}, have budded independent of government support while some even predate chavismo. These


autonomous mobilizations around production and security are essential expressions of community security established in chapter one and further expanded on in chapter three with an in depth examination of Foundation Alexis Vive.

Autonomy is directly related to contestation, as independent social groupings often clash with the state and each other over territory and politics. Colectivo La Piedrita is perhaps the most autonomous and contentious of the groups in the 23 de Enero. They, like many other groups in the parish, manage community programs such as clinics, stores, and youth sports. They are also amongst some of the more blatant proponents of armed self-defense. In 2011, the colectivo ignited widespread condemnation across the political spectrum when children were photographed holding automatic rifles at one of their events. Although, La Piedrita claimed it was a theatrical event and the rifles were only replicas. The group is also known for its deadly rivalry with José Pinto’s Movimiento Revolucionario Tupamaros (Revolutionary Movement Tupamaros). One of their more notable confrontations occurred in 2006 when three members of Pinto’s group allegedly killed Santana’s teenage son Diego and his friend. Since then violent reprisals between the groups have continued, including an attempt on Pinto’s life during which he was shot five times and an attack on Santana that left him with a bullet wound to the arm.

La Piedrita has also participated in nonlethal attacks against those they see as enemies of the revolution. In particular, they have launched tear gas canisters at the headquarters of the opposition COPEI party and the television news channel Globovisión for their stringent anti-

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government coverage and participation in the 2002 coup— the channel changed ownership in 2013 and their coverage has since become less confrontational, if not favorable to the government. These acts were also carried out in collaboration with the Caracas-based Popular Venezuelan Unity (UPV in Spanish), a small party led then by their late fiery heroine, Lina Ron—who, along with Chávez, is immortalized in a mural on a water tower overlooking the eastern side of the parish. Chávez, in turn, condemned La Piedrita as terrorists, claimed they were infiltrated by the CIA and ordered Santana arrested.

Santana is still at large and residing in the 23 de Enero, unable to leave for security reasons. But perhaps no occurrence encapsulates the complexities of this tenuous relationship more than when La Piedrita detained a military officer that ventured into their zone, scouting an escape route for the president in the event of another coup. La Piedrita, devout chavistas, corrected the officer: the government does not tell us anything, it must ask. This confrontation of local power against the state also highlights a longer history: one that understands that the

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155 See figure 7


social currents in the 23 de Enero, and throughout the country, birthed Chávez, not the reverse; and that the state does not enjoy a monopoly over the revolution by any means.\textsuperscript{158}

Figure 7 (taken by author, September 2014): water tower with murals of Chávez and Lina Ron painted by La Piedrita.

Reasons for horizontal contestation stem from many personal, ideological and political conflicts. But, overtime, groups in the 23 de Enero have developed subtle politics and diplomacy to avoid confrontations and maintain order with enough surface solidarity to unify in times of crisis –the glaring exception is the rolling conflict between La Piedrita and Revolutionary

Movement Tupamaros. Differences are usually addressed discreetly and zones controlled by each group are generally respected. A common point of contestation is based on moral discourse, referring to ideas around commitment to the community and revolution set against corrupt, criminal elements and those fixated on armed struggle. This discourse is often expressed with accusatory terms, like “pseudo-revolutionaries,” “lack of political projects,” and claims of being too close to the government.\textsuperscript{159} For government supporters to accuse one another of being co-opted would, at first glance, seem paradoxical. However, the nuanced language among the movements in the 23 de Enero reveals a delicate positioning of power and autonomy before the state. They profess loyalty to the broader revolution to ensure the delivery of resources and ideological cohesion, while tenaciously navigating towards greater autonomy.

Juan Contreras, the consummate diplomat, rejected this idea of moral discourse. When I tried to push him to elaborate on conflicts in the neighborhood, he simply explained that some groups have larger projects than others. In contrast, Ana Marin of Foundation Alexis Vive immediately understood this idea, saying, “of course; imagine, we’re here working hard and others are giving us a bad reputation.”\textsuperscript{160} This opinion is also evident in a communiqué by Alexis Vive: It is no coincidence that some pseudo-collective's behavior have been creating strange situations for a while in western Caracas, causing fear in communities, which inarguably is due


\textsuperscript{160}Interview with Ana Marin, Foundation Alexis Vive
to an orchestrated plan by the right and its laboratories to discredit the true praxis of revolutionary collectives.  

Conclusion

In conclusion, this concise history of the 23 de Enero as an urban territory of difference that produces community security movements follows four of Escobar’s six historical processes – capital accumulation, daily practices, incorporation into the state, and cultural-political practices – set dialectically by his two interrelated strategies. As we have seen, combative forms
of social organization and resistance have existed in 23 de Enero since the fall of Pèrez Jiménez. Today, groups in the parish are not merely clients of the government as in the past; rather, they are infused within the Bolivarian Revolution. They have been both victims and beneficiaries of the state: repressed and coopted, excluded and nurtured.

To review these historical processes, we begin at the highest level: capital accumulation. Continuing this effort of transplanting Escobar from the Colombian Pacific to Caracas, I look to David Harvey’s interpretation of Henri Lefebvre’s right to the city. In Harvey’s analysis, cities are geographic and social concentrations of surplus product. Thus urbanization is a class-based phenomenon, which depends on the mobilization of surplus product for reinvestment to yield more surplus value.\textsuperscript{162} This reinvestment in Venezuelan cities, flush with revenue directly or indirectly related to oil revenue since the early twentieth century, demands cheap labor. This, coupled with decades-long decline of rural production, led to successive waves of acute urban migration and mounting informal communities. It was in this context Pèrez Jiménez began to impose his strict vision of modernity, meant to order an urban process already beyond the government’s control.

Unlike the rural Colombian Pacific, where the modern state only began to pursue incorporation and development in the 1980s, the 23 de Enero was born of modernity, already tenuously incorporated in the state. Incorporation, therefore, is better understood in the 23 de Enero as a constant recalibration of meaning and participation. The fall of Pèrez Jiménez was a pivotal moment that opened the way for informal reinventions of formal urban space the dictator pompously bequeathed to those at the margins. As poverty, unreliable services and failing

infrastructure worsened in the 23 de Enero—and in barrios around the city—over decades, the parish became solidified as one of Balbo’s microstates: a place that lives and functions autonomously in its daily fight for survival, contrasted with proximate neighborhoods where power and resources abound.

