

on the streets of urban Ecuador? Negative experiences of begging are discussed to some extent, such as traffic accidents, health risks, harassment and the threats of urban clean-up campaigns, yet despite these downsides, Swanson insightfully suggests that these risks are likely to be substantially lower than those that girls would face if they were working as domestic workers behind closed doors.

Whilst the book covers many dimensions including gender, age, generation and ethnicity, I would have liked to have seen a closer look at the dynamics of the begging encounter, such as exploring the nature of the interactions between beggars and those who give (and those who do not). It could have been interesting if Swanson had been able to include some interviews with those who interact with beggars regularly in the streets, such as tourists. Furthermore, although the importance of informal networks for coping with life on the streets is highlighted, more could have been discussed in relation to siblings and birth order. In a majority world context where rural households have up to twelve children, birth order is likely to be extremely important in shaping children's opportunities for education, work and migration.

In this book Swanson emphasises the mismatch between minority world conceptualisations of childhood and indigenous understandings of childhood practices. She illustrates the dangers of imposing minority world discourses onto majority world realities such as neoliberal urban policies, of begging discourses with a hidden morality, and of decontextualised understandings of children's rights. *Begging as a Path to Progress* will not disappoint, for it pushes the reader to consider multiple perspectives and aspects of begging which unravel myths and reveal racist and sexist attitudes towards indigenous girls and young women in Ecuador.

*University of Stirling*

SAMANTHA PUNCH

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 44 (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X11001349

Ralph S. Clem and Anthony P. Maingot (eds.), *Venezuela's Petro-Diplomacy: Hugo Chávez's Foreign Policy* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), pp. x + 162, \$65.00, hb.

The pivotal role that oil plays in Venezuela's foreign policy toward Latin America is unique. Few other countries in history have attempted to translate the favourable terms offered to commercial partners for an export commodity into diplomatic gains, as Venezuela has done under the presidency of Hugo Chávez. *Venezuela's Petro-Diplomacy* explores diverse aspects of this political-commercial strategy and the nation's foreign policy in general, including the Petrocaribe trade agreement, the Alternativa Bolivariana para las Américas (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, ALBA) bloc, relations with Belarus, Colombia and Trinidad, the reactions of Venezuelans toward Chávez's foreign policy initiatives, and the attitude of the European Left towards Venezuelan policies.

The opening chapter by Harold Trinkunas points to 'elements of continuity with the past', in spite of the Chávez government's revolutionary and 'overtly ideological' rhetoric (p. 16). Trinkunas argues that even though 'conservative analysts in the United States' have expressed fears of Venezuela's intent to export the Bolivarian revolution to the rest of the continent, 'regime export' endeavours have not been 'uncommon in Latin America' (p. 21). Trinkunas concludes his essay with various policy recommendations. The United States, according to Trinkunas, 'should moderate its concerns over Venezuela's international policies' (p. 29). It should also place greater

emphasis on 'poverty reduction' (p. 29) and channel funds through NGOs rather than the State Department or the National Endowment for Democracy, due to its 'loss of credibility' under the Bush administration.

Anthony Maingot's essay also places Venezuela's foreign policy in a broader historical context in order to understand the adverse reaction of neighbouring Trinidad to Chávez's Petrocaribe programme. In doing so he discusses a diversity of factors dating back to the Trinidadian prime minister, Eric Williams, who in the 1970s questioned President Carlos Andrés Pérez's Caribbean opening, and even 'attacked the notion that Venezuela was a Caribbean country' (p. 105). Although Trinidad's posture is today more 'diplomatic' (p. 105), Maingot shows that the Chávez government's initiatives clash with that nation's interests as an oil producer in the region.

Diverse factors also lay behind the general approval that European progressives, including many trade unionists, showed towards the Chávez government, as Julia Buxton discusses in her chapter. Buxton's main point is that the 'disjuncture' between Europe, taking in the EU and even, on some issues, conservative sectors, on the one hand, and the United States, on the other, reinforces the outlook of European progressives toward Venezuela. Europeans do not generally share US assumptions and biases on issues such as nationalisation of basic industry, state intervention in the economy on behalf of the underprivileged, concern over human rights violations in the context of the war on terrorism in Colombia, and the Cuban government's defence of national sovereignty. One exception to this European-US divide is Venezuela's 'alignment with Iran', which Buxton calls 'problematic for progressives' in Europe (p. 146).

