

5-31-2012

# Conceptualizing Civil Society: The New Left's Reorganization of Civil Society in Latin America

Kathryn Keane  
*Fairfield University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/jogc>

---

### Recommended Citation

Keane, Kathryn (2012) "Conceptualizing Civil Society: The New Left's Reorganization of Civil Society in Latin America,"  
*Undergraduate Journal of Global Citizenship*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/jogc/vol1/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Journal of Global Citizenship by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).

## Introduction

The parameters of civil society have been an issue of contention and debate since the term was first used in the late seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> Each nation, region, culture and community has its own view and understanding of civil society and the role that it plays in daily life. With new left leaning political and economic models emerging since the 1990s, the definition of Latin American civil society has also shifted. Presently, in the aftermath of the neoliberal policies, Latin America is undergoing an ideological shift to the left. The rise of leftist or center-left regimes in nations throughout the region has had a significant impact on the space within societies for civil society organizations. This paper will explore how the shift from neoliberalism to the new left in Latin America is reorganizing and redefining the space for civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), and offer insight into the sustainability of the new left's policies in this arena. Using the specific examples from the leftist regimes of Venezuela and Nicaragua, the paper will take the form of a comparative case study. Responses will be cited from semi-structured interviews conducted with six NGOs in Nicaragua and Venezuela regarding how new political and economic models shape these NGOs' place in society and operational capacity. Comparing the neoliberal and new left parameters on the space of civil society provides a clear context for the testimonial results of the interviews. The paper will then analyze the extent to which the new left's definition and organization of civil society space differs from the post-Marxian definition. The paper will conclude with a critical examination of the effectiveness and sustainability of the new left's regulation of civil society, offering insight as to where Latin American and global civil society is headed in the future.

## Putting a Finger on the definition of 'Civil Society'

Before delving into the neoliberal and new left conceptualizations of civil society is it important to develop a working definition of 'civil society', and to understand the historical progression of the term. In Global Civil Society: An Answer to War, Mary Kaldor traces the evolution of the term 'civil society'. Her structuring of the historical ideology of civil society is echoed by many other academics including Taylor Rupert. The originally the term civil society described a political community living in a peaceful society governed by laws consented and agreed upon by citizens.<sup>2</sup> In essence, the term distinguished an established society from the chaotic and unpredictable state of nature that people would otherwise be living in; the term 'civil' society was closely related to 'civilized'. As Kaldor explains; "civil society is distinguished [during the

---

<sup>1</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2003. *Global civil society: An answer to war*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2003. *Global civil society: An answer to war*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. (7)

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] not from the state but from non-civil societies...”<sup>3</sup> Gradually more and more societies began to fit the definition of a ‘civil society’, and the term was in need of redefinition if it was not to be lost within the definition of a ‘state’. Thus, it was with the emergence of capitalism, that Marx and Hegel in the nineteenth century modified the meaning of ‘civil society’ as an “arena of ethical life in between the state and the family”.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps most critical to their use of the term was its ideological contrast with the notion of the state; civil society became its own entity.

The CIVICTUS Civil Society Index, which conducts thousands of worldwide consultations on the state of civil society, has sited the conceptualization of civil society produced by Marx and Hegel as the most accurate.<sup>5</sup> Kaldor argues, however, that the use of the term has continued to change to the present day. The post-Marxian definition, or what Kaldor refers to as the ‘activist’ perception of civil society, presupposes the state or rule of law like Marx and Hegel, and views civil society as “active citizenship” through “growing self-organization outside formal political circles.”<sup>6</sup> Again, civil society is contrasted with the state, but more distinctly the term is used to emphasize the possibility through individual or self-organization and political pressure to create change and influence the conditions of daily life.<sup>7</sup> This definition of civil society evokes the existence of a “global public sphere” for communication and the growth of transnational organizations and advocacy groups outside interstate relations.<sup>8</sup> Generally the theoretical definition of civil society adheres to the post-Marxian or ‘activist’ definition highlighted by Kaldor. The post-Marxian definition, therefore, serves as a benchmark against which other definitions or conceptualizations of civil society can be measured.

Nevertheless, any review of literature on civil society will quickly reveal that no two operational definitions of civil society are identical. The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project has attempted to bridge this gap by mapping the contours of civil society in its global survey. The five structural-operational features that the study revealed as part of the popular definition of civil society organizations are: 1) organized operations; 2) private or separate from the state apparatus; 3) not profit-distributing; 4) self-governing; and 5)

---

<sup>3</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 7

<sup>4</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 8

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich, V. and L. Fioramonti. 2008. *CIVICTUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc. Volume 2.

<sup>6</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 8

<sup>7</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 8

<sup>8</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 8

voluntary to participants.<sup>9</sup> The findings of this study suggest that agreement exists on only a general outline of civil society organizations. Other leading academics on the subject of civil society, such as Lester M. Salamon, Helmut Anheier, and Taylor Rupert, mirror the Johns Hopkins study's findings by outlining the same defining characteristics of a civil society organization; reinforcing the validity of its conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

The CIVICTUS Civil Society Index (CSI) also conducted a study to reach a working definition of civil society and found that most countries held that “groups such as community-based associations, women’s organizations, environmental groups, non-profit service organizations, independent media, and social movements ‘belong’ to civil society.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, only 38% of participants surveyed came to a common conclusion of the types of organizations that belong in civil society.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, the diversity of initiatives and heterogeneity of organizations within the civil society arena make studying civil society on a global scale precarious.

For example, one point of contention is the “trustworthiness” of civil society organizations. Rupert maintains that the ‘non-distributional’ nature of nonprofit organizations is viewed largely as an insurance policy of sorts that an organization is trustworthy.<sup>13</sup> In other words, because donors and board members of CSOs are not receiving benefits from the organizations, their interest in the program is not a personal one, but rather the very mission the organization they support. “And it is this ‘non-distributional constraint’ that underpins theorizing as to why nonprofit organizations have emerged: they do so, it is maintained, in response to market or state failure.”<sup>14</sup> Rupert also cites the importance of the recent stream of ‘neo-Tocquevillian’ studies focused on how nonprofit and voluntary organizations, “cast as ‘civil society’, contribute to good citizenship through creating “social capital.”<sup>15</sup> While many experts eagerly purport the honorable side of nonprofit organizations and NGOs within civil society, other experts criticize their role in societies around the world. Many of these criticisms come from scholars who view civil society organizations and their intentions as a

---

<sup>9</sup> List, Regina, L. Salamon, and S. Sokolowski. 2004. “Global Civil Society: An Overview”. In *Global Civil Society, dimensions of the nonprofit sector*. Edited by Salamon, Lester, and S. Sokolowski. Yorktown Heights: Kumarian Press Inc. 9-10

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. 13

<sup>11</sup> Malena, Carmen. 2008. *Does Civil Society Exist?* In: *Global Survey of the State of Civil Society*. Kumarian Press Inc. Bloomfield, CT.188

<sup>12</sup> Malena, Carmen. 2008. 188

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. 3

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. 3

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. 3-4.

function of larger forces at work. Therefore it is critical to explore these more contemporary ideological frameworks of analyzing civil society and what they offer to the understanding of global civil society as a whole.

### **Civil Society, Neoliberalism and Globalization**

Civil society can be explored through a variety of ideological frameworks. The popular, post-Marxian definition of civil society gained prominence throughout the establishment of the neoliberal model or framework; which is inextricably linked with the process of globalization. This is especially true in Latin America, where the introduction of neoliberalism went hand in hand with globalization. Civil society, as the neoliberal model would shape and define it, can be understood as a function of globalization, or the global spread of democratic institutions. The neoliberal model, according to Kaldor, promotes primarily the rolling back of the state, and the spread and strengthening of democracy.<sup>16</sup> Under neoliberalism the strengthening of democracy places a focus on individualism, and increased political participation.<sup>17</sup> At the foundation of democracy is citizen participation and ‘bottom-up’ policy making where the people agree upon the laws that guide them.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, for the global spread of democracy to be successful, civil societies need to be created so that citizens can take control of their lives. According to Kaldor, a healthy civil society is vital to the spread of ‘substantive democracy’ and the ability of individuals to shape their own lives and participate in debates about the policies that affect them.<sup>19</sup> As Rupert explains, for Kaldor, civil society is a process “not an end point”, like globalization and democratization.<sup>20</sup>

Kaldor traces the spread of democratization from Southern Europe in the 1970s, through Latin America and East Asia in the 1980s and Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> While civil society under neoliberalism and globalization facilitated political debate and individual participation, this structuring of civil society also enabled the economic pursuits of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism and globalization created networks, alliances and relationships between countries, and increased the frequency of decisions made at the international level. Rupert confirms Kaldor’s theorizing of civil society under neoliberalism as a function of western globalization; “usually the third sector is seen as part of – or even a tool for – the dominant liberal order in Western countries and the global Western

---

<sup>16</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 114

<sup>17</sup> Kaldor. 2003. 114

<sup>18</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. 42

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. (16)

<sup>21</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. 34.

conglomerate of international organizations and global civil society.”<sup>22</sup> Vital to the rolling back of the state, and the neoliberal model’s success, is opening up markets to global trade.<sup>23</sup> The conceptualization of an individual-focused civil society with many outlets for political participation, molded nation-states into compatible actors to participate, trade, and interact on an international level; furthering neoliberalism’s ideals.<sup>24</sup> Much of Kaldor’s work revolves around the analysis of the level and quality of democratization that has occurred with globalization. Kaldor argues the international financial institutions most invested in the spread of neoliberalism “provide funds to Western NGOs to spread Western ideals throughout the world.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, while neoliberalism created a large space for civil society actors such as NGOs and CSOs, the other structural adjustments that accompanied civil society under neoliberalism caused a controversial debate over the true intentions of NGOs and nonprofits as promoters of neoliberal ideals, or impartial actors opening up space for greater civil liberty.

### **The debate**

In the 1980s and 1990s the neoliberal model was both implemented and adopted by most states in Latin America. At the time, military dictatorships and authoritarianism dominated the political sphere in a large number of Latin American countries.<sup>26</sup> The neoliberal model of development challenged the authoritarian regimes through the implementation of what is known as the “Washington Consensus.” While neoliberalism undermined authoritarianism in Latin America, the public’s perception of the nature and role of civil society became blurred. The resulting consequences and benefits of the market-oriented model have been open to interpretation, and provide each side of the debate with their foundations for dispute.

Arguing the affectivity of the neoliberal model, not only for civil society, but as an effective economic model, Michael Walton (employed by the World Bank), argues that the structural adjustments imposed by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund did what it set out to do. Neoliberalism opened Latin America to the global market

---

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer. 16

<sup>23</sup> Walton, Michael. 2004. Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, bad, or incomplete? *Latin American Research Review* 39 (3): 165.