The forces of capital also affected the neighborhood in the 1980s and 1990s, when a series of economic crises and a battery of neoliberal adjustments generated further poverty, urbanization and a dramatic upsurge in the informal economy. However, in the 23 de Enero these forces spurred a deepening of social cohesion, the development of alternatives and an evolution of strategies to resist the formal order. Informal commerce and long-existing currents critical of capitalist alienation echo Escobar’s understanding of capital in a territory of difference: as a worldwide process of capital tends to organize a “third world,” it does so on the basis of a heterogeneity of social formations—which include noncapitalist modes—which, at any given point, might give rise to countertendencies and new forms of economic difference.163 The various colectivos, communes, community-based groups and all expressions of informal commerce represent these countertendencies and forms of economic difference in the 23 de Enero. With this in mind, community identity and resistance to the dominant order constitutes what Lefebvre called counter-space: established by practice, against the Eye and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power, against the endless

expansion of the “private” and industrial profitability; and against specialized spaces and a narrow localization of function.\textsuperscript{164}

Yet the forces of capital alone do not construct identity. In the 23 de Enero, daily and cultural-political practices have emerged based on historical transformation, migration and struggle. This is where Fernandes’s \textit{everyday wars of position} best highlights how daily discourses and shared experiences have constructed what Contreras refers to as \textit{vecindad}, or neighborhood bond. Cultural-political practices deployed through community radio, cultural functions and art since the 1970s demarcate discursive boundaries between the community (or the greater barrio) and those outside it. The result is everyday place making through dynamic race and class-based struggles empowered by a vigorous legacy of resistance. This process has generated tight long-term community cohesion and solidarity networks, ingredients so sought after by Schneider and Hope. As Fernandes summarizes, “guerrilla activists forged an alternate pole of historical memory that existed alongside and in contrast with deepening clientilist relationship between barrio residents and the state,”\textsuperscript{165} establishing contested autonomous space rooted in barrio identity and the exercise of political ontologies.

With this history we are left with one central question: why is the 23 de Enero different? One explanation for the 23 of Enero’s distinct legacy of resistance lies with Juan Contreras’s six elements: the cocktail of marginalization, rebellion (at its genesis and beyond), guerrilla activity, and cultural cohesion. Another factor Contreras neglects (because he is likely not looking at

\textsuperscript{164}Henri Lefebvre. \textit{The Production of Space}. Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1991., 382

himself) is the prevalence of local intellectuals in the neighborhood thanks to their access to formal education and student organizing at the Central University of Venezuela, especially in the school for Social Sciences and Economy. This is not to diminish the valuable organizational knowledge they received from the guerrillas and other activists, but to only point out the abundance of community leaders that studied at that university. In Caracas, the links between the university and the barrio and social mobilization cannot be overstated.

Yet this reasoning still does not fully factor the dialectics of the politics of scale. This is why Ciccariello-Maher, Fernandes and Velasco have effectively interpreted Escobar’s dueling strategies: recalibrations of democracy driven by counterhegemonic agency.166 As one longtime community activist put it, “For many of us who are in this social, cultural, and political struggle, 23 de Enero means that we are a parish that doesn’t keep quiet; that we always have a voice of protest, a voice of struggle, a voice of organization. We are … the most political parish; the most organized of all parishes. But at the same time – and here you feel the paradox – within our organization, we are the most disorganized.”167

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Chapter 3: A Community Security Movement: 
Foundation Alexis Vive

...deliberate "community organization" as a tactic for engineering change is only likely to work under an unusual set of conditions. Community organization consists essentially of lowering mobilization costs by creating leadership, establishing communications lines and feeding in information. Generally speaking, the tactic should work better when the community in question is already partly mobilized, when it is relatively powerful, when it is relatively invulnerable to repression, and where claims which the group is already making are being challenged by other groups.\(^{168}\)

From a dark tunnel emerging to blinding daylight, riding the Caracas metro from El Silencio to Caño Amarrillo, I am introduced to the barrio. Only a few cotton clouds drift across the bright-blue Venezuelan sky. Aging chavista graffiti along the opening tunnel reads \textit{Sí!} in large red and white letters—a remnant of the 2007 constitutional referendum. Stacked ranchos, stores and basketball courts pass by as the train hurtles into station Caño Amarrillo. People listen to music on headphones, gaze out the windows, talk to each other or read the newspaper as hanging rubber hand straps sway back and forth with the train’s movement. Graffiti between the ranchos below mark the zone of Colectivo Montaraz. The door closing alert climes and we chug on to Agua Salud. As we stream passed rows of trees on planned lawns along the track, tall apartment blocks quickly appear on both sides towering over the surrounding ranchos. The older complexes to the left are where I am headed.

I get out of the air-conditioned train car and ascend up an escalator feeling the heat. Exiting to the street, the quotidian cacophony of cars and friendly shouts echo off Block 15 directly across the street. It immediately smells of gasoline and exhaust from aging vehicles motoring by. The sun reflects off several mobile metal stands where \textit{buhoneros} (street vendors)

\(^{168}\) Charles Tilly:"Do Communities Act?" \textit{Sociological Inquiry} 43, no. 3-4 (1973): 209–238, 237
under umbrellas sell produce, natural fruit drinks, phone cards and trinkets. A hefty man selling fruit juice notices me and nods with a smile. He recognizes me from the other day when he sold me a tall plastic cup of freshly squeezed *parchita* (passion fruit) and gave me extra when he saw I liked it. To the left hot waves of asphalt slip down and rise abruptly, to the right the road relyantly slopes upward. This is 23 de Enero Street.

One can cross the street, dodging motorcycles and cars, to a small bus that will take you through La Cañada to the Freddy Parra Meetinghouse. But after a few trips under my belt, I prefer to walk. Going along Real de La Cañada Street, I am flanked by apartment blocks to my right and ranchos of Barrio Sucre to the left. Dozens of birds chirp from intermittent trees that offer shade on the sidewalk. Familiar graffiti and simple murals of the Coordinador Simón Bolívar and Colectivo Alexis Vive Carajo run along the apartment block walls where small piles of trash gather. People work on cars along the street and listen to the radio, while others glimpse out from tiny storefronts infused in the ranchos. Children in school uniforms walk with their parents and elderly people wait to be attended to at a Barrio Adentro clinic. I continue with my head slightly up, gazing at the imposing apartment blocks. But, as a native New Yorker, I am not impressed by their size; it is their history that draws me, instead.

Looking up, I finally notice Simón Bolívar’s eyes peering down at me from atop an old police outpost. A little further there is a small plaza with a bust of Che Guevara in the middle. That is where the bus stops. I turn right around the left flank of the Freddy Parra Meetinghouse, the headquarters of the Coordinator Simón Bolivar. The meetinghouse features a wide-open space in the center, accessed by passing through an unlocked gridironed gate. Two short buildings sit on the sides and a taller one of about thirty feet stands with inwardly slanted twin
towers in the middle. Murals of Che Guevara, Emiliano Zapata, Simón Bolívar and Hugo Chávez adorn the structures. On the front wall, another mural with a keffiyeh-covered face screams *Estado Palestino Ya!!* (Palestinian State Now!). I step over a long storm drain protected by grating and start across a large parking lot packed with cars and motorcycles between Blocks 17 and 18. I arrive at a state-run Café Venezuela on Boulevard Simón Bolívar, a strip of green-painted metal storefronts with cement benches and a row of small statues, and walk through the wide open-air entrance. The café workers greet me with smiles and after I reciprocate, I ask for a small coffee with sugar and take a seat at a wobbly table near the entrance. I sip my rich, hot beverage and look out at the La Cañada sector of the 23 de Enero.

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169 See Figure 10.

170 See Figure 9 for this view.
The central argument of this chapter is that Foundation Alexis Vive is a community security movement, based on the conceptual and historical groundwork laid in the previous chapters. Building on the spatial history provided in the second chapter, we continue with a more focused examination of community security movements in flux to order to get at Escobar and Zibechi’s central point: the emergence of alternative politics, economics and culture exercised by social movements. We do this by applying the five interrelated features established in chapter one: territorialization (chapter two), identity, praxis, constituency, and autonomy. As previously mentioned, the 23 de Enero is home to about a dozen larger, interrelated colectivos of a few
hundred participants each. Likewise, they maintain distinct praxis and operate a variety of projects, some more extensive than others. But they are united in purpose: the Bolivarian Revolution.

