

## IMPERIALISM AND RACIALISED WORLD CAPITALISM OR INTERCULTURAL TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SOCIALISM\*

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**ABSTRACT.** In Cole, 2016, I paint a bleak and depressing scenario of racism on three continents. In this paper, I address the fundamental issue of how things might be different: specifically an intercultural twenty-first century socialism that is both antiracist and, in the Latin American context, intercultural. I begin the paper with a discussion of the consolidation and hegemony of imperialism and racialised world capitalism. Given the structural role of and institutional nature of racism in the Anglophone world, and its interconnection with capitalism and imperialism, which is reflected in the political mainstream in the UK, the US and Australia, I believe it is the case that, in order to move beyond racism, we need to move decisively beyond capitalism and imperialism. I take as an example of such a movement: intercultural and intracultural twenty-first century socialism in the making in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela – proof that another world is possible.

**Keywords:** imperialism; racialised world capitalism; twenty-first century socialism; Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; interculturalism; intraculturalism; Indigenous Peoples; Afro-Venezuelan and Afro-Descendant Peoples; undocumented workers

### **The Consolidation and Hegemony of Imperialism and Racialised Capitalism<sup>1</sup>**

As Chris Marsden argues, for almost a quarter of a century since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reintroduction of capitalism in Russia and China, world imperialism has been seeking to take advantage to bring about what President George Bush senior proclaimed in 1991 to be the ‘new world order’ (Marsden, 2015). As Bush put it, the end of the 1990–1991 Gulf War against Iraq (when coalition forces from 34 countries led by the US led by the United States attacked Iraq in response to its invasion and annexation of Kuwait) would herald, a world

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‘where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind [sic] – peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law’ (George Bush senior, cited in Marsden, 2015).

Since Bush senior’s pledge, the major imperialist powers have visited destruction and death on millions of people – overwhelmingly Muslims and people of colour – in wars in the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa. In the words of the International Committee of the Fourth International (2014), ‘[t]ime and again they have proven their indifference to human suffering.’ Shortly after 9/11 (September 11, 2001) George W. Bush junior declared the ‘war on terror.’ The purpose of this ‘war,’ as Chris Marsden (2015) argues, both in its international and domestic manifestations, is ‘to provide a political rationale for the re-division of the world between the major imperialist powers’. Military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and elsewhere, he goes on, have taken place to install puppet regimes in order to secure control of oil, gas and other geostrategic resources, as part of an attempt at global hegemony. In the course of these bloody conflicts, the ‘imperialist powers have rained down bombs on defenceless civilians, carried out torture and assassination, and committed war crimes. Entire countries have been ravaged’ (Marsden, 2015).

In the Iraq War (2003–2011) alone, according to a 2013 report by university researchers in the United States, Canada and Baghdad in cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, in stark contrast to Bush senior’s promise of peace, security, freedom and the rule of law, nearly half a million people are estimated to have died from war-related causes in Iraq since the US-led invasion in 2003 (Sheridan, 2013). According to lead author, Amy Hagopian, violence caused most of the deaths, but about a third were indirectly linked to the war, and these deaths have been left out of previous counts (cited in Sheridan, 2013).

Modern imperialism is unquestionably implicated in global Islamophobia, but its reach is boundless. All the imperialist powers, the International Committee of the Fourth International argue, including the US, the UK and Australia, are taking a full role in the ‘struggle for spheres of influence’ (International Committee of the Fourth International, 2014). ‘Every area of the globe’, it goes on, ‘is a source of bitter conflict: not only the former colonies and semi-colonies in the Middle East, Africa and Asia but also the Arctic, Antarctic and even outer space and cyberspace’ (International Committee of the Fourth International, 2014).

With respect to racism at home – the racialisation of minority and immigrant communities, Marsden states:

‘No one can seriously believe that such actions do not have a profound impact on domestic political life. In a globalised world economy, where populations have become more ethnically and nationally diverse, the indignation created by imperialism’s crimes knows no borders. This is especially the case within the minority and immigrant communities that have borne the brunt of attacks on workers’ living conditions, leaving

millions without work and faced with conditions of desperate poverty’ (Marsden, 2015).

The orchestrated removal of socialism from the political agenda, Marsden concludes, ‘has created conditions in which the most disoriented and desperate elements can be steered toward terrorism as a way of protesting the social, political and cultural oppression they face’ (Marsden, 2015). While the ‘war on terror’ goes on and on overseas and at home, austerity immiseration capitalism means that it ‘would be a fundamental political error to believe that the vast repressive apparatus being assembled is to be used against only one section of the population’, since everywhere, ‘the working class is being reduced to penury as jobs are destroyed, wages slashed, exploitation ramped up and vital social services destroyed’ (Marsden, 2015).

Five years before Bush senior’s promise of a ‘new world order’, Margaret Thatcher stated in 1986, ‘[p]opular capitalism is nothing less than a crusade to enfranchise the many in the economic life of the nation. We Conservatives are returning power to the people’ (Thatcher, 1986).

Some thirty years later, the International Labor Organization (ILO) compiled the Global Wage Report, 2014/15. As Patrick Martin argues, perhaps the most devastating revelation in the report is the following statement: ‘Overall, in the group of developed economies, real wage growth lagged behind labour productivity growth over the period 1999 to 2013.’ This means, Martin points out, that throughout this fourteen year period, the share of national income going to the working class declined, while the share of national income going to the tiny minority of capitalists steadily increased (Martin, 2014).

