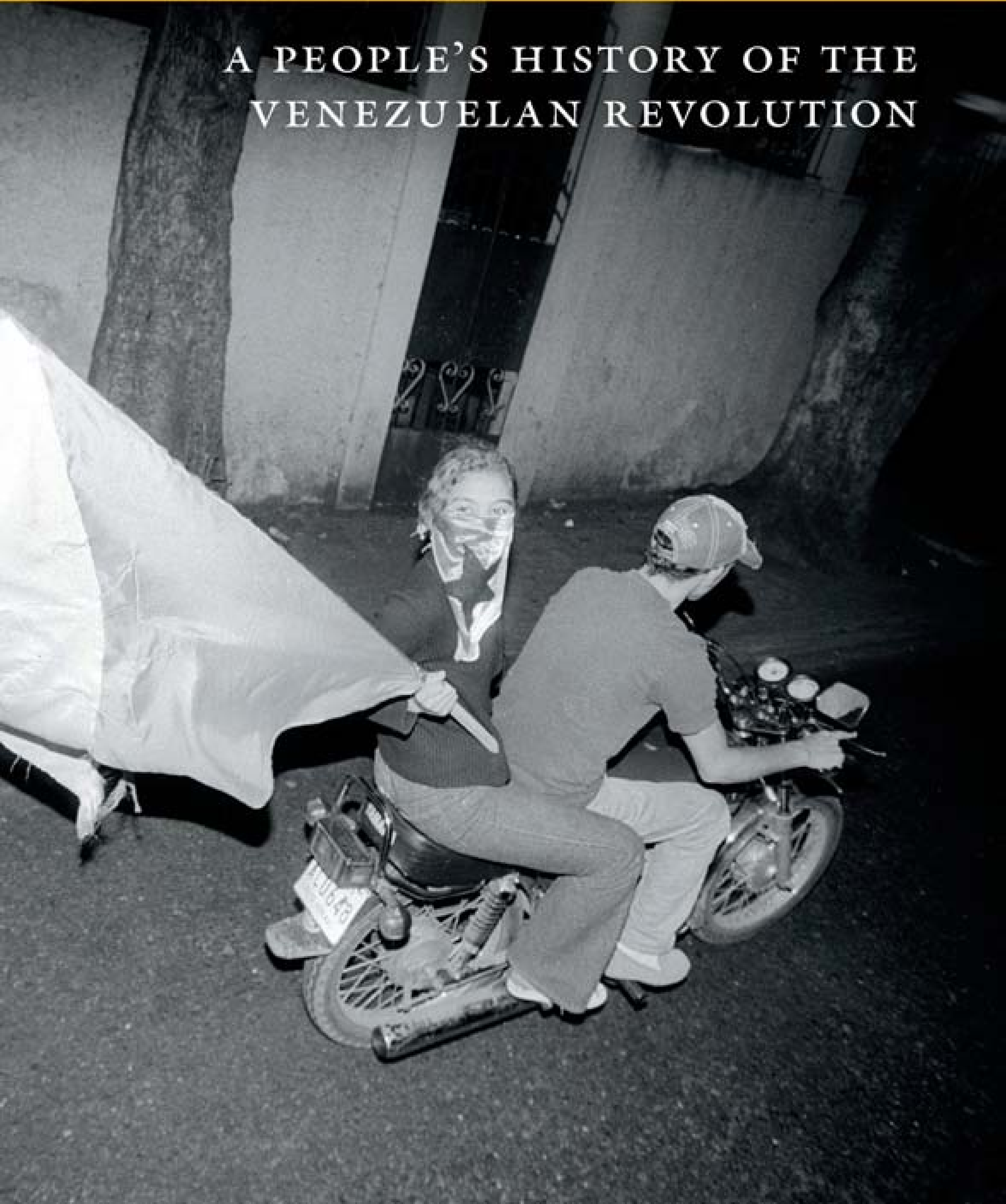
GEORGE CICCARIELLO-MAHER

We Created Chávez

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE VENEZUELAN REVOLUTION



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Photographs by Jeff St. Andrews

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GEORGE CICCARIELLO-MAHER

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FOR ABBEY AND OAKLEY FRANCISCO

In memory of Joel Olson

Contents

Acknowledgments ix *Map of Venezuela* xii

Introduction. What People? Whose History? 1

One. A Guerrilla History 22

Two. Reconnecting with the Masses 45

Three. Birth of the "Tupamaros" 67

First Interlude. The Caracazo 88
History Splits in Two

Four. Sergio's Blood 105
Student Struggles from the University to the Streets

126 Five. Manuelita's Boots
Women between Two Movements

146 Six. José Leonardo's Body and the Collapse of *Mestizaje*

166 *Second Interlude.* Every Eleventh Has Its Thirteenth

180 Seven. Venezuelan Workers
Aristocracy or Revolutionary Class?

200 Eight. Oligarchs Tremble!
Peasant Struggles at the Margins of the State

218 Nine. A New Proletariat?
Informal Labor and the Revolutionary Streets

234 Conclusion. Dual Power against the Magical State

257 *Notes* 307 *Index*

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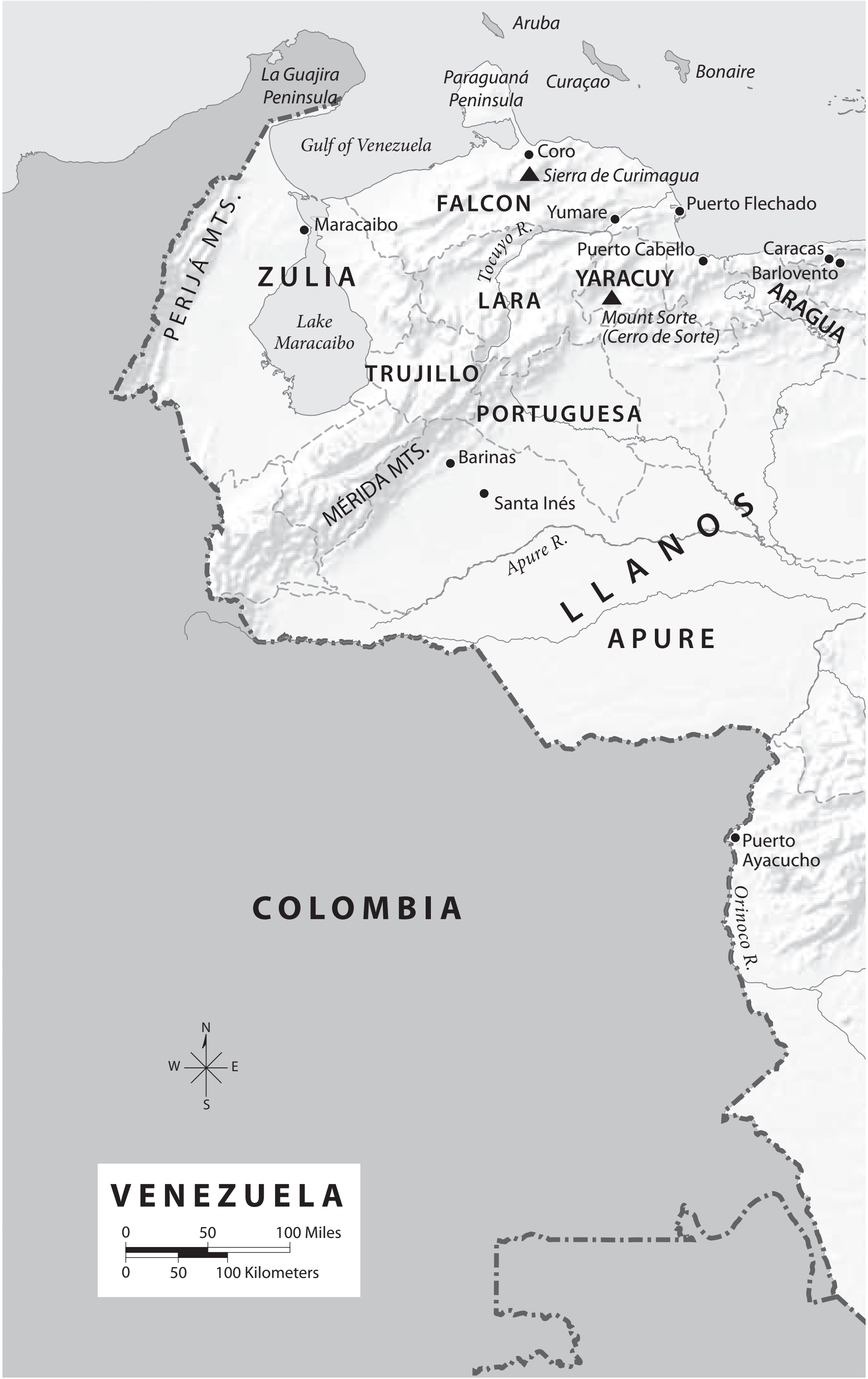
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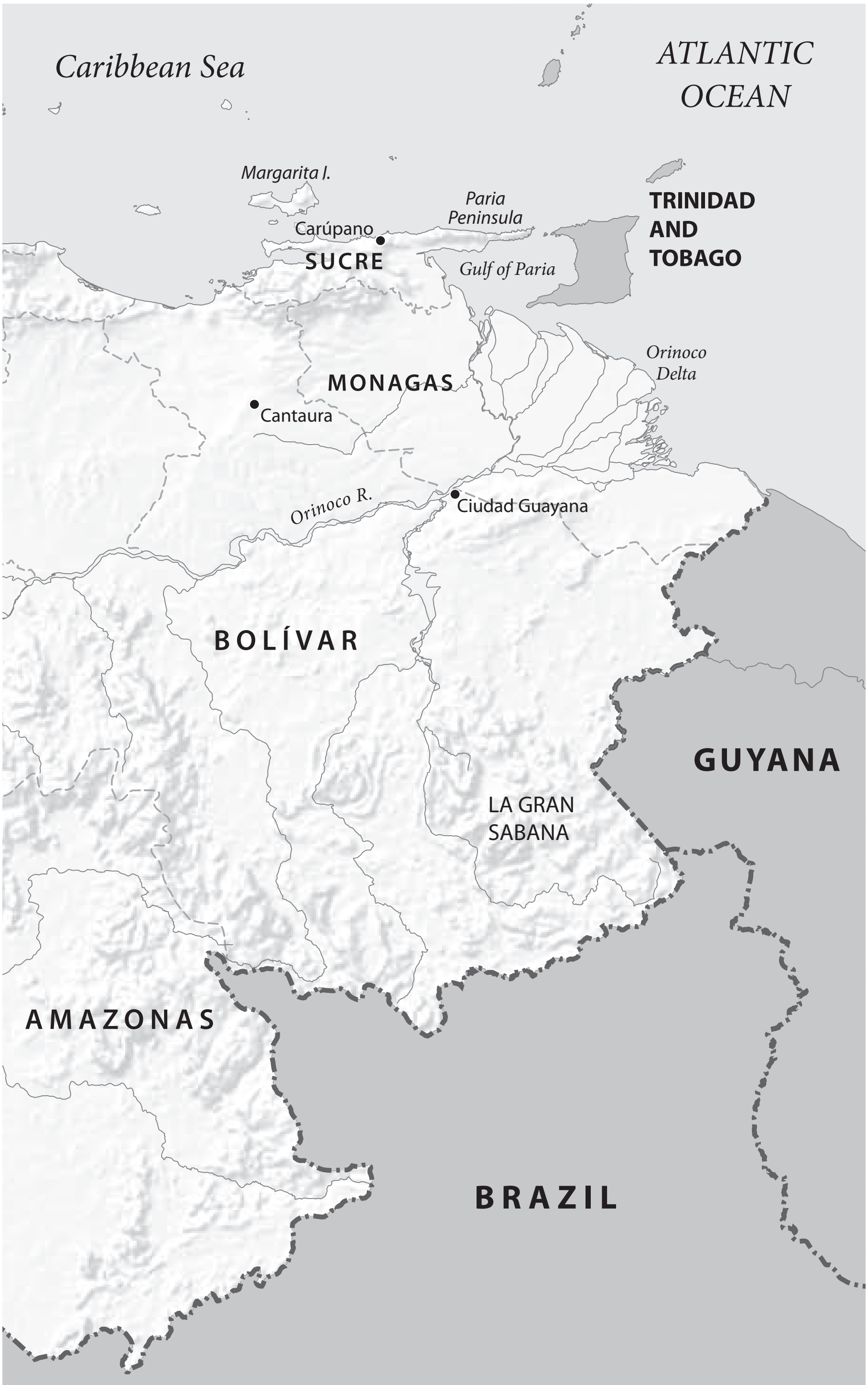
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Orinoco R.
Ciudad Guayana
BOLÍVAR
GUYANA
LA GRAN SABANA
AMAZONAS
BRAZIL

