

Corruption and the Extractive State

Corruption is the mother of the crisis, of all the problems, it has extended to all levels like a cancer, to the lowest levels, it has taken on a thousand faces and a thousand ways of camouflaging itself ... to wage a war against a monster with a thousand heads is a complex process, long and difficult ... it is very difficult to get rid of all these anti-values that are immersed in all sector and all institutions. (Hugo Chávez, cited in Díaz, Eleazar R. (2006), author's translation from Spanish)

Caracas, November 2012: I hadn't seen Alfredo for a year and a half, when I went to visit him upon my return to Venezuela. The day before we had agreed to meet via SMS, and since I had visited that particular community many times, I felt safe about going alone to his home, located in the middle of an established barrio community in 23 de Enero.

Alfredo was sitting in the living room waiting when I knocked on the door. It was close to Christmas, and a *nacimiento*—the cherished Venezuelan Christmas crib featuring Maria and Joseph in the manger with the newborn baby Jesus—was balancing on a shelf in the corner. Alfredo was one of the most dedicated believers in community work that I had met throughout the process. He had been involved in politics all his life, and had been central in organizing both the Health Committee and the Land Committee in his community ever since Chávez first came to power. In the past years, he had been *vocero de finanza*—finance committee spokesperson—in the communal council.

Last time we spoke, he told me of the problems that he was having because a competing faction in the community had embarked on a campaign of outmaneuvering Alfredo and his friends who, for a long time, had been central to community activism.

We started to chat, and I soon noticed that something was wrong. After a while he told me that he had resigned from his position as financial spokesperson. The other faction had smeared him, spreading rumors in the community that he was corrupt and that he hadn't done the *rendición de cuenta* (present the balance sheets) to the community, even if that was a lie. They had also claimed that he hadn't done any work in the communal council, which also was a lie, and the evidence was there for everyone to see—the work was visible there in the community, stairways, several new houses built and others reconstructed, and above all a huge project of drainage and reconstruction of a hillside on the outer slope of the community that put the houses on its edge at risk for landside. He got up and found his resignation letter for me to read. It was signed on June 6, 2011, two weeks after I last saw him. The letter stated that he resigned because of the campaign against his good name and honor, and the untruthful accusations against him and his work as the financial spokesperson. The letter was stamped with the communal council's seal.

Every time I had visited Alfredo during the past years, he had showed me the accounting books for the communal councils—everything listed in orderly columns and accompanied by a folder of neatly stacked receipts and invoices documenting the purchases that the communal council had made. In spite of the two housing projects that he had helped develop, his house had not been rehabilitated—the poor and crumbling apartment with humidity stains on the ceiling was certainly a testimony to that. Indeed, when he made a pot of coffee before we sat down to talk again, I realized that he didn't even have a cup in his cupboard that wasn't broken.

In spite of Alfredo's trajectory as a long-term renowned community activist he had become more vulnerable to power plays after the last electoral round, when he was elected for the second time. In the former communal council he had been accompanied by several long-term friends and allies—all of them long-term activists in the community. But in the last elections the other faction had orchestrated to outmaneuver him, rushing the elections with the help of a promotor in Fundacomunal who according to Alfredo was involved in the "complot," and adding new people to the electoral list from an area adjacent to the community—an area that, it was disputed, did not belong to the communal council. They had all voted for the other faction, probably

stimulated by sweet promises, and as a result, Alfredo's long-term ally lost the election and was replaced by one of the people in the other faction.

After that, they had then made life difficult for him and smeared his name in the community. Eventually he couldn't take it anymore, and resigned. Now, the others had taken over the communal council and carried out projects that he had been in charge of and raising money for, passing it off as their own work. Moreover, they were skimming off money, Alfredo maintained: "And they couldn't have done that without accomplices in the Alcaldia and Fundacomunal. I have seen them here, visiting, and I ask myself what they are doing here ... they are signing checks and papers and *vaina* (stuff)." And the copying machine and other items that the communal council had acquired for the common use of the community were long gone; quite convenient since the woman who headed the campaign against him, and now had a central position in the communal council, owned a local copying shop where they charged five bolivares per copy. Moreover, they were charging for writing out *constancias de residencia* (proof of residence) even if this was supposed to be free. "People say that I should take up the fight, but I won't ... Petra and Maria and the others feel intimidated (they were some of his allies in the community), and they have kids in the street."

"But doesn't the community care?" I asked. "They know what work you have done." "Ahh you know what people are like," he responded. "They sit at home and watch cable TV. They don't want to get involved." He got up and found another one of his folders, with photos of the different events and projects they had carried out. One after one, he placed them in front of me, explaining each one of them. Several photos were photocopied onto an A4 sheet, showing him at the meeting for a larger housing project that was implemented in the area. He pointed to some of the other people who appeared in the photos with him: "She got a house, and she got a house, and she got a house over in the Zona Central." Another photo showed several kids sitting in the street outside Alfredo's apartment making paper kites. "We made paper kites with the kids and went over to the football camp to fly them ... the kids still come to me and say Alfredo, Alfredo, when will we make paper kites again!!" "I am really sorry about all this, I know how dedicated you were," I said, and I really meant it. "Well what can you do," he responded and shrugged. "This is a part of the revolution as well ... politics ... but people shouldn't do dirty politics. It harms the revolution."

This story of how the dynamics of a communal council were characterized by rumors and allegations of corruption was not unique. Such stories were structured through a discourse which converted corruption into, to slightly twist Durkheim's concept, a social fact which people *thought* structured social life and people's behavior. Community activism became a key site where broad notions of social solidarity, "fair play" and corruption became activated as people were struggling to navigate different ideological and moral terrains. Perhaps we could even say that community politics sometimes became condensed into a "micro-cosmos" reflecting the challenges of transforming Venezuelan society from within as political imageries of "self-seeking behavior" and "politics of greed" were mirrored in local-level struggles.

Indeed, the talk of corruption (Gupta 1995) was so widespread that I realized that not only was corruption a key tale about the state as such, but also a key tale about society. I constantly heard tales of how employees, both in private and in public positions, hospital workers, shop keepers and bank clerks skimmed off money here and there. Everyone "knew" that the hospitals in particular were out of equipment and medicine because the employees stole and resold them. It was often said that when the Chávez government bought new high-tech medical equipment for the public hospitals, the doctors stole it and brought it to their own private hospitals only to then go to the press and say that the public hospitals were in a state of disarray. I heard innumerable tales of construction projects that were sucked dry along the way in an un-holy alliance between politicians, public functionaries and construction companies. Tales of shady business deals and the 10–15 percent "gratitude payment" for contracts. Tales about the notorious *empresas maletín* (suitcase businesses) that acquired contracts by "trafficking in influence" and then subcontracted the work, pocketing the difference. Rumors of how public servants, supposedly in relatively modestly paid positions, suddenly acquired expensive houses, new cars, new boobs or new designer clothing. Rumors of high-level politicians that suddenly moved to the far east of the city and dined at expensive restaurants in Altamira, Prado del Este and Las Mercedes. And in the context of community politics, rumors of members of communal councils that all of a sudden refashioned their homes with ceramic tiles and a new floor, or who all of a sudden purchased a new car or went for expensive holidays on the beach. People had a keen eye for what their neighbors did and bought, hence the proverb "no se ve la mano que roba pero sí la que gasta" [you don't see the hand that steals but you see the hand that spends]. If people spent outside

their “common pattern,” it was quickly discovered and talked about. In short, corruption was seen as an intrinsic part of life, as something that happened everywhere (yet I never spoke to anyone that admitted being part of it). It was by many considered almost a natural part of the human existence. Like one man said about corrupt politicians: “It has always been like that and it will always be like this.”

