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LOSS OF A COMMON HORIZON: ALBA AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION

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Abstract

This article deploys neo-Gramscian international relations theory to discuss how the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA) can be understood as an attempted transnationalisation of the counter-hegemonic historical bloc of social forces that originated with Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution. The Bolivarian Revolution inaugurated a protagonistic National Constitution which sought to give a central role to civil society and social movements in political life, enfranchising unrepresented people, like indigenous communities. ALBA consists of an attempt to transnationalise this movement by providing a model of regionalization for Latin America that constitutes an alternative to the neoliberal approach embodied in other regionalisation initiatives, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). However, the article argues that ALBA's success as a vehicle for the transnationalisation of counter-hegemony in Latin America has been severely compromised by emerging tensions and contradictions within the Bolivarian Revolution historical bloc, namely between the social movements and the central governments of ALBA's member countries. These contradictions become particularly evident when analysing social movements' struggles about the environmental impacts of massive infrastructure projects promoted by these governments as part of their overall national and regional strategy of economic development and poverty alleviation.

Keywords

ALBA; Bolivarian Revolution; social movements; hegemony; counter-hegemony; environment and development.

Resumo

Este artigo utiliza a teoria neogramsciana das relações internacionais para discutir como a Aliança Bolivariana para os Povos da Nossa América (ALBA) pode ser entendida como uma tentativa de transnacionalização do bloco histórico contra-hegemónico de forças sociais que se originou com a Revolução Bolivariana na Venezuela. A Revolução Bolivariana inaugurou uma Constituição Nacional que procurou dar um papel central à sociedade civil e aos movimentos sociais na vida política, emancipando pessoas não representadas, como as comunidades indígenas. A ALBA consiste numa tentativa de transnacionalizar este movimento, fornecendo um modelo de regionalização para a América Latina que constitui uma alternativa à abordagem neoliberal incorporada em outras iniciativas de regionalização, como a Área de Livre Comércio das Américas (ALCA). No entanto, o artigo argumenta que o sucesso da ALBA como veículo para a transnacionalização de um movimento contra-hegemónico na América Latina foi severamente comprometido pelas tensões e contradições emergentes dentro do bloco histórico da Revolução Bolivariana, nomeadamente entre os movimentos sociais e os governos centrais dos países membros da ALBA. Estas contradições tornam-se particularmente evidentes quando se analisam as lutas dos movimentos sociais sobre os impactos ambientais de projectos de infra-estrutura promovidos por estes governos como parte da sua estratégia nacional e regional de desenvolvimento económico e redução da pobreza.

Palavras-chave

ALBA; Revolução Bolivariana; movimentos sociais; hegemonia; contra-hegemonia; ambiente e desenvolvimento.

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Introduction

In 2005, the Summit of the Americas gathered in Mar del Plata to celebrate a new economic free trade agreement, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). This agreement would serve as an expansion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and aimed to inaugurate a free trade area 'from Alaska to Patagonia' (FTAA, 2003). However, simultaneously a parallel Summit took place that expressed resistance to, and discontent with, the FTAA. Hugo Chávez, Néstor Kirchner and Lula da Silva, the political leaders of Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil respectively, formed a diplomatic alliance to stop the approval of the FTAA. In this historical moment, Chávez presented to Latin America, in the Summit of the Peoples, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America or *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America* (ALBA). ALBA is a regional institution founded by Venezuela and Cuba in 2004, that was portrayed as an expression of the struggle for an alternative form of political, economic, and social integration in Latin America; an alternative regionalisation process that has been described by authors such as Thomas Muhr (2011) as 'counter-hegemonic'.

Informed by a neo-Gramscian perspective, this article builds upon ALBA's characterization as 'counter-hegemonic' to discuss ALBA as an expression of the transnationalisation of the national-based counter-hegemonic movement inaugurated with the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. The Bolivarian Revolution expressly aimed at transforming the social configuration of the Venezuelan state, by providing the economic, social, and political conditions that would permit previously excluded and unrepresented people, such as indigenous groups and poorer Venezuelans, to constitute themselves as active political agents in the shaping of their conditions of existence and collective future. By mobilizing Cox's (1987, 1993) conception of the transnationalisation of hegemonic classes, ALBA can be read instead as an institutional vessel for the transnationalisation of the Venezuelan historical bloc of social forces and the counter-hegemonic movement these represent, in an attempt to escape the national isolation of the Bolivarian revolution. This is expressed, for example, in the way that crucial social movements in the historical bloc of the Bolivarian state were provided with a platform

for transnational expression in the ALBA framework, with the creation of the Council of Social Movements (CMS).