At the beginning of 2015, Oxfam estimated that on current trends, within a year 1% of the world’s population will own more wealth than the other 99%, with the share of the best-off increasing from 44% in 2009 to 48% in 2014, and the least well-off 80% owning just 5.5%, while the wealth of the richest 80 doubled in cash terms between those years (cited in Elliott, 2015). Such is the result of the financial crisis of 2007/2008 and the onset of austerity/immiseration capitalism! Moreover, according to Oxfam, a mere 80 people owned the same amount of wealth as more than 3.5 billion people (cited in Elliott, 2015), thus giving credence, as Larry Elliott (2015) reminds us, to Thomas Picketty’s (2014) warning of a drift back to the levels of wealth concentration on the nineteenth century.

This growth of inequality is, of course, directly related to the ruling class’s response to 2007/8 and the insolvency of major banks which was to pump some \$12 trillion dollars into the financial markets via bank bailouts, near-zero interest rates, and central bank money-printing (known as quantitative easing) (Damon, 2015). As Andre Damon puts it:

‘This virtually free cash was used to drive up the world’s stock markets and corporate profits to record highs. The same governments and central

banks pursued brutal austerity policies against the working class, driving tens of millions into poverty' (Damon, 2015).

As Damon goes on, emblematic of the parasitism of global capital, 'the financial and insurance sector minted more billionaires than any other industry.'<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, as Sandra Polaski, ILO's Deputy Director-General for Policy, explains, '[w]age growth has slowed to almost zero for the developed economies as a group in the last two years, with actual declines in wages in some' (cited in Martin, 2014). To take the UK as a prime example, as Gerry Gold (2014) argues, 'the austerity we've seen so far [is] only the warm-up for the main event':

'The scale of future cuts proposed by the Tories is so vast and almost unimaginable that it's impossible to envisage any government carrying them through without provoking massive social and civil unrest. In effect, the ConDems ... [in December, 2014] declared all-out war on the people. Left unstated by chancellor George Osborne, the political choices are as stark as a further 60% reduction in the state's budget the chancellor set out in his autumn statement. Osborne was short on detail. No wonder. The Tories are talking about taking government spending back to the levels last seen in the 1930s, when a global slump prefigured a second world war' (Gold, 2014).

As Gold (2014) continues, austerity is patently self-destructive – 'of people's lives and livelihoods, jobs and services. But it's all capitalism can come up with'. It is overwhelmingly the racialized fractions of the working classes of the UK, the US and Australia whose resulting poverty is greatest.

Martin notes that currently nearly 200 million workers are unemployed worldwide, and that another 400 million will enter the job market looking for work in the next decade. How, he asks, 'will capitalism provide 600 million new jobs under conditions of worldwide economic stagnation? What wages will be offered? What will be the working conditions? What will be the level of exploitation?' (Martin, 2014).

Without doubt, unless capitalism and imperialism are challenged, the racialized workers and communities who bear the greatest brunt in the present will also bear the maximum burden in the future. Fearful of the response from workers worldwide, the 'ruling classes of the world are preparing accordingly, heaping up weapons, building armies of police, intensifying their attacks on democratic rights and spying on the entire population of the world' (Martin, 2014). The 'war on terror' provides part to the justification for this.

All the world conflicts, the International Committee of the Fourth International (2014) concludes, breed the tensions that lead to 'ethnic divisions' and communal fighting. The Committee refers to the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system between the development of a global capitalist economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, in which the private ownership of the

means of production is rooted. Capitalism is not capable of organising the world economy rationally:

‘The collision of imperialist and national state interests expresses the impossibility, under capitalism, of organising a globally-integrated economy on a rational foundation and thus ensuring the harmonious development of the productive forces. However, the same contradictions driving imperialism to the brink provide the objective impulse for social revolution. The globalisation of production has led to a massive growth of the working class. Only this social force, which owes no allegiance to any nation, is capable of putting an end to the profit system, which is the root cause of war’ (International Committee of the Fourth International, 2014).

Commenting on calls from sections of the ruling class, such as the Coalition for Inclusive Capitalism, to be wary of escalating inequalities, Damon (2015) concludes: ‘warnings about the growth of inequality are rooted in fears within the financial aristocracy that the ever more obvious and repulsive gap between the super-rich and everyone else will have revolutionary consequences.’

## **Twenty-First Century Socialism in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

### **People Power**

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela poses a serious challenge to capitalism, imperialism and racism. In that country, a conception of power, diametrically opposed to capitalist and imperialist power, has been formulated and has taken root. In 2010, stressing the prime importance of education, the late President Hugo Chávez identified it as a key form of power in the ongoing Bolivarian Revolution:

‘When we talk about power, what are we talking about . . . The first power that we all have is knowledge. So we’ve made efforts first in education, against illiteracy, for the development of thinking, studying, analysis. In a way, that has never happened before. Today, Venezuela is a giant school, it’s all a school. From children of one year old until old age, all of us are studying and learning. And then political power, the capacity to make decisions, the community councils, communes, the people’s power, the popular assemblies. And then there is the economic power. Transferring economic power to the people, the wealth of the people distributed throughout the nation’ (cited in Sheehan, 2010).

Of these three forms of power in contemporary Venezuela, the first – knowledge takes the forms of the revolutionary knowledge and the self-education of the people; of mass intellectuality and empowerment in the public sphere as well as liberatory processes in educational institutions, both formal and alternative. A

specific feature of education in the Bolivarian context is the way in which it permeates the whole society, and is not confined to institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The second form of power – political power – can best be described, following George Cicariello-Maher, as a dialectical relationship between *el pueblo* (the people) and the president, both Chávez and incumbent president Nicolás Maduro, whereby *el pueblo* both inform the president and are informed by him through the revolutionary study and practice of both, and for which the synthesis is twenty-first century socialism and anti-(US) imperialism (see Cicariello-Maher, 2013).