While recognizing that corruption was an intrinsic part of contemporary political life, the dominant Bolivarian narrative articulated that corruption was part of the bundle of vices that had been instilled in Venezuelan society since long back. To change this pattern, formed part of the efforts to construct a new society, and, indeed, Che’s New Man.

In this chapter, I will go back in history and disentangle how corruption has emerged both as a social practice and as a meaning-saturated narrative in Venezuela. Subsequently, I will inquire into how the template of corruption was conceptualized within the Bolivarian discourse in the context of community politics, representing a key point of contention in attempts to negotiate new public and private moralities. Through these combined efforts, I aim to offer a “thick” corrective to the often simplified stereotypes of corrupt “Third World” countries, at the same time as the analysis may shed light on why, on a general level, “corrupt practices” are so uneasily reversed.

ANTHROPOLOGIES OF CORRUPTION

Initially, I had little interest in the issue of “corruption.” However, I gradually realized that I could not leave it out of my analysis. Rather, as for most anthropologists, it imposed itself “because it matters to our informants and because of the prevalence of ‘corruption’ talk in the areas where we conduct fieldwork” (Haller and Shore 2005:6). In recent years, there has been a growing body of anthropology literature critically examining scholarly as well as popular usage of the concept of corruption. As a means to counter the notion that corruption is only something that is taking place among Third World “others,” significant attention has been paid to corruption in Western domains, including the Enron scandal (MacLennan 2005) the EU commission (Shore 2005) and Italy (Pardo 2004).

Haller and Shore have suggested that “corruption merits more anthropological attention simply because of its inexplicable pervasiveness and the curious fascination that people, in almost every part of the world, seem to

have with stories of corruption” (Haller and Shore 2005:8). However, the fact that anthropology hasn’t included the concept of “corruption” in its disciplinary vocabulary until recently doesn’t mean that anthropologists haven’t previously observed “it” in our field. But rather than labeling it “corruption,” we have resorted to concepts from our historical disciplinary tool box—gift-giving and gift-exchange, networks and kinships, solidarity, reciprocity, relationships of power and moral economies—in an attempt to capture how these forms of exchanges are interwoven in social, political and economic life. More recently, anthropologists have sought to show how corruption is also the legitimate child of the colonial administration. The imposition of a colonial apparatus fostered parallel moral economies intertwining “imposed” Western concepts of rational bureaucracy with localized notions of kinship, exchange, reciprocity and solidarity (Pierce 2006). Corruption may then be viewed as a hybrid child of different sets of economic logics, social moralities and relationships of power.

These perspectives, grounded in “solid” anthropology, continue to inform much of the thinking around the topic. Thus, anthropological accounts of corruption tend to highlight its historical and cultural context (Prato 2004:80, cited in Pardo 2004) as well as how it is interwoven with a broader realm of local social and political practices. Significantly, anthropological approaches to corruption tend to problematize the private–public divide that orthodox notions of corruption take for granted (and hinge on) by showing how these distinctions are inherently difficult to draw, even in “Western societies” (Haller and Shore 2005:5). As Pardo notes,

corruption and its causes must be understood in the context of the inherently difficult relationship between politics, bureaucracy, law and civil society which, in distinctively different ways, mark both Western and non-Western states. (Pardo 2004:10)

The fact that exchanges between differently situated actors have always existed in all societies without necessarily being labeled “corruption,” indicates that “corruption” can also be understood as part of the global discourse of modernity interlinked with the diffusion of Western notions of state formation and state–society relations. At the same time, societies still have significant divergent conceptions of what constitutes corruption, illustrating the inherent problematic of adhering to a universal definition of what corruption is. *Blat* (gift-giving) in the post-Soviet countries and *guanxi* (networking) in China (Haller and Shore 2005:17) are examples

of culture-specific social practices that would be termed “corruption” elsewhere.

In one of the, by now classic, anthropological contributions on corruption, Gupta explores how corruption is talked about in the village of Alipur in India. The topic was central to everyday conversations among the villagers, revolving around everything from “the going price” of a service or a loan, to who in the bureaucracy was most likely to lend a “helping hand.” In his analysis, Gupta focuses on how the state comes to be imagined through these everyday conversations: “The discourse of corruption turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined” (Gupta 1995:212). This is an approach that has been widely recognized and applied in subsequent studies (Lazar 2008).

However, “corruption” can be widely protested and contested even in societies where it is seen as “normal.” “The talk of corruption” often constitutes a profound critique of social hierarchies and power. Our task is to capture what this critique can tell us about how people interpret and conceptualize their society, both in its actual institutional and political form as well as in the domain of norms and values. That is not to say that corruption should be romanticized in the name of cultural relativism. Corruption has a range of negative effects upon society, like “inflated contracts, distorted development priorities, increased exploitation and inequality and heightened uncertainty” (Haller and Shore 2005:7), in addition to undermining democracy and the rule of law (Haller and Shore 2005:7). Moreover, it is the poor who are most affected by these distortions. As Pardo notes:

Corrupt relations draw on an interaction between power (and its asymmetries) and its expedient (dishonest, self-serving, and so on) or incompetent exercise, whereby the misuse of power breeds power and feeds on it. (Pardo 2004:12)

These hierarchical relationships, where corrupt transactions are often taking place, put the poor in a vulnerable position as they seek to have their needs and interests covered. At the same time, it has been argued that mechanisms of corruption serve to fill a gap and provide an opening for the under-privileged in the face of discordant state formations. As claims to the state cannot be made on the basis of universally ascribed rights, the poor can enter by paying—to a certain extent leveling the field slightly.

Pragmatically speaking, that may be true, but it does not come without a cost. Not only does the “practice of paying” effectively reproduce itself, creating a systematic disadvantage for those who simply cannot pay and creating a constant scramble for resources for those who can barely pay, but it also continues to privilege those in power, thus perpetuating unequal relations of power. As Pardo notes:

Corruption at once draws and thrives on injustice, exploitation of inequality, distortions of power and betrayal of fundamental principles of citizenship, for those that do not have access to, or refuse to engage in corruption are at a disadvantage. (Pardo 2004:11)

Moreover, as Zinn (2005) notes with reference to Schneider: “Those who are in a subaltern class position more often bear the stigma of label associated to corruption; whereas business and political elites can make use of connection capital” (Zinn 2005:239). Corruption may be a “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985) in a given situation, but the greatest benefits are always reaped by those in power.