Introduction. What People? Whose History?

The people is a poet singing to its own prayer,
although a rosary of sorrow hangs on its chest.
We need to sharpen our aim, our target practice
and although it says ugly words, the people has the right
and it doesn't make me angry, but it's the pure truth:
there is no uglier word than this society.
—Alí Primera

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

When we got to La Piedrita, they already knew we were coming. If not for the phone call they received from a trusted comrade, then from the video cameras lining the perimeter of this revolutionary zone that jealously guards its autonomy from all governments, right or left. If not from the cameras, then from the network of eyes dispersed across the community, always alert to unknown or unrecognized individuals. And if not from all that, then certainly from the guard at the top of the rickety stairs that climb from the parking lot of the apartment blocks into the chaotic jumble of the *barrio* that lay behind it. He greeted us down the barrel of a chrome nine-millimeter pistol with stern questions: "Who are you? What are you doing here?" If we didn't have good answers for these questions, there might have been a problem. But indeed, we had an excellent answer: two short words, "Valentín Santana."

Just minutes before, my photographer and I had been enjoying the warm June dusk a few blocks below, near a small park in the Monte Piedad neighborhood of 23 de Enero, a notoriously revolutionary area of western Caracas perched precariously above Miraflores Palace, the nominal seat of state power. We were chatting, laughing, drinking beer and *miche*—a surprisingly potent homemade firewater distilled from sugarcane—while others play dominos, when a new friend raised the inevitable question of why we were there. We had come to understand the revolutionary collectives that constitute Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's most radical support base, to grasp their political vision and their often tense relationship with the process of political transformation known as the Bolivarian Revolution. Had we gone to La Piedrita? No, we hadn't. Our only contact with the collective had been gazing in awe at the nearby murals surrounding their zone of influence, the most spectacular of which is a massive image of Jesus holding a Kalashnikov, bearing the message, "Christ Supports the Armed Struggle."

"Well then, you *must* meet Valentín," this new friend insists, and I know immediately just who it is that he means. Valentín Santana is the historic leader, the iconic figurehead, and the most publicly recognized member of La Piedrita. After a few frenetic phone calls in which our proposed visit is repeatedly rebuffed, our persistence pays off and we are cleared to head up to La Piedrita. We begin the climb upward, past Blocks 5, 6, and 7 of 23 de Enero, after which the multicolored superblock towers for which the area is famous give way to shorter blocks that are grouped tightly to form large, enclosed squares that are, from a military perspective, easier to defend.[1]

They knew we were coming, and yet they performed surprise, hostility, and militant discipline. Here, gun pointed at my chest, I can't help but feel like a young Herbert Matthews in the Cuban Sierra Maestra (in fact, La Piedrita adjoins the Sierra Maestra sector of 23 de Enero). Matthews, so the story mistakenly goes, was duped by Cuban guerrilla commander Fidel Castro, who in 1957 allegedly marched a small number of troops in circles past the *New York Times* journalist to exaggerate the strength of his forces. Although this description of events has since been discredited, Matthews' name became synonymous with journalistic naïveté.[2] This lesson notwithstanding, the power of guerrilla theater has not waned, with revolutionary movements—from the Sandinistas to the Zapatistas and beyond—increasingly fighting their battles in the media and the reactionary forces arrayed against them doing the same. But as I sit here witnessing a similar display, it dawns on me that there is little disconnect between image and actuality, that managing appearances is the performative equivalent to managing reality. La Piedrita's show of force itself requires the same sort of autonomous local control that it seeks to perform: the image *is* the reality, and the reality is one of radical autonomy from the state. This autonomy is not limited to the revolutionary context of contemporary Venezuela; La Piedrita has been fighting for more than 25 years.

Like many of the collectives dotting the revolutionary landscape of western Caracas, La Piedrita emerged as a spontaneous community response to the scourge of narcotrafficking, as young revolutionaries — imbued with the history and ideology of struggles past — confronted both the drug trade and the violently corrupt state that facilitated it (see chapter 3). The collective's beginnings were modest, with a single member (Santana himself) devoted to what he calls *trabajo de hormiga*, "ant work": publishing a small community newsletter that interwove references to Che Guevara with recipes and birthday wishes.[3] This same spirit of humility was reflected in their chosen name, which refers to a "pebble," little more than a mild nuisance. But La Piedrita would soon be something more than a nuisance to *malandros* (delinquents) and police alike, stamping out the drug trade entirely and effectively forcing the police out of their community. Today, La Piedrita's autonomous status is best expressed by the large, hand-painted sign that greets all visitors: "Here La Piedrita gives the orders and the government obeys." This is no exaggeration: the Chávez government once sent a captain of the military reserves into the zone, who was immediately taken into custody by the collective. When the official protested, explaining that he was merely there to scope out a possible escape route for the president in the event of a repeat of the 2002 coup, the response from La Piedrita was unambiguous: the government does not *tell* us anything, it must *ask*.

As I await Santana's arrival for my interview, the air in this corner of 23 de Enero is thick with tension. After a pipe bomb exploded prematurely while being placed outside the offices of the radically anti-Chavista chamber of commerce, Fedecámaras, on February 24, 2008, government forces determined that a militant who was accidentally killed called this area home.[4] Although Fedecámaras is widely loathed among Chavistas for participating in the short-lived 2002 coup in which Chávez was briefly replaced with the organization's then-head Pedro Carmona Estanga (see Second Interlude), planting pipe bombs was beyond the pale. For the first time in years, ever since these local militias had reached a sort of détente with the central state, police entered the area, searching homes for suspects associated with the self-styled "Venceremos Guerrilla Front," whose name appeared on flyers found at the scene. For many, including Valentín Santana and La Piedrita, this unwelcome incursion was an open attack on their tradition of local autonomy, and they responded by making that autonomy perfectly clear: on April 3, a multitude of local collectives including La Piedrita engaged in an "armed blockade" of 23 de Enero, appearing publicly in ski masks and armed to the teeth to shut down the community with burning tires and barricades as a sharp warning to the government. Chávez issued a stern rebuke on his television program *Aló Presidente*, insisting that "these people don't look like revolutionaries to me, they look like terrorists"; he even suggested that they had become infiltrated tools of the CIA.[5]

I am struck by the soft-spokenness of this militant organizer, who, with his light skin and army-green cap, looks more like an Irish Republican Army member than the bearded guerrillas more commonly associated with Latin America. Now, sitting on a crumbling wall across from us, Santana scoffs at the suggestion that La Piedrita might be even inadvertently serving the interests of the imperial enemy. Instead he catalogs the collective's achievements: after the drug trade and the violence associated with it were stamped out, they turned to eliminating even private drug abuse and alcoholism and now were poised to confront domestic violence. Alongside the elimination of such scourges, the collective had long promoted alternatives, including cultural and sporting activities aimed at reinvigorating a sense of revolutionary community among local youth. In this struggle on two fronts—against threats to the community and toward the regeneration of its cultural fabric—Santana has given more than most. In 2006, his own young son Diego was killed alongside Warner López, another young member of La Piedrita (according to Santana, they were killed by members of another radical armed organization, José Pinto's Tupamaro party).

Later that same month, we were invited to ride along with these revolutionary collectives as the extreme left of the Chavista bloc made its displeasure clear in a caravan throughout the entire *barrio* of Catia, within which 23 de Enero is but a small part, insisting that "we are not terrorists." Nevertheless, despite such militant pleas, tensions would only increase. In the year that followed, members of La Piedrita declared several opposition leaders "military targets," they attacked the opposition's television station Globovisión and other such targets with tear gas as "punishment" for crimes past and present, and Santana even publicly threatened the life of Marcel Granier, the head of the other major opposition television network, RCTV.[6] In response, Chávez again declared them "terrorists" and issued an arrest warrant for Santana himself. Noting the difficulty of arresting members of such militant organizations (one previous effort to arrest Santana had failed), Chávez even insisted that he would "go get him myself" and made clear what was at stake, adding, with a feigned ignorance of the group's history, that, "We can't allow La Piedrita such-and-such to become a state of its own."[7] As a result of such conflicts, it might not be surprising to find critiques of Chávez on the far left: after all, these revolutionary militants now confront a Venezuelan state that, with its bloated bureaucracy, sordid corruption, violent police, and chaotic prisons, looks much like the state that had been killing and torturing them for decades.