However, the article also argues that the transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution via ALBA was ultimately undermined by emerging contradictions within the historic bloc that supported it. Building on what Martínez (2013) calls the 'counter-hegemonic double turn' in the CMS, the article discusses how a growing tension emerged between the social movements and the governmental elites constituting the Bolivarian counter-hegemonic historic bloc that eventually weakened the movement and its transnational institutional expression in ALBA. These contradictions expressed themselves at both the national and international/ALBA levels and became particularly evident in the tension that developed between different expressed goals of the Bolivarian Revolution, namely between the goals of economic development and poverty alleviation, environmental protection, indigenous and minority rights, and participatory democracy.

The article develops this argument in three sections. First, it discusses the neo-Gramscian notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony. Second, the article considers how these concepts can be mobilized to analyse ALBA as an expression of the transnationalisation of a counter-hegemonic movement. Third, the article considers the contradictions within the Bolivarian counter-hegemonic historical bloc and how these ultimately undermined its transformative goals for the Latin American region. This discussion is particularly relevant for understanding the challenges facing counter-hegemonic movements in Latin America.

Hegemony, counter-hegemony and transnationalisation

Robert W. Cox (1987) is acknowledged as one of the main authors responsible for the mobilization of Antonio Gramsci's notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony for the study of world politics. Differentiating himself from neorealist (see e.g., Mearsheimer, 2001) and neoliberal (see e.g., Keohane, 1984) ahistorical conceptions of hegemony predominant in International Relations (IR) theory, Cox sought to develop a historical materialist approach to the concept that highlighted the close relationship between production, class relations and world politics.

The Coxian approach emphasises the Gramscian conception of hegemony as a combination of both coercion and consent. Hence, hegemony, at the level of world politics, does not simply mean military domination. Rather, to become hegemonic, a state must establish and protect a world order which is also universally consented to. Therefore, in an inter-state system, hegemony does not emerge purely from direct military domination, but is always accompanied by a consensualization process between the various interests that arise from a global civil society that operates on a world scale (Cox, 1993, pp. 59-62).

According to Cox (1993), a world hegemony can thus be witnessed when a national hegemonic historic bloc – comprising of a dominant set of social forces at the national level which, via coercion and consent, exercises hegemony over subaltern classes in that national state-society complex – expands outwardly, towards the international level, reproducing its national patterns into other states. Thus, the countries on the receiving

end, without undergoing the same historical process as the hegemonic state, will willingly adopt its political and economic models.

This world hegemony is exercised through international institutions that combine a repressive function and a consent-building function, expressed in the form of an emergent consensus around 'universal' norms, institutions, and mechanisms for the regulation of world affairs and national societies. These international institutions prescribe general understandings, protocols, norms, and behaviours that each state should abide by and which, ultimately, support the hegemonic modes of production and political organization. The hegemonic world order thus manifests itself through international institutions that embody the rules and facilitate the expansion of the hegemonic states' social forces, in the process legitimating their norms of world order while absorbing and rejecting counter-hegemonic ideas (Cox, 1993, pp. 62–64).

However, beyond tracing the national formation and transnationalisation of hegemonic movements, and their eventual consolidation as hegemonic world orders, Cox was also interested in identifying the immanent potentials for structural change in the hegemonic world order through the development of alternative, counter-hegemonic historical blocs. Cox's argument was that, in order to constitute themselves as effective counter-hegemonic movements, counter-hegemonic social forces needed to acquire autonomy from the hegemonic consensus, ultimately developing their own class and group identity (Cox, 1987, pp. 356–358). In this context, and once again closely following Gramsci, Cox highlighted the fundamental role of organic intellectuals in the production and reproduction of both hegemonic orders and counter-hegemonic movements. Similarly to Gramsci, Cox conceived the intellectual as belonging to a social stratum that fulfils certain functions of cultural and political reproduction (Hoare and Sperber, 2016, pp. 36–39). While the majority of organic intellectuals actively legitimize and reproduce the hegemonic order, intellectuals can also play a role in delegitimating dominant hegemonic consensuses and forms of common sense, actively seeking the development of alternative worldviews and identities that underline the ideational consolidation of counter-hegemonic movements.

A counter-hegemonic movement can thus be formed when a subordinated class, together with counter-hegemonic organic intellectuals, successfully leads the process of formation of a counter-hegemonic historical bloc that, involving several other subaltern groups, successfully breaks the dominant hegemonic consensus and conquers power at the national level (Cox, 1993, pp. 64–65). As Cox (1993, p. 65) notes, 'changing the world begins with the long, laborious effort to build new historic blocs within national boundaries'.

However, conquest of national power cannot be the end-stage of any counter-hegemonic movement. While the structural transformation of world order starts with the laborious task of building a national historical bloc, its potential to survive in face of the opposition of the hegemonic world order also depends on expanding beyond its borders and reproducing, at the international level, its own consensual understandings and conceptions of the world, namely via the establishment of international institutions and other mechanisms that promote its alternative mode of production and model of social organization (Cox, 1993).