A HISTORY OF STABILIZED CORRUPTION

In Bolivarian political discourse, corruption was one of the key concepts through which the differences between the past governments of the Fourth Republic and the Chávez government were mediated and contrasted. Indeed, one of Chávez’s main “war cries” against the old system—which contributed to his electoral success in 1998—was that the governments of the Fourth Republic were both morally and economically corrupt. The tale of the corruption of the Fourth Republic within the Bolivarian sphere was tied to a broader discourse of social decay, political illegitimacy and treason against *el pueblo*. The *descarado* (shameless) manner in which corruption was carried out was taken as evidence that society was morally and politically bankrupt. Carlos Andrés Pérez’s fame for corruption served as a moral and legitimizing justification for the attempted coup against him in 1992, underwriting the notion that Venezuela had to be redeemed from within.

In order to understand the depth of this narrative, it is necessary to go back in Venezuelan history and tease out the role of corruption in forming both political practices and political imaginaries. Private wealth accumulation through coercion and opportunity run as a thin red line through

Venezuelan history, ever since the first colonizers established themselves on Venezuelan soil. As the renowned Venezuelan historian Luis Britto García (2013) writes:

Corruption in Venezuela has historical roots. Perhaps a mode of production is nothing else than a mode of stabilized corruption. The conquest was a colossal looting operation, appropriating goods and common work by force to the benefit of a vile minority. In the colonial caste society positions were [bought and] sold, and their discriminatory stratification was prolonged throughout the Republic, leaving as the principal means of social climbing that of quick riches. The Oligarchic Republic and other systems maintained this unequal distribution of wealth stemming from racketeering. With the irruption of the oil and mineral economy, the assets and public incomes exceed that of the private economy, and a collection of new rich and new corrupts [emerges from] trafficking in concessions and from milking the State. (Britto García 2013, author's translation from Spanish)

As Britto García eloquently teases out, illegitimate enrichment by force constituted the very foundations for the establishment of Venezuelan political and economic structures through the colonial era. In the aftermath of the Wars of Independence, political and economic positions continued to be traded through the prerogative of force and cunningness. When the oil economy gained pace in the first quarter of the twentieth century, entrenched social inequalities dominated by political casts and networks became irrigated and solidified by the new possibilities for rent-seeking that they engendered. The collusion, meddling and horse-trading taking place between an emerging cast of oil professionals, the government and foreign private oil companies created a shady world of business deals and private and sectorial rent capturing.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE BOOM

I have previously discussed the extravagance and opulence that characterized the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez during the oil boom in the 1970s. The epoch also created a nexus between immorality and corruption: a public imagery that was projected and diffused from the heights of power.

To a certain extent, state spending had been kept in check during the 1960s because of the limited amount of wealth in state coffers (Coronil 1997:5). However, as the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez embarked

on a massive spending spree, corruption, at a systematic and endemic scale, became the new norm for political casts. Oil rents washed through the system, grandiose development projects and state policies were put in motion without any checks and balances, and Pérez himself created networks of close friends and allies through strategic trading of political and economic assets.

Several political scandals were exposed to the public, revealing dark connections between political and financial elites, corruption and criminal activities. The boundaries between legal economic activities and corrupt or criminal activities became blurred, and the protagonists of this economy reappeared with a new public face, flaunting their quasi-legal or illegal riches in the public without shame or remorse.

During the oil boom, criminality established its claim as a normal form of sociality. Its ideals were brought out into the open. Its heroes left the clandestine world and proudly paraded in public places, making deals in restaurants, broadcasting their accomplishments in private clubs, flaunting their loots everywhere, seeking the company of society's notables. (Coronil 1997:360)

The emergence of the imagery of the new, ruthless actor in the economic realm also shifted the normative definition of behavior in other spheres:

The notion of the responsible citizen paled before that of the independent individual, a person free from social constraints. To be someone, one had to be clever, daring, and rich; and to be rich, one had to have the power to stand outside the law and above social constraints. (Coronil 1997:360)

Venezuelans had always had an ambivalent relationship with oil, but now oil came to be seen “as the dark inside of nature and as the vicious lubricant of all transactions in Venezuelan society” (Coronil 1997:353). Petroleum came to be primarily seen as money, imbued with an innate “corrupting force”—what Simmel once called “the complete heartlessness of money” (Coronil 1997:353).

The processes of liberalization and privatization in the 1980s and 1990s made ample room for shady and criminal businesses, making well-placed individuals in politics and business perversely rich. It has been estimated that by 1990, wealthy Venezuelans had stashed away the equivalent, or more, of the nation's external debt in dollars overseas (Derham 2010:8).

This culture of private rent-seeking by illegitimate means circumscribed not only the upper echelons of political and economic circles, but also state bureaucracy itself. Indeed, within the bureaucratic culture you were allegedly considered “stupid” if you didn’t use the opportunities to enrich yourself. Tellingly, Gonzalo Barrios, a leading politician, and two-time minister for Acción Democrática, once famously remarked that “in Venezuela, there are no reasons for not stealing.” A number of proverbs surged from this “public secret.” One of the most famous proverbs, still frequently cited today, is: “No me des, ponme donde hay” [don’t give me, just put me where there is]. This meant that one wants a position from where one can amass and accumulate private wealth. Another one is: “Cuanto hay pa’eso?” [How much is there for this?], in the sense that a public functionary might, for example, blatantly ask how much you offer for a “service.” A third example is “con los adecos se vive mejor, porque roban y dejan robar,”¹ [with the adecos one is better off, they steal and let others steal as well]. Indeed, in 1984, the Venezuelan historian and journalist Carlos Capriles Ayalaco co-authored a book series in three volumes entitled *Diccionario de la Corrupción en Venezuela* (the Dictionary of Corruption in Venezuela) listing known cases of corruption.

THE CLASS DIMENSION OF THE RULE OF LAW

An important characteristic of Latin American societies is that the rule of law is differently dispatched according to class. Commonly, the elites perceive themselves as “above the law,” as epitomized by the classic phrase “do you know who you are talking to” (Gledhill 2004:167). This feature can be traced back to the ways in which institutions and principles from the Old World were incorporated into the existing and evolving socio-political body during colonial times. As Wiarda notes:

In the New World, classes and castes were strictly segregated; justice was similarly dispensed on a sectorial and not an egalitarian basis. When men talked of “rights” they were not referring to any abstract Lockean “natural” or individual rights but rather seeking to guarantee and frequently enhance the “fueros” or special privileges that were inherently theirs because of their or their group’s place and status in the society. (Wiarda 1971:440)

Thus, “the rule of law,” as well as the enactment of rights and duties, was not universally applied, but rather “strategically” used according to

accumulated power and privileges. As Gledhill notes with reference to DaMatta, the implementation of liberal constitutions in the continent, with its emphasis on equality before the law, actually served to perpetuate inequalities. The powerful were above the law anyway, as they could draw on their social connections and status. The poor on the other hand were those who would feel the force of the law if they transgressed it (Gledhill 2004:166).