In preparation for the caravan of militias, a young woman wandered through the crowd, offering to paint revolutionary slogans on car windshields. When one angry militant insisted, only half-seriously, that she adorn his windshield with the phrase "Death to Chávez!" she gasped audibly. To fully grasp the relationship between these most revolutionary organizations and Chávez's government, we must understand not only her astounded gasp but also the angry outburst that elicited it. In other words, we must attempt to grapple with the fact that the vast majority of such militants —those who deeply despise corruption, bureaucracy, and even the state itself and are more likely to associate that state with torture, murder, and "disappearance"—*are still Chavistas*, at least for the time being.

I probe this peculiar tension during my discussion with Valentín Santana, attempting to wrap my head around a central element of the political process underway in Venezuela as a whole, namely, the relationship between the radical autonomy from the state that such collectives maintain and the unification of revolutionary forces to take and exercise state power under Chávez's leadership. But such a fundamental tension, which in many ways constitutes the central theoretical problematic underlying this book as a whole, cannot be explained away easily. I ask Santana, this figure deemed a "terrorist" by the president and who that same president would soon seek to have arrested, what he thinks of Chávez. It is dark and so I cannot be certain, but his face seems to wear a smirk that suggests he foresees my confusion at the counterintuitive position he is about to assume: "Chávez is our maximum leader," he insists.

The "Paradoxes" of Power

And so I begin from a seeming paradox: despite La Piedrita's militant autonomy and rejection of the Venezuelan state, its members nevertheless pledge their loyalty, however temporarily and contingently, to the man currently sitting atop that state. As should be abundantly clear by this point, what matters more than anything else for this revolutionary collective and groups like it is not what happens in the gilded halls of official power. More important than *el presidente* is *el proceso*, the deepening, radicalization, and autonomy of the revolutionary movements that constitute the "base" of the Bolivarian Revolution.[8] But this is not to say that all that rests atop this base is mere "superstructure," that the realm of official politics is completely inconsequential, that the state itself does not enjoy a degree of autonomy. Rather, as La Piedrita's seemingly paradoxical fidelity to Chávez illustrates, there instead exists a complex and dynamic interplay and mutual determination between the two: movements and state, "the people" and Chávez.

By beginning with a paradox, we enter into an interstitial space, one suffering the painful in-betweenness that is to be against (*para*) the grain of the present (*doxa*): between the great leader and no leader at all, between the state and its absence, between paranoid errors of right and left, with the paradox of paradoxes best expressed in graffiti daubed near El Valle in southern Caracas reading, "Long Live Chávez, Not the Government."[9] Paradoxes, however, are generally intellectual creations, with the definition of *doxa* reserved for the privileged few. Like so many apparent paradoxes, therefore, this one too unravels and is to some degree resolved, in practice, by the work of 27 million tugging hands that strip away its congealed synchrony, its frozen timelessness. My starting point in this book is, therefore, not the one we most commonly associate with contemporary Venezuela. It is not the story of an evil and all-powerful, would-be dictator centralizing all power in his own hands, nor is it the tragic account of a well-meaning populist led astray by the inherent corruption of power. On the contrary, it is not the story of a Great Leader blazing a shining path and dragging the people, naïve and pliant, in His turbulent wake. It is not, in other words, any of the many stories we hear about Hugo Chávez Frías, but that is simply because it is not a story about Chávez at all.

Far too often, discussions of contemporary Venezuela revolve around the figure of the Venezuelan president. Whether from opponents on the conservative right or the anarchist left or supporters in between, the myopia is the same.[10] This is not without reason: since Chávez's election in 1998 after his imprisonment for a failed 1992 coup attempt, Venezuela has become a radically different place, and the "Bolivarian Revolution" that he inaugurated (in name, at least) has seen power wrested from old elites and unprecedented social improvements and is poised to transform even the state itself. But although Chávez is indeed important—and I hope eventually to recover the complexity of his current relationship to revolutionary movements and collectives — my point of departure must be a different one. Because often it is only through the simplicity of inversion that we can arrive at a higher level of subtlety, of complexity, and of nuance, the practical resolution of this paradox comes in the insistence from the outset that *the Bolivarian Revolution is not about Hugo Chávez*. He is not the center, not the driving force, not the individual revolutionary genius on whom the process as a whole relies or in whom it finds a quasi-divine inspiration. To paraphrase the great Trinidadian theorist and historian C. L. R. James: Chávez, like the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, "did not make the revolution. It was the revolution that made" Chávez.[11] Or, as a Venezuelan organizer told me, "Chávez didn't create the movements, *we created him*."[12] By refusing to center our analysis on the Venezuelan president from the get-go, by resisting the constant historiographic temptation that James scornfully dismissed as "the personification of social forces," by averting our eyes from the dazzling brilliance of the commanding heights of political power — whose light is blinding in more ways than one — a whole new world comes into view.

But in a way, this simple displacement of Chávez's centrality tells us little in and of itself; as James rightly warned, "even that is not the whole truth." Specifically, simply taking the focus off Chávez does not tell us where that focus should then fall, where our gaze must instead be directed. If "we created him," who is this "we"? Is it the working class? The peasantry? The informalized urban lumpenproletariat? If Chávez does not drive the Revolution, if we deny him that coveted throne, then which historical subject assumes it? Or, is the very concept of a historical subject — a single bearer of future history, be it an individual or a class — far too unitary and homogenizing to accurately explain contemporary Venezuelan political dynamics? More importantly, however, simply refusing to focus on Chávez the man tells us little about the complexities of the relationship that exists between this as-yet unidentified revolutionary subject, the transformative process as a whole known as the Bolivarian Revolution, and Chávez himself (and, more generally, the state apparatus that he inhabits).

What People?

In pressing toward an answer, we could do no better than to follow the lead of a revolutionary organizer from the *barrios* of Petare in eastern Caracas, when she asks insistently, "Why is everyone so worried about Chávez? What about the people? Worry about the people."[13] But if this is a people's history, the term *people* complicates before it clarifies, raising more questions than it answers, and I must ask: "What people?" and, "Whose history?" Some radical theorists in the United States and Europe have recently rejected "the people" as a useful category for revolutionary change, arguing instead—based largely on the experience of the French Revolution—that "the people" carries within it conservative, unitary, and homogenizing tendencies.[14] But one need go no further than a dictionary to see that such an understanding has little relevance to the Spanish-speaking world: the Royal Spanish Academy offers a series of five definitions of the people, or the *pueblo*, four of which refer straightforwardly to the inhabitants of a particular space or territory, but the last of which is subtly subversive, denoting instead the "common and poor" members of a population—the oppressed.[15] The history of Latin American revolutionary and social movements show us this distinction in practice: more often than not, "the people" has been taken up as a banner by precisely those same "common and poor" while simultaneously being deployed by governments, populist and nonpopulist alike, in an effort to maintain the status quo.

Thus, this idea of "the people" in Latin America is an instance of struggle, and although the phrase *people's history* was pioneered and popularized in the U.S. context by Howard Zinn, the contours of such a history in the Latin American and Venezuelan context refers to a far more specific content. Argentine-Mexican philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel elaborates upon this radical potential embedded within the concept of the people, drawing inspiration from Fidel Castro's 1953 speech "History Will Absolve Me," in which Castro adds to the concept of the people the peculiar modifier *si de lucha se trata*, if it is a question of struggle. Dussel insists that the *pueblo* is *not* a concept of unity, but one that instead "establishes an internal frontier or fracture within the political community," and stands, as he puts it, "in opposition to the elites, to the oligarchs, to the ruling classes of a political order."[16] For Dussel, the Latin American *pueblo* is instead a *category of both rupture and struggle*, a moment of combat in which those oppressed *within* the prevailing political order and those excluded *from* it intervene to transform the system, in which a victimized *part* of the community speaks for and attempts to radically change the *whole*. And the external division that the *pueblo* marks through its struggle is, according to Dussel, reflected in its internal multiplicity, in which dialogue and translation between its component movements serve to provide a common identity in the course of struggle.[17]

The "history" corresponding to this "people" would, therefore, be of a specific kind: rather than the traditional history that focuses on a progression of political leaders, the sort of "history from above" that leads to the exaggeration of Chávez's role, and beyond even a history *of* those poor and oppressed constituents of the people, this would instead be a history from *below*, one driven by the struggles and the self-activity of the people themselves, a struggle *by* the people over what it means to be "the people" to begin with. To do so, we must think in specifically (albeit not exclusively) Venezuelan terms, and in Venezuela past and present, the central reference point of struggles over what "the people" means has been the country's national anthem, "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo," or "Glory to the Brave People." In fact, the anthem has often constituted the very terrain of those struggles, embodying and crystallizing this division between those wielding power and its victims: "Invoked in official contexts, such as the state ceremonial occasion and the school salute to the flag, the hymn embalmed the *bravo pueblo* in the distant past; to sing it spontaneously in a popular assault on the street was to resuscitate it as a living critique, not a ratification of authority."[18] Whereas those in power have used the anthem to signal national unity, those they oppress draw upon its more radical elements—phrases such as "Death to oppression!" and "Down with chains!"—to mobilize the energies necessary for the radical transformation of the political system.[19]

But our history does not begin as far back as 1810, the year in which Vicente Salias penned "Gloria al Bravo Pueblo." If what interests us is a people's history of the process *currently* underway in Venezuela, we must inevitably seek a more concentrated focus on recent history, grasping those foundational moments that provide the parameters for today's struggles. In what follows, I begin this history in 1958, the year of the overthrow of Venezuela's last *unelected* dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and the year that nominally marks the establishment of Venezuelan "democracy." If it seems strange to *begin* a history of popular struggle with the establishment of a representative democratic system, it is because my approach is also a conscious inversion of traditional fables in which formal democracy is seen as the result—as the ultimate outcome of those struggles and their unquestioned *telos*, the final objective of struggle, and therefore also the moment at which that struggle ceases. Instead, the establishment of formal democracy in Venezuela marked the beginning of another struggle, a struggle for both democracy and equality as *substantive* and not merely formal parameters of social life.[20] It is this longer struggle that continues today; the formal democratic regime that was established in 1958 and later consolidated in the two-party, power-sharing pact signed at Punto Fijo (and therefore colloquially known as *puntofijismo*) was in many ways established as an attack on the people, as a subversion of the popular will that had ousted the dictator, and as an effort to prevent the incursion of the people into the halls of official power. This was the essence of the "pacted" democracy, and even "undemocratic democracy," of which many critics spoke throughout the years and in which the very force that made the democratic transition possible needed immediately to be tamed, its energies stifled and channeled.[21]

For this, Venezuela's ostensible "founding father" Rómulo Betancourt was both more responsible and less apologetic than most, and he would take aim directly at the idea of "the people" itself. According to Betancourt, the communist-turned-rabid-anticommunist who took power in 1959 in the first free elections to follow the dictatorship, "the people in the abstract does not exist," and the concept instead represented a weapon, "an entelechy which professional demagogues use in seeking to upset the social order." Instead of the people, Betancourt could see only a multiplicity of associations — "the political parties, the unions, the organized economic sectors, professional societies, university groups" — through which demands must be channeled.[22] Any attempt to unify these demands was seen by Betancourt and others as inherently dangerous to established power and potentially anarchic: frantically fearing the forest, he could only tolerate the trees. The irony is that in his open hostility to the concept of the people, Betancourt was in agreement with his archrival, Fidel Castro: the radically subversive potential of the *pueblo* was a mortal danger to men like Betancourt who sought only to control and channel its energies.