Figure 10: façade of the Freddy Parra Meetinghouse (taken by friend of author, September 2014)

Background: From Martyrs to Production

As chapter two details, the Simón Bolívar Cultural Coordinator (CCSB) formed in the wake of the Caracazo. Like the UTD and the CVI in Argentina, which formed in the midst of the anti-neoliberal picketing movements of the 1990s and early 2000s, the CCSB was founded following a major moment of rupture and a reordering of the formal political order. Students

from the 23 de Enero studying at the Central University of Venezuela first organized the Brigade of Solidarity with the People of Antonio José de Sucre in 1993 to build on the flare of community organizing happening throughout the city as the Punto Fijo pact system unraveled. Upon returning from a volunteer trip to Cuba, those same students founded the CCSB on December 17, 1993 with the purpose of organizing various community groups, political currents, remnants of guerrilla, and so-called Tupamaros and to put a united sociopolitical face on their movements through cultural events and youth sports programs. Robert Longa, a former member of the CCSB and founder of Alexis Vive, explains the idea behind the title was to express solidarity with the Colombian Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Board umbrella group and to decolonize their Latin American identity as distinctly non-European. Further inspiration to organize the CCSB came from Hugo Chávez’s two failed coup attempts in 1992, in which some future militants of the organization participated.

With material and political support from the new mayor of the capital district from the opposition Radical Cause party, Aristóbulo Istúriz, the organization coalesced. But as resources began to flow, fractures quickly emerged. The explosion of José Pinto, for instance, foreshadowed fierce conflicts and revealed the power of moral discourse among militants. Meanwhile, the CCSB continued to develop as an effective facilitator of what Juan Contreras, a founding member, refers to as local power: self-management and co-management of material resources with the end of sustainable development based in the historical protagonism of the


people as the social subject. Their praxis, therefore, consisted of facilitating community participation to address local problems and open political dialogue to stimulate critical thinking. More specifically, to this purpose they held political forums (future president Hugo Chávez attended a few); worked toward the recovery of cultural traditions and events, like *La Cruz de Mayo, Sangueo de San Juan,* and the *Paradura del niño;* organizing sporting activities as an integral part of wellbeing and an alternative to youth violence; and recovered space from criminals and drug dealers for common sharing, security and youth recreation. This small-scale territorialization and recovery of space has more resonance with Zibechi, who describes movements that have “roots in spaces that have been recuperated or otherwise secured through long (open and underground) struggles.” And with the arrival of Chávez to the presidency in 1999, their work was soon codified in the new constitution.

In August 2005 the CCSB, performed its most profound act of spatial recovery: the takeover of the Caracas Metropolitan Police outpost in the center of La Cañada. This victory of local power cannot be overstated. For over thirty years, the outpost served as the most prominent site of state repression, torture and control in the 23 de Enero. The taking of the outpost was non-violent and involved militants from the CCSB and the broader community. One day they collectively arrived at the outpost and called for a meeting with the police commander. In that

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176 Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (1999); Article 184: Open and flexible mechanisms shall be created by law to cause the States and Municipalities to decentralize and transfer to communities and organized neighborhood groups services the latter manage and demonstrate the ability to provide...
meeting, the community declared their grievances vehemently. Soon they forced their way into the inner offices, removed the officers and took possession of the outpost—all without firing a single shot. The former police outpost is now known as the Freddy Parra Bolivarian Meeting House, named in honor of a longtime CCSB militant and community organizer who died in a car accident in January of that year.

As smaller groups peeled off the CCSB, the group became known simply as the Simón Bolívar Coordinator (CSB in Spanish). Today the Freddy Parra Meeting House still serves as their headquarters and is an open and friendly place despite its combative appearance. There are no guards and even as a stranger I was quickly invited in to the central meeting area. Guadalupe Rodríguez runs the meetinghouse day-to-day, while Juan Contreras serves as a humble leader—though he told me to refer to him as simply a militant, he is an acting deputy in the National Assembly the CSB’s most visible spokesperson. The colectivo still remains true to their original purposes: the recovery of space, the recovery of traditions and sports as a way to mitigate youth crime and drug addiction.

Their current projects include: Café Venezuela (the CSB donated the space to the government); grocery store Carlos Vielma, named for a sixteen-year-old that was killed by the police in 1976; a bookstore; a computer lab with sixty-four computers; a SAIME office (the government institution for civil registry that provides passports and identification cards); a community radio station Al Son del 23 (to the beat of the 23); a veterinary clinic; a center for the elderly; government social Mission Robinson (a literacy program); workshops for handicrafts,

dance and music for children and adults; various youth sports programs; and the facilitation of political forums. They have also maintained a diplomatic posture with other groups in the parish, avoiding quarrels and praising the work of others.

The CSB has also generated controversy with their unabashed celebration of foreign and domestic armed actors. The construction of Plaza Manuel Marulanda, after the late founder of the FARC, in 2008 caused particular uproar.\textsuperscript{178} The plaza boasts a bust of Marulanda and a mural of another deceased FARC leader, Raul Reyes. Around the corner, on Boulevard Simón Bolivar in La Cañada.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{flag-CSB.jpg}
\caption{Figure 11: the flag of the CSB is proudly flown next to a FALN flag at the unveiling of a bust for Baltazar Ojeda Negretti on Boulivard Simón Bolivar in La Cañada. Block 19 can be seen in the background to the left. (taken by author, September 2014)}
\end{figure}

Bolívar, there is a row of busts honoring Simón Bolívar, Hugo Chávez, and the storied Venezuelan guerrilla leader Baltazar Ojeda Negretti. The CSB has also hosted international visitors for cultural exchange and solidarity, especially Basque activists. These homages and acts of international solidarity reflect two pervasive trends exhibited by the groups in the 23 de Enero: their historic connection to the guerrillas of the 1960s and their international reach. When I asked Contreras about the meaning of their tributes to the FARC, he merely expressed solidarity with rural struggles in Colombia. “After all, what are the FARC? The people [pueblo],” he explained.

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179 I was able to attend the unveiling of the bust of Baltazar Ojeda Negretti and speak with former guerrillas. See: Figure 11; and Aporrea Tvi. "Después De 22 Años Se Rinde Homenaje Al Mártir Baltazar Ojeda Negretti "Comandante Elías"" Aporrea. September 11, 2014. Accessed August 1, 2015.


181 Interview with Juan Contreras.
Colectivo Alexis González Vive Carajo (the Alexis González Lives Damn It Collective) was one of the groups that branched off the CCSB in the early 2000s. Given the controversy around the term colectivo –especially in 2014 following the opposition protests– I asked Ana Marin, a spokesperson for the group, what term they preferred. She insisted on Foundation Alexis Vive, or just Alexis Vive. The group, which originally focused on cultural education under the name Travesía, was made up of local youth and university students from the Central University of Venezuela (UVC in Spanish) when it seceded from the CCSB in 2005 over
differences around organizational structure, ideology and praxis. While conducting my fieldwork I heard rumors of tensions between the two groups. One community member I spoke with, a supporter of Alexis Vive, criticized the CSB for wasting resources on events and statues. When I asked Anan Marin about the supposed strained relations between the groups, she adamantly denied it and told me to check my sources. While I did not ask Contreras about the rumors directly, he made it clear they maintained friendly relations.