While the essays by Trinkunas and Buxton are even-handed in their analysis of the *chavista* phenomenon, the chapter by Norman Girvan on ALBA presents an overtly favourable view of Chávez's Caribbean initiatives. Girvan, who is a research professor at the University of the West Indies, discusses the advantages for the Caribbean nations of associating with ALBA and Petrocaribe. At the same time, he denies that a Caribbean nation's membership in ALBA conflicts with its obligations toward the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). While pointing to the economic benefits that Venezuela receives from ALBA and Petrocaribe, Girvan warns against non-reciprocal arrangements, which risk converting the status of member nations into that of 'freeloader' (p. 121).

The chapters by Javier Corrales, María Teresa Romero and Jorge Castañeda, who are among Chávez's harshest academic critics, as well as the ones by John Magdaleno and Román Ortiz, are overwhelmingly negative. The assertions that Chávez is a caudillo who has engaged in a 'spending spree' consisting of 'hand-outs' or 'the export of corruption' (Corrales, pp. 32, 33, 35) to finance foreign programmes for political purposes run through all five essays. In some cases the authors refer to the anti-chavista position on a controversial issue without summarising or paraphrasing the government's point of view. An example is the references to the Venezuelan government's 'alleged profits from drug trafficking' (Romero, p. 75) with the aim of 'becoming a regional power' (Introduction, p. 12). In other cases authors make an assertion on a controversial issue without presenting proof. Thus Corrales claims that the Chávez government fails 'to guarantee the secrecy of the vote' and engages in 'inciting and organizing mobs' (p. 37). Another example along the same lines is Corrales' statement that Venezuela's close relations with Iran are motivated by the intention of increasing oil prices and one possible way of doing this is the 'sinister' strategy of creating a crisis in the Middle East 'which would boost the price of oil' (pp. 39–40). Similarly, Ortiz

argues that Chávez's real reason for attempting to liberate Colombian guerrilla-held hostages was to 'impose "twenty-first century Socialism" on Colombia' (pp. 84–5). Romero, for her part, states that 'Chávez has ... famously attacked King Juan Carlos of Spain' (p. 73), when in fact the general impression of what happened is just the opposite. Romero also fails to provide evidence for her allegation of Venezuela's increasing 'isolation' (p. 74), when the actions of the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations, UNASUR), and the common policies of neighbouring nations on rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), the refusal to readmit Honduras into the OAS, and support for normalisation of trade with Cuba would point in the opposite direction.

The authors of these five chapters subscribe to the thesis put forward in *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left* (Routledge, 2008), co-edited by Castañeda, that Chávez heads a 'bad left' bloc in Latin America characterised by crass populism and authoritarianism. The view simplifies and decontextualises the complex phenomenon of 'twenty-first century socialism'. For example, several of the authors view Chávez's 'anti-Americanism' as nothing more than irrational or self-serving. Corrales writes that 'Chávez is interested in provoking the United States' in order to scapegoat it for 'all his economic woes' and justify a 'crack down on enemies' (p. 41). He fails, however, to trace the events leading up to the open confrontations between the two nations. From 1998, when he campaigned for the presidency, until after the general strike in 2002–3, Chávez's language towards the US government was relatively bland and discreet. The Bush administration, however, beginning in 2001, questioned Chávez's democratic credentials, then supported a coup against him in April 2002, set up an office of transition in the US embassy in Caracas a few months later, and shortly thereafter called for anticipated elections. This historical context suggests that the positions of the Chávez government towards the United States are more complex than is implied in these chapters. In spite of these shortcomings and criticisms, to its credit *Venezuela's Petro-Diplomacy* demonstrates the broad reach of Venezuela's foreign policy and the considerable interest it has generated, as well as its impact on diverse sectors in Venezuela and elsewhere.

*Universidad de Oriente,  
Venezuela*

STEVE ELLNER

*J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 44 (2012). doi:10.1017/S0022216X11001350

Jeffery R. Webber, *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia: Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2011), pp. x + 281, \$19.00, pb.

Jeffery Webber makes a provocative argument about contemporary Bolivian political economy. He says that, despite all its anti-neoliberalism rhetoric, Evo Morales' government has continued many of the features of Bolivia's neoliberal past, instituting what he calls 'reconstituted neoliberalism'. The liberatory potential of the early 2000s, when indigenous and radical Left forces combined in mass mobilisations to overcome both racial and class exploitation, has been lost as Morales' MAS party has moved away from mass politics to electoral politics. Webber catalogues a disappointing slide to reformism, arguing that the 'revolutionary epoch' did not produce a true social revolution, but rather a 'neo-structuralist' development model that reinforces existing class and capitalist structures.