This historical conceptualization of the rule of law in the public domain is helpful for illuminating Bolivarian narratives about elite relationships, the political system and corruption in the Fourth Republic. Intrinsicly, these are tied to a broader notion of inequality and injustice, whereby the rich historically got away with “anything.” As Gonzalo Barrios, the leading Acción Democrática politician and two-time minister quoted above once said: “What is stolen remains stolen, as long as it is sufficient to pay off judges and lawyers” (Díaz, Eleazar R. 2006, author’s translation from Spanish). In other words, corruption has historically been considered a “class privilege,” both by those who took advantage of this privilege, and those who witnessed it from the outside.

VENEZUELAN PERSONHOOD AND THE ORIGINS OF *VIVEZA*

What is going on here is a slow, dramatic and desperate effort of a society to assume itself, in a territory and within habits and codes that don’t correspond to them, nor expresses them, and occasionally, don’t even make sense to them. (Cabrujas 1996 [1995], author’s translation from Spanish)

It was José Ignacio Cabrujas, one of Venezuela’s greatest playwrights, writer, actor and public intellectual, who uttered these words. Working between reality and fiction his whole life, Cabrujas tried to penetrate the innermost soul of Venezuela. Without mercy he pointed to the weak spots of the nation, exposing vanity, self-delusion and self-deceit in a forgiving yet unsparing manner that only an insider can get away with.

The quotation is from one of his latest speeches, 11 months before he died in October 1995. At an event entitled *La Cultura de Trabajo* (the culture of labor) in the theater *Ateneo de Caracas*, Cabrujas gave a merciless verdict on what he considered to be Venezuelan culture, work ethic and national essence. His conclusion was quite gloomy, as the quotation illustrates. He maintained that Venezuela lacked an autochthonous culture and a vision for the future. The historical process of colonialism, of trying

to adapt to, and mimic, all things foreign had deprived Venezuela of an inner self, of an integrated core, he argued.

Venezuela hasn't been inaugurated, and her capital Caracas neither. It is a city without a vision, without memories, with nothing particular to her, it is a temporary project. The whole of Venezuela is a temporary project and besides it has the culture of a temporary project.² Here we have always been confronted with the dilemma that what we are, what occurs to us, our behavior, our historical self doesn't correspond with our books, with our verbs, with our words, with our institutions, with our laws and codes. There is an enormous difference between reality and the fixation of a cultural framework in the country. The laws that we have are not ours, it is a lie that the Criminal Code castigates crime, commerce in Venezuela has nothing to do with the Code of Commerce, it is a lie, above all that the constitution expresses the project of a nation, her innermost desires. (Cabrujas 1996 [1995], author's translation from Spanish)

Cabrujas maintains that what prevailed is the victory of opportunism, of the celebration of *la viveza*, a word derived from the term *vida* (life) "and we managed to confuse it with *viveza*, we think that being alive is to do mischief, to say that a person is *viva*, *vivo* (alive) because they are plotting something, they are up to something."

In his speech, Cabrujas held high the image of Bolívar, the visionary, the sublime man, true to his dreams and aspirations, uncompromising and morally uncompromised. For Venezuelans, Bolívar has become a paradigm, an enigma, their only bond to the sublime and the elevated. But paradoxically, Bolívar wasn't really a Venezuelan, Cabrujas said. The real Venezuelan is the villain in the story: General José Antonio Paez, who betrayed Bolívar and betrayed Gran Colombia. Paez: "the cunning, the astute, the mediocre, he who was incapable of pondering a dream." Cabrujas quoted a letter that was sent to Paez from the country's merchants at the time, saying that "[This] is a Venezuelan letter, completely." It read like this: "Esteemed General Paez, it seems to us that the project of General Bolívar is incompatible. We have struggled selflessly for overcoming the Spanish colony, the Spanish power, we have been killed in the battle fields in order not to have to pay taxes to the Spaniards, and what, are we now going to pay taxes to the Colombians? No." Then writes Cabrujas:

This is the reason why a sublime dream collapsed, because all the merchants of Venezuela decided that paying taxes to the government of Santa Fe de Bogota was a crime and something anti-Venezuelan.

And he continues:

This is the point where the sublime stays behind and the cunningness starts, the astuteness, against the Bolívar of the past, the complex dream, distilled, difficult, from the enterprise of enormous magnitude, emerges the trap, the sideways, the by way of, the meandering, the manner of coming, of not losing ... this is a big part of our history.

Cabrujas's speech has more historical un-packing and sophisticated nuances than I can cover here. It is also so culturally rich and subtle that numerous interpretations can be drawn from it. However, I wanted to quote him here because he manages to indicate the deep-seated and complex template of *viveza*, or what is called *la viveza criolla* in several Latin American countries, or in the case of Brazil, *jeitinho*.

The concept denotes a form of cunningness and calculated astuteness that forms part of the Latin American imagery of collective personhoods and social arrangements. "First we invent the *trampa* (the trick, trap) and then the law, with enough cracks to allow us to go through with *la trampa*," said Ezequiel Martínez Estrada, Argentinian intellectual and author (La Nueva 2010, author's translation from Spanish). It describes the socialization of an individualized and shameless anything-goes behavior, whereby only a fool obeys the rules.

In Venezuela, the concept encapsulates everything from corruption to shady or semi-legal *rebusques* (inventive ways of making quick money or earn an extra income), jumping ahead in the bus line, pushing one's way through by force in a traffic jam, refusing to offer prioritized seating to elderly and pregnant people on the metro, a general lack of respect for others and any kind of self-seeking behavior. It could also be used to denounce politicians or career climbers, or anyone who seek to get ahead through cunningness and foul play.

In colloquial speech it is often used when someone tries to be clever or trick themselves out of (or into) something, as in *no seas vivo/a* (don't be inventive/don't be mischievous). While it is commonly referred to as a negative trait, it is also at times ambiguously interpreted as a positive trait symbolizing the ability to survive in a difficult environment, a "talent for life," and, to a certain extent, social success. Sometimes, you would hear people practically boast about their capacity to enrich themselves through petty corruption or favorable *rebusques*. Among some, it seemed to be considered a sign of masculinity.

Thus, *viveza* represents a dense social signifier, which ambivalently and depending on context describes both a negative trait and an ability to get ahead, to not be left dumfounded and outmaneuvered by others who are more agile. Because of this ambivalence, it also reduced the effect of shame as a social control mechanism, as well as undermining social trust. Correspondingly, *viveza* is considered to fuel and amplify corruption and dishonest practices because it creates an attitude of “if I do not do it, someone else will do it,” or, “why cannot I do it if everyone else does it.”