Like the power of knowledge and the consolidation of political power in the hands of the people, the transfer of economic power to the people in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is about the transition from capitalism to socialism, in part via the creation of nexuses of power parallel to the state, entailing extensive economic power to the people, a revolutionary project that is profoundly educational and educative too. All these processes are, of course, counter-hegemonic to the dominant global neoliberal and imperialist consensus. Socialist revolutions, as *ongoing* processes, are by their very nature educational in that for the revolution to move forward, there is a continuous need for a sustained intellectual critique of capitalism, an understanding of the dangers inherent in twentieth century socialism and Stalinism,<sup>4</sup> and the need to learn afresh as the revolution progresses.

### **The Politics and Economics of the Bolivarian Revolution**

The background to the Bolivarian Revolution can be traced back to the 1990s, when as a condition for their obtaining international loans; and even by threats (Victor, 2009), a number of policies, based squarely on neoliberal capitalist principles and formulated in the U.S, were foisted on governments in Latin America and the Caribbean. The ‘Washington Consensus,’<sup>5</sup> as it became known, was most thoroughly applied in Venezuela. In 1998, Maria Paez Victor describes how this affected the country: ‘This oil-rich country’s economy was in ruins, schools and hospitals were almost derelict, and almost 80 per cent of the population was impoverished’ (Victor, 2009). In that year, Chávez won the presidential elections in Venezuela by a landslide.

Victor concisely summarizes Chávez’s impact on the racist oligarchy on the one hand, and on the people on the other:

‘Immediately the elites and middle classes opposed him as an upstart, an Indian who does not know his place, a Black who is a disgrace to the position. Hugo Chávez established a new Constitution that re-set the rules of a government that had been putty in the hands of the elites. Ratified in overwhelming numbers, the Constitution gave indigenous peoples, for the first time, the constitutional right to their language, religion, culture and lands. It established Human Rights, civil and social, like the right to food, a clean environment, education, jobs, and health care, binding the government to provide them. It declared the country a participatory democracy with direct input of people into political decision making

through their communal councils and it asserted government control of oil revenues: Oil belongs to the people' (Victor, 2009).

Chávez created a massive social democratic infrastructure, consisting in part of a large number of *misiones*, anti-poverty and social welfare programs, which continue under President Nicolás Maduro (see, for example, Dominguez, 2013; see also Cole, 2014a). These resulted in a reduction of the poverty rate from just over 50% in 1998 to just over 25% now, with extreme poverty down from just over 20% to just over 7% now. The national budget for 2014 allocated 62% of revenue towards social investment, compared to 'social spending' in the pre-Chávez governments which never exceeded 36% of the budget (The Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in the UK and Ireland, 2013). In his Annual Address in January, 2015, Maduro announced wage and pension rises of 15%; increased grants for students; 400,000 new homes for the poor; gas prices to remain at 5 US cents a gallon for now; and prices of essentials like food and medicine to remain low.

If the Bolivarian Revolution began with Chávez, twenty-first century socialism in the making did not. To exemplify this point, Ciccariello-Maher makes a further distinction between *el proceso* (the *ongoing* process) and the president, the former of which he describes as 'the deepening, radicalization, and autonomy of the revolutionary movements that constitute the "base" of the Bolivarian Revolution', that involved individual and collective action by revolutionaries which predated Chávez by several decades (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 6). He emphasizes that almost everyone he interviewed in his book, *We Created Chávez: A People's History of the Venezuelan Revolution*, as well as all those interviewed in the path breaking book *Venezuela Speaks!* (Martinez et al., 2010), spontaneously made this distinction (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 274). As one organizer told him, 'Chávez didn't create the movements, *we created him*' (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013, 7). Dario Azzellini describes the dual process at work in the revolution as follows:

'The particular character of what Hugo Chávez called the Bolivarian process lies in the understanding that social transformation can be constructed from two directions, 'from above' and 'from below'. Bolivarianism . . . includes among its participants both traditional organizations and new autonomous groups; it encompasses both state-centric and anti-systemic currents. The process thus differs from traditional Leninist or social democratic approaches, both of which see the state as the central agent of change; it differs as well from movement-based approaches that conceive of no role whatsoever for the state in a process of revolutionary change' (Azzellini, 2013).

Chávez's charisma and intellectual inspiration was a key element in the overall ethos guiding the Bolivarian educational project. It is important to stress at this stage that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela remains a capitalist society. In 2011, for example, the poorest fifth's share of personal income was less than 6%,

while the share of the wealthiest fifth was almost 45% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011: 8). Responding to recent attempts to oust the elected Maduro government, the Marxist Tendency of the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) or United Socialist Party of Venezuela, stated in February, 2015 that ‘the historical experience of Latin America is that if the power of the bourgeoisie is not broken, they will use it to destroy the revolution’ (Marxist Tendency of the PSUV, 2015). They therefore stressed the need for a ‘revolutionary offensive and to complete the socialist revolution in Venezuela’:

- Nationalisation, without compensation, of all the properties of those who have been involved in acts of economic and/or political sabotage.
- Trial and punishment all those involved in the Carmonazo<sup>6</sup> and other attempts to carry out coups and sabotage since then.
- Nationalise the main levers of the economy: the large landed estates, the national and transnational monopolies and all the private banks. With state property under the democratic control of the working class and the peasantry, a planned economy can be established which put an end to shortages of goods and inflation.
- Workers’ control at all levels in the state-owned enterprises, institutions and other entities of the state to fight bureaucratism and corruption.
- Consolidate workers’, peasants’ and community militias and further expand revolutionary agitation and organization within the armed forces by giving the soldiers the right to elect their commanding officers, to forestall any military coup plots (Marxist Tendency of the PSUV, 2015).