Cox thus provides a framework, framed within a wider neo-Gramscian perspective, through which the Bolivarian Revolution, and its attempted transnationalisation via ALBA, can be understood. From the start, the Bolivarian Revolution was portrayed by Hugo Chávez as an attempt at carrying out the dream of Simón Bolívar, the union of Latin America (Cole, 2011). The attempted actualization of Bolivar's vision for the region has been expressed in two different phases (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, p. 48): The first phase (1994-2004) was focused principally on domestic issues relating to poverty alleviation, as well as great political challenges, such as the attempted *coup d'état* on Hugo Chávez's administration in 2002, as it sought to consolidate power. The second phase (2005-2013) involved a greater emphasis on foreign policy at both the regional and international levels. Thus began the institutionalization of ALBA which aimed to break with the United States' hegemonic position in Latin America and promote an alternative process of regional integration. The next section provides a more in-depth analysis of these different phases and a discussion of ALBA as an expression of the attempted transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution.

ALBA and the transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution

ALBA was constituted in 2004, during what has been called the fourth wave of regionalisation in Latin America (Dabène, 2018, p. 51). The third phase of Latin America's regionalism came be characterized by the opening of national markets to neoliberal policies with emphasis on exports and free trade under the Washington Consensus (Drake, 2006, pp. 33–39). The perceived failure of pro-market policies meant that Latin America's left parties and left-wing movements had to reimagine the very constitution of a possible democratic society (Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Hershberg, 2009). Thus, Latin America's left turn during the late 1990s and early 2000s, frequently characterized as a 'pink tide', has been described 'as a multiplicity of disparate efforts to (…) re-found the constitutional order or social pact' (Beasley-Murray, Cameron and Hershberg, 2009, p. 320).

The fourth wave of regionalism was thus characterized by a questioning of the 'common sense' of the third wave, and by the development of a conception of regional integration not as a vehicle for free trade and capital accumulation, but rather as an instrument of democracy and development in Latin America (Dabène 2018, p. 53). Dabène (2018, p. 53) characterises this fourth wave regionalism as a 'counter-hegemonic turn' in the region, and sees it as an expression of a movement which, initiated with Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution, and with the active support of other regional leaders, such as Brazil's Lula da Silva or Cuba's Fidel Castro, had the expressed purpose of questioning US hegemony on the continent and promoting an alternative regionalization process, whose main international institutional embodiment was ALBA.

The creation of ALBA is frequently framed as part of the second phase of the Bolivarian Revolution, characterised by a reinforced focus on foreign policy issues. In 2004, Venezuela's government announced a 'new strategic map' which introduced the notion of '21st century socialism' (Muhr, 2013, pp. 7–8) and radicalized Venezuela's foreign policy towards a break of bilateral relations with the United States and the promotion of

integration and solidarity across the region through a process of Latin American institutionalization (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, pp. 53–61).

As mentioned above, the Bolivarian Revolution is characterised as having two different phases (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, p. 48). The first phase began when Hugo Chávez was first elected president in 1999 and promised a total political transformation of Venezuela, immediately announcing the intention of calling a Constitutional Assembly to produce a new Constitution for the country. The final document was submitted to a referendum on November 12th, 1999, approved popularly by 71 per cent of the voters. According to Cusack (2019), the new republic showed several distinguishing characteristics that would become core features of the Bolivarian Revolution. The promotion of national and Latin American autonomy became crucial, as well as the pursuit of endogenous development, while enfranchising previously excluded segments of the population (Cusack, 2019). This enfranchisement targeted specifically indigenous people, with Chapter VIII of the Bolivarian Constitution stating that 'as a consequence of [their] conditions of vulnerability, indigenous rights are recognised (…) as specific and original rights'. The Constitution protected indigenous peoples and directed 'the Venezuelan State to acknowledge its multi-ethnic, pluricultural and multilanguage character' (RBV, 1999, pp. 212–215). Article 62, for example, stated that 'the participation of the people in the creation and execution, and control of public affairs is the required means to achieve the protagonism that guarantees their complete development, both as individuals and as a collective' (RBV, 1999, p. 182). This predicted participation through traditional methods, such as elections to public office, the right to referendum or legislative initiatives, but also envisioned methods such as the development of self-management communities, cooperatives, and community businesses (RBV, 1999, pp. 182–185).

The attempt to institutionalize a participatory democratic model in Venezuela led to the establishment of the *misiones* (missions) in the social, political, economic, and cultural spheres which ultimately promoted grand missions for large-scale social projects that promoted citizen participation in local government planning and decision-making (Muhr 2008). Ultimately, the new Bolivarian Constitution would give a 'protagonistic' role to social movements, something social movements have ever since sought to promote both within Venezuela and in the context of ALBA. The 2012 *Plan de Desarrollo de la Nación* (PDN) also campaigned towards a culture of popular mobilization. The PDN was a program for the planification of contributions to electoral campaigns at the local and regional levels, organizing debates between the candidates and seeking popular inclusion during the electoral processes. The organization and expansion of Communal Councils (*Consejos Comunales*) also became an important tool for popular mobilization. Communal Councils were a new type of neighbourhood association, with each council being constituted of up to four hundred families who then met in a Citizens Assembly (Hawkins, 2010). Because the Communal Councils were not purely territorial, they frequently overlapped several different communities. The multiplication of communal spaces was understood as the materialisation of the participatory democracy project spreading across rural and urban areas (Vargas, 2020, pp. 185–208).

