

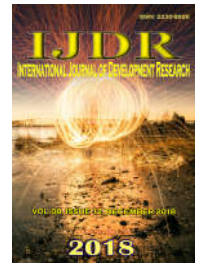


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## HUGO CHÁVEZ - HEROISM AND TYRANNY IN DISCOURSES ON LEGITIMATION IN POLITICAL POWER IN LATIN AMERICA

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### ABSTRACT

This work has been based on research results obtained by Vieira (2009)<sup>1</sup> and Vieira (2013)<sup>2</sup> and, through a methodology based on index paradigm proposed by Ginzburg (1986) and in postulates of Foucault's philosophy (1969), seeks to investigate the existence of a legal-political statement in relation to Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, according to which, in Latin America in the last decades, to legitimize himself in exercise of power, a politician has to be built in the place of a hero, but in him does not want to perpetuate indefinitely as a tyrant. Thus, in addition to the aforementioned theoretical-methodological reference, it will resort to classics of political and philosophical thought, as well as historical analysis, to demonstrate its existence and functioning.

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### INTRODUCTION

This work will take into account texts, reports, stories, videos and documentaries, broadly disseminated in print media, on internet and in audiovisual market about Venezuela's recent policy on Latin American continent, especially with the advent of public appearance of Hugo Chavez, the current president, which dates back to 1992 when he, as a military man, had led an armed movement against the established power of President-elect Carlos Andrés Pérez (frustrated coup). From collected material, linguistic formulations have been extracted whose materiality pointed to the existence of a political and juridical statement on aspect of legitimation in the exercise of Chávez's political power, in order to demonstrate on what [discursively] that legitimacy is based and whether there would be or what would be its limit, allowing us to speak, therefore, at the level of discourse, of a legitimation / delegitimation of Chavez as president of his country.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

For composition of thispaper, texts extracted from printed magazine materials (Caros Amigos e Piauí), internet sites, videos available on YouTube, documentaries, etc.

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were selected and cataloged; in short, texts found in media, in a broad way, dealing with Hugo Chávez or Venezuelan politics of the last two decades (from 1992) until the end of research in 2012, shortly before, therefore, the date of his death, which occurred on March 5, 2013, in the capital Caracas. Then, a route of reading and analysis of selected material (stories, reports, texts and transcriptions of videos and documentaries) was made, with the purpose of identifying and describing the functioning of a statement related to Chavez, according to which to reach to central positions of political power (presidency, for example), the politician must be discursively conceived as a hero, who, by his autocratic knowledge, differs from others, putting himself in a position to solve the problems of population; and at the same time distance itself from the image of tyrant, who seeks to continue indefinitely or perpetually in power. In that sense, the *corpus* was gathered according to adopted theoretical framework, which has privileged the analysis of clues, ruptures, retakes, repetitions and updates (hence a non-linear conception of history). The main operational concepts of analysis were extracted from the philosophy of Foucault (1969) and also from Ginzburg (1986), since, in Vieira (2009) we've sought to investigate the existence of political and legal discourse related to Venezuelan politician (set of statements), in Vieira (2013), on the other hand, it was tried to find out if the statement of "tyranny" found in pages of 10 (ten) years of editions of *Veja Magazine* were also found in other materialities. Ginzburg

(1986), in his *Myths, Emblems and Signs*, has devoted part of work to reflections on an epistemological model (or paradigm) which he calls an *indiciary*. In the chapter *Signs: Roots of an indiciary paradigm*, the author has shown that, at the end of the 19th century, that epistemological paradigm emerged silently in human sciences, which, according to him, had not paid enough attention, and on which still was not explicitly and sufficiently theorized. The author begins the discussion by reporting that, between 1874 and 1876, the Italian Giovanni Morelli (using the pseudonym of a Russian unknown Ivan Lermolieff) has published a series of articles on Italian painting at *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, in which he had presented a method for identifying old paintings. The method has consisted on analysis of characteristic details of certain famous painters (ear lobes, nails, finger forms, etc.), often unnoticed or neglected by their copiers. Those details had integrated a set of fundamental data for the attribution of authorship of works<sup>1</sup>. Ginzburg advocates that, despite being widely criticized (labeled as mechanical and roughly positivist by some) and later to have fallen into disrepute, Morelli's method of extinguishing has never ceased to be used, and through the testimonies of works of Wind, Castelnuovo and Freud, argues that in both Sherlock Holmes (of Arthur Conan Doyle) and Freudian psychoanalysis, that research methodology has left its mark as our small unconscious gestures (faulty acts, jokes, misconceptions, etc.) reveal our character more than any formal attitude, meticulously prepared and controlled by us.