The full socialist economic transformation, envisaged by both Chávez and Maduro has manifestly yet to take place. Having said that, it is also crucial to point out that twenty-first century socialism *in the making* is apparent throughout the society, in the communal councils, communes and workplaces, and crucially in the minds and actions of the people in the barrios (large communities attached to major cities where the poor live) (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013; see also Cole, 2014a). It is for this reason that there have been ongoing attempts for regime change, starting with the Carmonazo in 2002, and most recently exhibited by the internal opposition movement, self-named *La Salida* (the exit) in 2014–2015, and Obama’s declaration in 2015 of Venezuela as a threat to US National Security. As Diosdado Cabello, President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, put it, such declarations have ‘been used by U.S imperialists every time they want to attack a country’ (cited in *Morning Star*, 2015).

### **Communal Councils**

Central to the Bolivarian Revolution are communal councils, communes and workplace democracy. As Hugo Chávez stated:

‘We have to go beyond the local. We have to begin creating . . . a kind of confederation, local, regional and national, of communal councils. We

have to head towards the creation of a communal state. And the old bourgeois state, which is still alive and kicking – this we have to progressively dismantle, at the same time as we build up the communal state, the socialist state, the Bolivarian state, a state that is capable of carrying through a revolution’ (Chávez, cited in Socialist Outlook Editorial, 2007).

The communal councils, which discuss and decide on local spending and development plans, are key in the Bolivarian process. As Azzellini explains, communal councils began forming, in different parts of Venezuela on their own in 2005 as an initiative ‘from below,’ as rank-and-file organizations promoted forms of local self-administration called ‘local government’ or ‘communitarian governments’ (Azzellini, 2013). Following Chávez’s landslide victory in the 2006 elections, and as the revolution intensified, ‘official’ communal councils were created, consisting of small self-governing units throughout the country that ‘allow the organized people to directly manage public policy and projects oriented toward responding to the needs and aspirations of communities in the construction of a society of equity and social justice’ (Article 2 of the 2006 Law on Communal Councils, cited in Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 244).

In urban areas, they encompass 150–400 families; in rural zones, a minimum of 20; and in indigenous zones, at least 10 families. The councils build up a non-representative structure of direct participation that exists parallel to the elected representative bodies of constituted power. They are financed directly by national state institutions (Azzellini, 2013). Within a year 18,320 councils had been established (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013: 244) and in 2013, there were approximately 44,000 (Azzellini, 2013). Their objective is to submit the bureaucracy to the will of the people through direct participation at the local level. Committee members are elected by the community for two-year revocable terms and are unpaid. Ciccariello-Maher (2013: 245–246) points out, having noted that every council elects a five-person committee to oversee other levels of government at municipal, regional, and national level, that this is a powerful weapon against corrupt state and local bureaucracies that many hope they will eventually replace. According to the *National Plan for Economic and Social Development 2007–2013*, ‘Since sovereignty resides absolutely in the people, the people can itself direct the state, without needing to delegate its sovereignty as it does in indirect or representative democracy’ (cited in Azzellini, 2013). The government also created the Federal Council of the Government (CFG), which is a link between the government and the councils, and where the two can decide budget allocation together. This empowerment of ordinary Venezuelans by direct participation constitutes a deep educational experience that is in total contrast to voting in a narrow choice of pro-capitalist politicians, in part based on their personality, every five years or so (traditional representative democracy). In participatory democracy people get to plan for the needs of the people as a whole. In traditional representative democracies, on the other hand, ideological processes of interpellation attempt, largely successfully, to

convince the populace that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism, a deliberately mystified set of anti-democratic institutions, which benefit the rich at the expense of the poor. Schools and universities in the capitalist heartlands are becoming more and more central organs in this ideological onslaught. In communal councils people are empowered. In representative neoliberal democracies, they are disempowered.

### **Communes**

At a higher level of self-government, socialist communes are being created. These are formed by combining various communal councils in a specific territory. The councils themselves decide about the geography of these communes. The communes are able to develop medium- and long-term projects of greater impact than the communal councils, while decisions continue to be made in the assemblies of the communal councils. Communes can, in turn, form communal cities, again with administration and planning from below if the entire territory is organized in communal councils and communes.

### **Workplace Democracy**

The most successful attempt at the democratization of ownership and control of the means of production are the Enterprises of Communal Social Property (EPSC), which consist of local production units and community services enterprises. The EPSCs are collective property of the communities, who decide on the organizational structures, the workers employed, and the eventual use of profits. Government enterprises and institutions have promoted the communal enterprises since 2009, and since 2013 several thousand EPSCs have been formed (Azzellini, 2013).

In June 2013, labour movement activists from all over Venezuela met for the country's first 'workers' congress' to discuss workplace democracy and the construction of socialism. The aim of the meeting was to 'promote, strengthen and consolidate the self-organisation of the working class, based on an analysis of its labour and an evaluation of its struggles, to allow for the generation of its unity around a common plan of struggle' (Robertson, 2013). As Ewan Robertson (2013) explains, as part of resistance to factory closures and management lockouts by bosses opposed to Chávez, dozens of workplaces came under whole or part worker management in the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, the workers' control movement, which had the support of Chávez, had tended to stagnate because of opposition from management bureaucrats and reformist politicians within the Bolivarian process.

The congress, the result of a year of meetings between workers in different parts of the country, took up the slogan of the Venezuelan radical Left, 'Neither capitalists nor bureaucrats, all power to the working class.' The main themes of the congress were 'the self organisation of the working class'; 'the class struggle and the state; legality and legitimacy'; 'workers' councils, worker control and

management for the transformation of the capitalist economy’; and the ‘formation and socialisation of knowledge.’ The main goal of the congress was to draft a final declaration on the national political situation and on the labor movement, and to draw up a manifesto and plan of struggle. Workers taking direct control of their own lives by composing a revolutionary programme, analysing Venezuelan politics from the viewpoint of labour rather than capital, making their own judgements instead of being on the receiving end of decisions made on high by and for the ruling class, provide a complete contrast to the UK, the US, Australia and other neoliberal democracies.