Alexis Vive named their organization in honor of a prominent CCSB community leader, José Alexis González Revette, who was killed by the Caracas municipal police during the 2002 coup against President Chávez. Their area of influence is located in Zona Central, just up a hill west of La Cañada between blocks 22 and 28, and includes the spans of ranchos in barrios Santa Rosa and Camboya. According to Fausto Castillo, one of Alexis Vive’s former leaders, the organization was created to provide revolutionary education to the community, defend the revolutionary process, and recover space for sports, culture and the Bolivarian missions. Currently, Alexis Vive has approximately a hundred members. Though, they told me their extended membership includes friends and sympathizers who attend gatherings and parties and help them on an ad hoc basis.

By the end of 2006, Alexis Vive already accomplished one of its primary objectives: the establishment of a productive commune, the Comuna el Panal 2021 (the Honeycomb Commune

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183 Alexis Vive’s zone is also heavily featured in the critically acclaimed Venezuelan film, Pelo Malo (2013).

The name honeycomb “is a metaphor since a honeycomb is constructed by many worker bees; each one contributes a little to the community and all benefit from what they have built. …Everyone who is part of this commune has to be a worker bee to make sure that the commune has good services, tranquility, it stays clean, it is maintained, we have quality education, recreation, communal spaces,” explains Rosangela “La Chiqui” Orozco. 185 The number 2021 is a discursive reference that links them to Chávez, who before succumbing to cancer, insisted he would be president until 2021. The Honeycomb 2021 exists as a parallel entity alongside Alexis Vive. It is purposed with incorporating the community in Bolivarian socialism, collective work, security (the rapid community network), and production. Alexis Vive and the Honeycomb 2021 are complementary and inseparable. They have since expanded beyond the 23 de Enero, with semi-autonomous branches operating in Valencia, Carabobo; San Cristobal, Táchira; and Puerto La Cruz, Anzoátegui.

Identity

Alexis Vive is a product of the spatial history and identity established in chapter two. They emerged from the dynamic urban territory of difference that is the 23 de Enero, forged by Fernandes’s everyday wars of position. They are the barrio. But their course has been distinct, nonetheless. They are generally younger than many of the other groups in the parish. Their local intellectuals, Robert Longa and “La Chiqui” Orozco in particular, are in their late thirties. They were barely teenagers during the Caracazo and did not live through the repression of the 1960s
and 1970s. Moreover they have grown politically in the midst of the Bolivarian Revolution, with all its opportunities and bureaucratic limitations.\textsuperscript{186}

Alexis Vive’s identity is also a direct reflection of their ideology. Their rallying cry—\textit{We are collective. We think collective. We act collective}—reveals much about them as a class-based urban community security movement orientated to a diverse interpretation of Marxist-Leninism and Bolivarianism. They are what Zibechi refers to as Guevarists in their inspiration for revolutionary militancy. To join one must complete a training course in revolutionary thought and adapt a nom de guerre. As their most prominent leader, Robert Longa, explains, “A little of what Michel Foucault proposed in his toolbox and strategy of power, there we are a bit eclectic, we are constructing the socialism of the twenty-first century next to comandante Chávez.”\textsuperscript{187} They also look to István Mészáros, Simón Rodríguez, Simón Bolívar, and the UCV-based Marxist Ludovico Silva for intellectual guidance. Though the former MIR and Red Flag guerrilla, Carlos Betancourt, has mentored them most directly. His insistence on deepening the revolutionary process by empowering the communal councils and community-based security reflects obviously their ideology and praxis.\textsuperscript{188}

But for them no icon is more important, no thinker more admired, than Che Guevara. His image appears in many of their murals, their flag and the bandanas they use to cover their faces

\textsuperscript{186}This understanding is reflected well in this interview with one activist and community organizer. See: Alejandro Velasco. "Communes in Progress: An Interview with Atenea Jiménez." NACLA REPORT ON THE AMERICAS 46, no. 2 (2013): 31-34.


\textsuperscript{188}George Ciccariello-Maher. “We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution.” Duke UP, 2013, 82-84
during protests and presentations. As Carolina Cambre describes, “...more than a symbol that stood apart from people’s lives, Guevara’s image worked in concert with those lives, as part of the practice of people’s daily experiences.” Ana Marin confirmed to me that Che is undoubtedly one of their greatest sources of inspiration. Chávez, for them, was also “giant,” a professor and father figure, she tells me. She and Robert Longa, who are presented by their legal names, even appear in Oliver Stone’s short film Mi Amigo Hugo, relating the importance of Chávez to them and the revolution.

Alexis Vive celebrates two fallen companions: José Alexis González Revette (aforementioned) and Kley Gómez, a leader of Alex Vive who was killed by thieves in 2005. The deaths of Alexis González and Kley Gómez symbolically link Alexis Vive to their two principal threats: the political opposition and crime. I asked Ana Marin if they thought of themselves as a student movement as well, considering many of their members are university students. She told me no, they are a community organization. Still, one cannot help noticing their erudite discourse reflected in their affinity for Foucault and Mészáros. They are also guided by what they call the three E’s: efficiency, ethic and esthetic. Formulated by Longa, the three E’s are a major discursive tool, used to focus their praxis and position it towards the practical needs and wants of the community. This strong sense of identity based on shared history, culture and

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189 Student protesters in Venezuela have used bandanas and clothing to cover their faces for decades for fear of reprisal from the state. Those who cover their heads and faces during protests are known as encapuchados, or the hooded ones. The use of bandanas, therefore, says more about the collectives’ historical links to student movements than criminality. See: Fernando Calzadilla. "Performing the Political: Encapuchados in Venezuela." TDR/The Drama Review 46, no. 4 (2002): 104-25.


ideology provides the cohesion necessary to solve Hope and Schneider’s problem with the communitarian approach to crime prevention: it is difficult to establish and even more difficult to maintain, since near hermetic cultural or ideological bonds are required. Furthermore, identity is the basis for their political ontology as a vision of life and the perception of what life ought to be through competing notions of space, belonging, organization and purpose. They are *Alexisvivistas*.

Praxis: Violence, Production, Gender and Networks

Violence

Alexis Vive operates in a grey area of active violence, threats and preparation. The IACHR included them, along with la Piedrita, Movimiento Tupamaro, Unidad Popular Venezolana, and the Carapaica Group, as among the most violent groups either actively supported or permitted by the government. In order to address the topic of violence, we must first determine against whom violence is directed: local adversaries and the political opposition. Compared to other groups in the 23 de Enero, however, Alexis Vive is relatively mild. They are not in active conflict with other groups and they have not publicly threatened opposition figures for years.

Upon forming Alexis Vive immediately set forth to rid their area of drug dealers and delinquency, echoing the CSB’s praxis of recovering space from criminals. One resident told me when Alexis Vive began their campaign against crime she feared they would repeat the typical fit of social cleansing only to fall into criminality, like so many Tupamaro-like groups before. This was troubling for her considering the “delinquents” in the area were mostly children from the community, as is usually the case in popular urban areas. She told me this was not what happened with Alexis Vive, however. They instead quickly organized the community and engaged with drug dealers and addicts to convince them to rehabilitate. If the drug dealers did not acquiesce, the community gave them an ultimatum: leave the area or we will force you out. As far as I know, the drug dealers left without significant conflict.