Thus, while Betancourt rode to power on the radical energies unleashed among the popular masses, he was nevertheless deeply suspicious of those who demanded radical rather than gradual change, those who sought socialism over capitalism, and above all those who understood democracy as something more direct, more unfettered, and more participatory than the limited democracy that Betancourt would favor. As a result, and against this radical alternative, Betancourt and others sought to construct a democratic system that was protected from the people, in which all demands were to be diverted though institutional channels and specifically the two predominant political parties. This was a system of democracy as institutionalized antidemocracy, in which the people could only appear as a fragmentary and segmented nonpeople. And so we find at the very heart of Venezuela's so-called democracy a veritable conspiracy against the *pueblo* as a radical moment of rebellious energy. What is peculiar here is that, even as Betancourt denied the existence of the people, its spectral presence — the fear it inspired in elites — conditioned the creation of a system that sought to prevent the people from coming together as a force. The antipopular political system, therefore, was an expression, however negative, of the power of the people, and the history that this book tells is one that draws upon the same source, albeit from the opposite direction.

In constructing such a system, Betancourt's weapon of choice was domestication: the slow and systematic effort to build institutions capable of co-opting popular discontent and channeling it down official pathways. As though responding to his own experience of the Betancourt years, Venezuelan folk singer Alí Primera — whose verses grace each of my chapters — would later write that "the docile [*manso*] people are always corralled, but this doesn't happen if they are fierce [*montaraz*]." While Betancourt sought to create a *pueblo manso*, however, he could not tolerate the *montaraz*, and therefore turned to a dual strategy: domesticating those who would submit to the hegemony of his Acción Democrática Party (the workers' and *campesino* movements) while excluding and attacking those (particularly students and communists) who would not.[23] This people's history, this history "from below," begins with the immediate rebellions that greeted Betancourt's election; if he was suspicious of the radical movements, then this suspicion was mutual. As though knowing what would be in store, the poor *barrios* around Caracas rioted upon receiving word of their first truly "democratic" president, and Betancourt never forgave the capital city for its betrayal. After his inauguration, mass mobilizations continued, since even this limited democratic opening — when combined with the exhilarating experience of having overthrown a dictator — only served to stoke the flames of rebellion. Students occupied their campuses, peasants their land, and the unemployed marched in the capital demanding work. Picture this: less than one year after this "father of Venezuelan democracy" was elected, his government was shooting people dead in the streets, and the majority of his first years in office was spent under the iron heel of a state of emergency.[24]

Thus unable to successfully incorporate and accommodate this insurgent energy from below into a system capable of defusing it from above, Betancourt turned to exclusion, on the heels of which repression closely followed. His government gradually pushed radical sectors outside of the democratic institutions, thereby converting what might have been a loyal opposition into a disloyal one. This "outside" crystallized as the guerrilla war that began not long after Betancourt came to power; hundreds of young Venezuelans, inspired by the recent success of a small band of Cubans, sought to overthrow Venezuelan democracy. According to any of the standard criteria — be they military or political — the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle was a resounding and abject failure; the guerrillas grew increasingly alienated from their base, and this base largely opted for the "apparent contradiction" of electoral participation.[25] But what is key is to recognize that those radical energies from below that had generated the guerrilla struggle to begin with, those demands of the popular masses that the new democratic regime was either unwilling or unable to meet, did not simply disappear into thin air. Instead, the ostensible failure of the guerrilla struggle gave way to a dispersed multiplicity of revolutionary social movements, and former guerrillas themselves courted "legality" in a variety of ways, with both sectors twirling helically around one another in a constant struggle to both revolutionize the state and avoid its tentacles.

Whose History?

This is, therefore, not a history of the "exceptional" Venezuela, seemingly the only Venezuela visible to many social scientists in the United States and some in Venezuela. For decades, Venezuela had appeared to many as an island of stability amid the economic chaos, military rule, and civil war that had swept the region during the 1960s and 1970s. Some, like the political scientist Daniel Levine, even claimed that this stability derived from the ability, first of Betancourt and then of the two-party system, to incorporate conflict and change successfully into the sphere of official politics by "organiz[ing] social life from top to bottom," thereby undercutting more radical threats.[26] This view neglects the degree to which incorporation operated alongside exclusion, and the fact that Venezuelan society clearly was not organized "from top to bottom," as the "bottom" would soon make abundantly clear.[27] And as this "power from below" was gradually excluded, "power from above" became increasingly alienated, delusional, and, above all, rigid, with this rigidity coming as a direct counterpart to the ostensible stability of the system. As Mirabeau said of the colonists in Haiti, those elites who had considered themselves exceptional for so many years "slept on the edge of Vesuvius without even knowing it."[28] So too the academics like Levine, who would make a prognosticative error of epic proportions with the claim that "In Venezuela, the future lies with cautious men."[29] Such claims — and the "exceptionalism thesis" that undergirded them — would soon be left buried like Pompeii under so much molten ash.

As Venezuela's system of representative democracy grew increasingly rigid and exclusionary, corrupt and violent, the warning that the Theban chorus offered Antigone, "Bend or break, bend or break," became ever more pertinent.[30] For every demand that went unfulfilled, pressure only increased. It was during this time that Alí Primera—who was not coincidentally known as "the people's singer"—would turn the national anthem into a veritable battle hymn. Shortly before his suspicious death in 1985, Primera prefaced his rendition of "Gloria Al Bravo Pueblo" to an audience in Barquisimeto with the following words: "To purify it, to purify it among ourselves, to purify it in our hands, in our hearts, in our eyes, in our soul. To purify it for the times they have stained it. Our people's highest song, the song forged in the paths and the battles that gave us the name of Venezuelans, of the homeland. The song of always, the song of the birds, of the children, the song of Venezuelan unity, the song of future combat." As time passed, as the economy worsened, as neoliberal reforms pushed millions more into extreme poverty amid a collapsing currency and skyrocketing prices, and as rebellion became an everyday occurrence, this was a system that was unbending and could only break.

And break it did on February 27, 1989, on the very day that president Carlos Andrés Pérez's neoliberal reform package entered into force; the camel's back broke, and the *barrios* exploded in a week-long riot, known as the Caracazo, that approached the level of mass insurrection (see the First Interlude). During the Caracazo, *bravo* assumed more and more the radical content of the *pueblo* itself, *si de lucha se trata*, resignified in the streets according to its colloquial double meaning: "pissed off" or "fed up" with a state of affairs. Noun and adjective inverted, "the people are fed up [*bravo*]" stood as a straightforward indictment of the political system as a whole. During the insurrection—as the *bravura* of anger was matched only by a bravery against the most uneven of odds—the national anthem again proved prophetic, as Venezuelans and the world would "follow the example given by Caracas" in its moment of fury and the political process that the Caracazo inaugurated. Those fed-up people would not find much relief in the short term: somewhere between three hundred and three thousand were slaughtered to restore the façade of democratic stability, and a dying system limped on despite having already received the blow that would eventually kill it.

The subject of my history is this *bravo pueblo* that made its most resounding appearance in 1989, which simply by appearing exploded the prevailing "myth of harmony" that was premised on its invisibility.[31] What had masqueraded as singular "harmony" was now revealed as two, with the previously hidden side of the equation gathering under the mantle of "the people" (not, however, without maintaining its hard-won internal differentiation).[32] This is a history written from that hidden nonplace that would only appear as fully visible in 1989, what Alí Primera calls "the other Venezuela," one possessing even its own "truth":

> I come from where you've never gone . . .
> the other Venezuela, the Venezuela of the poor,
> the Venezuela with no reason, no reason to exist . . .
> The truth of Venezuela isn't found in the Country Club,
> the truth is found in the hills [*los cerros*, the *barrios*]
> with the people and their discontent.

This is a history of exclusion and frustration, torture and massacre, wealth and thievery, the wink of the politician and the nod of the bureaucrat. But it is also far more than that because limiting our history to the crimes of the powerful would be to remain mesmerized by their own governing myths, myths that imply that they actually are "in" power rather than merely occupying ultimately fragile positions within the political institutionalism of the state. If the moral bankruptcy of Venezuelan elites was revealed for all the world to see in the 1989 Caracazo, their political fragility appeared most clearly in a pair of failed coups in 1992, the first of which—on February 4—was led by Chávez himself.

We Created Chávez tells the story of what happened between 1958 and 1989, the story that binds the 1989 Caracazo to Chávez's failed 1992 coup and eventual election in 1998, and ultimately the story of the relationship between this *bravo pueblo* and the political process currently underway. Thus, although this is a "people's history," as my subtitle suggests it is also a history of the Bolivarian Revolution, and while narrowing the scope of the former it seeks to expand our understanding of the latter: this revolution has been a far longer process than many recognize. Most historic accounts of the Bolivarian Revolution begin in 1998, the year Chávez was elected, as an expression of the precipitous collapse of Venezuela's two-party system.[33] While this moment was undeniably important for what has come since, I call it an "expression" consciously: Chávez's election, much like the disgust felt toward those he replaced, was the *result* of previous struggles, and so we must turn our gazes back still further. Some existing histories do so, looking for the origins of Chávez's electoral success in his notable *lack* of success in 1992 and his live television appearance that marked that failure. Taking full responsibility for his failings on that day—a rare occurrence for political figures in Venezuela — Chávez spoke two fateful words that would become a slogan overnight and cement his political future: the rebels, according to this young lieutenant colonel, had failed *por ahora*, "for now."