I want to emphasize that these social templates and practices imbued in the concept of “*viveza*,” should not be read as a “proof” of individual or collective pathologies. Such discussions always actualize the question of politics of representations, not least in the context of poverty and inequality (Bourgois 2003:11–18). However, what I want to illuminate with this section is how the concept of *viveza* forms part of a broader social narrative about norms and values steering political and social life, crafting both individual and collective identities. In Bolivarian discourse, it emerged as part of a discourse advocating for the refoundation of society through fostering new individual moralities—epitomized by the imagery of Che’s New Man—through collective organization and critical consciousness. Together with other templates, such as individualism, consumption, greed and lack of values, *viveza* was part of a story of not only economic corruption, but also social corruption in the sense lack of solidarity, decency, honesty and fair play. As I have sought to show throughout the past chapters, these narratives about today’s moral decomposition were framed as the outcome of the Punto Fijo regimes’ blatant amorality, and capitalism’s—and later neoliberalism’s—erosion of the social fabric and public morals.

REVERSING AND CONTESTING THE MORAL CRISIS

Coronil argues that corruption forms part of a broader array of social disorders emerging from the thwarted form of capitalist development taking place in the Latin American continent:

“Corruption,” a word that condenses multiple meanings related to the self-seeking violation of public norms—from idleness on the job to clientelism and nepotism, from petty theft to blackmail and murder—has become an endemic structural phenomenon widely accepted as an inevitable part of everyday normality. (Coronil 2011:39)

However, even though it has become part of everyday life people haven't stopped hoping for something else:

But this economic and moral crisis far from extinguishing it, has rekindled the hope that someone, or something, will offer a solution to our social fragmentation and establish a sense of collective well-being. The turn to the Left has been an expression of this hope. (Coronil 2011:39)

In Venezuela, the Bolivarian revolution was cast as that “someone, or something” that could transform Venezuelan society into a kinder, more orderly state of being. People put their hopes not only on the fact that the Bolivarian state could promote a new mode of state culture, but also on the fact that the process intrinsically would change people “from within”—their hearts and minds—so that a new social order could take shape. As a social activist writes on the activist forum www.apporea.org:

It cannot be denied that our revolutionary process is full of acts of corruption ... but they are fruit of the immaturity of the revolutions, that is, in our ranks there is a diversity of human beings: those who are supporting the process but don't trust it. Those who are participating in order to satisfy their economic interests. Those who have political interests There are those who dress in red but who are white and green on the inside. And there are those who put their mind, heart and life into the revolutionary process. (Díaz 2009, author's translation from Spanish)

The dominant political narrative about how this “social disease” has gained foothold focuses on Venezuelan state formation since colonial times and on the fraudulent rule of the Fourth Republic. It is useful to consider Oscar's words, which illustrate the direct linkages drawn between historical trajectories and the contemporary challenges within the Bolivarian process:

OSCAR: What is happening is that ... since our process of independence, those struggles were accompanied by dealing out land, by control over houses ... all the wars that were taking place during the independence period in the 1880 and up till today ... the important military figures among the ruling casts, who had the weapons, start to get engaged in these economic relations as well, in trading with the European countries, a form

of slavery, because this doesn't come in the genes, I mean, they have told us that we are corrupt, because this is normal and common. But no, this comes from a concept of class, that there are some people who need to have more and more in order to be well, and for that they have to screw up others. And you see, this government hasn't gotten rid of this. It is like the *adecos* used to say: "Ponme donde hay."

ISELIN: Ponme donde hay?

OSCAR: Yes, that was the *adecos*.

ISELIN: What does that mean?

OSCAR: It means like "where are the resources" or "where is the money," it was like a saying among the *adecos*, "find me a place where there is, don't pay me," because if I am in a position to manage a budget in a municipality or a budget for whatever, I use this position to charge my 10 percent, my 15 percent, or through some scam I build up some grand business and tentacles. And in effect, things haven't changed. Look, all the director or sub directors of whichever ministry, whichever state institution, has chauffeurs, has a paid mobile phone, has a great car, has a salary, and through this he has the dispositions, or like, the resources that give him power, that give him decision-making power, and many people affiliate with him in order to, well, to get a small contract, and this is corrupting our communities, our communities don't escape this. Today, in the communal councils, there are fights and disputes because people owe money or because people make some business and don't pass on all the money to the community that they really received.

In Oscar's formulation, one recognizes the often repeated narrative of how the historical heritage of corrupted state practices and "privileges" attached to public office had also permeated the Bolivarian process, while at the same time bringing the communities into the realms of corruption. In the past, poor communities were generally not accustomed to wealth. To the extent that "contentious" money did trickle down, it was through spoils in the form of clientelist networks, populist-style hand-outs and small-scale corruption. However, this "scrambling for spoils" was seen as having been installed into people, and now that more wealth was

available, rent-seeking practices became reinforced. As Miche, one of the promotores in Fundacomunal worded it:

MICHE: The weaknesses, well, we all know what they are, here in Venezuela there aren't other people than the very Venezuelans, who have been here for 40, 50 years, and, at the end of the day, we are dragging along with us the same vices that have existed for 40, 50 years here ... it's not like people from Mars have arrived to organize us. Why am I saying this? Because the same people who are now in the communal councils are the same people who were with the *adecos*, with the *copeyanos*, with Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), which I am saying with quotation marks...

ISELIN: The people in...?

MICHE: The people in the communal councils. Because the majority of the people involved are older people, 40, 50 years, or that is like the average, there is a low degree of participation among the youth, and that is why they are dragging along with them the same vices from 40 years ago, and as there are now resources available *el gusanito de la corrupción* (the worm of corruption) is eating them and they are always looking for ways to skim off funds or get into corruption, well, here I mean corruption not only in the manner of stealing money but also in the sense of helping someone you know more than someone you don't know, all this kind of human misery...

In the section above we discussed how the template of *viveza* encapsulates a particular form of social cunningness also engendering corrupt practices. People often attributed to other people a remarkable capacity of inventing *trampas* (tricks) to win a struggle or to get their hands on money, a feature of community politics that frequently generated tensions within the communities. These conflicts often played out between competing fractions with different "interests" and often different ideological reasons for partaking. The following case study about a long-term conflict in a communal council serves to illustrate how these processes played out in practice. It shows how the collusion between corrupted state officials and local struggles for power translated into a prolonged process whereby the community was negotiating what kind of moralities should guide community organization.