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Alexis Vive’s integral security (their term) is a preventative holistic approach based on the Cuban neighborhood network, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. To prevent crime and drug abuse they run children’s sporting and cultural events in order to give them an alternative to violence and drug dealing, including annual youth Olympic games and a surfing school that is held on the coast. Like the CSB, Alexis Vive also recovers space for collective use. This includes a community garden and a pool, which they constructed from what used to be an abandoned dumping site for mechanical junk. While I interviewed Ana Marin poolside, children occasionally banged on the door to take a dip. She politely repeated to them, “No, my love. We’ll open it later.” To detect immediate threats they use closed circuit surveillance cameras and a rapid communication network: a web of interlinked neighbors that alert each other through whistling, text messages, walky-talkies and vocal calls. The nerve center of their operations is a small command center next to the community pool, between Blocks 27 and 28. From there, they monitor the area on half a dozen televisions. Alexis Vive has also participated in many protests calling for the government to do more about insecurity and police corruption.

When I asked one resident if Alexis Vive had armed patrols, like other groups in the 23 de Enero, she told me if something happens they can organize about two hundred workers and community members in under five minutes. “Why would we need guns?” she asked. It was also explained to me that the bees of the Honeycomb Commune 2021 represent their attitude toward self-defense: if you harm one bee, the whole hive will attack you. Even so, she admitted to me

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that the area was not completely safe and that violence and robberies do occur but far less than before. “We still have not completely escaped those social problems,” she added. Nonetheless, others report they do patrol some places armed.

Drug addiction, she told me, is considered a health problem and is treated with community support. Ana Marin explained to me if they catch someone committing a crime in the area they grab them and hand them over to the police. That is why the revolution created those mechanisms, she said. But her response belies the essence of their existence: to fulfill services the state has failed to provide and create alternatives. The killing of Jacinto Pacheco, a member of their Valencia branch, by national police officers during the opposition protests in early 2014 further challenges this ostensible confidence in law enforcement. As Carlos Betancourt argues, “Security isn’t a question of centralization or decentralization. Any national police force will just be the same corrupt cops in a national uniform.” Yet, this notion of relying on civilian security

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groups has been attempted before, like Medellin’s Convivir experiment, with inauspicious results.\(^{199}\)

It is generally believed that Alexis Vive is armed and violent,\(^{200}\) though their discourse is mostly non-violent. Widely circulated photos of some of their youngest members saluting with pistols in the air are a persistent driver of this perception.\(^{201}\) Visitors from Australia took the photos during the 2006 World Social Forum, which was partially held in Caracas. The original pictures, Alexis Vive claims, were of the members saluting with raised \textit{fists} and the pistols were edited in.\(^{202}\) One possibility is that the members were indeed holding pistols and following the negative public reaction, they decided not to show their weapons in the open again and deny the authenticity of the photos. This would amount to a significant shift in discourse away from violence, which is plausible considering it is the only instance of them displaying arms in public.

They have insisted many times that they are not armed and that they consider armed struggle an option of last resort.\(^{203}\) Other than on murals, I never saw a single firearm during my time in the 23 de Enero. However, Alexis Vive could easily have access to weapons from a wide


\(^{201}\)See figure 14


variety of sources. Given the group’s local threats and the abundance of firearms in Caracas\textsuperscript{204}, it is difficult to believe they would not be armed to some extent. They also readily admit they are prepared for violence should they, or the revolution, come under attack. As Longa explains, “The Council of Integral Security for Defense is based on the vietnamese model of General Vo Nguyen Giap: local Committees of Self-defense, Regional Districts and the Vietnam Liberation Army. In our case we believe that the social movement must not arm itself for an offense but yes it must be prepared for defense.”\textsuperscript{205}


Alexis Vive has also participated in some minor aggressions against the opposition. On May 24, 2007 they, along with peasant activists\textsuperscript{206}, vandalized the façade of Fedecámaras’s headquarters (the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce), the group primarily responsible for the 2002 coup against President Chávez. The following evening with members of the CSB, some of them elderly, they did the same to one of Venezuela’s most watched private

television networks, Globovisión, also involved in the 2002 coup.207 Their activities in UCV have been similar: spray painting walls and damaging property, actions they consider pacific. Though on at least one occasion, they have been accused of repressing protesters at the university.208 In Zibechi’s view, these exploits serve as self-affirming forms of action by which new actors make themselves visible and assert their distinctive identities tend to replace the older forms, such as the [labor] strike.”209 Such actions, therefore, function to shape their identity, especially early on in their formation; though, they have not participated in similar actions or threats since. Also akin to what Rubin describes about the COCEI of Oaxaca, Mexico, Alexis Vive at times used aggressive protests as part of their repertoire, used strategically to push the envelope without committing to combat.

Alexis Vive has also allegedly been involved in criminal activity, like drug trafficking, kidnapping and extortion. Historical trends of Tupamaro-like groups in the 23 de Enero falling into criminality, social cleansing and oppression –otherwise known as their double face– are evident, as discussed in chapter two. However, I cannot verify Alexis Vive commits such crimes and considering the highly polarized political climate in Venezuela, one should take blanket accusations with a grain of salt. One theory is that surplus from their projects and government funding ensures they do not seek resources through illicit activity. Though Alexis Vive is coy

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about their capacity to defend themselves, their participation in overt violence is rare and their capacity for armed combat is likely merger. In sum, their praxis is based far more on organization, education and production than violence.

![Figure 15: The building from which Alexis Vive broadcasts Radio Arsenal and Arsenal Television. Block 26 is in the background. (taken by author, September 2014)](image)

**Production**

Founded in 2006, the Honeycomb Commune 2021 predates the Organic Law of Communes passed in December 2010, which supplies a legal framework for the construction of
communes as drivers of production and grassroots power.\(^{210}\) When I asked Yulimar (pseudonym), a member of the Honeycomb 2021, who the commune consisted of she simply replied, “We are the community.” Seven communal councils (1,600 families) in the area are the backbone of the Honeycomb 2021. Communal councils were legally sanctioned in April 2006 by the Law of Communal Councils with the intention of creating “instances of participation, articulation and integration among diverse community organizations, social groups and citizens that permit the organized citizenry to directly exercise control over public policies and projects aimed at answering the needs and aspirations of communities in the construction of equality and social justice.”\(^{211}\) Though the communal councils are widely applauded for their empowerment of communities, concerns remain. Nationally the communal councils have yielded mixed results, facing various challenges such as apathy, corruption and political exclusion among community members.\(^{212}\)

In the 23 de Enero, the commune operates sugar packing and block making factories (funded by Ministry of Agriculture and Land); a bakery and a sewing factory that makes shirts and book bags (funded by Capital District mayor Juan Barreto); and they have plans to construct


a posada (an inn).\textsuperscript{213} They also have four fish farming tanks with the capacity to cultivate over four hundred cachamas (a small, flat freshwater fish) at a time, which they sell to the community at below market prices.\textsuperscript{214} They are also developing the capacity to produce pectin, a light-brown power extracted from citrus fruits and used as a gelling agent for jams and other products.\textsuperscript{215} The production of goods and services is the cornerstone of Alexis Vive’s praxis and their primary mode of resistance. When I asked Yulimar if she thought the Honeycomb 2021 was activity resisting, she said they absolutely were: “We still live in a capitalist system, an oil renter system. We are resisting that everyday.”