### **Interculturalism and Intraculturalism in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

Before looking at intercultural and intracultural practices in Venezuela – processes of empowerment that are preferred to multiculturalism – it is first necessary to point out a basic fact about ‘race’ and class in Venezuela.<sup>7</sup> Second, it is important to make a distinction between multiculturalism and multicultural societies. With respect to the former, if real socialist transformation in Venezuela has not yet taken, nor has the eradication of racism. Arlene Eisen (2014a) has noted ‘the near total correlation between class and race in Venezuela’. She states:

‘That is, nearly all the wealthy and bourgeois people are phenotypically European, while nearly all those in poverty who live in the countryside or shacks on the sides of hills in the city are Black and Brown. Demonization, animalization and criminalization of people of African and Indigenous descent are themes both deeply embedded and flagrantly visible in the culture and institutions of Venezuelan society. White supremacy endures in Venezuela often resembling the United States and other settler colonial countries founded on conquest and slavery’ (Eisen, 2014a).<sup>8</sup>

As far as multiculturalism and multicultural societies are concerned, it needs to be stressed that multiculturalism is an essentially liberal concept. I am using ‘liberal’ in the sense of ‘middle of the road politics’, not in the way it tends to be used in everyday discourse in the US, where it takes on a more politically Left of centre connotation. Multiculturalism has tended to be about superficial aspects of cultures, which are seen as fixed and unchanging, epitomised by the 3 Ss in the UK: ‘saris, samosas and steel drums’, or in Australia, ‘spaghetti and polka’. While the Left view multiculturalism as impeding social progress and social transformation, conservative politicians view it as a threat to the kind of monocultural societies<sup>9</sup> to which they aspire. While twenty-first century socialists tend to reject the ideology of multiculturalism, they are, of course, firm advocates of multicultural societies, in the sense of societies with people from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds living together with totally equal rights.

Interculturalism (pertaining to two or more cultures) and intraculturalism (variations within one culture) are key concepts in Latin American politics. Unlike the liberal concept of multiculturalism, both are about the forging of decolonialisation. Decolonisation is viewed as an umbrella term, and is defined as:

‘putting an end to ethnic borders that influence opportunities in the area of education, work, politics and economic security, where no one is privileged on the basis of race, ethnicity and or language. It also signifies to avoid [sic] favouring conceptualisations of the Western world as if they are universal, yet valuing that knowledges, skills and technologies of the indigenous civilisations’ (Congreso Nacional de Educación, 2006, cited in Lopes Cardoza, 2013: 26).

Benjamin Martínez is critical of ‘multiculturalism’ and argues that ‘interculturalism’ ‘is not simply the recognition of others’ but ‘the respect for knowledge, culture, and religion that is fundamental in building a truly democratic society. It is not enough to know that we are different, we must also acknowledge and change the inequalities that exist’ (cited in Fischer-Hoffman, 2014). Interculturalism and intraculturalism are linked to plurilingualism and unity in diversity, to cohesion between people and between humans and the environment; and to critical social awareness; and social justice more generally.<sup>10</sup>

Since the first presidency of Chávez in 1999, while significant obstacles and problems remain, major strides have been made to enhance the rights of Venezuela’s indigenous and Afro-descendant communities (see Martínez et al., 2010: 193–219).

As Chávez himself put it:

‘We’ve raised the flag of socialism, the flag of anti-imperialism, the flag of the black, the white and the Indian . . . I love Africa. I’ve said to the Venezuelans that until we recognise ourselves in Africa, we will not find our way . . . We have started a hard battle to bring equality to the African descendants, the whites and the indigenous people. In our constitution it shows that we’re a multicultural, multiracial nation’ (Chávez, 2008, cited in Campbell, 2008: 58).

## **Indigenous Peoples**

In September, 2014, the Venezuelan chapter of the Indigenous Parliament of America completed final details of a report on the levels of inclusion of original peoples in Venezuela communities. Indigenous peoples were excluded for more than 500 years following the arrival of the colonizers. The report was presented at the World Summit on Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations held in September in New York City.

The document systematized all the policies fostered by Chávez since 1999. Indigenous leader César Sanguinetti revealed the racist nature of the 1961 Constitution of Venezuela that had only one chapter on indigenous peoples and gave

the State gradual responsibility for incorporating indigenous peoples into ‘civilization’ (cited in Telesur, 2014). Now, however, reflected in the Constitution of 1999, each original people ‘has its own cosmovision and its own culture.’ Sanguinetti also stated that ‘the revolutionary process has recognized the ancestral rights of the autochthonous communities and promoted their full inclusion.’

During the fifteen years of the Bolivarian Revolution, he concluded, actions taken to protect indigenous people ‘are not only included in the constitutional juridical framework, but have also been consolidated through the application of effective policies’, an example of which is a Ministry with jurisdiction over the affairs of indigenous communities and peoples, one that is ‘unique in Latin America’ (cited in Telesur, 2014).

*Mision Guaicaipuro* seeks to restore territorial titles and human rights to the numerous autochthonous settlements in the country, exists to consolidate the Bolivarian Republic as multi-ethnic and intercultural. Its objectives are to:

- Demarcate and title the habitat and lands of indigenous peoples and communities.
- Promote the harmonious and sustainable development of indigenous peoples, within a vision that respects their different ways of conceiving that development.
- Promote the integral development of indigenous peoples to ensure the effective enjoyment of their social rights (health, education, housing, water and sanitation), cultural, economic and political rights in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
- Promote, develop and implement policies to settle the historical debt to organized indigenous communities, and generate the greatest amount of happiness.

*Mision Guaicaipuro* provides comprehensive health care and implements organizational tools for project ideas, and for the demarcation of indigenous lands and the formation of community councils to promote socialism (Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, undated).