Those marginal data, for Morelli, were revealing because they constituted moments in which the control of an artist, linked to cultural tradition, was distended to give rise to purely individual traits, "which escape him without his realizing it." Even more than non-exceptional allusion at that time to an unconscious activity, it impresses the identification of inner core of artistic individuality with elements subtracted from control of consciousness (GINZBURG, 1986, p. 150). For Ginzburg (1986), Wind's observations on Morelli have drawn scholars' attention to a fragment, long forgotten (left over) of Freud's famous essay, Michelangelo's Moses, conceived in 1914. In that, Freud records Morelli's influence on his psychoanalysis, saying that long before he heard of psychoanalysis, he had read about works of art of Ivan Lermolieff (who we know to be Giovanni Morelli), who, at the end of the fourteenth century, had provoked a revolution in art galleries throughout Europe, with its way of identifying works by artist, paying attention to details (FREUD *apud* GINZBURG, 1986):

He came to that conclusion, dispensing with the general impression and fundamental features of painting, emphasizing, on the contrary, the characteristic importance of secondary details, insignificant particulars such as the conformation of nails, auricular lobes, halo, and other elements that normally passed unnoticed, and that the copyist fails to imitate, but that each artist performs them in a way that differentiates them. [...] I believe that his [Morelli's] method is closely related to the technique of medical psychoanalysis. It also has a habit of penetrating concrete and hidden things through elements that are little noticed or unnoticed, from detritus or "scraps" of our observation (FREUD *apud* GINZBURG, 1986, p. 147). Those

<sup>1</sup>According to Wind (*apud* GINZBURG, 1986, p. 145) "Any museum of art studied by Morelli immediately acquires the appearance of a criminal museum."

clues that Ginzburg sees relate in the form of symptoms (in case of Freud), clues (in case of Sherlock Holmes) and pictorial signs (in case of Giovanni Morelli), would be linked, according to the author, to medical semiotics, since Freud was a physician, Morelli had a medical degree, and Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of the Sherlock Holmes character) had also been a physician before he devoted himself to literature. "In those three cases, one can see the model of medical semiotics: the discipline that makes it possible to diagnose diseases that are inaccessible to direct observation on the basis of superficial symptoms, sometimes irrelevant to the eyes of layman" (GINZBURG, 1986, p.151). Morelli goes on to say that indiciary paradigm has to do with a series of human activities (for a thousand years man was a hunter), and relates to a series of disciplines linked to human (medicine, history, politics, for example), in which the analysis of particular traces and signs (symptoms) is decisive for the solution of equally singular problems, often linked to the daily life of men. Doctors, historians, politicians, carpenters, potters, seamen, fishermen, hunters, and women were, for the Greeks, only a few among many categories that operated in that vast territory of conjectural knowledge (of conjectures, cunning, ability to foresee events): territory ruled by the goddess Méti (Zeus's first wife), who had personified divination by water. "But that paradigm has remained[...] implicit - crushed by prestigious (and socially higher) model of knowledge elaborated by Plato" (GINZBURG, 1986, p. 155). That systematic, totalizing epistemological viewpoint that comes from Plato and passes through Galileo, Descartes and Newton, and which sacrifices knowledge of individual element in favor of generalization expressed in objective-mathematical language, finds in natural sciences the privileged way of developing. The consolidation of disciplines such as Physics and Biology as a scientific knowledge (which will only occur with humanities much later) is due to the tendency [of those subjects] to erase individual traits of objects with which they deal, provoking emotional distance of the observer.

The belief in emancipation of humanity through modern science (which explains everything in general and linear relations of cause and effect), however, runs counter to infiltration of indiciary paradigm in *humanities*: "If reality is opaque, there are privileged areas - signs, clues - that allow you to decipher it. That idea [...] has penetrated into the most varied cognitive spheres, profoundly shaping the human sciences" (GINZBURG, 1986, p. 177). Besides Freud, seen above, the aphorism of Nietzsche and Adorno came to denounce the decadence of systematic thought:

The very term "aphorismatic" is revealing. [It is a clue, a symptom, a sign] *Aphorisms* was the title of a famous work of Hippocrates. In the seventeenth century, collections of *political aphorisms* began to emerge. Aphorismatic literature is, by definition, an attempt to formulate judgments about man and society from symptoms, from signs: a man and a society that are sick, *in crisis* (GINZBURG, 1986, p. 178).