Finally, production here is not limited to goods and services, as culture and space are also material. Alexis Vive’s most striking expression of culture is their use of murals and imagery. Like other groups in the parish Alexis Vive demarcates their zone with revolutionary street art, just as the murals that decorate the Freddy Parra Meetinghouse. Upon entering Alexis Vive’s central area, one is greeted by numerous murals that are intermittently repainted. One of their more famous murals depicts a revolutionary Last Supper that features Jesus Christ in the center with historical revolutionary figures as his disciples, Kley Gómez and Alexis González included.\textsuperscript{216} As Cambre points out, “The parking lot mural frees viewers from passive reception so that a space for dialogue can open, though not necessarily through language, which then


\textsuperscript{216}See figure 16
engenders a capacity to act.” The murals thus act as an immediate divider of allies and foes: those offended by the imagery may leave. However their visual discourse, like their general demeanor, is shifting away from confrontational imagery to softer blues and yellows with cartoonish fronts. Their other mode of cultural production is their radio station Arsenal 98.2 FM, which is broadcast throughout Caracas, and their television channel, Arsenal Television.

Figure 16: from left to right– Manuel Marulanda, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Marx, Jesus Christ (center, robed in the colors of Simón Bolívar), Simón Bolívar, Alexis González, Kley Gómez, Hugo Chávez, Simón Rodríguez, and Chief Guaicaipuro on the far end. (BBC Mundo. “Caracas, Entre El Arte Y La Propaganda.” August 24, 2010. Accessed August 6, 2015.)

See figure 17
Gender

Gender is not an explicit part of Alexis Vive’s discourse or agenda. Yet the participation of women in their movement is both monumental and obvious. Ana Marin told me while Alexis Vive recognizes feminism as a historical struggle, they do not compartmentalize the revolution: they believe in a total revolution, for all. This sentiment is not uncommon among radicals in the 23 de Enero. For longtime activist Nora Castañeda, feminism as she understood it was unsuited for her purposes: “I lived in 23 de Enero, and there we worked for the rights of the community. We were clear that the motor of this entire process needed to be the workers, women and
men.\textsuperscript{218} Difficult debates on the role of feminism in revolutionary praxis amongst activists in the parish have raged since at least the 1970s, with many reflecting the same attitude as Alexis Vive.\textsuperscript{219} But feminism and gender struggles still course through their movement, if only implicitly.

Eighty percent of Alexis Vive’s membership is male, but female leaders are visible, influential and common. Ana Martin and “La Chiqui” Orozco, for example, are two of the group’s most visible spokespeople, even though Robert Longa, one of the original founders, is the main authority. Likewise, women are prominent in the Honeycomb 2021, such as Judith Guerra, who is the main spokesperson of Comunal Council Santa Rosa.\textsuperscript{220} Both Zibechi and Diaz-Barriga tell us that social movements often open new spaces for women to challenge traditional gender roles. In the 23 de Enero, women have for decades pushed beyond their households to reorder social experiences through direct participation in protests and social movements.

The Bolivarian Revolution has further opened these participatory spaces for women, especially in urban areas. As Fernandes informs us: “despite male leadership and authority, the growing presence of women in local assemblies, committees, and communal kitchens has created forms of popular participation that challenge gender roles, collectivize private tasks, and create

\textsuperscript{218} George Ciccariello-Maher. \textit{We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution}. Duke UP, 2013, 129


alternatives to male-centric politics.”

The women of Alexis Vive and the Honeycomb 2021 do not simply push the boundaries of domestic life; they proudly lead and manage projects. Female figures, though, are noticeably absent from their male dominated murals, discursive icons and intellectual champions. The one conspicuous exception is the late UPV leader, Lina Ron, who assisted Alexis Vive with events and is celebrated by many groups in the parish.

Figure 18: Ana Marin, Foundation Alexis Vive. (taken by author, September 2014):

Networks

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of the horizontal social, political and economic relations of Alexis Vive. The local, national and international networks referred to

here are included as praxis to describe Alexis Vive’s positioning: a deepening of their vision of the revolution determined by their ontological politics. Locally, Alexis Vive is a bit distinct in that they are not part of the Revolutionary Secretariat of Venezuela (an umbrella organization of colectivos) –neither is the CSB– and at times decline to participate with other groups in the parish in protests, gatherings and other functions.\textsuperscript{222} Other times they have worked collaboratively with other groups, like their actions against Globovisión and Fedecámaras with the CSB and rural activists, and attended mass marches.\textsuperscript{223}

Lina Ron’s UPV also helped Alexis Vive with events such as providing tents for their International Bolivarian Campout in January 2006, which included participation from the Venezuelan Ezequiel Zamora National Peasant Front (FNCEZ in Spanish) and the Landless Workers' Movement (MST in Portuguese) of Brazil.\textsuperscript{224} Alexis Vive also publicly expressed solidarity and with La Piedrita after the killing of Diego Santana\textsuperscript{225} and joined them in protests in the 23 de Enero to oppose José Pinto’s Tupamaros.\textsuperscript{226} One member of Alexis Vive stated, “Those that call themselves Tupamaros do not have influence or a presence in the community within their diverse sectors in the 23 de Enero. They have taken up the practice of chavismo
without Chávez and enrich themselves individually. They seek cover under the name of a legend, but they are simply clear examples of the Fourth Republic and nothing more.” Despite that harsh statement, Alexis Vive generally maintains respectful and diplomatic relations with other groups in the parish.

The group’s expansion to other states and their sudden seeding of panalitos (little honeycombs) across western Caracas is another expression of their praxis of networks. As Longa explains, “Each little honeycomb must have five to ten neighbors. If this year we make at least fifty little honeycombs, we should have five hundred communal citizens pushing this logic of popular construction and strengthening the Bolivarian Revolution.” The little honeycombs primary purpose is to drive the establishment of communes through the communal councils. For Longa, the communal councils are the cells of the commune and the little honeycombs are the DNA. The effect, thus far, has been sugar and medicine distribution programs and preventive healthcare and youth sports initiatives in western Caracas, led mostly by women. Semi-autonomous Alexis Vive-Honeycomb 2021 branches also thrive in the cities of Valencia, Carabobo; San Cristobal, Táchira; and Puerto La Cruz, Anzoátegui with similar factories and community-based projects. As previously mentioned, they also have links to rural movements, like the FNCEZ, and a strong parallel movement at the Central University of Venezuela.

Similar to their predecessors, Alexis Vive has international reach. They, like the CSB, maintain relations with social movements and academics from across Latin America and the world. For example, they have hosted Basque activists and representatives from the Brazilian

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Free Fare Movement (*Movimento Passe Livre*) and Landless Workers' Movement, the Evita Movement in Argentina, and the barrio-based Ukamau labor movement in Santiago, Chile. The group is also allegedly linked to Cuba through the Francisco de Miranda Front\(^{228}\) (an organization created in 2003 by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro to facilitate collaboration between radical militants) but they do not openly display this connection, unlike their other linkages.