<sup>24</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. 38

<sup>25</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2004. “Globalization and Civil Society”. In *Exploring civil society: Political and cultural contexts*. Edited by Glasius, Marlies, David Lewis, and Hakan Seckinelgin. London; New York: Routledge 195

<sup>26</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2003. “The Idea of Global Civil Society”. *International Affairs* (79): 583-593.

and enabled economic growth, but the preexisting political and social conditions in Latin America were simply too corrupt and dysfunctional to achieve a higher level of development.

To reinforce his point, Michael Walton cites positive global trends and data in his article “Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, Bad or Incomplete?” The Washington Consensus, Walton elaborates, heralded fiscal prudence, trade liberalization, privatization, a deepening of the financial sector and capital market-opening, tax reform, and property rights.<sup>27</sup> Walton readily admits that shifts to a greater dependence on markets were usually beneficial, [but] probably disappointing relative to the expectations of advocates, and certainly incomplete as a development strategy.<sup>28</sup> Walton also points out in his article an important distinction to be made within the neoliberal community. That distinction is between ‘neoliberals’ and ‘neoconservatives’. Neoliberals stand firmly behind the belief that their structural adjustments and economic reforms will bring about better conditions for both the country of concern and the greater global community. Neoconservatives favor globalization “in so far as it benefits the USA”; they are more deliberate and specific as to the groups, parties, or NGOs that they support, and always have the US interest in mind.<sup>29</sup> Walton clearly maintains a neoliberal perspective of civil society and therefore discusses the structural adjustment program modifications and those that are still required for success. Educational and infrastructural deficiencies, as well as weak institutional conditions and high levels of inequality, are listed amongst what Walton argues are the largest hindrances to Latin American development.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the academics and experts specialized in Latin American politics and economics that contest neoliberalism’s success in the region also include within their analysis of neoliberal reforms the positive outcomes that have been generated. Hagai Katz includes “growth and technological advancement, wealth, and knowledge...transparent and consequently more accountable” governments, and finally better communication and sharing of ideas, in his assessment of the positive outcomes of neoliberalism.<sup>31</sup> Jean Grugel argues that after the

---

<sup>27</sup> Walton, Michael. 2004. Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, bad, or incomplete? *Latin American Research Review* 39 (3): 165-183.

<sup>28</sup> Walton, Michael. 2004. 165-183.

<sup>29</sup> Kaldor, Mary. 2004. “Globalization and Civil Society”. In *Exploring civil society: Political and cultural contexts*. Edited by Glasius, Marlies, David Lewis, and Hakan Seckinelgin. London; New York: Routledge 195.

<sup>30</sup> Walton, Michael. 2004. Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, bad, or incomplete? *Latin American Research Review* 39 (3): 165-183.

<sup>31</sup> Katz, Hagai. 2006. “Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks”. *International Society for Third Sector Research and the John Hopkins University*. (17): 333-348.

introduction of neoliberalism, “democratic institutions have been more stable than at any other period in the region’s history, civilian government has become firmly established and the public sphere has been consolidated as a space of a debate and discussion.”<sup>32</sup> The consolidation of the public sphere that Grugel references, is the civil society as defined by Kaldor and Rupert. As Kaldor explains, the neoliberal model included within its structure the creation and maintenance of a space for civil society. After all, the spread of democracy went hand in hand with the opening up of civil society in countries around the world. What is important for the purpose of this study is to distinguish between the parameters placed on civil society by neoliberalism, and the perception of civil society organizations as a part of neoliberalism by citizens in Latin America. At the structural level, neoliberalism created a space for civil society where organizations and actors experience a large level of freedom and encouragement in their missions. The perception of the actors within this space however, has been largely muddled by the consequences and repercussions of the other neoliberal structures that were simultaneously introduced along with this conceptualization of civil society.

One perception, which a contingency of Latin American citizens share of civil society organizations such as NGOs, is that they are a mechanism of neoliberalism. As part of the neoliberal apparatus, which has had what many would argue, grandiose detrimental affects on the population, these civil society organizations, particularly international NGOs, are to be rejected and forced out. This is a viewpoint that will be further explored with the discussion of the new left. Many experts argue that the neoliberal model exacerbated the preexisting social, political, and economic issues, and created new problems for Latin America. “In the 1970s and 1980s, the failure of the statist model of development, the drying up of economic aid, and the growth of indebtedness, contributed to growing disaffection and to demands, often from outside donors, to introduce democratization measures to legitimize painful economic reforms.”<sup>33</sup> The ‘outside donors’ referred to include the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and are seen by many as the major enforcers of neoliberal political and economic reform. The seeming focus of these institutions, as perceived by experts and the Latin American public alike, is not on the betterment of the populations in need of their services, but rather on the maintenance of power and control of the institutions. Having lived through what Walton calls the

---

<sup>32</sup> Grugel, Jean. 2009. “Basta de Realidades, Queremos Promesas: Democracy After the Washington Consensus.” In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin america*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. (26).

<sup>33</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. *Global civil society 2007*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. (38)



“disappointing” results of the neoliberal structural adjustments, many throughout Latin America have found themselves longing for an alternative to the neoliberal model. While some nations have remained loyal to neoliberalism, others are undergoing a shift to more leftist policies and regimes as a resurgence of old populist tendencies gain strength. The economic reasoning for this desire for a new model may well be founded, yet the eagerness of many Latin Americans for a new model may bring unforeseen detrimental changes to the space now enjoyed by civil society. It is this reshaping by the ‘alternative’ model of the new left, that this paper will now explore in terms of its ramifications on civil society.

### **The New Left and the Restructuring of Civil Society**

In contrast to neoliberalism which focuses on decentralization of power and increased reliance on the private sector for goods and services – NGOs and nonprofits would be included in this sector as outside the state apparatus – the left and center-left policies bring civil society back under the control and organization of the state. Prime examples include neighborhood associations and councils. Goldfrank echoes this trend stating; “whereas the neoliberal model is premised on a society of individuals competing in the marketplace, the left’s participatory programs encourage collective formulation and pursuit of goals in a context of cooperation.”<sup>34</sup> What is occurring is an ideological reorganization of civil society, largely owed to the negative response to neoliberalism, which reduces the power and influence of NGOs and traditional civil society organizations. Civil society in Latin America is at a crossroads “between the emergence of a genuine post-neoliberal development model that can begin to address the historical problems of inequality and exclusion, and the resurgence of new forms of populism that are likely to exacerbate...those same problems.”<sup>35</sup> The consequences or benefits of whichever path countries chose to take will eventually become clear socially, politically and economically.

Miguel Olivera explains; “the new populists have in common with their predecessors a strong reliance on mobilizing the masses against internal and external enemies, as well as on policies of income redistribution through social programs.”<sup>36</sup> Essentially, through the charismatic influence of political leaders and social elite, a greater level of state control over society is justified “for the

---

<sup>34</sup> Goldfrank. 2009, 43-54

<sup>35</sup> Oxhorn, Philip. “Beyond Neoliberalism? Latin America’s New Crossroads.” In *Beyond neoliberalism in Latin America?*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 217-231. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 218

<sup>36</sup> Olivera, Miguel. 2007. “Deepening Democracy in Latin America”. In *Global Civil Society 2*. Edited by Albrow, Martin, H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Price, and M. Kaldor. London: Sage Ltd. 116

greater good of the people”.<sup>37</sup> This places a strain on civil society organizations such as NGOs and nonprofits that are viewed as an “outside” force. The space for civil society is therefore, transformed from one in which NGOs and civil society organizations can thrive, to one comprised mainly of ‘community’ organizations dominated by middle and upper class actors.<sup>38</sup> According to Benjamin Goldfrank, the left’s “notion of deepening democracy implies a more responsive, accountable state and an active citizenry with institutional opportunities to participate in politics beyond elections.”<sup>39</sup> While the left contends that community councils and grassroots organizations deepen democracy, through the creation of greater points of access for the public to voice their concerns; the singular source of regulation by the state, lends itself to vulnerability for injustice.

Both the neoliberal and new left frameworks for analyzing civil society and its role within Latin America are valuable to the debate over the extent to which civil society is being redefined by the new left. Commonly, the two viewpoints argue that civil society is imperative to the improvement of life for citizens everywhere. The debate and contradictions between the ideologies arise when the specific parameters and intended missions for civil society organizations are analyzed.

It is important to recognize that the public’s perception of an organization is not always accurate, nor just, especially when NGOs and CSOs are condemned as mechanisms of neoliberalism. When charismatic leaders with emotionally grabbing nationalistic platforms point a finger of blame at civil society organizations, the public is easily swayed. The issue then becomes a question of: what if? What if the public services and spaces for participation created by international NGOs and CSOs were removed from the equation? How much does a country really rely on NGOs and CSOs for support and infrastructure? The rest of this paper will look into the specific cases of Venezuela and Nicaragua, and attempt to answer these questions, as well as analyze the extent to which ‘civil society’ has been redefined in comparison to Kaldor’s post-Marxian or ‘activist’ definition of civil society.

---

<sup>37</sup> Olivera. 2007, 116

<sup>38</sup> Motta, Sara C. 2009. “Venezuela: Reinventing social democracy from below?” In *Reclaiming latin america*. Edited by Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. (75-90). London: Zed Books Ltd.

<sup>39</sup> Goldfrank, Benjamin. 2009. “Neoliberalism and the Left: National Challenges, Local Responses, and Global Alternatives.” In *Beyond neoliberalism in Latin America?*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 43-54. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

### **Case Studies: Evidence from Venezuela and Nicaragua**

The progression towards left leaning regimes in both Venezuela and Nicaragua has been a gradual process. Each country has faced its own challenges and set backs, yet the outcome of each of their distinct histories was the rise to power of leftist regimes. These are only two cases within Latin America, while countries such as Bolivia and El Salvador could also be examined as part of the leftist trend. The shift away from the neoliberal model had begun by the end of the 1980s and 1990s, as neoliberalism lost “its credibility and its capacity to provide politically feasible guidelines because it was based on an elitist, exclusionary pact among small groups of experts and elites representing the interests of transnational capital.”<sup>40</sup> In Nicaragua and Venezuela the door was open for the leftist ideologies to take root. The preexisting political, economic and social characteristics of the two countries played a pivotal role in the development of leftist policies and structures. Throughout the changes to the political leftist political regimes, the space for civil society has simultaneously been transformed. The Marxist ideology of Nicaragua’s Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), which organized itself during the three consecutive Somoza family dictatorships, introduced on a party platform leftist policies for the first time in Nicaragua in 1979. In Venezuela, the process of Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution has “redefined the regional political narrative, introducing new language of citizenship, rights, participation, cultural pride and sovereignty.”<sup>41</sup>

Below, the analysis will first trace the complicated history of Bolivarianism or Chavismo in Venezuela and its reorganization of civil society. Following this section, Nicaragua’s historical background will be explored in terms of the FSLN and Ortega’s consolidation of power and the reasoning behind diffusion of leftist policies from Venezuela to Nicaragua regarding civil society space. Exploring the policy changes that have reshaped the space for civil society in Nicaragua and Venezuela also sheds light on the deviation from the post-Marxian or activist definition of civil society.