With respect to language, as Jerry Harris points out:

‘Article 9 stipulates that while Spanish is Venezuela’s primary language, “indigenous languages are also for official use for indigenous peoples and must be respected throughout the Republic’s territory for being part of the nation’s and humanity’s patrimonial culture.” The 1999 constitution also affirms that “exploitation by the state of natural resources will be subject to prior consultation with the native communities,” that “indigenous peoples have the right to an education system of an intercultural and bilingual nature,” that indigenous people have the right to control ancestral knowledge over “native genetic resources” and biodiversity, and that three indigenous representatives are ensured seats in the country’s National Assembly (these were elected by delegates of the National Council of Venezuelan Indians in July 1999)’ (Harris, 2007).

In October, 2014, to celebrate Indigenous Resistance Day, Maduro established a presidential council for indigenous peoples, formed as a result of elections held in

over 2000 indigenous communities after the idea was discussed in over 1500 countrywide assemblies. Delia Gonzalez, a spokesperson for the Wayúu community of Zulia state, noted that the debates leading up to the council's creation were conducted with respect, tolerance and spirituality, with the aim of enabling diverse indigenous peoples to make significant contributions to the transition towards socialism (cited in Dutka, 2014).

Maduro also handed over collective land titles to 14 original communities. From 2011 to 2013 the Committee for the Demarcation of Land and Habitat, of the indigenous ministry signed 40 property titles for collective lands, including over 1.8 million hectares of land (Dutka, 2014). In addition, he lowered the threshold age for indigenous pensions to age 50, compared nationally to women over 55 and men over 60 who live in family homes maintained by minimum wage workers (Dutka, 2014).

Maduro further announced the creation of an institute to protect the country's 44 native languages. Cognizant of the loss of some indigenous languages, Maduro proclaimed: 'We should immediately found and motivate a team systematically [that can] permanently, scientifically, register, rescue and revive all indigenous languages that exist in Venezuelan territory' (cited in Dutka, 2014). Finally, Maduro announced over £4 and a half million investment to address extreme poverty in nearly 400 indigenous communities, and also promised 5000 new homes of indigenous peoples to be built in 2015 via Mision Vivienda (Dutka, 2014).

Demonstrating its commitment to indigenous Venezuelans, as at the beginning of 2015, the Ministry of People's Power for Indigenous Peoples had built over 3,000 homes, granted over 50 common ownership land deeds, financed nearly 1500 socio-productive projects, given grants to 500 indigenous peoples to study through an agreement with Cuba, had completed over 250 public work projects. Overall, over half a million indigenous people had benefited (Radio Nacional de Venezuela/Prensa-Embaiada venezolana en EE UU, 2015). In addition, the Ministry has opened public spaces for debate and people's participation, including the Indo-American Youth Congress; the Congress for Socialism and the Eradication of Poverty; the Indigenous Peoples Peace Conference; the Presidential Council on People's Government of Indigenous Peoples and Communities; and Indigenous Mercosur – an offshoot of Mercosur (Common Market of the South). Indigenous peoples have also enjoyed new opportunities in sports and culture, as with, for example, the National Indigenous Games, a sports event (Radio Nacional de Venezuela/Prensa-Embaiada venezolana en EE UU, 2015).

This is not to say that all is well with respect to indigenous peoples in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. As Lusbi Portillo, coordinator of an indigenous rights NGO, makes clear, while the government has repeatedly handed over titles, this has not always resulted in actual access and control of the land. He also expressed concern about the quality of land handed over, 98 percent of which is in the mountains 'and the big growers do not want it anyways' (cited in Fischer-Hoffman, 2014). Portillo is referring to the ongoing battles between indigenous

people and the wealthy who claim ownership of large amounts of land. In 2008, as Portillo points out, Chávez stated ‘between the large estate owners and the Indians, this government is with the Indians’ but despite an official policy of siding ‘with the Indians’, Portillo goes on, one of the main contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples is for acknowledged rights to land that has the capability of producing food and providing for habitat (cited in Fischer-Hoffman, 2014). Moreover, as Cory Fischer-Hoffman (2014) explains, conflict between ‘land owners’ and indigenous peoples has resulted in murders of the latter. Fischer-Hoffman (2014) also points out that most of the land granted to indigenous people has been granted to the Yukpa, while there are over 30 other indigenous nations in Venezuela, and some, like the Guajiro (also known as Wayúu), remain landless.

As Portillo explains, the Yukpa have used land occupations as a means of asserting their rights to the land, which has forced the government to the negotiating table, and has resulted in the transferring of titles specifically to Yukpa communities (cited in Fischer-Hoffman, 2014). Portillo warned that, despite the fact that Chávez halted coal mining in indigenous territory as long ago as 2008, a mining company has been pushing to reopen the two mines that Chavez had shut down (cited in Fischer-Hoffman, 2014). Finally, there are ongoing struggles against military bases on indigenous territory.

Despite all this, compared to the plight of indigenous Americans (see Cole, 2016, chapter 2) and indigenous Australians (see Cole, 2016, chapter 3), Venezuela has much for these countries to emulate.

### **Afro-Venezuelan and Afro-Descendant Peoples**

In 2005, Hugo Chávez declared 10 May as Día de la Afrovenezolanidad (Afro-Venezuelan Day), the anniversary of the insurrection of enslaved people led by Jose Leonardo Chirino in 1795. At a conference in Caracas to celebrate the day in 2014, Nirva Camacho, a spokesperson for the National Afro-Venezuelan Front, reiterated a theme expounded by many of the speakers – the racism and violence of the Venezuelan right – the Venezuelan allies of the United States whose aim, she argued, is to recolonize Venezuela. She then read from a manifesto that affirmed the Front’s commitment to the struggle against colonialism, capitalism and imperialism, and in full support of President Maduro’s executive actions and the Bolivarian process (Eisen, 2014b). Maduro noted that ‘today’s fascist ideas that attack society and attempt to impose a racist model of society are the same that have always denied the liberation of the peoples.’ He argued that the reasoning of the Venezuelan right today is the same as those who opposed the liberation of enslaved people (Eisen, 2014b).