**Constituency: the Mother Queen**

Alexis Vive’s relationship with their constituency appears mixed. While their constituencies may enjoy greater security, colectivos in the 23 de Enero can also be an imposition, particularly for those who support the opposition. Colectivos are, after all, hegemonic actors within their community. Alexis Vive, however, has gone to great lengths to incorporate their constituency in programs, events and democratic participation. The most obvious evidence of this is the Honeycomb 2021 commune and the little honeycombs.

“The community is the Mother Queen,” Ana Marin told me as we closed our interview. Community participation and engagement is essential to Alexis Vive’s praxis, as Rosangela Orozco explains:

> Decisions are made in assembly where the maximum authority is the community, even down to the color of the walls. People decide upon their own rules of communal living… This is the way we taught people about socialism, what exchange looks like in socialism, what a commune is,

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Despite this rosy narrative, there are still those in the community who do not support the government or Alexis Vive. I heard rumors from people involved in the proceso that residents were growing tired of Alexis Vive and other colectivos. Yulimar admitted to me that there are many opposition neighbors in barrio Santa Rosa, but they were not the majority. She told me neighbors openly voice their opinions and even get into heated arguments. Robert Longa also makes it clear that “the little honeycomb [commune] is characterized as chavismo or nothing, chavismo or death. In the little honeycomb no one can enter that does not obey the maximum cause of socialism and the communal constitution.” While this posture reinforces ideological and political cohesion vital to the movement, it also undoubtedly marginalizes moderates in the community.

This dynamic is comparable to what Jeffery Rubin tells us about the constituency of the COCEI in Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico: the core movement often clashes with moderates and ordinary people in the community. In that case, the result is nuanced interrelations between community members and the movement, diffusing tension and maintaining open discourse. Another possibility, on the other end of the spectrum, is Enrique Desmond Arias and Corinne Davis Rodrigues’s *myth of personal security*: when a community security movement becomes too exclusionary, relations with the constituency become a precarious everyday negotiation of

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power and safety, rules and punishments. Alexis Vive, by all accounts, has avoided the later by opening participatory space and providing services, security and employment through its factories. But, there are still community members uneasy about Alexis Vive’s authority. As Chapter two relates, the 23 de Enero has never been a space of homogenous action or stasis. It thus follows that Alexis Vive’s constituency would be neither static nor fully satisfied.

Figure 19: Robert Longa addressing the community. (Facebook, Inc. “Fundacion Alexis Vive’s Facebook Page.” Last modified January 17, 2013. Accessed August 11, 2015.)

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Autonomy

For Robert Longa, Alexis Vive is a transverse axis that articulates the politics of both the government and the community: “it is a way to bring the government to the bases, because we are also the government and we are involved in the dynamic of its construction.” This is where Alexis Vive exemplifies the greater paradox of the Bolivarian Revolution, as those in the proceso understand it: future Venezuelan socialism is thought to be built based on various council structures that cooperate and converge at a higher level so as to transcend the bourgeois state and replace it with a communal state.” This trajectory, insisted on by the most ideological voices in the government and grassroots, is facilitated by chavismo’s broad strategy of what Ellner describes as social-base democracy: a diminishing of traditional institutions in favor of constituent power. Alexis Vive undoubtedly sees themselves as protagonists in this process, as evident in their communal ambitions and integration into the Bolivarian militias. The question, thus, is what can we make of Alexis Vive’s autonomy: are they coopted clients or revolutionary vanguards?

Alexis Vive does not explicitly participate in any party, though some members are PSUV militants. “It is not that we are against this party or another, it is just that our work is with the


community,” explained Ana Marin.\textsuperscript{236} Though they have periodically participated in REDES – a chavista party headed by former Metropolitan Caracas Mayor, Juan Barreto, as an election platform for the grassroots movements in Caracas. Furthermore, one of their most prominent leaders, Rosangela “La Chiqui” Orozco, has ascended institutionally to become the Minister of the Ministry of Popular Power for the Communes and Social Protection in May 2015, a major government post. I asked Ana Marin if Orozco’s post (at the time she was a vice minister) compromised Alexis Vive’s autonomy. She told me, “Well, it would be best if [Orozco] answers that, but there is no problem. Her duties as Vice Minister are in line with our work.”\textsuperscript{237}

Alexis Vive also has been accused of being too close to the government. In an article for the open online news source Aporrea, Roland Denis, a longtime Caracas-based intellectual and activist, harshly criticized Alexis Vive for their silence following the killing four members of another colectivo in downtown Caracas by state security forces, including their prominent leader, José Oderman. Denis wrote, “Even though they accuse the innocent base of being armed, a great part of the rest have stayed shamelessly silent or even collaborating with the political interests of the killers, as is the case with Collective Alexis Vive.”\textsuperscript{238}

Alexis Vive fired back the next day on Aporrea, calling Denis ignorant to the reality of the barrio and that “…while the Bolivarian Revolution governs we are willing to collaborate with state institutions, we recognize ourselves as political subjects, not to do so

\textsuperscript{236} Interview with Ana Marin.

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid.

would be to reject Comandante Chávez himself... we recognize the tensions, the struggles of [the Venezuelan people] throughout these fourteen years of revolutionary process.”

This polemic between Alexis Vive and Roland Denis showcases both the tense discourse over autonomy and Alexis Vive’s struggle to balance their praxis within the reality of contested institutionalization. In the wake of the opposition protests in early 2014, Alexis Vive emerged as the government’s ideal colectivo, appearing in commercials and a lengthy interview on Globovisión, to dilute coverage of colectivos repressing protesters. In October, the government returned to Alexis Vive with a public visit by the then Minister of the Interior, Miguel Rodríguez Torres, to quash rising tensions surrounding the Oderman incident, to which Denis refers.

Alexis Vive was clearly part of a public relations campaign by the government to put a positive face on colectivos and counter the negative press.

In sum, Alexis Vive is semi-autonomous. From the beginning, Alexis Vive has seen itself within (and beyond) the Bolivarian Revolution. They are funded through a mix of internal and external sources. Externally they receive financial, political and technical support from the local and national government for their projects—as detailed previously in the section on production. These funds reach Alexis Vive in a variety of formal and informal ways. The most formal is through national ministries and their zone’s seven communal councils, which petition for grants for local development projects. Additionally, they generate funds internally from membership fees, fiestas and surplus from collectively owned businesses. They also likely receive informal

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funds through local government. Like the Unemployed Workers’ Union (UTD) of Salta, Argentina, Alexis Vive strives for autonomy while receiving funds from the state. For them autonomy is seen as an objective to be achieved by their determined praxis via the Bolivarian Revolution, not despite it. When Chávez visited Alexis Vive for the 369th installment of his nationally broadcast television show, *Aló Presidente*, in January 2011, he was warmly welcomed.

“You’re a member of the commune, you’re a commoner [*comunero*] too,” Salvador Salas, a spokesperson of the group, insisted to the president.

“Of course!” declared the president. “And what’s going on with the sugar and all this?”

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241 This is speculative, but the allocation of state funds in Venezuela, especially at the local level, is often porous and unaccountable. See: Brian Ellsworth. "Special Report: Billions Unaccounted for in Venezuela's Communal Giveaway Program." Reuters. May 6, 2014.

