

These gaps notwithstanding, *Sovereign Emergencies* is a solid achievement. It is well written throughout, and Kelly displays a keen eye for telling archival details. The tone of ‘critical empathy’ (p. 12) vis-à-vis rights campaigners, which Kelly establishes in the introduction and maintains throughout the book, is well executed. While firmly a history book, it offers interdisciplinary appeal for social scientists and legal human rights scholars, especially as a demonstration of agent-based power despite untested practices and formidable structural obstacles.

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Donald V. Kingsbury, *Only the People Can Save the People: Constituent Power, Revolution, and Counterrevolution in Venezuela*

(Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018), pp. xix + 210, \$90.00, hb; \$25.95, pb.

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Rhetoric is not the same as reality; legitimations are not the same as experiences. The former may shape the latter, but how, to what extent and with what consequences are empirical matters. The relation between them needs to be created and sustained and scholars need to examine its formation in detail. In a word, it needs to be ‘unpacked’. This is not accomplished here. The vast bulk of the exposition in this book is made up of references to writers and debates within critical social theory, mostly Latin American and European.

Donald V. Kingsbury’s *Only the People Can Save the People* concentrates attention on ‘constituent’ and ‘constituted’ power. The author addresses the sources and dynamics of this relation for ‘Bolivarian’ Venezuela, but unfortunately remains mostly on the rhetoric and legitimation side of the equation. Constituted power is more or less what we know as states and organisation: with established procedures, rules and enforcement capabilities. Constituent power is harder to pin down: at issue are social energies and egalitarian urges that break through from time to time in revolutionary moments, social movements or just uncontrolled collective action. For the author the breakthrough moment in Venezuela was the Caracazo of 1989, massive social protests that brought an end to four decades of liberal two-party democracy and ‘marked the emergence of a previously unrecognized or *unrecognizable* political subject ... *la turba*, the multitude, the masses’ (p. 55). The central point for Kingsbury is the presumed new consciousness emerging in these moments. ‘The revolution taking place in Venezuela since the Caracazo’, he writes, ‘has been fundamentally a question of the formation and persistence of modes of subjectivity opposed to the common sense imposed by late

capitalism in the developing world' (p. 65). At home, Chavismo stands for a form of intersubjectivity through which people make sense of the world. In its foreign relations (at least under Chávez) Bolivarian policies have promoted 'humanist transnationalism and its preferred understanding of constituent power as the cornerstone of collective identity' (p. 77).

For the author the social and political project of Chavismo is nothing less than a 'fecundity of rebellious subjectivity' (p. 55). Without systematic information about this new consciousness, it is difficult to know what to make of all this. But systematic information is what we do not get. There is no account, for example, of school curricula (controversial to be sure), no systematic presentation of interview data and no analysis of the evolving life of associations. We get details on congresses of the official party. We also get a lot of anecdotes from encounters: with a friendly cooperative in Merida, or chats with the author's old friend, 'Miguel'. The most concrete chapter (on the sociology of the Caracas Metro) mentions numerous groups (land committees, *barrio* assemblies) but never looks within. Validation is found more in references to authors and debates within contemporary critical theory than in data on the formation of consciousnesses and how they may help consolidate collective behaviour.

The dichotomy of constituted and constituent power is used to frame an analysis of Venezuelan society and politics pre and post Chávez, rewritten to fit the author's theoretical and political preferences. Underneath the theoretical debate of this book is an evident desire to make the case that 'Bolivarian democracy' changes the game for post-liberal politics. What is commonly called 'democracy' is treated with undisguised scorn in this book, preceded in most cases with adjectives: imperial, merely electoral, liberal or post-liberal, polyarchical. In contrast Chavismo promotes the 'democratization of antagonism' (p. 152).

Kingsbury recognises that the Maduro government is highly militarised and relies on repression to remain in place (pp. 175–7). But this dose of realism is tempered by consistent assertions that the devolution of the Maduro regime is a betrayal of the legacy of Chávez (as validated by critical social theory), not a logical evolution of a military/populist regime centred on adulation of the leader, whose charismatic founder is gone. Like others who work in this vein, he sees these as aberrations rather than as a logical outgrowth of Chávez's own vision of a military/populist alliance with himself as the indispensable mediator. Kingsbury is puzzled that with over 7 million members, the Chavista party could be so badly defeated in the legislative elections of December 2015 (p. 73). But membership figures of this kind are unlikely to be reliable: they are surely inflated by holders and seekers of office, along with clients of public services for whom a party card has been a requisite for access to goods and services.

For Kingsbury, the point is to recognise the roiling energies of constituent power. More or less established sets of institutions and procedures are just fleeting moments of control. For their part, aspiring revolutionary parties (like the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV) established by Chávez in 2006) do little more than hold the door open for constituent power (p. 66). But, of course, revolutionary history is full of cases in which initial moments of enthusiasm are followed by consolidation of power in some form. Kingsbury laments the 'creeping proceduralism of Bolivarian government'

(p. 145) which is perhaps inevitable in any regime that wants to perpetuate itself in power. This is what Max Weber meant by the 'routinisation of charisma' and his analysis of types and dynamics of authority (traditional, charismatic and bureaucratic) remains relevant, as are Robert Michels' reflections on the 'iron law of oligarchy' which pointed to tendencies to concentrate power in collective forms.

The author is theoretically ambitious, and presents big questions about the dynamics of democracy and culture in the contemporary world. But big questions call for systematic evidence and, as I have suggested, evidence is in short supply, overshadowed throughout this book by references to authors and debates within critical theory. This leaves the reader facing a complex theoretical superstructure that teeters on a limited base.

The author is so focused on the dichotomy of constituted power vs. constituent power and on the presumed emergence of a new 'rebellious intersubjectivity' that he ignores or sets aside more proximate explanations of Venezuelan realities: the hyper-centralisation of power in an executive with unchecked power, the expanded role of so-called security forces, the unwelcome consequences of the gutting of institutions of all kinds (from health to education, water supply to infrastructure maintenance), massive outmigration and, of course, bad economic policy, hyperinflation, mismanagement and corruption. A little more Max Weber or Robert Michels and a little less critical theory might help clear the air.

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Robert Samet, *Deadline: Populism and the Press in Venezuela*

(Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp. xi + 244, \$27.50; £24.00, pb.

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In *Deadline* anthropologist Robert Samet offers a rich and nuanced ethnography of the role of the press in weaving the fabric of political culture through crime journalism in Venezuela. Urban crime in Venezuela is alarming: one in every 200 Venezuelans die in gun violence-related circumstances. Public responses to crime from Venezuelan citizens oscillate between acts of defiance and anti-crime protests. State responses to crime have shifted from rooting out the economic inequalities that enabled violent crime to emerge in the first place, to overreliance on repressive policing to crack down on urban crime. The crime press has been a major actor in shaping both spheres, amid the bitter political polarisation. The exploration of these relationships between collective mobilisation, urban security policies and the press are the guiding ideas that ground *Deadline's* analysis.