### **The Chavismo Space for Civil Society**

Hugo Chávez’s reshaping of not only the Venezuelan left, but also of the space for civil society within the country has taken place over a three-step process. His Bolivarian Revolution began under the ideology of a moderate social democracy, then shifted more radically to the left-of-center, and finally reached

---

<sup>40</sup> Margheritis, Ana, Periera, Anthony W. 2007. The neoliberal turn in latin america: The cycle of ideas and the search for an alternative. *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (3): 26

<sup>41</sup> Buxton, Julia. 2009. “Venezuela: the political evolution of Bolivarianism.” In *Reclaiming latin america*. Edited by Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. London: Zed Books Ltd. 57

its present state of Twenty-first-century Socialism, or the New Left.<sup>42</sup> The ideology of the new left has spread throughout the region following Chávez's rise to power. "The election of Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 was followed by Lula in Brazil in 2002...Néstor Kirchner in Argentina in 2003...Tabaré Vazquez in Uruguay in 2004, Evo Morales in Bolivia 2005...around 60 percent of Latin America's population now lives under a government that is in some way, or the Left."<sup>43</sup> In 1998 Chávez was elected president with an image of the 'anti-party candidate' garnering power and support from a population furious towards the two parties which had poorly led the country the previous four decades: Acción Democrática (AD) and the Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela (COPEI).<sup>44</sup> The AD and COPEI formed a single-party system through the 'Pact of Punto Fijo' in 1957, and shared control of state institutions, and ensured immense political and economic control for elites within the parties.<sup>45</sup> In the 1990s the role of civil society in Venezuela predominantly manifested itself in protests and numerous coup attempts against the injustices of Punto Fijo; Chávez led one such protest himself in 1992.<sup>46</sup> By involving himself in Venezuelan civil society activity, Chávez "resorted to the old Cuban rallying cry of *Patria o Muerte, venceremos* (Fatherland or death, we shall overcome!) to promote his Bolivarian Revolution."<sup>47</sup> In the first phase of *chavismo*, Chávez's focus was against Punto Fijo policies, and for the promotion of the Bolivarian revolution and regional integration of Latin America.<sup>48</sup> It was through promotion of his positions as anti- Punto Fijo, that he gained much of his popularity as the new alternative to past parties and models.<sup>49</sup> Using nationalistic symbols of historical figures, legendary heroes, and national myths, Chávez united the spirit and pride of Venezuela under his administration.<sup>50</sup> "La llegada del Presidente Chávez al gobierno estuvo marcada por un signo de esperanza y optimismo en buena parte de la población...era el triunfo de la anti-política en el país."<sup>51</sup> Additionally in this initial stage, civil society took a more accepted role by the government than in previous

---

<sup>42</sup> Buxton. 2009, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Grugel, J. and P. Riggirozzi. 2009. "The End of the Embrace? Neoliberalism and Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Latin America" In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin America*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Riggirozzi. (1-23). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 1

<sup>44</sup> Buxton. 2009, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Buxton. 2009, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Buxton. 2009, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Olivera, Miguel. 2007. "Deepening Democracy in Latin America". In *Global Civil Society 2*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 217-231. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>48</sup> Buxton. 2009, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Leon-Briceño, Roberto. Venezuela 2010-2012: Entre el Conflict y el Cambio. *Documentos LACSO*. Caracas, 2011. 16

<sup>50</sup> Buxton. 2009, 60.

<sup>51</sup> Leon-Briceño, Roberto. 2011. 16

administrations, as chavismo placed a strong emphasis on “el pueblo” or the people of Venezuela and policies to improve their living conditions. ‘Plan Bolívar’ was one of the first policies enacted by Chávez, and tasked the Venezuelan military with the construction of and repair of community infrastructure throughout the country; such as school building.<sup>52</sup> From the onset of his leftist policies, Chávez strove to achieve goals with national services and resources instead of international aid. Punto Fijo created a dependency on basic food imports, which in turn inspired Chávez to break the cycle of dependency and reverse it through national integration and rural relocations.<sup>53</sup>

The second phase of the Bolivarian revolution incorporated a pro-poor stance on economic and social policy. Anti-neoliberal and anti-united states sentiments came to the forefront of the policy agenda, and new social programs strove to provide social and economic rights to the poor.<sup>54</sup> The space for civil society in Venezuela underwent the largest reorganization of the revolution during this phase through the creation of ‘missions’ around the country funded entirely by profits from the state owned PDVSA oil company.<sup>55</sup> These missions were part of his pro-poor stance, which was meant to gain him an exorbitant amount of support. He focused on “salud con servicios médicos cercanos, vendía alimentos a precios subsidiados, inscribía a las personas de todas las edades en programas de educación de todos niveles y el Presidente hablaba de la dignificación y protagonismo de los pobres...”<sup>56</sup> The missions had a variety of functions including educational initiatives, healthcare provisions, and employment training.<sup>57</sup> The nationalistic tone of chavismo encouraged “state-to-state” interactions within these spheres of civil society has provisions, and thus began to shut out NGOs and CSOs outside of the state apparatus.<sup>58</sup> Then in January of 2005, the reorganization of the space of civil society transformed again with the implementation of ‘Consejos Comunales’.<sup>59</sup> Continuing the trend begun by the missions, state control over civil society space solidified with the installation of the councils in both urban and rural communities. The highly regulated and government monitored process of constituting a Consejo required a team of eight representatives from the Presidential Committee of Popular Participation educating communities on the purpose, objectives and organization of the

---

<sup>52</sup> Buxton. 2009, 62.

<sup>53</sup> Buxton. 2009, 63.

<sup>54</sup> Motta. 2009, 79.

<sup>55</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64.

<sup>56</sup> Leon-Briceño, Roberto. 2011. 16

<sup>57</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Motta. 2009, 84.

councils.<sup>60</sup> All communities hoping to form a committee were required by law to strictly follow the framework specified by the government.<sup>61</sup> “This project of a new, direct, participatory democracy will replace the previous representative democracy, which is derided [by Chávez] as formal and false.”<sup>62</sup> Within the councils, community members divided up into work committees staffed by an elected spokesperson and developed detailed programs for the implementation of projects agreed upon by citizens of the district.<sup>63</sup> Communal banks were installed in each neighborhood or community to receive funding from the government and save profits made by council programs.<sup>64</sup> The space for civil society, through the policy changes enacted by Chávez shrank the operational space for NGOs and CSOs outside of the missions and councils; Venezuela shifted towards a civil society structured, controlled, and maintained predominantly by the state.

The negative aspects of this shift included the reinforcement of traditional power relations favoring the elite and a suspicious level of state interaction in citizen participation within civil society. As Chávez boasted at the 2005 World Social Forum, his Bolivarian revolution aimed to create a new socialist model to be spread throughout Latin America.<sup>65</sup> “This socialism was to be informed by the specificities of Venezuela’s historical experience while breaking with the ‘failed’ socialist and communist experiment of the twentieth century.”<sup>66</sup> Through the formation of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our Americas (ALBA) Chávez spread the “principles of cooperation, social justice and exploitation of comparative advantage” throughout the region.<sup>67</sup> “The state is understood as an all-powerful institution capable of controlling society.”<sup>68</sup> Nationally, Chávez consolidated his power by taking control of the National Assembly, PDVSA management, the military and the national electoral council.<sup>69</sup>

The United States (US) took notice to these changes in the political structure of Venezuela and began a series of tactics to limit his power. Anti-

---

<sup>60</sup> Motta. 2009, 84

<sup>61</sup> Motta. 2009, 84

<sup>62</sup> Zúquete, José P. 2008. “The missionary politics of Hugo Chávez”. In *Latin American Politics and Society*. 50 (1): 91-122.

<sup>63</sup> Motta. 2009, 84

<sup>64</sup> Motta. 2009, 84 – 85.

<sup>65</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64

<sup>66</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64

<sup>67</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64

<sup>68</sup> Kaldor, M. and D. Kostovicova. 2007. “Global civil society and illiberal regimes”. In *Global Civil Society 2*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 86-112. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>69</sup> Buxton. 2009, 65

Chávez forces funded by the US did not succeed, and caused Chávez to “restrict foreign funding of domestic political organizations and NGOs.”<sup>70</sup> Chávez also shifted to a model of “asymmetrical warfare in response to fears of US invasion,” and allied with China, Russia and Iran for weapons upgrades.<sup>71</sup> Chávez’s power remained unchecked as oil prices rose, US isolation strategies failed, and leftist governments rose to power around Latin America.<sup>72</sup> “Resistance against neoliberalism has fueled the rise of left-wing governments and movements across Latin America.”<sup>73</sup> The stage was set for other civil societies to be redefined and reorganized under state control and away from being predominantly comprised of independent CSOs and NGOs.

Further control and restriction of the space for civil society in Venezuela has included policies intended to suffocate NGOs and CSOs and drive them out of the country. In December of 2010, Chávez was successful in passing an initiative called the ‘Ley para la Protección de la Libertad Política y la Autodeterminación Nacional’. This law limits the receipt by NGOs and CSOs of international financial support, essentially creating what one journalist called “un muro de Berlín legislativo”.<sup>74</sup> The following testimonies of three Venezuela representatives from NGOs focused on advocacy for NGOs, environmental concerns, and media or press rights. In the interest of the security of these participants their names, and the names of their organizations will not be used; rather a numbering system will differentiate the responses.