The Bolivarian Constitution thus symbolised an attempted refoundation of Venezuelan politics under a participatory democratic model (Hawkins, 2010). It was understood by its promoters as the first impulse of a national project in which sovereignty was placed

in the people's hands, who exercised it directly through mechanisms established by the new Constitution. It sought the consolidation of national independence from foreign powers, and the construction of a 'socialism of the 21st century' implying a deep transformation of Venezuela's economic and political system.

However, this project was never understood as a purely national one. In fact, the perception of its success and future survival was premised on its capacity to transnationalise itself beyond the borders of the Venezuelan state. Hence, the second phase of the Bolivarian Revolution, beyond being characterised by a reinforcement of Chávez's presidential powers vis-à-vis opposition forces following the attempted *coup* of 2002, also witnessed the establishment of a foreign policy expressly oriented to the transnationalisation of the Bolivarian project (Roniger, 2019).

Venezuela's 'new strategic map', presented in November 2004, expressed the desirability of a multipolar world, constituted of five regions that Chávez considered the main poles of global power (Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America). An autonomous South America was envisioned in this context, where the USA no longer led either the world or the American continent. To achieve this, Venezuela's foreign policy began to engage in the strengthening of South American regional integration through an incremental process of institutionalization (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, pp. 47–66). Ultimately, the view was that, to liberate Venezuela from the United States' economic and geopolitical dominance, it was necessary to solidify its sovereignty via an international strategy of promoting a regional integration process that constituted an alternative to the Washington-led regionalism in Latin America (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, pp. 47–66). ALBA came to be in this context.

A major development that favoured the idea of ALBA was the failure of the proposed FTAA during the Summit of the Americas in 2003 (FTAA, 2003). This rejection revealed a regional break with the Washington Consensus and a changing orientation in Latin America's models of economic and social development (McCarthy-Jones, 2015, pp. 53–61). ALBA was from the beginning described as the opposite of the FTAA, with the former's heads of state describing the latter's neoliberal initiative as the 'most polished expression of the appetites for domination over the region and, if it were to take effect, it would constitute a profound neoliberalisation which would create levels of dependence and subordination without precedent' (ALBA, 2004). ALBA was thus established in a clear rejection of the contents of FTAA's agreement, affirming aspirations towards Latin American and Caribbean (in opposition to Pan-American) integration for the region. The bloc would be built within Latin Americanism foundations, that is, with the objective of building a *Patria Grande* (Great Homeland), for the people of Bolivar, envisioning a postcolonial fraternity. It would be built through developmental guarantees, South-South cooperation and cultural protection for the mutual integration and benefit of the Latin American people.

Besides ALBA, the Latin Americanism integrational strategy saw the creation of other regional institutions, like the Union of South American Nations (*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* – UNASUR), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (*Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* – CELAC), and interstate projects such as *PetoCaribe*, *Banco del Sur*, *Gasoducto del Sur* or *Transcaribeño* (Roniger, 2019). *PetroCaribe* was an initiative founded in 2005 by Venezuela to provide subsidised oil to

17 countries in the Caribbean and Central America. *Banco del Sur* was founded in 2007 in Buenos Aires to serve as a substitute institution to the World Bank and the IMF which, once again, was to be funded with Venezuelan oil money. Finally, the *Gasoducto del Sur*, as well as the *Transcaribeño*, were new infrastructure projects for cooperation towards financial and energetic sovereignty in the region.

ALBA thus became the centre of an increasingly intertwined network of regional initiatives focused on integration-based cooperation and solidarity between Latin American states, which expressly excluded a US-led neoliberal regional integration model. At the centre of ALBA's alternative was an attempt to transnationalise the 'participatory democracy' inaugurated in Venezuela with the Bolivarian Revolution by conceiving a key role to social movements in ALBA's regionalisation model. Hence, ALBA actively encouraged the participation of non-state actors at the regional level, aiming towards the construction of what has been described as a 'transnational organised society', as an alternative conception to that of liberal individualism's civil society (Muhr, 2012). Therefore, ALBA actively sought to 'upscale' what were understood as the democratic conquests of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution by integrating transnational social forces in ALBA's governance structure (Muhr, 2011). The main expression of this was the institutionalization of the Council of Social Movements (CSM).