This, too, was a crucial moment, but again, merely tying 1998 to 1992, rooting Chávez's successful seizure of power through the ballot in his unsuccessful effort to do so by the bullet, is not enough. A history of the trajectory stretching from 1992 to 1998 is still firmly a history "from above," a history of state power, first of failure and then of success in "seizing" the state, rather than being a history "from below," a history of popular power. To rewrite this history from below, it is necessary to look back even further, narrowing even more the list of existing historical accounts to those that locate the fundamental impetus for both 1992 and 1998 in an earlier date: 1989, the Caracazo. Here the shift is a fundamental one: if 1992 and 1998 center on Chávez the individual and the state as his object, 1989 reveals that this individual project rests on a mass base more bent on *destroying* than *seizing* the state. Whereas 1992 and 1998 center on questions of "constituted power," of the institutionalized power of the state, 1989 was instead an explosion of "constituent power," that radically unmediated force aimed against those institutions and which itself resists institutionalization.[34] Yet even many of those histories that recognize the fundamental importance of 1989 do not follow this importance to its ultimate conclusion, choosing instead to center contemporary history on Chávez himself, thereby contributing, however inadvertently, to what Velasco deems "a historical genealogy that rests on the rise of Hugo Chávez as the redeemer of long-suffering popular sectors, whose political awakening can be traced, at best, to the mid and late 1980s."[35] I hope to go further. After all, where did 1989 come from? Here our regression is not infinite, and the clash between the "from below" and the "from above" that occurred on the streets in February 1989 finds both sides constituted in the years after 1958: in the guerrilla struggle and its collapse and the period of autonomous movement-building that followed in its wake.

Changing the World?

If, in what follows, I largely privilege such radically "constituent" moments as foundational to understanding what is going on in Venezuela today, the point is not to neglect the "constituted" power of the state or the moments of "constitution" in which the two enter into a transformative relationship.[36] Thus, in destabilizing this seeming paradox between the autonomy of radical Chavistas *from* the state and their support *for* Chávez, we also destabilize the ostensible opposition underlying its appearance as a paradox by reformulating the classic question of revolutionary politics and the state: Do we "change the world without taking power," as the title of John Holloway's book would have it?[37] Or is it only by seizing such power that transformation becomes possible to begin with, as goes the retort of Holloway's detractors?[38] Once again, the opposition is merely apparent, and we begin to overcome it by subjecting its opposing terms to the creative dynamics of popular practice. The story that follows, the story of recent Venezuelan history, is, therefore, not the story of one side or the other, of how to seize the state as is or to avoid its sinister tentacles entirely. It is instead one that rejects the very terms of this opposition in the manner of Enrique Dussel, who insists that "to speak precisely, power is never *taken*."[39] The Bastille can be *taken*, the Winter Palace can be *taken* by a small number of disciplined Bolsheviks, but power is something that is *held* by the people, and the problems emerge with the institutionalization of that power, which Dussel deems both necessary and profoundly dangerous.

Put differently, my goal here is to avoid the twin dangers that plague contemporary discussions of revolutionary change in Latin America in particular: the tendency to fetishize the state, official power, and its institutions and the opposing tendency to fetishize antipower. Thus, alongside the general fetishism of the state that manifests in the Venezuelan context as a fetishization of Chávez the man, there stands as well an equal and opposite fetish of what has been called "horizontalism," the fetish of refusing or ignoring the state a priori as in Holloway's insistence that "the world cannot be changed through the state."[40] To fetishize means to worship something human as though it were divine, and I hope that the literal fetishism of both positions is clear: the first refuses to see the state (and Chávez) as produced by human hands and therefore subject to radical transformation; the second—in its denial of human organizational capacities, of organic leadership generated through struggle, and of the delegation of power—sees such transformation as utterly impossible and futile.[41] For both, in other words, the state is a superhuman entity to be either worshipped or feared but never transformed.

Although the practical dangers of fetishizing the state are more acute and more obvious in discussions around Venezuela, we cannot afford to neglect the dangers that come with fetishizing horizontalism, especially because these have methodological implications for how to write a history like this one. If a focus "from above" creates an evident blindness toward movements "from below," the fetish of the horizontal creates a more specific blind spot in which movements and organizations that are not sufficiently "horizontal" either are misrepresented as being more egalitarian, directly democratic, or antistate than they are or are rendered illegible and invisible.[42] Here, organizations such as La Piedrita stand as a sort of double warning of the difficulties of an abstractly horizontal approach. Despite the collective's organic relationship with the local community, to study it horizontally would be to ask the impossible; even insisting on speaking to nonleaders would mean asking members of a tightly disciplined organization to break that discipline. Blinkered horizontalism, in other words, would render the internal functioning of collectives like La Piedrita even more opaque than they already seem, as when one uses the wrong lens to view an object, but as I will show, their importance to the process is undeniable.

In the history that follows, the difficulty of the seemingly "vertical" relationship between mass and vanguard (like the paradox of movement and state, autonomy and unity) is held at bay on the practical plane, as different stages of struggle against this corrupt and violent "democracy" instituted in 1958 have manifested in different forms of struggle, different tools, and different weapons. For example, the early guerrilla struggle to which we turn first was an unapologetically *vertical* enterprise, and indeed, much of the debate shaping that struggle revolved around what, if any, political control would be exercised on the military structures of the guerrilla fronts. While this verticalism resulted largely from its military character, we should not let this obscure the very real elements of racial and gender privilege operating within the struggle. While my account has been enriched by discussions with rank-and-file participants of the guerrilla struggle (including women and Afro-Indigenous fighters), these can in no way serve as a substitute for discussions with those actually charged with making and executing the broader strategies and tactics that determined the course of the armed struggle. For better or for worse, the most radical demands of the people were represented most often through vanguardist structures during this period. This does not excuse errors, of which there were many, frequently tied to but not reducible to verticalist elements such as vanguardist *foquismo*. Nor should it obscure that at certain points the guerrillas were more alienated from their nominal support base than at others; more than anything else, this fact doomed the armed struggle and determined the strategic transformations that would emerge in its wake. Nevertheless, these guerrillas remained, to some degree, the most revolutionary and intransigent representatives of the *pueblo* as a radical critique of oppression and inequality, and it is in this sense that the history of the guerrilla struggle remains, however imperfectly, a "people's history."

In the same way that fetishizing the horizontal might lead to a neglect of leadership, so too could such an approach exclude a priori those who have opted strategically to work either within or in a close relationship with government institutions on the national, state, or local levels. Indeed, to exclude those who see in such institutions an unavoidable instance of struggle would be to neglect the vast bulk of revolutionaries on the ground driving the Bolivarian process forward. Thus, that many high-ranking government officials have been drawn from the ranks, not only of the guerrilla struggle but also from other sectors of the revolutionary movement, does not exclude them from this history; rather, it poses again and in a slightly different way the seeming paradox from which I began: those who have suffered most from the violence of the state in the past have nonetheless come to occupy positions in that state. While such figures must be balanced with those who voice very real and credible concerns about movement autonomy and radicalism, be it from the sphere of semiofficial movements or those who reject any and all association with the state (but without ceasing, for the most part, to support the president and the process), this does not undermine their relevance.

Just as these twin fetishes fail by establishing too firm a distinction between what they support and what they oppose, and just as my objective is to reestablish the linkages they cut, so too must we speak of reestablishing a relationship between the horizontal and the vertical more generally. In this, we can do no better than to turn to the Venezuelan revolutionary, former guerrilla, and inspiration for much of what has been called "Bolivarianism": Kléber Ramírez Rojas. In a 1994 essay about the movements that had sprung up in the *barrios* in the aftermath of the 1989 Caracazo rebellions, Ramírez—who only recently had lent his pen to the forces behind Chávez's failed 1992 coup to draft a litany of documents outlining the structure for a revolutionary government—reflected on both the successes and failures of the horizontalism of these popular movements. While admitting that the radical insistence on horizontal modes of organization emerged as a justified form of self-defense from the old and corrupt political parties, and that the very real autonomy this horizontalism afforded the movements constituted "a well-deserved political and social victory," Ramírez nevertheless argued that through the fetishization of dispersed popular assemblies, this "triumph has been converted into its own defeat." "From a strategic perspective," he continued, "horizontality will be necessary for the development of the commoner [*comunero*] state; but tactically, at this moment it becomes a serious error because it foments the isolationism of the popular bases from national struggles."[43] It is in an effort to avoid these twin fetishes that, when it comes time to conclude, I will speak neither of power from above nor entirely from below, but instead of a "dual power" that exists in ongoing, tense, and antagonistic opposition to the state, straining insistently upward from the bases to generate a dialectical motion allowing the revolutionary transformation of the state and its institutions, with the ultimate goal of deconstructing, decentralizing, and rendering it a nonstate. For Kléber Ramírez, this dialectic of dual power means the "liquidation of the current . . . state" and its replacement with what some might, again, deem a paradox: a "government of popular insurgency."[44]

One final warning before I begin, and it is related to what I have just said, because there is something else worth noting in this exaggerated emphasis on horizontalism, this abstract imperative to "change the world without taking power." Too often, discussions of how to change the world degenerate into model-building exercises, and too often the raw material for such exercises is provided by Third World revolutionaries and the model constructed by First World philosophers. If the impetus to "change the world" by taking power derives in many ways from the Russian Revolution, the model for *how* to do so in the Latin America of the 1960s was in many ways provided by the Cuban Revolution as filtered through the writings of the radical French intellectual Régis Debray. In 1963, Debray made a pilgrimage to the Sierra of Falcón to speak with the Venezuelan guerrillas. More than four decades later, I have had the opportunity to speak with many of those same people, as well as a multitude of younger organizers from various sectors of the struggle. While it may therefore seem that I would want to liken my task to Debray's, nothing could be further from the truth. This is not merely because Debray's *foquista* "model"—in which the guerrilla struggle is led by a small elite of mobile *focos* detached from any social base—was a caricature of the Cuban Revolution, but also because its application in Venezuela and elsewhere was nothing short of catastrophic.

Debray's name, therefore, stands not as an inspiration but as a warning about the danger of models for how to "change the world." Has horizontalism become a model in its own right, one revitalized by the momentous nature of the Zapatista insurgency and amplified by theorists like Holloway under the banner of antipower? If so, does the imperative to refuse power accurately reflect the Zapatista experience, or is it as much a caricature of that experience as was Debray's theory of guerrilla warfare? Do the Zapatistas refuse all power or do they seek to regenerate a new form of power from below? Do they refuse all institutions or do they merely subject those institutions to the constant pressure of popular intervention (in, for example, revocable mandates and popular assemblies), what Dussel calls "obediential power," building on the Zapatista imperative *without* creating a model?[45] And even if such theories actively reflect Zapatista practice, is it possible to generalize and export the particular and local experience of the Zapatistas across the continent and the world without contributing to what I have called elsewhere "anarchist imperialism"?[46]

This book consists of three sections of three chapters divided by two explosive historical interludes, two "constituent" moments of rupture that represent qualitative leaps in the history of the Venezuelan people. The first section tracks the guerrilla struggle, its failure, and the tide of urban militancy that arose in its wake; the very same vanguardism that doomed the guerrillas was disproven in practice by the rebellious masses. This is a history of failure, of defeat, but one in which those very defeats provide fodder for subsequent victories. In the first section, chapters move chronologically (approximately by decade: the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s); the second section rotates our axis in an effort to think sectorally according to some of the more important social movements that emerged in the wake of, and indeed often from within, the guerrilla struggle in a flourishing of student, women's, and Afro-Indigenous organizing that centers on the 1970s and 1980s but that also extends into the present. The final section then rotates our axis once again, speaking broadly according to economic class but always casting a critical eye toward traditional understandings of who it is that constitutes the political subject of revolutions. When the subjects of these final chapters — the working class, the peasantry, and the so-called lumpenproletariat, or informal urban poor — are combined with those of the previous section with which they overlap, we have the broad strokes of what is understood in Venezuela and much of Latin America as "the people."