#### **Interviewee #1:**

The first representative who took part in the survey is affiliated with an environmental NGO aimed at improving the quality of life for Venezuelans through environmental education and the promotion sustainable practices. While this NGO is focused in the environment, as the interviewee pointed out, the field crosses into issues concerning the economy, human rights, and politics. Chávez’s administration has relied heavily on the environment, particularly oil, to fund its projects, therefore this organization has “transformado en una ONG mucho más estudiosa de la legislación y los derechos humanos...” The interviewee listed a few of the environmental abuses the government has committed including, “utilización de la renta petrolera y de otros recursos como oro, hierro, e incluso

---

<sup>70</sup> Buxton. 2009, 64

<sup>71</sup> Buxton. 2009, 71

<sup>72</sup> Buxton, Julia. 2009, 64

<sup>73</sup> Ballvé, Teo, and Vijay Prashad. 2006. *Dispatches from latin america: On the frontlines against neoliberalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press. 14

<sup>74</sup> “Ley Contra las ONG es un “muro de Berlín legislativo.” 2010. El Universal: Nacional y Política. Venezuela.

extensiones de tierra donde hay bosques o diversidad biológica...” The recent laws restricting international support to NGOs has placed this organization in high risk of shutting down. “Nuestra sostenibilidad es dudosa pero vamos a seguir haciéndolo hasta que podamos...” Beyond the financial restrictions recently enforced by the new left, the government has been flagged the organization as a possibly treasonous entity. “Fuimos investigados ‘económicamente’ por el Banco Central con la excusa de saber como contribuían las ONGs con el producto interno bruto, cuando somos sin fines de lucro y el historial de nuestras declaraciones de impuestos así lo demuestran.” This has been a tactic used on many NGOs and CSOs within Venezuela, and continue to be used as a constant reminder of governmental control and power. The interviewee goes on stating; “creo que andaban buscando simplemente encontrar algún lado para justificar el proyecto de Ley de Cooperación Internacional donde se especifica que podemos ser traidores a la patria si recibimos dinero o ayuda de otros países...”

This organization works closely with other international environmental organizations along with groups within Venezuela. Since the government began its reorganization of civil society the NGO has lost workers who were simply too afraid of the retribution they would face from the government. “Hemos tenido perdidas muy valiosas de gente que nos ayudaba y a partir de nuestras denuncias contra el uso de PVC como material de construcción (proyecto particularmente liderizado por el propio Chávez) se asustaron y decidieron no seguir con nosotros.” In this case their direct attack of Chávez’s use of PVC as a building material for constructing houses for the poor, led to the loss of the workers who feared for their lives; “no queremos obligar a nadie a hacer algo que no quiera...” While this NGO continues its promotion of the education of the public on environmental issues, they question not only their own sustainability, but also that of other NGOs throughout the country. “Muchas ONG cerraron sus puertas, otras internacionales se fueron del país...” The interviewee offered a concrete example of a reputable NGO, Conservation International, which was shut down for using the space for civil society actors to promote sustainable environmental ideals.

The interviewee explained that NGOs try to create change through the public sphere, yet with the passage of the new laws and policies, this is essentially impossible. NGOs and CSOs across all disciplines are threatened on various levels; “el primer nivel es la inseguridad que tienen los voluntarios de cualquier ONG en las zonas más pobres o más necesitadas de la ciudades o centros urbanos, donde funcionan grupos armados organizados por el propio gobierno como los “colectivos” pero que antes se llamaban los “círculos bolivarianos”...” Volunteers and representatives from NGOs face physical harm, or even loss of life in instances such as the ones mentioned above. On an economic level, organizations



are losing support from businesses within the country that simply cannot risk jeopardizing their corporation. At the level of public support and participation in civil society, there has been a closing of the space and channels for cooperation and communication. “Hay un cierre de medios de comunicación y muchos canales que pertenecen al gobierno de turno que ayudan a difundir la idea que los ciudadanos que pensamos distintos somos peligrosos.” Finally, in respect to the governments restructuring of civil society organizations, the interviewee states that organizations known as OMGs or ‘organizaciones muy gubernamentales’ have been created to model the correct forms of citizen participation. These organizations “con la descalificación personal crean un ambiente muy hostil hacia nosotros que ha causado agresiones físicas a algunas personas.” The brave testimony of this representative offers invaluable insight to the current situation in Venezuela’s civil society. The specific examples of restrictions, abuses and threats made by the new left and its proponents stand as obvious signs of the deterioration of civil society space.

## **Interviewee #2**

The second representative interviewed reiterated many of the same issues and concerns as the first interviewee, highlighting the serious risk of governmental retribution for organizations and individuals alike. The mission of this representative’s organization is to defend and promote freedom of the press and expression within Venezuela. The organizations three areas of interest are; monitoring of freedom of the press (against attacks, threats, and limitations); training of investigative journalists; and the promotion of the right of journalists to access public information as a reporting tool. The vision of this organization is “ciudadanos venezolanos que ejerzan con mayor conciencia su derecho a las libertades de expresión e información, posibilitándoles se efectiva participación en una sociedad democrática.” Therefore, the organization seeks to be “un referente en la promoción del ejercicio independiente, plural y de calidad del periodismo como elemento fundamental de estos derechos.” When asked about their perception of the relationship between NGOs and the government, the interviewee responded “el gobierno revolucionario supone, en el peor de los casos, que las organizaciones de la sociedad civil son un instrumento de la conspiración imperialista en su contra...y que son bolsones de autonomía que obstaculizan la buena marcha del Plan Simón Bolívar de desarrollo.” The government is promoting and operating under the premise the NGOs and CSOs are mechanisms of the detrimental capitalist or neoliberal model, and therefore must be pushed out. In place of these ‘neoliberal’ organizations, the government has established, according to this representative, a parallel system of NGOs “mientras busca asfixiar a las ONGs genuinas.”

Similarly to interviewee #1, the second representative's organization has been investigated by the government in terms of its financial backing; however, this organization has also been investigated for its promotion of special investigative journalism curricula. "Se nos investiga por el desarrollo de un programa de promoción del periodismo de investigación en universidades venezolanas, que el propio presidente Chávez 'denunció' durante una alocución pública." Of the 22 universities that offer degrees in journalism, only one has a specialization in investigative journalism, suggesting the importance of the promotion of such a curriculum. After the investigation into the nature of their educational mission, the NGO was investigated financially for receiving international funding and support. "Se nos investiga bajo la presunción de haber cometido crímenes penales como 'traición a la patria' e 'ilícitos cambiarios'..." In addition to the investigations of this NGO, the organization has been greatly restricted based on the recent passage of 20 laws in December, including the Ley de Autodeterminación. These laws have created for this organization, and "la mayoría de las ONGs que conocemos y los donantes, un clima de incertidumbre y por lo tanto, paralización." The arbitrariness of the Ley de Autodeterminación, allows the government to interpret the parameters of the law as it sees fit; essentially providing it with the grounds to investigate and shut down any NGO or CSO it feels threatened by. "Esta ley sólo puso en manifiesto la voluntad del estado Venezolano por controlar y extinguir a las ONGs." Within this new law, it is stated that NGOs are obligated to register with the government "ante un registro especial de la presidencia de la republica, con la potestad de ratificar (o no) e carácter de ONGs del registrante." This process restricts organizations from the outset as to their missions and receipt of support; without the governments approval they are essentially paralyzed. The information provided by the testimony of interviewee #2 not only corroborates the concerns and observations of interviewee #1, but as a representative organization for other actors within civil society (particularly journalists and the media), the trends mentioned by interviewee #2 are well founded. The space for civil society in Venezuela as perceived by these individuals and the organizations where they work, is collapsing under the new lefts stringent regulations.

### **Interviewee #3**

The third and final interviewee from Venezuela is also affiliated with an NGO which represents 49 civil society organizations throughout the country. "The objectives of the association are the creation and development of knowledge and the education and encouragement of the action of citizens organized for the promotions and protection of human rights... to contribute to expanding and strengthening respect for, and guarantees of, the dignity of persons in civil,

political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions.”<sup>75</sup> Identical to the previous two representatives, interviewee #3 went into great detail about the restrictions and obstacles that the laws passed by the National Assembly have created for CSOs and NGOs in Venezuela. In the words of this representative “the government is trying to silence the voices of the most outspoken individuals within civil society.” The intended targets of the governmental restrictions include “student organizations, labor unions, journalists,” and CSOs. With advocacy and distribution of information as its core goals, this organization poses a large threat to the control of the government over civil society, and its silencing of descending opinions.

In a report published by the organization, and included within the representatives testimonial evidence the laws passed in December of 2010 are viewed as “illegitimate.” “These illegitimate laws and measures reveal the absence of checks and balances among the branches of government and the institutions that safeguard human rights; they demonstrate a precipitous attempt by the State to impose a system to restructure society that would close the door to our democratic way of life and exert control over the individual and society as a whole.”<sup>76</sup> The representative further explained that their organization has been investigated, along with 34 other NGOs under the umbrella of the organization. The government, again, is looking for any instances that could be deemed treasonous under the Ley de Autodeterminación, and continues to hold the threat of penalization over the heads of these organizations. Individuals have been targeted as examples of what will happen to other civil society actors who speak out against the government; one individual in particular had to move out of his neighborhood because of a slanderous commercial aired on the government-controlled television station over 1000 times in one month. The commercial was comprised of a cartoon of this journalist exiting the US embassy carrying bags filled with money. This is only one example of the governments harsh punishment towards individuals its views as a threat. The individual political actions of citizens are viewed in the same light as activity by political parties; enabling them to receive the same punishments as parties and CSOs. The same report goes on to list some of the concrete punishments for ‘violating’ the Ley de Autodeterminación;

“a fine equivalent to double the amount of the resources received in the case of international funding (art. 6, art. 7), and disqualification from taking part in elections for a period of five to eight years; a fine from

---

<sup>75</sup> Reyna, Feliciano and Yolanda D’Elia. “Civilis, Investigación y acción de la sociedad civil en derechos humanos”. Civilis. Caracas, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Reyna, Feliciano and Yolanda D’Elia. “Civilis, Investigación y acción de la sociedad civil en derechos humanos”. Civilis. Caracas, 2011.

5,000 to 10,000 tax units for those who provide the economic assistance or financial support, or who host foreign citizens deemed undesirable by the government, including their expulsion from the territory (art. 8), and political disqualification of the president of the host organization for a five to eight year period (art. 9).”<sup>77</sup>

The obvious question to be asked of this representative is; provided that your organizations mission is so controversial and public, does the government not know what you are doing? And what is the sustainability of your program once the government begins to target you? The representative responded that “the government knows we are speaking out, but knows that we are doing so based on our constitutional rights, this not yet a totalitarian regime, so there is still some space for civil society organizations.” The consequences of course have been the investigations and threats of punishment to the major organization and the majority of its affiliates. Furthermore, in a study conducted by one of the affiliate programs, using the CIVICTUS Civil Society Index 2009-2010, “con base en 113 organizaciones de diferentes sectores y regiones del país, se encontró que 60% había experimentado restricciones ilegítimas a su libertad de asociación, estando entre las más comunes las restricciones de acceso a recursos públicos, la negativa a obtener información sobre actividades de distintos entes de gobierno, y la presencia de obstáculos para realizar trámites de registro y actualización de documentos legales.”<sup>78</sup> This is a staggering statistic, and vital to the assessment of the space for civil society under the new left. The recent regulations have placed a tangible and quantifiable strain on civil society actors, and in the words of interviewee #3 are causing a “closing of the space of civil society” in Venezuela. The sustainability of this representatives organization, its affiliates and other NGOs and CSOs in Venezuela, interviewee #3 explains, will rely on the level of creativity they can reach in working together within the country and abroad to continue their respective efforts. “Its time to work together on maintaining civil society space.”