The CMS was established at the 5th ALBA Summit, in 2007, with the expressed objectives of promoting the continuous struggle for pluralism in harmony with the environment and with the principles of *buen vivir*, and to forge a new Latin American *Patria Grande*, decolonized, founded on multiversity, and respecting the difference of every social and cultural particularity. The CMS was to operate as a space for the development of common agendas, fully identified with the principles which directed ALBA as a process of integration, and it envisioned the constitution of national chapters that would define their own dynamic guidelines in coordination with their national governments (Martínez, 2013, pp. 63–67). The CMS thus expressed an attempt to transnationalise the goals of participatory democracy of the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Manifesto written for the 1st Summit of ALBA's CMS expresses great similarities with the Venezuelan Bolivarian Constitution, including a call on both other states and social movements of Latin America to unite in the common struggle for an autonomous region, committed to the ideals of development, peace, and solidarity. In the Manifesto it can be read:

> *What we are living in Latin America is part of a process of social reappropriation of our common destiny, of new forms of political organization, [that promote a] horizontal, direct, and participatory democracy, a new economic system which benefits the peoples within harmonious, solidarist and communitarian social relations of production*[1].

ALBA and the CMS were thus a clear expression of the transnationalisation of the counter-hegemonic movement initiated with Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, aiming at a

[1] CMS (2009) "Manifesto Geral da Primeira Cúpula de Conselhos de Movimentos Sociais da ALBA-TCP". Accessed 31 October 2022: https://mst.org.br/2009/10/21/manifesto-aponta-para-fundacao-do-conselho-de-movimentos-sociais-da-alba/.

reconfiguration of politics at the national and regional levels based on the development of a participatory, direct democracy model of governance, and the gradual development of a transnational organised society.

However, as the next section discusses, the transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution soon faced similar tensions to the ones that were emerging within the Venezuelan historical bloc itself, leading to a growing split between social movements adhering to the goals of participatory democracy and central governments and regional institutions increasingly concerned with promoting economic development and poverty alleviation in the midst of the constraints imposed by the hegemonic world order.

Contradictions and breakdown in counter-hegemony

In an assessment of the development of the CMS, Martínez's (2013, pp. 63–77) has built upon Muhr's (2011) argument that ALBA represents a transnationalisation of the counter-hegemonic movement initiated with the Bolivarian Revolution to argue that, in fact, that movement has witnessed what can be described as 'double-turn of counter-hegemony'. While the first 'turn' is characterised by a process of transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution's principles of 'participatory democracy', namely via the establishment of the CMS within ALBA's institutional framework, the second 'turn' is characterised by a growing dissatisfaction, on the part of social movements, with the perceived predominance of member-states' agendas, accompanied by a side-lining of social movements and their understanding of the principle's orienting ALBA's regionalisation process. Hence, Martínez (2013) speaks of an evolving fracture in the historical bloc associated with the Bolivarian Revolution as, increasingly, social movements came to contest the political elites that had hitherto led the process at both the national and regional levels, in ALBA.

The discussion in the rest of this section supports Martínez's conclusions and illustrates them by an analysis of how this growing fracture between social movements and ALBA's member-states not only manifested itself at the regional level but was in fact an expression of deeper tensions within the historical bloc supporting the Bolivarian Revolution, namely within the Venezuelan state itself. This facture can be identified with particular clarity by analysing how social movements and central state authorities in Venezuela – but also in other ALBA member-states – came to increasingly clash over their understanding of how Bolivarian 'participatory democracy' could better be articulated in the context of the pursuit of the frequently contradictory goals of environmental protection, poverty alleviation and economic development. This analysis will focus particularly on the tensions between indigenous communities' attempts at environmental protection vis-à-vis major projects of economic development, both in Venezuela's national context and in the context of ALBA's South America Regional Infrastructure Integration Initiative (IIRSA).

The Wayúu are an indigenous community living in the *Sierra de Perijá* (Perijá Mountains) located in the state of Zulia. The Wayúu have been at the centre of the debate regarding Venezuela's economic development model. According to Montiel (2010, pp. 205–217), the Bolivarian Revolution is allegedly an advocate of environmental protection and protection of indigenous rights and lands; however, few steps have actually been taken

towards the articulation of these ends and the creation of a national economy that is environmentally sustainable and not predominantly based on the extraction of natural resources.

Corpozulia, the Zulia State development corporation, provides mining concessions and makes deals with multinational companies to exploit coal within areas inhabited by Wayúu communities, namely areas surrounding the Socuy, Mache, and Cachirí rivers. North of the Perijá Mountains there are already two coalmines owned by Corpozulia and multinational companies that were responsible for the displacement of indigenous communities. Thus, the Wayúu community, afraid of having this experience repeated, maintained a defiant campaign against further mining in indigenous territory. In this campaign, the community was able to maintain a high profile both in the Venezuelan and in the international spotlight through alliances with environmental organizations such as *Sociedad Homo et Natura*.