Camacho went on to call for a program of action:

‘Considering that the AfroVenezuelan and AfroDescendant population in general still confronts the lashes of racism and racial discrimination,

which are incompatible with socialism and the revolution, we propose that together the state and social organizations undertake to:

1. Incorporate racism as an element of analysis in the different forums dedicated to the construction of peace, since as an ideology it is present in part of Venezuelan society, especially in the ultra right's close relation to fascism.
2. Revise communication policies in public and private media to eliminate racist bias, which would contribute to respect for our ethnic diversity...
3. Apply the organic Law against Racial Discrimination<sup>11</sup> to persons and/or groups who incite hatred and violence through racist demonstrations, like those expressed in the terrorism that recently has plagued Venezuelan society.
4. Design and execute a plan to identify and articulate the variable of Afrodescendant, considered in the Organic Law on Education<sup>12</sup> as a necessary step towards the eradication of racial discrimination in the Venezuelan educational system in order to achieve equality for future generations.
5. Encourage a cross-section of ethnic perspectives as state policy, in all public and private institutions that give attention to the people.
6. Direct all levels of government and popular power from the Presidency of the Republic to those who administer government in the streets inside AfroVenezuelan communities, at regional, municipal and grassroots levels to evaluate and respond to specific needs (housing, health, education and roads) which historically are a product of structural racism.
7. Implement an ambitious plan of constructing Camps for Peace and Life in AfroVenezuelan communities, especially in the communities where narcotraffickers have manipulated our youth' (cited in Eisen, 2014b).

These obstacles to indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan and Afro-Descendant rights underline the crucial need for the ongoing struggle to decolonize. As Fischer-Hoffman concludes, the 'framework of decolonizing is a growing theme throughout the Americas' (Fischer-Hoffman, 2014).<sup>13</sup>

In his closing speech to the conference, approving the principles of the manifesto, Maduro enthusiastically praised the various Venezuelan insurrections led by enslaved people as decisive turning points in Venezuela's anti-colonial, anti-imperial struggles. He declared the whole nation a 'cumbe of equality, peace and love' and went on to express admiration for cultures of resistance and happiness bred in the struggles of Afrodescendants in the Caribbean, Latin America and North America. He concluded that the government would invest an extra 550 million bolivars to strengthen systems of popular culture, especially in Afro and Indigenous communities (Eisen, 2014b).

### **Undocumented Workers**

As Tamara Pearson (2014) has argued, while 'most first world and imperialist countries criminalise refugees and undocumented migrants, scapegoating them,

promoting racism, and mistreating them, Venezuela welcomes migrants; and provides them with the same rights as Venezuelan citizens'. While there are some problems because of bureaucracy and racism, the Chávez and Maduro governments, she goes on, have never blamed the millions of migrants on Venezuelan soil for any of the problems the country faces. On the contrary, 'migrants – documented or not – are welcomed and receive health care, education, and other benefits' (Pearson, 2014).

According to Article 13 of the Migration Law of 2003, enacted by the Chávez government, migrants 'have the same rights as nationals without any limitations' (Ley De Migración Y Extranjería, 2003, cited in Pearson, 2014). Furthermore, in February of the following year, Chávez issued Presidential Decree 2,823, which instigated a national campaign to pay what he referred to as 'Venezuela's historical debt to migrants' (cited in Pearson, 2014). Foreigners residing in Venezuela without documents could legalize their stay and become 'indefinite residents.' Police in Venezuela are obliged to help children without documents to get identification (Pearson, 2014).

Ruben Dario, a general director at the National Experimental University for Security (UNES), a university for police officers that focuses on human rights, stated that Venezuela's migration policy 'is distinguished for being tolerant, without any kind of discrimination, solidarious, with complete respect for all migrant human rights, and for not criminalising migration' (cited in Pearson, 2014).

Pearson (2014) points out that Venezuela has been taking concrete, though slow and small steps, towards a united Latin America based on cooperation between regions, and where borders either do not exist, or are less prohibitive, and where no one is 'illegal'. She concludes:

'Venezuela [is] setting an example for first world countries: showing that humane treatment of all migrants, documented or not, is easy and possible. Further, that the most important thing is to not force migration: to remove borders, to have cooperative trade policies (rather than the US's trade policies which impoverish people in Mexico, Haiti, and so on), and to not support the invasion and destruction of other countries, such as Iraq, thereby creating the refugees that countries like Australia and the US refuse to look after' (Pearson, 2014).

Pearson could have added the UK to her reference to Australia and the US as countries to whom the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is providing an example of compassion and humanity to all categories of migrants. Indeed Venezuela's overall policy of interculturalism and intraculturalism, tied to decolonization, and of course to twenty-first century socialism in the making, serves as an exemplar to the treatment of racialized minority groups *per se* worldwide.

The preceding analysis is not meant to idealise Venezuela as a multicultural paradise. Indeed as we have seen, racism still exerts a significant blemish on the society. What makes the country exceptional with respect to the combating of racism, and what totally distinguishes it from the UK, the US and Australia is that

ever since the election of Chávez nearly twenty years ago, and continuing under Maduro, the state apparatuses are consciously attempting to promote both the physical and mental welfare of racialised groups.