NEGOTIATING MORALITIES

This communal council had been involved in a conflict over power and resources dating back to a housing project developed by the foregoing members of the council that had now been replaced with new members after elections took place in 2011. The initial project had been developed through a meticulous process conducted by the committee for housing and infrastructure, who had been mapping out the needs and deficiencies of all the houses on the street. Based on that investigation, a prioritized list was elaborated and handed to the Fundacomunal, which eventually approved the project. However, at that point, something happened. From what I gathered based on my long-time interaction with this particular communal council, a member of the community who worked in Fundacomunal “conspired” with the heads of the finance committee who had the authority to release the funds from the banking account, and changed the list of beneficiaries. That move was discovered by another member of the community who also worked in Fundacomunal, who in turn contacted a person she knew in Safonaac, the institution directly in charge of depositing project funds into the accounts of the communal councils, once the projects were approved by Fundacomunal. However, by the time that account was frozen, some members of the community, allied with those in the finance committee, had already withdrawn their checks.

The project was then stalled, and the communal council that had been responsible for the project ended its term. Thus, it was up to the subsequent communal council, which was elected at great pains as people in the community had become cynical as to what the matter was really about, to get the project up and going again. The finance committee of the former communal council “disappeared,” refusing to meet up and present its financial statements to the community. Eventually, after a lot of back and forth with Fundacomunal over whether the bank account could be opened again, the new communal council was promised that it could go on with the project if a community consensus was reached over who would benefit from the initiative and if the money was spent according to plans. This brought tension to the community as the communal council was, after the new elections, divided between two factions that had control over the project and over the key positions in charge of overseeing accounts and releasing funds. After a series of heated community meetings, the last part of the discussions took place behind closed doors, in a meeting attended by voceros of the communal councils (where I was also

allowed to be present) during which members reached an agreement on those that would benefit from the project. These allocations were first and foremost based on the census of documented needs, though it seemed as if some horse-trading was also taking place over who, among the friends and allies of those present, was needy enough or deserving of being included on the list. At the subsequent community assembly meeting, when the list and the planned proceedings for releasing funds were announced, for the most part, people embraced this community “truce.” At the meeting it was made clear that it would no longer be allowed to hand out personal checks to house owners, as had happened before. Now, the house owners had to elaborate a budget with a hardware store, and a check would be written out to the store so as to eliminate the possibility of people directly accessing the funds. In the meeting however, some people, and one woman in particular, were disputing this new practice, arguing that it was nobody’s business if they actually repaired their kitchen or their living room with the money they received. The woman thus proposed that the checks be written out to individuals instead of to the hardware store. The argument was obviously not completely coherent—she could have gone to the hardware store and worked out the budget herself. But as Teresa, one of my contacts in the communal council commented afterward: “She just wanted to have her hands on the check; that is what she wanted.” Thus, what took place was a subtle negotiation over the manner in which the legal procedures of the communal council were to be carried out—a subtext that everyone, including this researcher, understood.

THE CORRUPT STATE

In the context of community politics, I often heard rumors or tales of how public functionaries “lured” people into corruption through enticing them into “deals” or promising some form of “help,” thereby making people in the communities accomplices in scams that were, above all, an expression of ingrained dishonest practices of the state body. Miriam, for example, was utterly enraged by some of her co-workers who allegedly engineered such scams, considering it deeply immoral and threatening to the Bolivarian process:

I don’t mingle with crooks; if you stole a check from a communal council you have to assume your shit, because you cannot steal money from the communal council, you cannot steal from el pueblo, steal from the rich but

not from el pueblo. And you stole money from someone poor, and that is against the principles of the revolution and also against the principles of God, you see? You can have all the problems in the world, but you cannot take something that isn't yours, you cannot take as much as a bolivar from a communal council you see? That is like stealing candy from a child.

As we learned in Chap. 7, Miriam was deeply concerned with how the institutions were directed by people who seemed to be more concerned with their own interests rather than with attending to the communal councils and nursing popular power by displaying a revolutionary moral. For her, petty corruption by public officers was evidence of how the vices of the Fourth Republic continued to hold sway over public institutions. However, she also perceived people in the communities as *vivos*, as the following quote, formulated in her usual straightforward manner, indicates:

What happened before was that the communal councils were formed because ... people were going to take the money, they didn't participate with the intention that our *Comandante* wanted, to organize themselves, to help the communities, they just meddled their way in so they could take the candy or the money that the president was giving for the communities.

It should be noted that what Miriam said here is in no way descriptive of all communal councils, something she also emphasizes later in the interview. However, this dynamic was believed to be widespread in the first years of the communal councils. Many community members went to public institutions to denounce their fellow neighbors who had stolen common money, but to no avail as the judicial status of the communal council members and their public prosecution were not contemplated in the law. This was deeply concerning for lawmakers,³ which is why the 2009 reform of the law for the communal councils provided for the prosecution of communal council members who embezzled funds. The law also dictated that family members, up to fourth-degree consanguinity, could not occupy main seats in the communal councils at the same time, preventing them from becoming a "society of accomplices."⁴

The initial penetration of corruption in the communal councils was facilitated by the fact that this model of community organization was not yet known or understood by all members of the community. This gave ample leeway for some "inventive" individuals to steer the process as it pleased them. As public outcry over neighbors who were stealing "the

community's money" grew, and people became more and more aware of what the communal councils consisted of (and the social gains they could bring), the community's "panopticon" was increasingly activated. People seemed to believe that major cases of corruption within the communal councils decreased after the first few years of their functioning, though rumors of "cuts" here and there were always widespread. But as Lazar (2008) also notes for community organizations in Bolivia, "minor compensations" are often socially accepted as long as they are not too much. Members of the community recognized that voceros couldn't work for free, but the ambiguities of what constituted corruption or not, and the ethos of voluntary work inscribed in the formal design of the communal councils, made it a contentious topic as to where the compensation should be drawn from and how much.

For example, once I visited a communal council that was in the process of constructing and rehabilitating several houses in its community. I had traveled with Gerardo, a promotor integral from Fundacomunal, up to the highest hills of La Silsa, next to 23 de Enero. We spent the morning visiting the different houses and talking with the workers and the house owners before we went to the home of the leader of the communal bank in order to fill out the necessary paperwork that Gerardo needed for bureaucratic purposes in Fundacomunal. On the metro ride back home, Gerardo confided that when the housing project was first launched, the ladies in the communal bank had tried to do some "creative accounting" and that he went down hard on them. He had told the leader of the communal bank that she could not play around with the invoices, "because you are the one that will pay for it" (if it gets detected) but that everyone recognized that she worked for free, and that, for that reason, she should rather cut a deal with the workers to get a share. I asked if that was common and he answered that, yes, it was, "but I wouldn't know how." This episode illustrates how gray areas of the law and folk perception of fairness to some extent interfered with how corruption was socially evaluated in the communal councils.