In this context, President Chávez manifested support to the Wayúu's cause, publicly expressing a refusal to extract coal if it meant deforestation and disrespect for indigenous territories. However, despite these statements, Chávez's need for hemispheric energy integration meant his support of the Wayúu struggle proved hollow. In 2006, Chávez ratified big development plans to expand coal exploitation in Zulia, in the context of the IIRSA, an infrastructure integration initiative which will be further discussed below. At this point, Chávez's declarations became out of sync with his actions and, in 2008, coal concessions had not been repealed by the President and the mines continued to operate (Suggett, 2008).

Meanwhile, the Wayúu community was brutally oppressed by Corpozulia during the Indigenous Resistance Day, October 12th, 2008. The Wayúu community gathered in the Socuy River for an anti-coal conference and were received by Corpozulia's functionaries accompanied by armed National Guard troops who aggressively interrogated and threatened the Wayúu mobilised there (Suggett, 2008). The growing tension between indigenous groups and the central state was further evidenced by the way the Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples came to accuse the Wayúu communities of being a subversive group and of harbouring separatist ideals (Montiel, 2010, pp. 205–217).

The Bolivarian Constitution thus became a document of empty words for the Wayúu community. Under the Organic Laws of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities, the indigenous territories should be protected by the 'consent of the community' (Montiel, 2010, p. 213). However, this article was constantly ignored, with the Venezuelan state supporting extraction activities and Corpozulia operating on indigenous land despite local communities' opposition. When meeting with the state Commission on Energy and Mines, the Wayúu community was faced with the confirmation of this situation when it was claimed that the Mining Law was superior to the organic laws which defended the indigenous peoples and that the Mining Law could not be revoked, however much it was contested (Montiel, 2010, p. 213).

The Wayúu conflict can thus be interpreted as a testing ground for the orientation of the Bolivarian Revolution regarding the complex balance between the goals of economic development based on resources' extraction on the one hand, and, on the other hand, environmental protection and participatory democracy involving indigenous populations

and other minorities. While the Wayúu community and their allies argue that the environment in indigenous territories, and the laws consecrated in Chapter VIII of the Bolivarian Constitution regarding the rights of indigenous people, must be respected, the state-backed Corpozulia company continued carrying out the extraction of coal from indigenous territory.

To recap, when Hugo Chávez was elected, the Bolivarian Revolution sought to structure a participatory democracy to promote the creation of a communal state that would expand and guarantee the rights of the poor and minorities in both urban and rural areas. However, concomitantly, Venezuela's dire needs of economic development were pursued via projects that frequently clashed with locals' interests and ways of life. As demonstrated above, the Wayúu community in the Périja mountains had their struggles subverted by the central government who kept ignoring the Bolivarian Constitution's ideals of participatory democracy, environmental protection and right to the land of indigenous peoples, triggering the emergence of tensions between social movements and governmental elite's economic development ambitions. Social movement's struggles ended up being silenced either by active repression or via generous social missions that were funded by the capital of the exploration of the energetic resources that caused the environmental destruction of the region.

These emerging tensions and fractures within the Bolivarian Revolution's historical bloc, however, have not manifested themselves only at the national level, but also found expression at the regional level, namely within ALBA. Hence, the transnationalisation of the counter-hegemonic Bolivarian Revolution carried with it not only a strategy of siege avoidance, but also the internal contradictions and fragilities affecting the movement. These tensions and contradictions at the centre of ALBA, as an expression of the transnationalisation of the Bolivarian Revolution, are particularly evident in the growing conflict between social movements, whose regional institutional expression could be found in the CMS, and ALBA's member-states, in what concerns their respective understandings and support of the IIRSA's framework.

As mentioned above, ALBA was institutionalised with an expressed commitment to *buen vivir,* an expression of indigenous knowledge and communitarian solidarity economics in both Bolivia and Ecuador. Ultimately, it describes the goal of ensuring a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature. ALBA pledges to develop the greatest possible security and happiness in harmony with nature, social justice, and the true sovereignty of the people (Muhr, 2013, p. 14). However, the commitment to *buen vivir* has come to increasingly find itself in contradiction with the projects of economic development expressed by the states inspired by the Bolivarian Revolution and their search for the political and economic autonomy that the ALBA counter-hegemonic movement embodies.

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, the 7th ALBA Summit took place in 2009, where the fundamental principles of the Peoples' Trade Agreement (*Tratado de Comércio de los Pueblos* or TCP) were defined. The TCP Agreement promoted principles of solidarity, cooperation, and sovereignty in harmony with nature:

> *Human beings are part of an interdependent system of plants, animals, forests, oceans, and airs with whom they must live in harmony and equilibrium respecting the rights of us all. To guarantee the rights of human beings we much recognise and defend the rights of Mother Earth*[2].