It would be all of these separate and cross-cutting slices that, seen more broadly, emerged from the guerrilla struggle, underwent a period of autonomous development, and then began to slowly reagglomerate with (para)-military elements in the run-up to the 1992 coup and the 1998 election, propelling Chávez to the seat of constituted power. But these two dates — 1992 and 1998 — do not provide the content of our explosive interludes, regardless of their importance; in fact, I speak of these moments of "constituted power" only in passing. Instead, our interludes describe those radically creative and generative moments — the 1989 Caracazo and the 2002 rebellion that overthrew the coup-installed government and returned Chávez to power — moments in which the Venezuelan people appeared in struggle as a constituent force, revealing itself as both the source of power and the feet of clay that prop up many of those who wrongly claim that power as their own. Once we set our sights on the people, on the expression of power "from below" rather than "from above," traditional milestones — whether it be 1958, 1992, or 1998 — are both subordinated to a different set of moments (1989, 2002) and imbued with an entirely new meaning.

To return, finally, to the question of people's history, to see that the inversion from which we set out — the refusal to remain mesmerized by the figure of Chávez or by the state — has allowed for an infinite enrichment of our account, generating an alternative series of watershed moments and historical ruptures. To conclude where we began — not full circle but full spiral — we turn again to C. L. R. James, who insists that "phases of a revolution are not decided in parliaments, they are only registered there."[47] Hugo Chávez is not a *cause* but an *effect*, not Creator but creation; in this sense, the history that follows is literally a defetishization, a demystification. His election and even his failed coup did not mark the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution, but were instead the result and reflection of its long and largely subterraneous history, a history that has only recently emerged into the light of day, and to which this project hopes modestly to contribute. We have reached that higher plane of complexity of which I wrote at the outset, from the perspective of which we can now attempt to grapple with the undeniable importance of Chávez to the *contemporary* moment and his relationship with the revolutionary social movements that created him. But even in this we must not focus too much on Chávez; to paraphrase what many a revolutionary organizer in Venezuela has told me: "we created him" — but we will also go beyond him if necessary.

One. A Guerrilla History

I'm not staying at home, because I'm going into combat
I'm going to defend La Puerta in the Valley of Momboy . . .
Let's go to Boconó! Let's go up into the mountains!
To kiss the garden which remained forever in Bolívar's eyes
—Alí Primera

June 30, 1962

Nationally recognized Venezuelan journalist and former head of the Patriotic Junta that overthrew the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Fabricio Ojeda rose and walked calmly to the podium. This towering figure of resistance solemnly recounted having stood above a grave in the Cemetery of the South—later to become a symbol of extrajudicial killings during the 1989 Caracazo—and taking a solemn oath that "the sacrifice of our martyrs would not be in vain." But this speech was unlike any Ojeda had ever given before. Elected to Congress by "the will of the glorious people of Caracas, which now find themselves oppressed and humiliated," Ojeda was announcing his decision to abandon the halls of official power. Four short years after playing a central role in Venezuela's democratic transition, Ojeda was now joining the guerrilla struggle seeking to topple that regime. As he neared the end of this fateful speech, Ojeda reached a fever pitch, evoking a ferocity that far exceeded his diminutive physical stature, his voice rising to a shout as he sought inspiration in the national anthem:

> And so, Mr. President, call my substitute because I have gone to fulfill the oath that I took before you all to defend the Constitution and the laws of this country. If I die, it matters not, others will come behind me to take up our rifle and our flag to continue with dignity what is an ideal and an obligation for all of our people.
>
> Down with chains!
> Death to oppression!
> For homeland and people!
> *Viva la Revolución*![1]

When Alí Primera speaks of heading "up into the mountains" in the epigraph with which we began, I see him as symbolically tracing Ojeda's path: back to his birthplace — Boconó, Trujillo, which Bolívar himself declared the "garden of Venezuela" — and on to La Puerta, both an actual town and a metaphorical gate to the guerrilla struggle.

Why begin the story of the contemporary Venezuelan revolution in 1962? And why with Fabricio Ojeda? If only to mark the origins of the guerrilla struggle, this moment would prove imperfect: Ojeda was a latecomer in this strict sense. If only because of his celebrity, however symbolically important, then the decision would not be an admirable one but one that leads toward an answer. Why had a leader of the resistance to the dictatorship, who himself participated in Venezuela's nascent democracy, turned so rapidly against this new government? To answer this question is to discover the open secret of fifty years of Venezuelan history, the truth concealed under the thin veneer of Venezuelan "exceptionalism." At an astonishingly early stage, Fabricio Ojeda was eloquently expressing the shortcomings of formal liberation and the formal democracy that had come to preside over this "liberated" state. "The Venezuelan people," he insisted, "are already tired of promises that cannot be fulfilled and disappointed with a democracy that never arrives."

If Ojeda's critique of representative democracy was heretical to many, he approached the level of blasphemy toward that foundational moment in 1958 in which he himself played a fundamental role, when Pérez Jiménez was overthrown by a unified civilian-military rebellion of the type so often recurrent in Venezuelan history. "On January 23 — this I confess as creative self-criticism—*nothing happened in Venezuela* . . . only names were changed."[2] Young idealists, with Ojeda at their head, had believed in good faith that by merely removing the "tyrant," they would be able to overcome the glaring contradictions that had plagued Venezuelan society. But Rómulo Betancourt was elected, taking power in 1960, and within less than a year the country had returned to emergency measures, searches, imprisonment, torture, and abuses of executive power, all in the name of that same "democracy" that, for Ojeda and others, was their antithesis. "This is our decision, this is our path. We go to arms with faith, with joy"; however, despite this joy, Ojeda insisted—long before Mexico's Zapatistas—that arms were a last resort: "We take up arms against violence, against repression, against torture, against corruption. We take up arms against depravity and treason. . . . so that the dawn of liberty and justice might glimmer on the horizon of the Nation."[3]

Fabricio Ojeda was not the first to head for the Venezuelan hills, nor would he be the last. More farsighted radicals knew Venezuelan democracy would be in trouble as soon as Rómulo Betancourt took the reins, but few could have foreseen the precipitousness of its decline. The collapse of the dictatorship was greeted with mass euphoria and, as one might expect, optimism toward this newborn democracy. But even before January 23, 1958, the nominally unified movement that overthrew Pérez Jiménez was racked with cleavages. Betancourt, himself a former Communist, had been languishing in exile and attempting to prove his anticommunist credentials to the United States while maintaining an anti-imperialist façade at home, despite the fact that the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) played a central role in the united front against the dictatorship. Paralleling this political division was an equally profound generational divide that cut across party lines. The "old guard" of Betancourt's Democratic Action (AD), Christian Democratic (COPEI), and Democratic Republican Unity (URD) parties were largely in exile while those younger party cadres still in Venezuela were battling the dictatorship on the ground and making corresponding strategic decisions. Ojeda, a youthful member of the URD, embodied this more radical "young guard" in many ways. As we will see, this generational divide would be exacerbated by a rural/urban divide that plagued Betancourt's presidency from the outset, although ironically it did not figure into initial guerrilla strategy.

But while the young radicals had successfully crafted the political unity needed to overthrow Pérez Jiménez, the old guard was busy consolidating unity of a different type. First in the Pact of New York, and later in the more infamous Pact of Punto Fijo, representatives of AD, COPEI, and URD sought to pour the foundation for a limited, multiparty democracy that excluded both the far right of the *ancien régime* and the Communist far left.[4] The result was a rigid political system, a "partyocracy" known as *puntofijismo*, a straitjacketed and heavily mediated democracy that was celebrated for its "exceptional" stability by some but increasingly alienated from the vast majority. It was this system that would finally collapse more than three decades later, and while the deafening snap would only occur in 1989, some load-bearing beams began to give way from the outset in a succession of splits that drew the young radicals away from their own parties and into the armed struggle.

Meeting Douglas

As I write, guerrilla commander-turned-Chávez critic Douglas Bravo is 78 years old, but you would not know it. A short man with dark hair, an angular face, and broad shoulders accentuated by a blazer with padded shoulders reminiscent of Miami Vice, it is less than a month since this epic guerrilla leader underwent open-heart surgery to replace his aortic valve. Sitting in a small café in Parque Central, he unhesitatingly pulls open his shirt to show the scar. He is as strong as a horse, evidently, and despite more than two decades of "rehabilitation"—a friendly government euphemism used to denote the pacification of former guerrillas—he is still a guerrilla at heart. As we speak, his eyes dart sharply and nervously about, over my shoulder, to the elevator, to the entrance—habits learned during decades of covert existence that are, no doubt, hard to shake. His nose does not work properly, he explains, since breaking it in three places in a fall in the mountains during the 1960s. Soon, he confides, he will have surgery to repair it. How, I ask, can a well-known guerrilla fighter, rehabilitated or not, trust that he will receive good medical care when the industry is largely dominated by the right? He confides with a wink: "My doctor is a good friend who helped us during the guerrilla struggle."[5] After a brief discussion in which my political sympathies are probed, Bravo abruptly announces: "I can work with you. Meet me tomorrow."