Taking, therefore, Foucault's philosophy, its *archaeogenealogy*, as a set of postulates that approaches that indiciary epistemological model (by the very notion of *non-linear* history that offers, alongside its taste for thresholds, its look at noises and for ruptures, and the abandonment of a cause and effect relationship between phenomena) - which is seen especially in its concept of discursive statement -, we've decided to construct our *corpus* of research in order to verify,

following traces, signs or "symptoms," if the statement that Chávez is a tyrant is present in other materialities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an interview with Hugo Chávez, granted to the program *Roda Viva* (TV Cultura), 03/10/2005, the text that introduces the questions that will be made to said politician reads as follows:

Hugo Chavez was elected by popular vote in December 1998. He had already tried to come to power in 92, through a military coup that did not work out and took him to prison for two years. (...) Of humble origin (...). He achieved the position of colonel and launched a political action inspired by Simón Bolívar, the hero of South American independence (...). With a popular speech to fight corruption and poverty, Hugo Chávez has been in government for six years, and has survived several crises. In 2002, he suffered an attempted military coup that failed (...). The opposition, including military wings, business sectors, and the middle and upper classes accused Chavez of wanting to impose on Venezuela an authoritarian regime similar to that of Fidel Castro, the same line of thought as the US government, and was able to call a plebiscite with the idea to shorten the presidential term. People have gone to the polls, but said yes to Hugo Chavez. Strengthened and supported by governments of the continent (...) the president (...) reformed the Congress, changed the Constitution, and with the abundant money obtained by the rise in price of oil, began to invest heavily in social programs, which much increased its popularity and (...) its chance of re-election in the following year.

In the passage above, the 1992 military coup is placed as an oscillating factor in Chávez's destiny (which led to his imprisonment), but also to a certain extent as a form of ruse that highlights him on political scene. Violence and his humble origin are also present in the fragment, updating what Foucault (1974) postulates about governments of tyranny in archaic Greece: political instability, heroism and autocratic knowledge. The fight against corruption and poverty also legitimizes Chávez as a hero, able to save / rebuild the country, but the allusion to his continuity in power for six years puts the theme of power and its constant threat (usurpation) at center of discussion. The reference to the 2002 coup, the opposition and the US evokes that same sense of political instability. Popular support, materialized in formulations of the text, is also present as in analysis of Oedipus by Foucault (1974), because, in case of Oedipus and Chavez, this support is another indication that updates the statement according to which these characters (Oedipus and Chavez) are tyrants. Finally, the reformulation of Congress, the change in Constitution and use of oil to increase his popularity are put in the way of the said politician to remain in power (win reelection), which also rebuilds the statement of tyranny. The documentary *Hugo Chávez*, a French production directed by Ligia Blanco, in the year 2002, brings some speeches from the politician. One of the excerpts selected for the analysis is as follows:

[NARRATOR] Who is Hugo Chavez, the President of Republic of Venezuela? Is he a Christian Bolivarian revolutionary, as he describes himself? Or is he a demagogue? [...] [INTERVIEWED MAN] Chávez has received a country with a huge expectation of profound changes and certainly 60% voted for him, thinking that the man with authority, with

his own military training, is able to lead a country that, certainly, it was in very poor condition. [...] [CHAVEZ] You ask me how to govern. Govern with ethics, govern surrounded by people, who are there and who has already begun to receive the positive impact of a government that has a commitment to that people, and especially to the poorest. [...] [NARRATOR] Chavez wants to meet the expectations of those who elected him. So he wrote a new constitution to restore the legitimacy of state, which was accepted by 70% of votes in referendum. [...] [CHÁVEZ] One day a journalist asked me something and I answered something. He asked me: Where are you going now? I replied: I go to power, but first I go to the catacombs with this people. And since then I've been in the catacombs, deep down for five years. And I'm here today, but I feel like [if I were] in the catacombs. I will never leave this catacombs. Power did not come to my head. More: I do not feel empowered. The power I have is not mine, it belongs to the people (we translate).