## **Conclusion**

Some twenty-five years after George Bush senior promised a ‘new world order’ of peace, security and freedom; and thirty years following Margaret Thatcher’s pledge of ‘power to the people’ and her insistence that popular capitalism is a crusade of enfranchisement of the many, the United States, with the UK, Australia and others as partners, is engaged in a permanent ‘war on terror’, while neoliberal capitalist governments throughout most of the world are increasingly encroaching on human rights, and preparing to crank up measures to prolong austerity. At the same time, the political and communications ISAs interpellate the populace that the ‘war on terror’ is the only way to deal with the ‘terrorist threat’, and that ‘we are all in it together’ as far as austerity is concerned, to which ‘there is no alternative’.

In the Anglophone world, peoples at the receiving end of racism encompass a vast plethora of different constituencies including indigenous peoples in the US and Australia, people from the UK’s ex-colonies in the UK, as well as older non-colour-coded communities such as the Irish community, also racialised in Australia, and the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, and newer groups of people such as Eastern Europeans. In the US, in addition to African Americans, Latina/o Americans are racialised. In both the US and Australia, there is a long history of racism directed against the Chinese and Japanese, while the racialisation of asylum-seekers is common to both the UK and Australia. As we have seen in this paper, disparities in wealth are increasing, but it is the above mentioned racialised groups that bear the brunt of poverty and unemployment.

Antisemitism is a serious problem in the UK and Australia, and Islamophobia is rampant in all three countries. Both antisemitism and Islamophobia are set to escalate, as the ‘war on terror’ at home and abroad spawns further reaction from dispossessed Islamists who utterly mistakenly view Jewish people worldwide rather than Zionism as a major threat to Muslim people in the Israeli occupied territories.

From the perspective of human survival, let alone morality, a replacement for imperialism, neoliberalism, capitalism and racism is self-evidently imperative. I have given no more than a brief glimpse of different ways of running a society in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (for a more detailed analysis, see Cole, 2014a).<sup>14</sup> The Bolivarian Republic is commended not as a ‘model society’, nor as a blueprint, but merely to demonstrate that there are alternatives to the nightmares of imperialism and permanent war, to the horrors of austerity/immiseration capitalism, and to a dystopian world of institutional racism and ongoing racialization, to processes by which the rich get richer and richer and the poor get poorer and poorer.

## NOTES

1. The first part of this paper draws on the Conclusion to Cole, 2016.
2. Damon, 2015.
3. See Cole, 2014a: 79–86 for an analysis; see also Cole, 2014b for an examination of alternative education in Venezuela.
4. Stalinism refers to political systems that have the characteristics of the Soviet Union from 1928 when Joseph Stalin became leader (his leadership lasted until 1953). The term refers to a repressive and oppressive form of government by dictatorship, which includes the purging by exile or death of opponents, mass use of propaganda, and the creation of a personality cult around the leader.
5. The Washington Consensus was a set of ten policies formulated in 1989 by the US Government and international capitalist institutions based in Washington DC, and encompassing the following:
  - Fiscal discipline – strict criteria for limiting budget deficits
  - Public expenditure priorities – moving them away from subsidies and administration towards previously neglected fields with high economic returns
  - Tax reform – broadening the tax base and cutting marginal tax rates
  - Financial liberalization – interest rates should ideally be market-determined
  - Exchange rates – should be managed to induce rapid growth in non-traditional exports
  - Trade liberalization
  - Increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) - by reducing barriers
  - Privatization – state enterprises should be privatized
  - Deregulation – abolition of regulations that impede the entry of new firms or restrict competition (except in the areas of safety, environment and finance)
  - Secure intellectual property rights (IPR) – without excessive costs and available to the informal sector
  - Reduced role for the state (World Health Organization, 2014).
6. El Carmonazo or the Carmona decree was a document drawn up in April 2002 the day following the Venezuelan coup that unsuccessfully attempted to oust Hugo Chávez.
7. It should go without saying that twenty-first century socialism should encompass all equality issues. While my focus here is racism, elsewhere (e.g. Cole, ed., 2012) issues of gender, sexuality, disability and social class are considered in addition to 'race.' Other equality issues that need to be central are those related to 'age' and freedom of worship.
8. Animalization was directed at Chávez, proud of his African and indigenous roots ('Miko Mandante' – 'Ape Commander' a mocking of the affectionate address of the working class 'Mi Comandante') and classist as far as incumbent President Nicolas Maduro, proud of his working class roots, is concerned ('Maduro/burro' – 'Maduro/donkey') (Eisen, 2014a). Eisen is employing 'white supremacy' in its Critical Race Theory (CRT) usage. For a critique, see the Introduction of Cole, 2016.
9. I am using 'monocultural societies' not in the sense of societies that consist of one 'ethnic group', but in the sense of societies that *ascribe to*, as in the case of the aims of the British school curriculum, 'British values,' the American dream, or in the imperatives of Pauline Hanson, abide by Australian culture, laws and way of life (Cole, 2016).
10. See Mieke Lopes Cardoza's interesting discussion of Bolivia, in particular, the 2006 *Bolivian Proyecto de Ley* (Lopes Cardoza, 2013: 25) for similar developments in that country. One practical educational implication is that coupling interculturalism with

intraculturalism and plurilingualism means that students learn in the native language local to their area as well as Spanish (Lopes Cardoza, 2013: 26).

11. This was passed in May, 2011.

12. The objective of the 2009 law is ‘to guarantee our people a free, accessible, liberatory, and secular education that definitively guarantees teacher stability and autonomy.’ To accomplish this, the Law redefines the structure of the education system and its constituent parts. Specifically, Article 20 emphasizes the community role in education, including parents, teachers, administrative workers, laborers, and community organizations in the definition of the educational community. Families are given the responsibility of instilling certain enumerated values and principles in their children as part of the joint education effort between families, schools, society, and the state (cited in Arnoldy, 2010: 875).

13. Fischer-Hoffman notes that in 2014, the Seattle City council unanimously voted to change Columbus Day to ‘Indigenous People’s Day’, becoming the first city in the United States to do so.

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