However, while ALBA was making such environmental commitments, it was also expressing support to development projects, such as the South America Regional Infrastructure Integration Initiative (IIRSA), whose incompatibility with the principles of environmental protection quickly led to growing tensions between the various actors supporting the Bolivarian Revolution and its transnationalisation. IIRSA is a regional integration project, founded in 2000 by Latin American political leaders from Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina, which aims to synchronize strategic infrastructure works towards the facilitation of natural resources extraction and development. In December 2004, in Cuzco, Peru, upon the foundation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), twelve participant Presidents, including the leaders of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela (ALBA member-countries), confirmed their commitment to the IIRSA initiative. IIRSA is an initiative clearly framed within the parameters of the Washington Consensus, outlining an open regionalism agenda that recommends deregulation of the economy and liberalization of foreign trade in Latin American countries (Cardoso-Castro and Ravena, 2020).

IIRSA executes regional integration based on four 'hubs' comprehending the Amazon region and integrating infrastructure projects from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela (Cardoso-Castro and Ravena, 2020). According to Cardoso-Castro and Ravena (2020), the Amazon territory, transversal between Peru, Brazil and Bolivia, concentrated projects related to ports and waterways, roads, seaports, air transportation and borders crossing, electrical and hydroelectrical power plants. These projects would permit the reinforcement of state power and facilitate the implementation of development policies. Furthermore, competition would be promoted which would allow domestic firms to seize global economies of scale. Concerning technology, these projects would support innovation policies and an active trade policy targeted at strong intellectual property regimes and investment opportunities for domestic firms (Cardoso-Castro and Ravena, 2020).

However, IIRSA development projects also reveal a clear lack of environmental regulation as, according to Cardoso-Castro and Ravena (2020), only 50% percent of the action in the Amazon region between 2013 and 2014 had environmental licenses. As for social and environmental impacts, indigenous communities, which are protected by national constitutions, such as those of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, were frequently ignored in the planning processes of IIRSA projects, as well as frequent victims of displacement as a result of their implementation. Thus, IIRSA's overall plan for the Amazon region was the generalization of a shared approach to environmental legislation that facilitates integration from a supranational perspective, while ignoring national and international

[2] ALBA-TCP (2009). "Joint Declaration of the Nations Members of the ALBA on Inauguration of TV Station of the South. Caracas". Accessed 31 October 2022: http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org/joint-declaration-of-the-nations-members-of-the-alba-on-inauguration-of-tv-station-of-the-south.htm

commitments expressed in the context of ALBA for the protection of the environment, and the rainforest in particular (Kozlff, 2010).

For example, in IIRSA's framework, a team of technical experts from Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina planned for the construction of a new pipeline across Venezuela's Guayana region and the Amazon. Inclusively, the Russian firm Gazprom had expressed interests in what was considered 'the most ambitious physical infrastructure initiative in South America' (Márquez, 2006). The project was the source of much controversy, alarming environmentalists from the 'Red Alerta Petrolera-Orinoco Oilwash', who expressed concern about the Amazon rainforest and indigenous populations. This network of environmentalists explained that the IIRSA project describes an offer of energy extraction that is cleaner than oil, but that risks major spilling in a region where the pipeline would be vulnerable to natural disasters or sabotage that could cause damages to the environment and to local communities. Furthermore, the Wayúu community also expressed great concern with IIRSA's project, which was complementary with Corpoluzia's plan for the expansion of coal extraction in the Zulia (Montiel, 2010, p. 215).

Once again, the growing tension between the national pursuit of economic development and the expressed commitments to environmental protection and participatory democracy of the various actors constituting the historical bloc of the Bolivarian Revolution became evident. On the one hand, ALBA member states were under enormous pressure to develop economically, to industrialise, to become autonomous regarding energy resources and vis-à-vis international donors. Additionally, economic development is seen as the only way these states can reduce poverty, one of the main goals of the Bolivarian Revolution. But, on the other hand, economic and technological development, especially based on resource extraction models, usually have great environmental costs, which causes tensions between ALBA member countries' governments and the CMS's social movements.

As mentioned earlier, ALBA sought to present an alternative framework to address environmental issues with the ultimate objective of respecting the principle of *buen vivir*. In terms of ALBA's narrative, it aimed to defend the oppressed and the vulnerable, like the indigenous communities (Watts and Depledge, 2018). However, despite this rhetoric, ALBA's member states continued to rely on hydrocarbons' revenues for social missions and development promotion while stripping communities from meaningful participation in environmental policies and development projects (Cutler and Brien, 2013, p. 227). Venezuela, for example, has been accused of shutting out NGOs from domestic environmental policy making and supressing dissent and national social movement's protests. Concomitantly, protected areas in Bolivia and Ecuador have been explored for gas and oil even against the resistance of indigenous peoples, mostly in the context of IIRSA initiatives (Watts and Depledge, 2018; Cutler and Brien, 2013, pp. 226–229).

Thus, the environmental issue demonstrates the fundamental developing tensions, and even fractures, between the various actors constituting the historicaj bloc supporting the Bolivarian Revolution as a counter-hegemonic movement, and its transnational institutionalization in ALBA. This fracture was publicly acknowledged in the follow-up to the People's World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2010. The conference gathered an estimated thirty thousand people from 135 countries, including the presence of many regional NGOs and

social organisations, and expressly attributed the 'historical responsibility' of climate change to developed countries (Watts and Depledge, 2018). The conference placed the rights of the Mother Earth and the principles of *buen* vivir at the centre of governance and climate justice. It promoted proposals to fund non-extractive economic development, protect indigenous communities' rights and oppose market-based environmental governance (Zimmerer, 2015).