The next day, we meet nearby in Bravo's unadorned apartment to discuss the early stages of the guerrilla struggle. Bravo himself joined the Communist Party in 1946 at the age of 13. Even before the fall of the dictatorship, the guerrilla struggle had found its first organizational form in the "shock troops" that the PCV entrusted to Bravo, Teodoro Petkoff, and Eloy Torres as early as October 1957 as the spirit of the new began to push through the shell of the old.[6] To the obvious question of why these "shock troops" were turned so quickly against a nominal democracy, and a newly minted one at that, his answer is simple: *they were forced to*. This was because right out of the gate, Betancourt was taking no prisoners, especially not in Caracas, a city that he felt had betrayed him in the 1958 election and in which former head of the governing junta, Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal (supported by the PCV and URD), defeated Betancourt by a five-to-one margin.[7] To add insult to injury, on December 8 and 9, supporters of Larrazábal rioted in an effort to reverse the result of the election, and, as if things could not get worse for the president-elect, Fidel Castro visited the country in late January.[8]

Castro, nominally a Betancourt ally at that point, recalled the moment when, during his speech in Plaza El Silencio, he mentioned the new Venezuelan president's name: "there was a storm of booing from the vast crowd."[9] While Betancourt's anti-Communism certainly predated that fateful and humiliating day, it is equally clear that he would find a new object of hostility in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and what he would soon decry as "Castro-Communism." The old social democrats like Betancourt and Peru's American Popular Revolutionary Alliance had in a flash been superseded by a new and more direct mode of Latin American resistance that would soon train its sights on them. Not even the Communists escaped the Cuban example, but while the PCV would eventually chart a leftward course to outflank the newer revolutionary currents by supporting the guerrilla struggle, Betancourt took a very different tack, turning to the barracks instead of to the people and quickly making his "the bloodiest government in Venezuelan history."[10]

Reflecting on the series of events that brought the young democracy to the brink of revolution within less than two years of Betancourt's inauguration, Bravo emphasizes three in particular. First, Betancourt took power in a global context of crashing oil prices in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis alongside a domestic social context in which the population demanded the continuation of Larrazábal's hugely popular Emergency Works Plan. The resulting fiscal pressure created a pincer-like "institutional crisis" that sparked the wave of militant demonstrations voicing radical demands. Betancourt drew his first blood against those very sectors left unprotected by the elimination of the Emergency Works Plan: in August 1959, mere months after Betancourt had taken the reins of the state, government troops fired on a demonstration of fifty thousand unemployed workers in Plaza la Concordia, killing three. Nearly simultaneous demonstrations by students and land occupations by peasants in Aragua State were similarly repressed.[11] Speaking with an elderly resident of western Caracas who moved to the capital in 1956, I am told that "the Betancourt years were the worst! It was lead, lead, and more lead! His policy was to shoot first and ask questions later."[12]

Second, it was this repression carried out in their own names that led the younger and more radical sector of Betancourt's AD to break decisively with the reactionary old guard. Perhaps surprisingly and certainly ironically, given Betancourt's hysterical hostility to Castro-Communism, this new party, the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), twisted the knife in the wound of their separation by explicitly avowing the Cuban example. These were the same young AD members—most notably Domingo Alberto Rangel, Américo Martín, Moisés Moleiro, and former AD General Secretary Simón Sáez Mérida—who had been responsible for creating the alliance with the Communists that had overthrown Pérez Jiménez successfully, partly against the wishes of the party's exiled leadership. Aside from taking an estimated 80 percent of the AD youth contingent, the MIR also took with it a charismatic and influential set of leaders and fourteen congressional deputies, thereby foreshadowing a second split a year later in which the group headed by Raúl Ramos Jiménez departed with an additional twenty-six deputies, depriving Betancourt of even a congressional majority.[13] Predictably, Betancourt and what remained of AD "reacted harshly against this new body that had been torn from its flesh," and repression against the newborn MIR was immediate and severe, arguably more so as a result of its insolent betrayal.[14] Less than six months after the party's founding, six of its members were arrested for subverting the regime, sparking an escalating cycle of student demonstrations and further repression.

Finally, the simmering tension surrounding Cuba came to a head in San José, Costa Rica, in August 1960 at a meeting of the Organization of American States. As a part of the Punto Fijo Pact, Betancourt had invited ample cabinet representation from both COPEI and URD, but when the United States attempted to pass a motion condemning the Cubans, URD foreign minister Dr. Ignacio Luís Arcaya first attempted to change the proposal before finally refusing to sign it. For this, Betancourt sacked him, prompting pro-Castro rallies in Caracas.[15] While the URD remained in the cabinet for the moment, the repression of the young MIRistas and the resulting galvanization of student rebellion led the government to close all institutions of higher education and send troops into the rebellious Central University (UCV) in October 1960 (see also chapter 4).[16] This was more than the remaining URDistas in the cabinet could take, and they resigned.

Despite a climate of mutually heightening tension, however, Bravo insists that up to this point both the MIR and the PCV had remained within the realm of legality and peaceful struggle. This is echoed by MIR founder Moisés Moleiro, who, despite facing early charges of subversion, insists that the party's turn toward the armed struggle came only in response to ferocious repression at the hands of the young elite democracy.[17] Indeed, the MIR and the PCV found themselves increasingly in the same position. In September 1960, a PCV-led oil union was attacked at Lagunillas, leaving one dead and twenty injured, and amid occupations at the UCV and in 23 de Enero, the parties found even their press freedoms assailed: in October their printing press was closed and in November their official publications were shut down directly.[18] When a militant telephone strike broke out in November, the MIR preemptively called for an insurrection, thereby leaping from loyal to disloyal opposition.[19]

Nevertheless, despite facing a similar level of repression, the process whereby the PCV came to a similar conclusion was an excruciatingly slow and hesitant one. Although the existing history reflects the revolutionary situation that existed during October and November 1960, few recognize just how close the country was to overthrowing Betancourt. Whether through an exaggeration of "objective" barriers to revolution, Stalinist ambiguity toward the national bourgeoisie, or cautious patience with the new democracy, revolutionary movements surged forward but the Party failed to react. Or, better put, certain *sectors* of the Party failed to react. To the seething dismay of Bravo and other young radicals, the Communist Party failed to act when it mattered most: at one point in late 1960, several military commanders essentially offered to hand over power, but "the Communist Party began to debate whether it was right to overthrow a democratically elected government." The debate continued for more than twenty-four hours, by which time the deadline had passed and the insurrection had been duly exhausted and repressed.[20] The workers and students in the streets and even the radicalized liberals of the MIR already were clear on the repressive nature of the Betancourt government, and yet the Communist Party, nominal bastion of the popular revolution, was offered power and failed to make up its mind. "Do you understand what this means?" Bravo rhetorically demands of me, with an insistence that has not faded in fifty years. "*Our tragedy!* The incapacity of the Communist Party to understand this historical moment. How truly sad that was! That was the first big battle, *chico*, and we lost." In the words of a PCV guerrilla, the party "killed the tiger but was afraid of the hide."[21]

To add to the tragedy, this same situation would repeat a year later in late

1961 and early 1962, with similar results, as the Party continued to vacillate amid a strike of transport workers. Despite refusing to support the rebellions prompted by the strike — which led to nineteen deaths in January — the PCV and MIR were blamed, their headquarters searched, and more than one thousand arrests made.[22] If the MIR's calls for insurrection a year earlier had been premature, the upsurge of November 1961 was, according to Bravo, the time for decisive action: "It was at that instant that there should have been some kind of military action." But it was not until six months later that the PCV finally cut the Gordian Knot of its irrational patience with a representative democracy that bludgeoned it daily, activating its clandestine cadres within the Armed Forces in military-civilian uprisings in Carúpano (known as the Carúpanazo) and Puerto Cabello (the Porteñazo) in May and June 1962, by which point it was too late for anything but a spectacular and bloody failure.[23] As Bravo explains, the revolutionary momentum of previous months had been squandered: "the masses were on the withdrawal, on the defensive, the student movement was on the defensive, the workers were on the defensive, and the government was on the offensive." When I ask if it was the officers who failed to rise up in late 1961, I am immediately corrected: "No, no, that's not what I'm saying. We, the political directorate [of the PCV] committed the error of launching the military movements *not* at the moment of revolutionary upsurge, but rather at the [later] defensive moment." This sentiment was recognized by Betancourt at the time, who reputedly quipped: "Those idiot revolutionaries didn't know what to do."[24] Immediately after the May rebellion at Carúpano, both the MIR and the PCV, harassed and repressed since 1960 and operating largely underground and without press freedoms, now found themselves officially banned by presidential decree (the PCV for the first time since the dictatorship that it had helped to overthrow).[25] For many, the only path left open was the armed struggle.

Not all members of the PCV shared this decision, however. While younger members of the Politburo were chafing at the bit, many more experienced militants were hesitant. On the forty-sixth anniversary of the Porteñazo, I sit down with several aging members of the Páez Front in the state of Portuguesa, a "Communist fortress" if ever there was one. At first, these aging former fighters, some in their 70s, are hesitant to meet me. They send emissaries to feel me out, a process that takes place in the back of a pickup truck on the way to an unknown location. I am asked for revolutionary references: who can vouch for me? Security is tight, or rather surprisingly tight given the relatively open atmosphere that has prevailed in Venezuela in recent years. None would deny that things have gotten better under Chávez and that these modest septuagenarians are not living in fear, but the danger of reprisal from right-wing elements and the possibility of an eventual change of government are at the foremost of wary minds.

It seems as though I have been sufficiently convincing, and a meeting after lunch is arranged, at which point I realize that the emissaries were none other than the guerrillas themselves. Even after we begin the interview, signs of reticence remain: barely perceptible hand gestures and laden looks are exchanged, as if remembering for an instant that some things are best left unsaid, some subjects best avoided, and some statements best made off the record. Afterward, I discover that this is the first that some of these men have spoken openly of their experiences, even among themselves. But as relaxation sets in and a sort of purgative catharsis emerges through releasing what has gone unspoken for so many years, they slowly lower their guard by way of humorous comments: "If they're from the CIA, we're already fucked," one jokes, with another adding, "I've only got a few years left anyway."

Two of these guerrillas — Jesús and Carlos Jiménez — are the sons of former Communist Party founder and Central Committee member Demetrio Jiménez. Jesús recalls his father bringing him, as a child, to a political meeting in Puerto Cabello, where he had been a union organizer in the 1930s before being recruited by the PCV and where he played a key role in organizing the Porteñazo. A neighbor recalls the suffering that their family experienced during the guerrilla struggle, explaining that "This family felt the weight of government repression on their own flesh." This is no mere metaphor: torture was frequent in both physical and psychological forms, and Jesús recalls his family — children included — being subjected on several occasions to mock firing squads in full view of their neighbors.[26] Perhaps unsurprising given their family heritage and local tradition, these former guerrillas are staunch Communists and have nothing but the deepest respect for the Party's role in the armed struggle. As Jesús puts it, "there was no social insurgency where the PCV wasn't present . . . Venezuelans are rebellious by nature, but it is the PCV that agitates this." Visibly moved, tears in his eyes, he continues: "we [Communists] have always been faithful, incorruptible, decent, and firm . . . I want you to emphasize in your book the work of the Communist Party." But the Party, he insists, certainly is capable of committing its share of errors, and the decision to throw its weight behind the armed struggle was one such error. Their father had opposed the decision and voted against it, and the motion was carried by only a small majority. With not a small amount of bitterness, Jesús reflects on the lives lost and the fact that many of the younger militants who carried the motion—like Bravo and the "tremendous traitor" Teodoro Petkoff—would break with the PCV not long afterward (as both would later break with Chávez). But initial opposition notwithstanding, the respect these guerrillas had for party discipline was such that they unreservedly joined the armed struggle that they had opposed as individuals.