AMBIVALENT MORALITIES

As Gledhill notes with regards to higher-level corruption, "popular protest may reflect only antagonism to exclusion and excess, rather than objections of principle" (Gledhill 1994:104). Similarly, everyday lower-level corruption may be thought of as a blurred boundary between what is "fair" and "justified," and what is "crooked" or "greedy." In everyday life,

Venezuelans are confronted with a range of daily chores which forces them to deploy, or not, strategies that go against normative or legal boundaries. People may choose to pay a public functionary for “a little help” instead of seeing their papers placed at the bottom of the paper stack because they know no one “on the inside.” Or for example, it is compulsory to have a medical certificate in order to receive a driver’s license. But instead of going through the toilsome process of waiting at a doctor’s office for an appointment and pay for the routine check, one can easily buy a medical certificate from a “sympathetic” doctor. (When I accompanied a friend to get her driver’s license, the office of the “sympathetic doctor” was conveniently located right next to the office that issued the driver’s license.) It is also compulsory to take driving lessons in order to get a driver’s license, but one just needs to ask around in order to find someone who can issue a license without requiring proof of driving lessons—of course, in exchange for a small sum of money.

To a certain extent, corruption holds a spot on the opaque scale of moral ambiguities that is between how things are and how they should be. Upon closer scrutiny, what people consider as corruption is not clear-cut, and what is also not clear is if all forms of corruption that contravene the law are considered morally “bad.” Moral categories of what is bad and what is acceptable, what constitutes corruption and what doesn’t, are ambivalent and context-specific, not only among different people, but also within the moral chart of individuals. As Rigi notes in an extensive descriptive analysis of the various practices of gift-exchange, bribes, corruption and extortion within, and outside, personal relations in Kazakhstan, people often have an ambiguous and context-specific perception of these practices and the degree to which they, freely or unwillingly, are engaging in them. “While the status of *blat*⁵ and of small bribes disguised as gifts is ambiguous, large bribes and extortions and the Mafia are classified as outright corruption” (Rigi 2004:114, cited in Prado 2004).

William, a young man in his 30s working for Fundacomunal, tried to explain his idea of the different categories of corruption to me. For him, the basic form of corruption was *el rebusque*—meaning that people, for example, stole small things on the workplace and resold it privately, or inflated their traveling expenses when they handed them to their employers. This kind of rebusque wasn’t really corruption in his view, but rather a necessary way of making ends meet, in which most people would engage without thinking of it as corruption. He argued that “ordinary” low-level salaries very rarely covered basic needs and that in one way or the other, people had to earn some extra once in a while. In that sense, the rebusque

can be seen as filling the void between real salaries and the cost of living, which converts the practice into a structurally deficient part of the economy reflecting economic inequalities and the conditions of the working poor. The other corruption category he identified was that of politicians and businesses engaging in corrupt deals—that was, in his opinion, “corruption” pure and simple. Here there were no “excuses” other than greed. I asked him how he would categorize stealing money within the communal councils destined to community projects. This he classified as robbery. I asked him if someone would classify this as a rebusque rather than stealing, and he said that, no, “they are rats, they are stealing from their own people.” In William’s view then, *el rebusque* was, to some extent, acceptable and perceived as an act of need, while corruption was “pure robbery”—an act of greed and low morality.

CORRUPTION HIGH AND LOW

The ethnographic focus of this chapter is on the interface between popular sector communities and public institutions. However, I want to reiterate that these practices should in no way be taken as indication of a culture of poverty (Lewis 1966) in the form of social pathologies particular to certain social groups. As Zinn (2005) has noted, “those who are in a subaltern class position more often bear the stigma of label associated to corruption; whereas business and political elites can make use of connection capital” (Zinn 2005:239). Tales of lower-level corruption should therefore always be seen in relation to the broader political-economic organization, whereby the wealthy, through their relationships with political elites as well as their positions, assets and networks, are capable of using the ambivalences of legal norms and their class shield against law enforcement to amass wealth through dubious means. By that, I do not mean to condone corruption at “lower levels”—and as this section has shown, corruption within communal councils was by and large morally condemned—but to emphasize that an interpretation of social norms and practices in this context has to be intrinsically understood in relation to broader socio-political organizations as well as relationships of hierarchies and power.

As Pardo notes “the experience of corruption may be a corollary of the reach of the state. It may also be testimony to an internalization of its norms and values” (Pardo 2004:10). The state in Venezuela was historically shaped by crude power plays and the amassment of wealth, long before the concept of corruption was invented. However, as processes of state formation throughout the twentieth century were mirrored in the

imagery of democracy and rule of law, corruption also emerged as a symbol-laden socio-political concept in public life, gradually bringing out in sharp relief the contrast between “democratic ideals” flaunted by the elites and their actual practices. It is telling that Carlos Andrés Pérez was ultimately removed from power on corruption charges—though it should be added that his removal also reflected internal power plays in Acción Democrática (Trinkunas 2002) and the need for a scapegoat to take the blame for the legitimacy crisis that concerned the political casts at large.

However, Pérez’s public fall evidences that “corruption” has, since long ago, been internalized in the public imagery as an “evil” and that it is a pervasive phenomenon extremely difficult to root out. I often spoke with community activists about what could be done to change things at state level, and many pointed to the necessity of reforming the ethos and organization of public offices from within. “Opportunity makes thief,” one man said, and the “informal” state organization of fiefdom, networks of loyalties and gate keepers provide ample space for dishonest practices. At the same time, the practices of corruption were also explained as the outcome of the continuous power of existing state personnel, engaging in corrupt behavior since long back. One man explained this by recounting how SAIME⁶ (previously called DIEX⁷ and later ONIDEX⁸), the public office issuing passports and identity cards, had been reformed. SAIME used to be a public institution that was notorious for corruption, including “selling” fake identity cards and routinely charging fees for issuing documents. Moreover, as DIEX, the office allegedly had the habit of “forgetting” or simply not bothering to issue identity cards to popular sector citizens who were not *adeco* supporters, which meant that those citizens were not allowed to vote.

However, in 2003, as a part of Misión Identidad,⁹ the institution was taken over by the political scientist and lawyer Hugo Cabezas, aided by young people from Frente Francisco de Miranda. After Misión Identidad was completed, the institution was reformed and only received online applications (avoiding personal contact with public officers). Many of the existing personnel, basically *adeco* supporters, retired. The result, according to my interlocutor, was that SAIME was now one of the public institutions that functioned properly and was known for having low levels of corruption.

However, as we have explored previously in this book, most state institutions in the Chávez era were a corollary of new and old personnel, networks and organizations, permeated by an ambivalent co-existence of old “state practices,” and new ideological visions and political ideals. Moreover, the deeply ingrained imagery of the state as a site through which one can amass

wealth (“ponme donde hay”) still held sway over how new cohorts of state servants exercised their role and the social expectations inscribed into such positions. Rosa, whom we got to know in Chap. 3, recounted that she had been asked by a neighbor: “Why do you continue to work when you have two children working for the government?” Rosa told me this to exemplify *la mentalidad* (the mentality) that circulates among many people. If you have children working for the government they are able to pull strings in order to provide the things you need. And as government workers they are well positioned for getting their hands in the honey jar one way or the other.