In support of the 'People's Agreement' emanating from the People's World Conference, ALBA countries met with the social movements represented in the CMS, as well as non-member state governments from across the world, at the 10th ALBA Summit, in June 2010. In this context, the Bolivian government promoted the mobilization of social movements to defend the proposals of the People's World Conference (Cutler and Brien, 2013, p. 226). However, Bolivia's commitment to the positions of the World's People's Conference was also infused with contradictions if the relations between the Bolivian government and indigenous communities within the country are considered. According to Zimmerer (2015), protesters in Bolivia, who sought to draw attention to the impacts of state or corporate-led resource extraction and the resulting destruction of indigenous communities' livelihoods, sustainability prospects and water resources, were silenced and marginalized by government forces during the conference. In response, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu, a Bolivian indigenous council, directly referred to these tensions when, in reference to the Bolivian government's expressed position at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-16), noted that:

> *Externally our President is the defender of Mother Earth, of nature, but internally he is doing the opposite… They are trying to hide these internal contradictions (…)* (Building Bridges, 2010, p. 35).

As a response to this accusation, the Bolivian government accused the National Council of being funded by right-wing interests. Following these mutual accusations, several protests erupted in defence of the National Council, contesting the Bolivian government's concessions to private foreign companies for the extraction of natural resources, resulting in the contamination of water resources and deforestation. This example, once again, highlights how the pursuit of an economic development agenda mainly based on resource extraction by ALBA member-states is clashing with the goals of environmental protection and participatory democracy of the Bolivarian Revolution and leading to a breakdown of the solidarity between the various state and non-state actors supporting the counter-hegemonic movement at both the national and regional levels (Cutler and Brien, 2015, p. 228).

Thus, while ALBA member states consider social movements to be allies and an integral part of the counter-hegemonic historical bloc that seeks to challenge neoliberal hegemony in the region, there are growing signs of contradictions and tensions between the agendas of sovereign economic development and poverty alleviation, on the one hand, and environmental protection and participatory democracy on the other. The fact that ALBA member states depend for the funding of their social missions and sovereign economic development mainly on the revenues deriving from the exploration of

hydrocarbon and energy resources extraction, fuels a growing contradiction between ALBA's member states national governments' search for autonomous development and the environmental protection concerns of social movements, in particular indigenous communities. This contradiction is increasingly compromising the cohesion of the counter-hegemonic bloc at both the national and regional levels, as tensions arise between the immediate interests of social movements and governmental elites.

Conclusion

The Bolivarian Revolution can be seen as an attempt at the development of a counter-hegemonic movement in Latin America which, despite having found its origins at the national level, in Venezuela, soon sought a transnational expression and institutionalization in the constitution of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). This article has traced this transnationalisation process as a key aspect of the possibility of survival of any counter-hegemonic movement in the context of a global neoliberal hegemony. However, the article has also highlighted increasing tensions within the historical bloc responsible for the Bolivarian Revolution and its transnationalisation. As was discussed via several examples, Bolivarian governments and national- and regional-based social movements have come to be in dispute in their respective interpretations of how best to pursue the frequently clashing goals of economic development, environmental protection, and participatory democracy. From the analysis here developed, it becomes clear that ALBA and its member states have increasing difficulty in adequately addressing this challenging balancing act. The process of building communal states in the region appears to be failing because of the continued dependence of Bolivarian states on a development model based on an extractive economy, whose effects in terms of environmental degradation lie at the core of a growing uncoupling between the social movements and the governmental elites, culminating in a fracturing of the historical bloc that led and supported the Bolivarian Revolution.

This fracture is expressed at both the national and regional levels, as Venezuela or Bolivia have come to adopt national policies that directly contradict ALBA's principles of *buen vivir*, of development in harmony with nature and of participatory democracy involving indigenous groups as key actors in the decisions over the development model to be implement on their lands. Venezuela, for example, has been financing ALBA and its social missions with revenues from the exploration of hydrocarbon fuels and, although simultaneously promoting the production and exploration of alternative fuels, environmental disasters, namely the deforestation caused by coal mining, left indigenous communities in a very vulnerable situation showing there is a clear contradiction between national interests and ALBA principles. In the context of these contradictions, the role of Bolivarian states, as intermediaries between the demands of social movements, the goals of sovereign regional development, and the pressures of a hegemonic global neoliberal world order, has become increasingly difficult. Finding a path in dealing with these challenges is fundamental for the future of the counter-hegemonic movement that ALBA embodies. Failing to do so, will have as a result the loss of a common horizon (Vargas 2020).

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