All three of the civil society organizations interviewed from Venezuela readily admit the growing obstacles and challenges their organizations face. With the rise of Chávez and the new left, came restrictions and regulations that have redefined the space for CSOs to operate within society. The case of Venezuela is extremely important to the debate of the extent of change to civil society in Latin America under the new left, because it is the epicenter of the new left and its

---

<sup>77</sup> Sinergia, Asociación Venezolano de Organizaciones de Sociedad Civil, y sus 49 afiliadas. “Informe sobre la situación de la Libertad de Asociación en Venezuela.” Sinergia. Caracas, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Sinergia, Asociación Venezolano de Organizaciones de Sociedad Civil, y sus 49 afiliadas. “Informe sobre la situación de la Libertad de Asociación en Venezuela.” Sinergia. Caracas, 2011.

policies are the ones diffusing throughout the region. As the case of Nicaragua will illustrate, less consolidated and formidable regimes are taking the steps within their reach to mimic Chávez's civil society policies. Although the steps may not be as concrete as an actual law, the ideology behind the actions of governments such as Nicaragua's clearly adheres to the new left.

### **The case of Nicaragua**

Space for civil society in Nicaragua has been under immense change, over the course of recent history. As the country struggled through civil war, dictatorships, and the establishment of a democratic political framework, civil society has taken many shapes. During the 43-year dictatorship, the Somoza regime "repressed autonomous civil organizations and promoted clientelist mechanisms."<sup>79</sup> Spearheaded by the FSLN, the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty was due in large part to the grassroots resistance that reclaimed some of the lost space for civil society.<sup>80</sup> The 1980s saw an expansion of the space for civil society organizations within Nicaragua, as revolutionary sentiments and ideology with Christian foundations proliferated. "Participation [in civil society] was underpinned for many people with the ideas of liberation theology, which were promoted through the Christian Based Communities (CEB)."<sup>81</sup> The definition of civil society that had been growing within Nicaragua since the demise of the Somoza era, was quickly forgotten, however, as the 1990s began.

In 1989 the FSLN lost power, and with the exit of the party went the public perception of a civil society built from the ground up. The space for civil society before 1989 was constructed and maintained by the people in their efforts to reclaim their country from a horrible autocratic dictatorship. In 1990 Violetta Chamorro came to power as the president of Nicaragua, largely owing to the United States-waged Contra War against the Sandinistas.<sup>82</sup> The series of right-wing governments that took place in the 1990s marked the introduction of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Nicaragua.<sup>83</sup> Rolling back of the state, rapid increase in the presence of NGOs, and strict economic reform were all part of the harsh adjustment to a neoliberal model, and created the tendency for top-down policy implementation.<sup>84</sup> NGOs were a vital aspect of the neoliberal model,

---

<sup>79</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>80</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>81</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

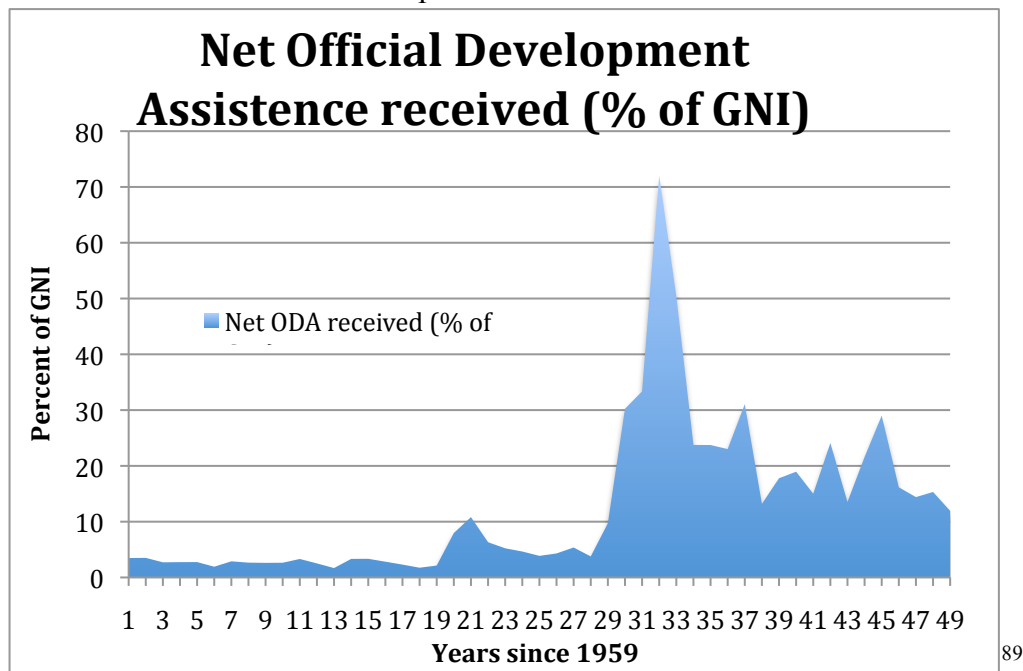
<sup>82</sup> Staten. 2010, 145

<sup>83</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>84</sup> Katz, Hagai. 2006. "Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks". *International Society for Third Sector Research and the John Hopkins University*. (17): 335

in what came to be called the ‘NGO-sation of civil society’ because of their addressing of poverty, unemployment, and the streamlining of international aid.<sup>85</sup>

Today international donations are the largest contributors to the sustainability of NGOs and CSOs in Nicaragua.<sup>86</sup> “International aid represents 21 percent of gross national product and CSOs are highly dependent of foreign aid, which represents 90 percent of most organizations’ budgets.”<sup>87</sup> Recent statistics from the World Bank offer graphical evidence of the dependency on foreign aid in Nicaragua; also noticeable is the decline in official development assistance received over the last five years. The structural role that civil society organizations and NGOs play in Nicaragua is immensely more critical than in the case of Venezuela. Lacking the imperative oil revenues enjoyed by Chávez, Nicaragua is the second most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere after Haiti. Nicaragua is “still in early or moderate stages of socio-economic transition.”<sup>88</sup> Political corruption, turmoil, and inadequacy have compounded the high level of poverty within the country, creating an immense need for the very services CSOs and NGOs aim to provide.



<sup>85</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>86</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>87</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 68

<sup>88</sup> Riesco. 2009, 114.

<sup>89</sup> Country, By. "Nicaragua | Data." *Data | The World Bank*. Web. 04 Nov. 2010.

<<http://data.worldbank.org/country/nicaragua>>.

In 2000 with the rise of the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC) to presidential office through the Bolaños administration, an opening for opportunities and growth within the civil society space began. Bolaños distanced his government from the corrupt practices of his predecessor and in doing so, lost his party's backing in the National Assembly.<sup>90</sup> Isolated and desperate, president Bolaños "turned to international donors and civil society to shore up his legitimacy instead."<sup>91</sup> For the first time since the neoliberal model was introduced, NGOs and CSOs felt the Nicaraguan government relax its control on citizen participation.<sup>92</sup>

During the near two decades from 1990 to 2006 while the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was not in governmental power, Ortega was working to consolidate his own power. The reorganization of civil society is only one step in a long list of deliberate political decisions that Ortega has made over the last two decades to ensure his political success. He signed 'el pacto' and pushed it through the National Assembly with his political opponent Arnoldo Alemán in 1999.<sup>93</sup> Within the agreement, after serving a presidential term, a president is awarded a seat in the National Assembly, and therefore immunity from prosecution.<sup>94</sup> 'El pacto' enabled the FSLN and the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) to dominate the seats in the Supreme Court and Supreme Electoral Council, essentially creating a two-party system where smaller parties stood no chance of gaining office.<sup>95</sup> Finally, what proved most imperative for Ortega's return to power, the pact reduced the 45 percent lead needed to win an election to 35 percent and a five-point difference between candidates.<sup>96</sup> When the votes were tallied in the 2006 election, Ortega had accrued 37.99 percent of the vote, barely ten points higher than the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) candidate, Eduardo Montealegre who managed 28.3 percent.<sup>97</sup> Winning the 2006 election, Ortega began his second term as president of Nicaragua and a New Leftist policy scheme that changed the space and definition of civil society in Nicaragua.

The time for growth within the space for civil society was short lived in the Bolaños years, as the FLSN returned to office in 2007. The party's

---

<sup>90</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>91</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>92</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>93</sup> Baltodano, Mónica. 2009. *Sandinismo, Pactos Democracia y Cambio Revolucionario*.

Managua: Fuzión de Colores. 110

<sup>94</sup> Staten. 2010, 145

<sup>95</sup> Staten. 2010, 145

<sup>96</sup> Staten. 2010, 145

<sup>97</sup> Close, David. 2009. "Nicaragua: the return of Daniel Ortega." In *Reclaiming latin america*.

Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. (109-122). London: Zed Books Ltd. 117

“vociferous rejection of NGOs (as opposed to ‘popular organizations’) and lack of interest in dialogue with organized civil society has significantly changed the nature of opportunities for CSOs to engage with the state.”<sup>98</sup> Organizations of CSOs such as Participation and Concertation System (CONPES) have been sidelined by the reframing of civil society under New Leftist policies.<sup>99</sup> Following the new left model, Ortega created by decree ‘Consejos de Poder Ciudadano’ or Councils of Citizen Power (CPCs) throughout the country.<sup>100</sup> The top-down implementation of civil society policy used to form the councils exemplifies the ideological influence that neoliberalism has had not only on political leaders in Latin America, but also on the population which accepts the decrees. “Over time, the pattern of isolating executive decisions from popular debate gradually spilled over into other areas of decision-making.”<sup>101</sup>

Ortega promoted the CPCs like Chávez touting their ability to deepen democracy and give the public direct control over the political decisions that affected them: or as Ortega put it making ‘el pueblo presidente’.<sup>102</sup> The councils start at the neighborhood level with representatives from the area advocating their opinions and concerns under the supervision of an FSLN “professional”; in many cases a local party secretary who can mold citizens’ input into policy proposals.<sup>103</sup> While the CSCs certainly create more points of access for citizen participation, the oversight councils by party representative’s places the legitimacy of direct communication of interests to the government in question. Initiatives at the neighborhood committee level are communicated to municipal cabinets and then to departmental cabinets before finally reaching the national cabinet, headed by Ortega himself.<sup>104</sup> Beyond opening the space of citizen communication and participation in the new left’s form of civil society, many CSCs have specialized functions such as resource distribution.<sup>105</sup> However, “these new spaces for citizen engagement with government represent a challenge to the autonomy of grassroots organizations.”<sup>106</sup> The creation of the CPCs is a direct diffusion of civil society policy on the part of the Ortega administration; mirroring Chávez’s ‘Consejos’ or ‘Missions’. Hugo Chávez and Muammar el-Qaddafi both redefined civil society

---

<sup>98</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>99</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>100</sup> Close. 2009, 116

<sup>101</sup> Grugel, Jean. 2009. “Basta de Realidades, Queremos Promesas: Democracy After the Washington Consensus.” In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin america*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Riggirozzi. (25-48). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 34

<sup>102</sup> Close. 2009, 118

<sup>103</sup> Close. 2009, 118

<sup>104</sup> Close. 2009, 119

<sup>105</sup> Close. 2009, 119

<sup>106</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 70



under their leftist regimes through the implementation CPCs.<sup>107</sup> The ideology behind these shifts and reorganizations of civil society space, is that citizen participation needs to directly benefit the citizen rather than intermediary organizations such as CSOs and NGOs.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the new organization of civil society “bypasses existing ‘local governance spaces’ and attempts to reorganize state-civil society relations.”<sup>109</sup> “The assumption that the state is all-powerful is linked to the tendency to focus on domestic factors and to treat external influences as add-ons, exogenous rather than endogenous determinants of democratic developments.”<sup>110</sup>

The Municipal Development Committee (MDC), created in 2003, serves as the arena for dialogue between the government and CSOs and NGOs.<sup>111</sup> The affectivity of the MDC to carry out the maintenance of this channel for communication has proven less than ideal. CSOs and NGOs in Managua rarely receive immediate response from the MDC, if any at all, regarding their concerns and interests.<sup>112</sup> Recent newspaper articles explain the lack of response or blatant ignoring by the government of CSO and NGO concerns.<sup>113</sup> CSOs and NGOs in Managua eventually grew tired of lobbying with the MDC to no avail, and came together to form the ‘Alliance of Civil Organizations of the Southwest Periphery of Managua’.<sup>114</sup> The Alliance opened up a space for communication within civil society for organizations to cooperate, and garnered enough power to overcome the lack of cooperation with the local government.

The power of the Alliance and the amplitude of its voice within Managua have been largely silenced by the FSLN administration’s creation of its CPCs.<sup>115</sup> These community councils now stand as another hoop for CSOs and NGOs to jump through in order to have their opinions heard by local and national representatives. “While the previous government often excluded CSOs altogether... the CPCs exclude according to party affiliation,” making the space for civil society an extension of the political party.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>108</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>109</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>110</sup> Kaldor, M. and D. Kostovicova. 2007. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69-70

<sup>112</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 70

<sup>113</sup> Larios, Carlos. “Ayuda a los pobres sigue bloqueada en la aduana.” *El Nuevo Diario*. Managua, 2011.

<sup>114</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 70

<sup>115</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 70

<sup>116</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 73

Since the FSLN's return to power in 2007, opposing political parties have faced similar struggles to CSOs and NGOs in terms of funding restrictions. The Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS) leadership has "been targeted by the government since the FSLN's return to power with a systematic campaign to discredit them with accusation of corruption and with attempts to control or cut off their funding from international donors."<sup>117</sup> "The governance spaces created by the FSLN are used to channel resources, which provides the state with its own mechanism for transferring resources to the poor, but which increases clientelism."<sup>118</sup> The use of CPCs to redistribute welfare resources is compounded by the fact that "government departments now require a letter of approval from a CPC before they will consider any requests for resources."<sup>119</sup> Essentially, CSOs and NGOs are cut off from distributing the supplies donated to them by international contributors and the government has complete control of resources and more importantly for Ortega's consolidation of power, credit for solving the nation's social problems.<sup>120</sup> This manipulation of public perception of the Ortega regime has garnered him support, but has also inspired civil society actors to change their practices to avoid possible governmental interference. As will be seen in the interviews from Nicaragua, staying out of the media and traveling without affiliation to specific programs are a few of the strategies currently implemented by civil society actors. NGO community Ortega has labeled NGOs as "reproducers of capitalist values" and attempted to "neutralize" the anti-Sandinista NGOs and feminist organizations that question his administration's legitimacy.<sup>121</sup>

In tasking the government headed councils with the responsibility of distributing vital resources such as food and basic supplies, the image of Ortega's administration becomes one of charity, solidarity and care for the poor. "Why the president fought so hard for the CPCs can be explained by the chance they offer him, as coordinator of the national cabinet of the CPC, to present a view of citizens' demands that corresponds to his values..."<sup>122</sup> Ultimately the illusion of civil society is painted to satisfy the unassuming public, while the master puppeteer orchestrates whichever agenda is most important to his political dominance. Ortega is also hoping that the tension between the executive and legislative branches over the CPCs and their validity will escalate to a level where

---

<sup>117</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 69

<sup>118</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 73

<sup>119</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>120</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>121</sup> Howard and Vasquez. 2011, 75

<sup>122</sup> Close, David. 2009. "Nicaragua: the return of Daniel Ortega." In *Reclaiming latin america*. Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. (109-122). London: Zed Books Ltd. 119

a push for a new constitution is possible.<sup>123</sup> In an ideal world for Ortega, a new constitution would enable him to extend his administration beyond the 2011 elections. The support Ortega hopes to gather through the success of the CPCs is only one example of the means by which he is creating a charismatic and politically enticing image of himself.

### **The Testimonies**

The testimonies of NGO and CSO representatives who operate in Nicaragua describe various tactics Ortega is employing to improve his image to the Nicaraguan public, and consolidate state control over civil society.

All of the civil society organizations contacted in Nicaragua are non-state actors with no affiliation to the state-controlled structure of civil society. The purpose or mission of each organization varies across a spectrum of services including medical, educational, and human rights advocacy. Each individual response offered new and unique insight to the space for civil society organizations within Nicaragua. While Nicaragua, unlike Venezuela, has not passed any law or decree directly prohibiting or restricting CSOs and NGOs, the testimonies describe alternative means by which the government has placed obstacles before the successful operation for many organizations. Each of these obstacles or challenges directly translate into part of Ortega's strategy to consolidate and maintain power; interviewees were well aware of the government's manipulation and interference in the space within which they operate.

### **Interviewee #1:**

The first representative from Nicaragua is affiliated with an NGO focused on providing medical services, particularly in Managua. The testimony that this interviewee provided highlights the manipulative nature of the Ortega regime in terms of civil society. Reiterating the strategy of Ortega to gain support and popularity throughout the population by taking credit for the successes of civil society organizations, interviewee #1 explains that they no longer do national TV interviews that could be spun to appear as part of Ortega's 'good deeds'. The representative goes further in analyzing this scheme of the government by stating; "Ortega is a dictator, and smart enough to play defense; that defense requires maintaining public support...One tactic to do this is through creating the illusion of being a strong supporter or highly involved in the public services that CSOs and NGOs provide. Another way is to confiscate the resources intended for CSOs to distribute to the poor, selling some for profit and giving out the rest in a display

---

<sup>123</sup> Close. 2009, 119

of charity.” The final part of this testimony, which refers to the confiscation of resources, shows how the government can tangibly interfere in the operation of civil society organizations without the passage of laws. The lack of infrastructure in Nicaragua, and the unregulated governmental control of the little infrastructure that does exist (for example the military, police and postal services), enables the government to punish CSOs without concrete laws or policies. “Shipment of supplies and resources is always difficult, but the concern amongst NGOs is rising as more containers are withheld and ransomed by the government...therefore organizational managers and site coordinators are constantly looking over their shoulders for government interference in their work.” Interviewee #1 also added to this statement that they have made sure not to travel under the name of any particular organization, so as to not ‘raise any red flags’ and avoid more ‘bureaucracy and red tape’ that would interfere with their operations’ success. The organization of representative #1 does not receive any funding from the Nicaraguan government, and relies entirely on international funding. Therefore, when asked ‘what if Nicaragua were to pass a similar law to the Ley de Autodeterminación in Venezuela?’, they answered that their program would be shut down. There would be no hope of sustainability for the CSO, and the repercussions for the Nicaraguans who benefit from the goods and services of this medical organization would mean markedly poorer quality care and facilities. The Ortega administration merely wants to appear to care about the people and their provision of vital goods and services, while in actuality the only goal of the administration is its consolidation of power.

The representative of this medical NGO commented on their perception of the relationship between Chávez and Ortega arguing that Venezuelan oil subsidies are facilitating and enabling the Nicaraguan governments sustainability. Given that Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, the government has fewer resources to draw upon for financial stability. Therefore, “Nicaragua receives subsidized oil from Venezuela, and in turn sells that oil to national distributors for a profit...the national distributors then sell the oil to the public, and make a large profit that they use to buy property in Costa Rica.” This is only one example of the backing that Ortega enjoys in return for his loyalty to Chávez and the new left. Ortega is essentially given a false sense of security because of the Venezuelan support he receives, while in reality suffocating NGOs and CSOs out of the country would destroy an exorbitant amount of the resources much of the population relies on for survival. In terms of the future of representative #1’s organizations; “until they observe physical harm or imprisonment of members of the organization, the CSO will continue operation in Nicaragua...The turning point would be when the risks outweigh the rewards; after all, there are needs in other places too.” The bluntness of this response could

be echoed by any organization in Nicaragua; if the government continues to increase its hostility and interference in NGO and CSO operations, the termination of programs will be the end result.

**Interviewee #2:**

Within the last year, the Catholic Church in Nicaragua has spoken out against the Ortega regime and its recent policy changes and “unconstitutional” maneuvers, particularly within the National Assembly. As a response to the church’s comments and stance against the increasingly authoritarian regime of Ortega, Catholic affiliated or based organizations are being severely restricted. Interviewee #2 is a board member of a Catholic-based organization that operates in Nicaragua. The information that this participant provided focused upon the governments withholding by of cargo as the main interference in the CSOs operation. Like in the testimony of interviewee #1, the government has used this form of control and penalization as a strategy for halting the operation of this CSO. The cargo in question contains critical supplies for the organizations successful operation in numerous Nicaraguan communities. Without the supplies, the affectivity of the program will be severely hindered, and if such interference continues, the operational ability of the CSO will stop. “No explanation has been given for this action, but it is obviously politically motivated and it is meant as a message” to the organization. There have been a number of articles in the national newspaper regarding the governmental crackdown on Catholic organizations. One such article explains that “representantes de la Iglesia Católica aseguraron que este año han tenido problemas para poder sacar las donaciones recibidas y llevarlas a los más necesitados.”<sup>124</sup> The testimony on interviewee #2 is certainly part of a trend experienced by Catholic-based CSOs throughout the country; a trend meant as a warning to other NGOs not to speak out against the regime.