Conclusion

In conclusion Alexis Vive was born out of urban territory of difference, a legacy of resistance and revolution. Their historical context, the space opened to them by the Bolivarian Revolution, and the real needs and wants in the community led to their birth. This analysis has revealed marked paradoxes and questions, especially ambiguities concerning Alexis Vive’s relation to violence, the state and possible involvement in illicit activities. With their evolution, Alexis Vive is has become increasingly professionalized and has emerged as a more enduring social, political and economic fixture. Have they surpassed the movement and transformed into something more institutional?
In comparison with other community security movements examined in chapter one, Alexis Vive shows notable similarities and clear contrasts. Like the CVI of Buenos Aires, they identify as a residents-based community movement even though so many of them are students. They are beholden and driven by their community identity, revolutionary ideology and commanding discourse: efficiency, ethic and esthetic. Similar to many colectivos, they at times push the boundaries of violent action and prepare for possible conflict. Alexis Vive is surely not pacific, but the scope and sophistication of their praxis is far wider than just an urban militia. They have opened significant participatory space to their constituency, though differences persist. These differences are mostly diffused in open debate, like the COCEI; though, others continue to feel excluded and threatened.

The most obvious difference between Alexis Vive and the other community security movements is their absolute support the government and the Bolivarian Revolution. They exist within contested institutionalization, like the UTD of Argentina, striving for autonomy while continuing to rely on state resources. With this in mind, how can we say Alexis Vive exists where and when need meets resistance? This, of course, is a matter of perspective: political ontology. Alexis Vive’s material need is not dire, but many in their community continue to be vulnerable to crime and economic hardship. Their resistance is, as Yulimar related, against capitalism and the oil-renting model, not the state as it was for generations past. The remaining question on illicit activity is valuable. Is Alexis Vive involved in illicit activity? Does it matter? This thesis is not interested in moral judgments. If Alexis Vive were involved in illicit activities, the question under this framework would be how does that affect the five points of analysis? In other words, would revenue from illicit activities be distributed to the rest of the community and
what would be the impact on the constituency? How would it affect autonomous and vertical relations with the state and formal institutions, like law enforcement? These questions highlight the ambiguities and dynamics that give social movements life. As Zibechi and Slater (separately) describe: a zumbayllu boldly traversing politics and the political, revealing new meanings and ontologies.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the framework for community security movements established in chapter one was applied to examine the collective action of Foundation Alexis Vive. To develop the framework, we first adjusted the scope of human security to fit the community. Human security was chosen as a starting point to understand the needs and wants of community security movements, who see wellbeing as holistic and inseparable from physical security. The injection of Arturo Escobar’s notion of postdevelopment, as a critique of development theory and practice, makes this analysis immediately uncomfortable. Yet the utility of human security as a vague, occidental concept seems obvious. What Juan Contreras likes to refer as “education, health, housing, dignified work, and recreation what every human being needs in any part of the world,”243 is effortlessly understood as human security on his terms, as the defense of life and the perception of what life ought to be.

Once animated through collective action community security insists on emancipation as a way of life, as Zibechi says. Examples of community-based movements from different parts of Latin America with endogenous human security agendas were briefly presented to sketch a vision of how and why these groups mobilize and their challenges. Based on the examples, poverty, marginalization and unmet needs and wants are motivators; while a strong shared identity and social cohesion are facilitators for collective action. Furthermore, all community security movements are contextual: they organize at a moment in their particular histories, creating something new, while rejecting dominant systems. They emerge where and when

243 Interview with Juan Contreras.
necessity meets resistance. Finally, the framework settled on is a consolidation of Zibechi’s seven common features in accordance with Escobar’s post-development movements: territorialization, identity, praxis, constituency and autonomy.

Considering these criteria, it may be said that organizations such as Hezbollah, the FARC, the Zapatistas and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Rojava are also community security movements. After all, they all maintain development and social service programs in the midst of conflict or resistance to a dominant system. I would disagree with this assertion, however, based on the problem of scale. In the first chapter McLean defined the community a “geographical area based on common ownership of resources of social, economic and cultural facilities and where residents regard themselves as having common objectives, interests and needs.”\(^{244}\) While those actors may instill common ownership and objectives in their praxis, their scopes stretch beyond the concerns of local residents. They are too big to allow for a community level analysis. However, it is possible that a type of community security movement network (many movements acting in cohesion) provides the backbone for such larger organizations. While this question lies outside the parameters of this thesis, I welcome further research on the topic.

The second chapter focuses on the first of feature of the framework: territorialization as a historical process. This analysis is guided by Escobar’s concept of territories of difference, retooled for the urban landscape. A concise history of the 23 de Enero as an urban territory of difference that produces community security movements follows four of Escobar’s six historical features.

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processes –capital accumulation, daily practices, incorporation into the state, and cultural-political practices– set dialectically by two interrelated dialectical strategies engaged in conflicts of scale. A strong space-based identity persisted by a historical memory of repression and resistance, ensures the 23 de Enero endures in the imagination of its residents and the nation. Today, the groups of the 23 de Enero are not merely clients of the government as in the past; they are infused within a precarious revolutionary process. These Venezuelan sans-culottes have been both victims and beneficiaries of the state: repressed and coopted, excluded and nurtured.

Chapter three allows us to explore one group in depth: Foundation Alexis Vive. We began with a more focused history of their origins from the CCSB group, which reflects their recurrent trajectory. Continuing on we proceed to examine Alexis Vive by applying Zibechi’s remaining consolidated features. Identity, chosen first because it informs all other features, revealed a tightly organized and highly motivated group with extraordinary cohesion. Praxis was divided into four sections: violence, production, gender and networks. An examination of violence, a complex and ambiguous topic, showed that while the group is certainly capable of self-defense, they have decreased confrontations with the political opposition and have begun to professionalize. Production here covers goods, services, space and culture.

Their ambition is evident in their ever-growing portfolio of economic projects and social programs; the development of the Honeycomb Commune 2021; and expansion to other states. While Alexis Vive is not explicit about their feminism and they avoid atomizing the revolution (their words), they have opened considerable space for women to participate in the movement and grow as influential leaders. They, unlike many other community security movements, are absolute in their support of the government and the Bolivarian Revolution. Alexis Vive exists
within on of the driving paradoxes of the Bolivarian Revolution: autonomy through the state. But as they continue to rely on state resources they manage a sort of contested institutionalization, calibrating onward.

The glaring limitation of this analysis is that it does not benefit from an extensive ethnography of Alexis Vive. Such work would provide deeper insight into the everyday texture of their internal and external relations. Any thorough analysis of community security movements would demand such rigger, which is where this thesis falls short. The principle strength of this thesis is its capacity to engage in broader questions either normally avoided or poorly framed. For example: why are popular social movements susceptible to criminality? This is best examined through questions on history, autonomy and constituency. Ciccariello-Maher, for instance, loosely compares the colectivos of the 23 de Enero to the Black Panthers in the United States.²⁴⁵ This is a tempting comparison to make, and both also share qualities with the CVI in Buenos Aires: where needs meets resistance. These ontological conflicts are expressed in the world through competing notions of space, belonging, organization and purpose. The idea of community security thus opens space to understand and debate those connections. It is unsatisfying to rest on commonalities. Community security movements are complex social organizations that bubble up in dire conditions and long histories, leveraging opportunities, and balancing constituencies and autonomy. They exist within a nexus of poverty and crime, institutional neglect and outright repression. They are a moment.

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