Here too, as in magazines and other research documents, there is a concern to understand who Hugo Chavez is and why there is so much controversy surrounding his name. In the midst of questions, the *Christian Bolivarian revolutionary* expression and the term *demagogue* stand out. The first, according to video, would be the way in which Chávez describes himself, thus showing that that is a subversive-revolutionary process, linked to an idea of liberation from foreign domination (evoked by mention of Bolivar) and, finally, Christian, which perceives the intersection of religious discourse with political discourse, provoking the effect of a sense of providence, salvation and predestination (as we've seen in the priest's speech in the first pages of Oedipus). The second (the term *demagogue*) does not refer directly to the sense postulated by Aristotle in *Politics*, but to pejorative sense that we see in Weber (1946), that is, in sense of deceit, when he talks about *politician of power*. We say that because the disjunction "or" excludes one of two forms analyzed here (or two together), showing that the politician can only be associated with at most one of these [reciprocally excluding] definitions. Let's see:

Ultimately, there are only two types of deadly sin in the field of politics: the lack of objectivity and - often just the same, but not always - irresponsibility. Vanity, the need to stand out personally in the foreground as clearly as possible, strongly tempts the politician to commit one of those sins, or both. This is even more accurate in case where the demagogue is forced to rely on the "effect". Therefore, he often runs the risk of becoming an actor as well as of seeing with superficiality the responsibility of the consequences of his acts, becoming interested only in the "impression" he causes. Lack of objectivity tempts him to fight for attractive appearance of power, not real power. His irresponsibility, however, suggests that he likes power simply for power without a substantive purpose. [...] The "power politician" can achieve strong effects, but in reality his work leads nowhere and has no meaning (WEBER, 1946, p. 139-140, in bold).

The man interviewed, at one point in the documentary, says that Chávez has received a country with an expectation of profound changes, which updates what Foucault (1974) comments on Cypselus of Corinth and *Oedipus* tragedy:

if we consider the histories that Herodotus [...] told about the old Greek tyrants, in particular on Cypselus of Corinth, we see

that it is someone who thought to own the city. Cypselus said that Zeus had given him the city and that he had returned it to the citizens. We find exactly the same thing in Sophocles' tragedy (Foucault, 1974, p. 45).

The expectation of changes, while retaking the aspect of Greek tyrannies (leaving the Oligarchy for a better condition), also touches on theme of *transitional governments*, as postulated by Fontana (1997), since it is Latin America. The reference to 60% support at ballot boxes characterizes popular support. On the other hand, mention of militarism as a way of expressing authority to direct the country recalls the theme of demagoguery, as analyzed by Aristotle (The Politics), for whom the tyrant was chosen from among the military, according to its eloquence (good rhetoric). Finally, we've read in speech of the "interviewee" in question, that Venezuela had been in a *very poor condition*, thus showing that Chavez legitimizes himself as one who removes *polis* from a serious problem, as did Oedipus. Chávez then re-emphasizes the importance of popular support for his government by saying that his way of governing is ethical (overcoming existing corruption), but above all surrounded by people (the poorest), showing that aspect of tyranny referred to by Lima Filho (1999) here is also present: the mass trust him [the tyrant] firmly, as long as this one does everything for that. Moreover, there is also mention of new laws designed to *meet expectations of those who elected him*, which shows that here we also have the aspect of *new legislation*, very common in Greek Tyrannies of archaic antiquity.

Finally, Chavez's response to a journalist puts power at the center of debate around his government. Chávez would have told a journalist who asked him "where [Chavez] would go now": to power, to the catacombs with people. And he states he's been in catacombs ever since. That will never leave catacombs of power. That the power he has is not his, but the people's. We thus perceive that, in Chavez's own speech, a position of subject is materialized according to which power is something to be conquered and maintained, which belongs to him, for if it did not belong to him, he would not say the power I have [*does not belong ...*]. If it belongs to him because it is his, but if that refers to people, it is in the sense of fundamental importance of popular support, which is indeed indispensable as a condition of governability, as seen in other passages above the same documentary.

## Conclusion

From the above, we've found that the statement on tyranny appears in different ways in linguistic formulations above, proving to be repeated / updated in relation to president Hugo Chávez, explaining the existence of a discourse according to which heroism is related as form of legitimation in power as much as the permanence of a politician in a position or function can represent excess and tyranny, undesirable characteristics of a politician, from the point of view of the discourse.

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