**Interviewee #3**

The representative contacted within the third NGO in Nicaragua, quickly turned down the interview. While there could not be a direct testimony from this organization, the strong resistance to the interview speaks for itself. This organization, like the others interviewed in Venezuela and Nicaragua, is extremely dedicated to its mission, and therefore would not take any steps that would jeopardize the sustainability of the program. In their explanation for not partaking in the survey, the representative offered; “You may want to rethink your paper so that it will not depend on the opinions of Nicaraguans who would be

---

<sup>124</sup> Larios, Carlos. “Ayuda a los pobres sigue bloqueada en la aduana.” *El Nuevo Diario*. Managua, 2011.

subject to reprisals.” The demonstrated ability of the government to terminate programs and place huge obstacles in their path, gives meaning to this response.

The power of the Nicaraguan government is unchecked, like in Venezuela, and the channels of communication between CSOs and NGOs and the government are weak at best. Once an organization has been targeted as anti-Ortega there is no limit to the lengths the government will go to in an effort to force the organization out. The three representatives contacted reinforce the evidence gathered regarding the limited space for civil society in Nicaragua. While there are no specific laws or regulations on this space, the government has utilized alternative means of control to consolidate power, and maintain dominance over the various actors within civil society. The analysis section of the paper brings the theoretical and ideological implications for civil society space demonstrated by both the testimonies and historical evidence of the leftist regimes in Nicaragua and Venezuela.

**Analysis: Measuring the deviation of the New Left space for civil society**

The activist version of civil society, as posited by Kaldor, is a radicalization of democracy, which presupposes a state or rule of law, insists on limitations on state power, and also a redistribution of power.<sup>125</sup> Within this perspective, civil society is synonymous with active citizenship “outside of formal political circles, and expanded space” where citizens are capable of creating change through “self-organization and through political pressure.”<sup>126</sup> Finally, at a global level, post-Marxian thinkers conceptualize a “global public sphere” where transnational communication and advocacy networks can form.<sup>127</sup>

Considering the space and shape of civil society under the new leftist regimes in Venezuela and Nicaragua, the ideology which seems to best encompass their structure of civil society is what Kaldor names ‘the postmodern’ version. Civil society in the postmodern conceptualization is an arena of pluralism where debate and diversity of opinion is welcomed.<sup>128</sup> The new left’s structuring of civil society upon first glance appears to follow this ideology with its councils and committees for active citizen participation and advocacy for specific interests. A closer look, however, reveals the exclusionary tendencies of the new left policies, particularly in relation to NGOs and CSOs as actors within civil society. Non-state organizations are viewed by the left as an ‘other’ and fear of the lack of governmental control over such organizations has resulted in the

---

<sup>125</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 8.

<sup>126</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 8.

<sup>128</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 9

rigid policies on the space for NGOs and CSOs within civil society. Venezuela's passage of the 'Ley de Autodeterminación' in December of 2010, and Nicaragua's intervention in the successful shipment and receipt of resources to many NGOs, stand as clear examples of the new left leaders discomfort and hostility towards a civil society space which is truly tolerant and plural.

Academics such as Manuel Riesco make sense of the exclusion and suffocation of NGOs and CSOs, particularly internationally funded and based organizations, by linking them with the image of neoliberalism in Latin America. He argues that major events are taking place in Nicaragua, Venezuela, and elsewhere in terms of transition away from the neoliberal model. "In all these countries, movements have surged to power which question the neo-liberal model in a generally radical manner... their achievements are considerable, especially as regards recovering revenues from natural resources and improving the incomes and participation of the poor..."<sup>129</sup> While neoliberalism, and certainly neoconservatism, have been discredited by many throughout Latin America, the operational space that the neoliberal model creates for civil society actors in indisputably more expansive and less restrictive than that of the new left model.

Imperative to the understanding of the new left's momentum and support throughout the region, is the recognition of the power of the middle class. Neoliberalism's causation of the decline in income for middle class employees (particularly in the public sector) and the cuts in government spending on public services, health care and education gave rise to the "new poor."<sup>130</sup> The new left's mobilization of this population had surmounted to incredible support for "a new and more active state in defending public goods and public spaces."<sup>131</sup> Kaldor, like Riesco, addresses the likelihood of populations, such as Latin America's left, to view civil society as "Eurocentric; a product of a specific Western culture that is imposed on the rest of the world."<sup>132</sup> The anti-neoliberal and anti-west sentiments that Riesco and Kaldor take into consideration in their analysis of civil society conceptualization, lead to reformation and redefinition of civil society.

The Venezuelan and Nicaraguan new lefts, like postmodernists, emphasize "the importance of national and religious identities as well as multiple identities

---

<sup>129</sup> Riesco, Manuel. 2009. "Regional social policies in Latin America". In *World-regional social policy and global governance*. Edited by Deacon, Bob, Maria Cristina Macovei, Luke van Langenhove, and Nicola Yeates. 108-139. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis. 114

<sup>130</sup> Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. 2009. "The End of the Embrace? Neoliberalism and Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Latin America." In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin america*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 18-19

<sup>131</sup> Grugel and Ruggirozzi. 2009, 19

<sup>132</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 9

as a precondition for civil society.”<sup>133</sup> Through the structure of the missions and councils in Venezuela, individuals gain identity not only through their family, occupation, and religion, but also as a member of civil society who partakes in decision-making and advocacy. Further highlighting the cohesion of the new left with postmodernist conceptualization of civil society are the nationalist tendencies used to enclose the space for civil society. In drawing the boundaries of the space for civil society around nationality, the new left and postmodernists seek to separate themselves from foreign or international presences such as NGOs and CSOs. Therefore, the policies and actions of Ortega and Chávez would not appear to Kaldor or Riesco as anything other than ‘postmodern’ policy diffusion.

Kaldor’s activist belief in the limitation of state powers is completely undermined by the new left’s structuring of civil society as a network of government monitored channels for communication. Although this redistribution of civil society space and political power fits into the post-Marxian ideology of the redistribution of power, the legitimacy of the councils and missions in Venezuela and Nicaragua is debatable. Post-Marxian or activist thinkers promote active citizenship, which in some cases is self-organized. The new left could make the argument that their councils and committees encourage self-organization, yet the strict parameters on the groups, and the need for governmental approval of community-desired programs undermines the integrity of the councils. Finally, the global public sphere which post-Marxian theorists argue is created through the space of civil society, is more of a regional public sphere under the new left. In Chávez’s concept of the new left and the Bolivarian revolution, nationalism is expanded to regionalism within Latin America. His creation of ALBA, promotion of the new left, and political and economic support pledged by his administration to partners such as Ortega, exemplify Chávez’s desire to expand the boundaries of cooperation politically, economically, and on the level of civil society throughout Latin America. “The idea of [regional] integration is as old as LA independence, which is why it is called Bolívar’s dream.”<sup>134</sup> While the well founded sentiments behind regional unity and independence from international actors and institutions that proved detrimental to development and overall standard of living in Latin America in the past, the legitimacy of the new left regimes as constructive mechanisms for the improvement of society and not as strategies for the consolidation of individual power remains to be seen. The space for civil society, particularly the NGOs and

---

<sup>133</sup> Kaldor. 2003, 10

<sup>134</sup> Riesco, Manuel. 2009. “Regional social policies in Latin America”. In *World-regional social policy and global governance*. Edited by Deacon, Bob, Maria Cristina Macovei, Luke van Langenhove, and Nicola Yeates. 108-139. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis. 114



CSOs, within Latin America is collapsing as new left policies reshape the arena surround only those organizations and groups constructed, monitored, and maintained by the state.

### **Conclusion: Latin America's Restrictions on Civil Society Space**

As civil society is being redefined and reshaped in Latin America, it is important to understand the sustainability of such organizations. The bottom line in sustainability is an organizations ability to secure the resources, human, financial, and technological, that it needs to operate. The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project highlighted the general criteria for sustainability within its research analysis. First on the list of criterion is a self-generated income; through fees, venture activities, member dues, or earnings from the resources under their ownership.<sup>135</sup> Second, and important to the subject of this paper, is governmental support, which can stabilize the financial base of the civil society sector.<sup>136</sup> Third on the list is popular support, most calculable through the number of volunteers within the organization. Finally the study cited the broader policy environment of the societies within which the organization operates.<sup>137</sup> “Especially important here is the legal environment, the set of laws and regulations governing the operations of civil society organizations.”<sup>138</sup>

The importance of the analysis of civil society space in this paper is inextricably linked to the importance or impact that civil society organizations are capable of having within their respective countries. “The first measurement of the impact of the civil society sector is the overall contribution this sector makes to the production of value in the economy.”<sup>139</sup> In developing nations such as Nicaragua policy makers are faced with the realization that the opportunity for economic growth is an incredibly powerful incentive for supporting organizations within their society. In addition to the economic value that civil society organizations generally contribute to society, the services that they provide to the population have a major impact.<sup>140</sup> Many of the services that the civil society sector provides to society culminate in the expression and advocacy of public

---

<sup>135</sup> List, Regina, L. Salamon, and S. Sokolowski. 2004. “Global Civil Society: An Overview”. In *Global Civil Society, dimensions of the nonprofit sector*. Edited by Salamon, Lester, and S. Sokolowski. Yorktown Heights: Kumarian Press Inc. 70

<sup>136</sup> Heinrich, V. and L. Fioramonti. 2008. *CIVICTUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc. Volume 2. 70

<sup>137</sup> Heinrich, and Fioramonti. 2008, 70

<sup>138</sup> Heinrich, and Fioramonti. 2008, 70

<sup>139</sup> Heinrich, and Fioramonti. 2008, 74

<sup>140</sup> Heinrich, and Fioramonti. 2008, 74

opinion, and the drawing in of members and volunteers to promote those opinions – two other defining contributions of the importance of civil society.<sup>141</sup>

Venezuela and Nicaragua's new lefts are at varying stages in their progression towards complete 'Twentieth-Century Socialism'. "Neoliberalism, dubbed *capitalismo salvaje* (savage capitalism) reached its peak during the so-called "lost decade" of the 1980s, when privatization of public services and national resources devastated the already highly polarized societies and economies of Latin America."<sup>142</sup> Presently, the reclaiming and reacquiring of many Latin American nations by regional forces and powers is gaining momentum. Chávez has successfully consolidated his power, taken political and economic control of the country, and reorganized the space of civil society in Venezuela. As these policies and leftist strategies continue to take shape under his administration, regional governments within Latin America have begun employing new left ideologies within their own borders.