However, I suggest that it is a highly fictitious intellectual exercise to separate corruption at state level from corruption in other spheres of society (be it the business community or any other public or private institution or enterprise). Corruption is part of multi-vocal bundles of social practices that are thriving upon ambivalent norms and values, socially codified strategies for regulating supply and demand and historical formations of power and privileges.

Thus, in essence, we need to understand how templates of corruption are historically dense and intimately intertwined with broader processes of state formation and social relations, forming part of a broader set of discourses and practices embodying and articulating social and political moralities. As this chapter has demonstrated, the Bolivarian discourse harbored on the one hand, a profound tension between everyday realities of social and political life, and on the other, ideals and visions of a different moral order that could engender a more just and harmonious society.

* * *

Throughout the past three chapters, I have explored how the Bolivarian process under Chávez was characterized by attempts to find a new moral terrain from which the Bolivarian process’ political goals could be realized. Epitomized by phrase “Che’s New Man,” linkages were made between individual behavior, goals and values, and the emergence of a new social order at large. What loomed large in these discourses were denouncements of individual and collective behavioral traits such as individualism, greed, corruption, reckless consumption and dishonesty. However, throughout these chapters, I have tried to highlight the broader processes and structures underpinning these discourses and social struggles, tracing them back to particular forms of post-colonial state formation, social and political dynamics emerging through the development of the oil economy, and local versions of global discourses of modernity, class identities and development.

The discussions sustained through these pages show that Venezuela's experience with extractive capitalism engendered very particular political practices, social experiences and cultural idioms. In people's vernacular narratives, we find that they draw direct linkages between "macro processes" and their individual life experiences. "Extractive capitalism" or "neoliberalism" was not only theoretical and descriptive concepts, but also deeply communal and embodied social experiences codified in local idioms and narratives. In the next and final chapter, I will offer some concluding reflections on how we may understand and interpret the interlinkages between local experiences of popular struggle in the Caracas barrios, Venezuela's oil-fuelled development trajectories before and during the Bolivarian process, and global structures and processes. We will start with a snapshot of a large concentration in the city center of Caracas, the year before Chávez died.

NOTES

1. This is the more commonly used short version. The full version is: "Con los adecos se vive mejor, porque roban y dejan robar mientras que los copeyanos roban pa' ellos solos" [with the adecos one is better off, they steal and let others steal as well, while the copeyanos only steal for themselves].
2. *Temporary projects* is the translation of *campamiento*, which literally means camp (like summer camp). However in Venezuela it can also refer to the habit of starting short-time project/campaigns, for example a political campaign launched solely for electoral propaganda.
3. Interview, anonymous member of National Assembly, spring 2011.
4. The phrase "una nación de cómplices" [a nation of accomplices] was first used by the writer Tomás Lander in 1836 in an attempt to describe how all the stakeholders at the time engaged in the same destructive and amoral dynamics, bleeding the country economically, politically and morally. The phrase is often used in the contemporary discourse to underscore that "everyone" is corrupted in one way or the other.
5. *Blat* is the local term for using personal relations for obtaining goals.
6. The office has been called Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería (SAIME) since 2007.
7. In 1963 named Dirección de Identificación y Extranjería (DIEX).
8. In 2004 DIEX was re-named Oficina Nacional de Identificación y Extranjería (ONIDEX).
9. Misión Identidad was a program put in motion by the government in 2003 after recognizing that large parts of the poor and rural urban population didn't have identity cards. The mission was organized in mobile outreach units whereby people from Frente Francisco de Miranda traveled across the country issuing identity cards.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bourgois, Philippe. 2003. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cabrujas, José Ignacio. 1996 [1995]. *La viveza criolla. Destreza, mínimo esfuerzo o sentido del humor*. Caracas: Cátedra Fundación Sivena-Ateneo. <http://es.slideshare.net/lmballesteros/la-viveza-criolla>. Accessed February 20, 2017.
- Coronil, Fernando. 1997. *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2011. State Reflections. The 2002 Coup against Hugo Chavez. In *The Revolution in Venezuela. Social and Political Change under Chavez*, ed. T. Ponniah and J. Eastwood. Cambridge, MA: David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University.
- Derham, Michael. 2010. *Politics in Venezuela. Explaining Hugo Chávez*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Díaz, Eleazar R. 2006. La corrupción en Venezuela. *Aporrea*, August 6. <http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a24200.html>. Accessed February 20, 2017.
- Díaz, Octavina. 2009. La Corrupción en la Cuarta y la Quinta República. *Aporrea*, September 17. <http://www.aporrea.org/contraloria/a86644.html>. Accessed February 20, 2017.
- Ellner, Steve. 2009. A New Model with Rough Edges: Venezuela's Community Councils. *NACLA Report on the Americas* 42 (3) (May/June): 11–14.
- García, Luis Britto. 2013. Para vencer la corrupción. *Aporrea*, August 25. <http://www.aporrea.org/contraloria/a172305.html>. Accessed February 20, 2017.
- Gledhill, John. 1994. *Power and Its Disguises. Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*. London: Pluto Press.
- . 2004. Neoliberalism. In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, ed. D. Nugent and J. Vincent. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gupta, Akhil. 1995. Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. In *The Anthropology of the State. A Reader*, ed. A. Sharma and A. Gupta. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Haller, Dieter, and Chris Shore. 2005. *Corruption. Anthropological Perspectives*. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.
- La Nueva. 2010. Editorial: El auge de la viveza criolla. *La Nueva*, December 26. <http://www.lanueva.com/Sociedad-/440601/el-auge-de-la-viveza-criolla.html>. Accessed February 20, 2017.
- Lazar, Sian. 2008. *El Alto, Rebel City. Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Lewis, Oscar. 1966. *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty. San Juan and New York*. New York: Random House.
- MacLennan, Carol. 2005. Corruption in Corporate America: Enron—Before and After. In *Corruption. Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. C. Shore and D. Haller. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.

- Pardo, Italo. 2004. Introduction. Corruption, Morality and the Law. In *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society*, ed. I. Pardo. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Pierce, Steven. 2006. Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48 (4): 887–914.
- Prato, Giuliana. 2004. ‘The Devil Is Not as Wicked as People Believe, Neither Is the Albanian’: Corruption between Moral Discourse and National Identity. In *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society*, ed. I. Prato. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Rigi, Jakob. 2004. Corruption in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society*, ed. I. Pardo. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Shore, Cris. 2005. Culture and Corruption in the EU: Reflections on Fraud, Nepotism and Cronyism in the European Commission. In *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. C. Shore and D. Haller. Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.
- Trinkunas, Harold. 2002. The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic. *Latin American Research Review* 37 (1): 41–76.
- Wiarda, Howard. 1971. Law and Political Development in Latin America: Toward a Framework for Analysis. *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 19 (3): 434–463.
- Zinn, Dorothy Louise. 2005. Afterword-Anthropology and Corruption: The State of the Art. In *Corruption. Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. D. Haller and C. Shore. London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.

Open Access This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, duplication, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