In the case of Ortega, the new left proved a critical tool for building his regime and siphoning power back to the state. The sustainability of the new left in Nicaragua, particularly its desire to move towards more exclusionary policies towards international actors is precarious at best, yet the pledge of Venezuelan economic and political support is arguably the linchpin for success. Importantly, the reliance on international aid, and the inability for the Nicaraguan government to provide basic public services to its people, limits the extent to which it can truly collapse the space for CSOs and NGOs. Venezuela, however, enjoys the profits from its lucrative natural resources, particularly oil, and is less deterred economically and socially by the removal of international actors. What is of concern for Venezuela is the quality of the goods and services that the government can provide, as well as the authenticity of the space for new civil society organizations.

On a global level, organizations such as Human Rights Watch reference a global trend of retaliation towards and resistance of CSOs and NGOs gaining popularity.<sup>143</sup> "National governments forced to contented with an expanding web of international agreements are less able to control flows of information and opinion and, in the face of global social norms and pressures, must now take into

---

<sup>141</sup> Heinrich, and Fioramonti. 2008, 74

<sup>142</sup> Ballvé, Teo, and Vijay Prashad. 2006. *Dispatches from latin america: On the frontlines against neoliberalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press. 37-38.

<sup>143</sup> Roth, Kenneth. 2010. "Abusers' Reaction: Intensifying Attacks on Human Rights Defenders, Organizations, and Institutions." In Human Rights Watch 2010 World Report. United States: Human Rights Watch.

account not only public opinions within their borders, but the opinions of external constituencies as well.”<sup>144</sup> Many governments have chosen to retaliate against this trend in transparency and communication. Censorship, physical abuse and threats, blockage of funding, harassment, are just some of the tactics employed by defensive governments in an attempt to deter the presence of CSOs and NGOs.<sup>145</sup> As Kenneth Roth explains in the introduction to the 2010 Human Rights Watch World Report, “one method seemingly in ascendancy is the adoption of intrusive laws and regulations – designed not to provide a framework to facilitate the creation and operation of NGOs, but to control and muffle them.”<sup>146</sup> Echoing the trends described in Venezuela and Nicaragua, Roth writes, “the overall trend has been for States to adopt new laws restricting the space for human rights activities.”<sup>147</sup> Although the report was written in 2010, before the passage of Venezuela’s ‘Ley de la Autodeterminación’, the initiative was referenced as a pending restriction on human rights monitoring. The report described the law as a bill that “would subject NGOs that receive foreign assistance to vague registration requirements and the duty to answer intrusive government questions about their activities, funding, and expenses.”<sup>148</sup> While the repercussions of the new left’s organization and control of the space for civil society are yet to be fully realized, the very fact that citizen participation is being promoted and discussed is encouraging.

As Latin Americans experience new levels of citizen participation and continues to learn from their past civil society spaces for advocacy, a future in which citizens are not “ignorant subservient peasants” or “masses in full transition” is more likely.<sup>149</sup> In fact, within the next few decades, Manuel Riesco argues, “the vast majority of the LA population will have achieved the status of citizens, with decent health standards, basic and secondary education of reasonable quality, and large numbers having completed the tertiary level as well.”<sup>150</sup> Only time will tell the quality and legitimacy of these political, economic, and civil society advances in Latin America. “The strengthening of South-to-South networks is imperative if the dominant global structures of power – represented by the USA and institutions such as the IMF and the WTO (World Trade Organization) – are

---

<sup>144</sup> Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. *Global civil society 2007/8*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. 20-21.

<sup>145</sup> Roth, Kenneth. 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Roth, Kenneth. 2010.

<sup>147</sup> Roth, Kenneth. 2010.

<sup>148</sup> Roth, Kenneth. 2010.

<sup>149</sup> Riesco. 2009, 115.

<sup>150</sup> Riesco. 2009, 166.

to be challenged.”<sup>151</sup> Included in this assessment of the new lefts affectivity is the extent of the aftermath of exclusionary policies towards international actors and the space in which they operate. In the mean time, the international global community of civil society actors continues to fight for its presence and importance within the borders of the new left countries.

---

<sup>151</sup> Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. 2009. Conclusion: Nuestra América – the spectre haunting Washington. In *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*. Edited by Lievesley, Gerladine, and Steve Ludlman. London: Zed Books. 221

## References

- Albrow, Martin, Helmut Anheier, Marlies Glasius, Monroe E. Price, and Mary Kaldor. 2007. *Global civil society 20078*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Ballvé, Teo, and Vijay Prashad. 2006. *Dispatches from latin america: On the frontlines against neoliberalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.
- Baltodano, Mónica. 2009. *Sandinismo, Pactos Democracia y Cambio Revolucionario*. Managua: Fuzión de Colores.
- Buxton, Julia. 2009. "Venezuela: the political evolution of Bolivarianism." In *Reclaiming latin america*. Edited by Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. (57-74). London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Castaneda, Jorge G. 2006. "Latin America's Left Turn." *Foreign Affairs*. (85.3): 28-38.
- Chávez, Lydia. 2007. Daniel ortega's new best friend: Hugo chavez. *salon.com* 2007.
- Close, David. 2009. "Nicaragua: the return of Daniel Ortega." In *Reclaiming latin america*. Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. (109-122). London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Country, By. "Nicaragua | Data." *Data | The World Bank*. Web. 04 Nov. 2010. <<http://data.worldbank.org/country/nicaragua>>.
- Daniel Ortega, Hugo Chavez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: Unholy alliance. 2010. *The Costa Rica News*2010, sec Latin American News
- Flamini, Roland. "The new Latin America; will radicals or moderates triumph?". *CQ Global Researcher* 2, (3).
- Glasius, Marlies, David Lewis, and Hakan Seckinelgin. 2004. *Exploring civil society: Political and cultural contexts*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Goldfrank, Benjamin. "Neoliberalism and the Left: National Challenges, Local Responses, and Global Alternatives." In *Beyond neoliberalism in Latin America?*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 43-54. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Grugel, Jean. 2009. "Basta de Realidades, Queremos Promesas: Democracy After the Washington Consensus." In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin america*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. (25-48). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. 2009. "The End of the Embrace? Neoliberalism and Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Latin America." In *Governance after neoliberalism in latin america*. Edited by Grugel, J., and P. Ruggirozzi. (1-23). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heinrich, V. and L. Fioramonti. 2008. *CIVICTUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc. Volume 2.
- Howard, Joanna and Luis Serra Vasquez. 2011. Changing spaces of local governance in nicaragua. *Bulletin of Latin American Research; Journal of the Society for Latin American Studies* 30 (1): 64,64-79.
- Kaldor, Mary. 2003. "The Idea of Global Civil Society". *International Affairs* (79): 583-593.
- Kaldor, Mary. 2003. *Global civil society: An answer to war*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Kaldor, Mary. 2004. "Globalization and Civil Society". In *Exploring civil society: Political and cultural contexts*. Edited by Glasius, Marlies, David Lewis, and Hakan Seckinelgin. London; New York: Routledge (195).
- Kaldor, M. and D. Kostovicova. 2007. "Global civil society and illiberal regimes". In *Global Civil Society 2*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 86-112. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Katz, Hagai. 2006. "Gramsci, Hegemony, and Global Civil Society Networks". *International Society for Third Sector Research and the John Hopkins University*. (17): 333-348.
- Larios, Carlos. "Ayuda a los pobres sigue bloqueada en la aduana." *El Nuevo Diario*. Managua, 2011.
- "Ley Contra las ONG es un "muro de Berlín legislativo." 2010. *El Universal: Nacional y Política*. Venezuela.

- Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. 2009. Conclusion: Nuestra América – the spectre haunting Washington. In *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*. Edited by Lievesley, Gerladine, and Steve Ludlman. London: Zed Books. 221
- Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam. 2009. *Reclaiming latin america*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- List, Regina, L. Salamon, and S. Sokolowski. 2004. “Global Civil Society: An Overview”. In *Global Civil Society, dimensions of the nonprofit sector*. Edited by Salamon, Lester, and S. Sokolowski. Yorktown Heights: Kumarian Press Inc.
- Malena, Carmen. 2008. *Does Civil Society Exist?* In: *Global Survey of the State of Civil Society*. Kumarian Press Inc. Bloomfield, CT. 183-200.
- Margheritis, Ana, Periera, Anthony W. 2007. The neoliberal turn in latin america: The cycle of ideas and the search for an alternative. *Latin American Perspectives* 34 (3): 25-48. .
- Motta, Sara C. 2009. “Venezuela: Reinventing social democracy from below?” In *Reclaiming latin america*. Edited by Lievesley, Geraldine, and Steve Ludlam.
- Olivera, Miguel. 2007. “Deepening Democracy in Latin America”. In *Global Civil Society 2*. Edited by Albrow, Martin, H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Price, and M. Kaldor. London: Sage Ltd. (114-123)
- Oxhorn, Philip. “Beyond Neoliberalism? Latin America’s New Crossroads.” In *Beyond neoliberalism in Latin America?*. Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 217-231. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reyna, Feliciano and Yolanda D’Elia. “Civilis, Investigación y acción de la sociedad civil en derechos humanos”. *Civilis*. Caracas, 2011.
- Riesco, Manuel. 2009. “Regional social policies in Latin America”. In *World-regional social policy and global governance*. Edited by Deacon, Bob, Maria Cristina Macovei, Luke van Langenhove, and Nicola Yeates. 108-139. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.
- Roberts, Kenneth M. 2009. “Beyond Neoliberalism: Popular Responses to Social Change in Latin America.” In *Beyond neoliberalism in Latin America?*.

Edited by Burdick, John, Philip Oxhorn, and Kenneth M. Roberts. 1-13. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Roth, Kenneth. 2010. "Abusers' Reaction: Intensifying Attacks on Human Rights Defenders, Organizations, and Institutions." In Human Rights Watch 2010 World Report. United States: Human Rights Watch.

Sinergia, Asociación Venezolano de Organizaciones de Sociedad Civil, y sus 49 afiliadas. "Informe sobre la situación de la Libertad de Asociación en Venezuela." Sinergia. Caracas, 2011.

Staten, Clifford L. 2010. *The History of Nicaragua*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood.

Taylor, Rupert. 2010. *Third sector research*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Walton, Michael. 2004. "Neoliberalism in latin america: Good, bad, or incomplete?" *Latin American Research Review* 39 (3): 165-183.

Zúquete, José P. 2008. "The missionary politics of Hugo Chávez". In *Latin American Politics and Society*. 50 (1): 91-122.