These aging guerrillas in a secluded corner of Portuguesa are not the only ones who opposed the decision to enter the armed struggle. Their hesitance was echoed by the recently deceased retired general Alberto Müller Rojas, who I met in Caracas only a few days later in the Red House, the headquarters of the newly formed United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), of which Müller was at the time the first vice president.[27] Amid the dense smoke of a dozen cigarettes smoked in rapid succession, Müller explains that he had joined the Communist Youth in 1946 before leaving voluntarily, which was party policy for those joining the military. He too was opposed to the idea of the armed struggle, but as a nominally "apolitical" member of the military, he was not bound to the same party discipline as the guerrillas in Portuguesa. When, as an officer, he was approached by old friend Teodoro Petkoff to join the armed struggle, he refused immediately. "Why?" I ask. "*¡Porque no soy bolsa!*" ("Because I'm not an idiot"). This simplicity, however, masks a more complex strategic military analysis: according to Müller, representative democracy had not yet run its course and still enjoyed mass support.[28] But Müller's response does not address the fundamental reason that most participants give for turning to the bullet: that the repressive young democracy had left them no alternatives. As one early combatant in the armed struggle told me: "Many thought it was suicide, but not going was also suicide."[29] After all, if the Cuban experience had taught anything, it was that the objective barriers to revolution could be transformed by subjective action of the will. Unfortunately for the young militants who carried the banner of the armed struggle into the Venezuelan hills, their subsequent experience would do little to prove the Cuban thesis.

From Foquismo *to Prolonged Guerrilla War*

Much like the MIR's premature call for urban insurrection in November 1960, the initial stages of the guerrilla struggle were marked by the youthful exuberance of its participants and the intoxicating optimism provided by the Cuban example; many young MIR militants were motivated by romanticism, and the PCV's indecision left the guerrillas without a developed apparatus for the struggle.[30] According to Luben Petkoff, who, along with brother Teodoro was one of the earliest leaders of the communist guerrillas, "When we took to the mountains for the first time we were more than a little taken with the idea that our war was going to be a Cuban-style war, or very similar to the Cuban guerrilla war. We thought that the solution to our problems was no more than two or three years away, and that the guerrillas were going to solve the problems of the Venezuelan revolution in the short term."[31] During 1961, Douglas Bravo and others had begun to establish small, rural guerrilla units known as *focos*, first along the mountainous eastern coast near Turimiquire Peak and the sweltering western state of Lara, but by the time of the military rebellions in Puerto Cabello and Carúpano, the government suddenly realized that it faced a rapidly expanding threat in the countryside.[32] Within a few short months, clashes had occurred all over the country: in Sucre in the coastal east and then Turimiquire, then in Bravo's home state of Falcón in the west, then in La Azulita in the Andean state of Mérida (under guerrilla commander and later founder of La Causa R, Alfredo Maneiro), then in Portuguesa where I spoke with the Páez Front, and further south in Trujillo.[33] In a major clash in Yaracuy, more than a dozen newly minted guerrillas were arrested (including Luben Petkoff) and several were killed.[34]

Despite their exuberance, the learning curve for Venezuelan guerrillas was predictably steep: most of the initial fronts were liquidated almost immediately, and survivors made their way — lessons learned the hard way — to reinforce the more established fronts.[35] Central among these was the José Leonardo Chirino Front, headed up by Douglas Bravo in his home state of Falcón in northwestern Venezuela and named for an Afro-Indigenous leader who sparked an eighteenth-century slave rebellion in the very same sierra that would later provide refuge for the guerrillas (see chapter 6).[36] Second, and arguably more important for the unprecedented mass support it enjoyed, was the Bolívar (or Liberator) Front in Lara State, which was consolidated under the leadership of Argimiro Gabaldón. Son of General José Rafael Gabaldón, a former governor of Lara who had rebelled against the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez in 1929 and set about building an army of indigenous peasants, Gabaldón the younger built his front on the warm ashes of a 1960 communist-influenced indigenous rebellion.[37] Tucked between the mountainous zones of Trujillo and Portuguesa and home to the heavily communist towns of Humocaro Alto and Humocaro Bajo, this front would see the area's first serious combat in April 1962.[38]

While Luben Petkoff would later characterize the early optimism of the guerrillas as "adventurist," it was not adventurism per se that doomed the rebels, but the particular *form* that this adventurism generally took: vanguardist *foquismo*, the belief that small, mobile, and isolated *focos* could quickly create the necessary conditions for a revolution. In mid-1962, after the first wave of defeats and desertions, the dwindling Chirino Front held its First Guerrilla Conference. The initial euphoria had worn off, and amid the difficult terrain of the Sierra — the geography as inhospitable as the peasantry was stubborn — the Cuban example could only seem distant, and the guerrillas began to take stock of their errors. Bravo describes the somber realism of the conference in the following terms: "What was fundamental was to leave immediatism aside, to carry out profound mass work, and to avoid unnecessary combat." But for others, from a distance and still enamored of the vision of rapid victory, this looked like withdrawal: "In Caracas, revolutionary circles made fun of us. Since we weren't fighting, they made jokes saying that we were boy scouts."[39]

A Tale of Two Armed Forces

If unchecked optimism led these young guerrilla units to quick defeats, relations with the military proved to be yet another stumbling block. But in neither case would imported theories — from Cuba or elsewhere — prove helpful. Such theories, after all, tended to pose an opposition between the archetypal Latin American military "gorilla" and the revolutionary insurgent: the first clean-cut, rigidly disciplined, and reactionary, and the latter unshorn (exemplified in the Cuban *barbudos*), freethinking, and rebellious. This caricature has never suited the Venezuelan context, and given the important and complex role of the military in the Bolivarian Revolution, it is essential to grapple with this issue. Many root the particularity of the Venezuelan Armed Forces in the composition of state power (where, unlike in Colombia, the power of the landed oligarchy was more limited), the composition of the military (which, unlike in the Southern Cone, was not strictly elite and unlike the case in countries like Bolivia was not strictly racialized), or the experience of the Liberation and Federal Wars. For Douglas Bravo, however, there is a more proximate historical reference point, what he deems "Trejismo." Named for Hugo Trejo, the progressive lieutenant colonel who led an aborted rebellion against Marcos Pérez Jiménez on January 1, 1958, Trejismo refers to a democratic and progressive current within the Venezuelan Armed Forces, a sizeable segment of which would turn against Betancourt within a few short years of his election.[40] For Bravo, failing to grasp the importance of this current within the military was one of the guerrillas' most serious errors because it threatened to leave the military in the hands of traditional conservative sectors.[41]

Recognition of this potential discontent within the military heavily influenced the establishment in 1963 of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) as a broad structure to unify the disparate guerrilla fronts. In the aftermath of the failed rebellions in Carúpano and Puerto Cabello and the subsequent forcible exodus of leftist officers from the Armed Forces into the guerrilla ranks, no number of prejudices about military "gorillas" could prevent the revolutionaries from recognizing their potential radicalism, and the nominal head of the FALN was none other than Captain Manuel Ponte Rodríguez, one of the leaders of the rebellion at Puerto Cabello. The FALN's founding document even included a direct appeal "to rescue the Armed Forces," and it was not merely the structure of the FALN, but also its operating procedures, that were shaped by the peculiar nature of the Venezuelan military: it was FALN policy *not to engage the Armed Forces in battle* if possible, and the FALN's honor code pledged to "respect" the lives of soldiers.[42] There were strategic reasons for this, and the FALN's political counterpart, the National Liberation Front (FLN), actively sought to "facilitate the conversion of allies and new combatants from the enemy front," allowing "every honest, patriotic, nationalist, democratic or revolutionary officer" to redeem themselves "before the eyes of history."[43]

One noteworthy example was Captain Elías Manuitt, a young army officer stationed in Táchira, near the Colombian border, at the time of the Carupanazo. Upon hearing of the uprising, Manuitt promptly deserted his post, showing up at Communist Party headquarters carrying two machine guns and demanding to be incorporated into the guerrilla forces.[44] This fidelity to the ideals of the traditional Armed Forces was seconded by Tulio Martínez, a former army lieutenant who also left his post after the 1962 rebellions, to later become Bravo's lieutenant in Falcón, insisting that "I haven't deserted, I haven't betrayed anything. I remain, and intend to remain, an officer. I have only left an army which goes on parade for an army which fights."[45] It was precisely this peculiarity of the Venezuelan guerrilla army that would be violated in one of the most serious early errors of the armed struggle. On September 29, 1963, a mere two months before the presidential election, in operations named for the communist leaders Olga Luzardo and Italo Sardi, an attack was initiated on a commuter train traveling from Los Teques to El Encanto, south of Caracas. When the smoke had cleared, four National Guardsmen were dead, and the Betancourt government would take full advantage of the attack to undermine the moral claims of the guerrilla struggle. To this day, Teodoro Petkoff (now of the anti-Chávez opposition) is considered by many as the responsible commander, although he denies this.[46]

For Douglas Bravo, this position vis-à-vis the military "is one of the peculiarities of the Venezuelan revolution," one that explains the tendency toward joint civilian-military action of the sort later undertaken (with Bravo's own blessing) by Chávez and others.[47] But it is not without its own contradictions, which would play out in different ways through the decades. Most fundamentally, this "peculiarity" draws out a tension within the armed struggle between guerrillas and what could be deemed "putschists," namely, those who saw the struggle as leading up to action *within* the military, a coup d'état, rather than with the complete transformation and replacement of the Armed Forces from below.[48] While this debate would resurface in the run-up to Chávez's 1992 coup, in the short term it contributed to the PCV's oscillation between two forms of vanguardism, seeking revolutionary change from either the *focos* or the barracks, but never truly from the popular masses.

The FALN's "Swan Song"

Although widespread doubt existed regarding the potential effectiveness of guerrilla action in the cities, urban guerrilla units enjoyed early successes where their rural counterparts were all but exterminated. The urban equivalent of the guerrilla *foco* was the Tactical Combat Unit (UTC), small platoons of five to six fighters. The UTCs had been active before 1959 — some even fanning the flames of urban discontent at Betancourt's election — but their strategic relationship to the rural guerrilla army was never concretized.[49] Their tactics were nothing if not innovative; between 1961 and 1963, soccer stars were kidnapped, French impressionist paintings stolen, airplanes hijacked to drop propaganda, and the U.S. military mission occupied. These commando-type operations were combined with mass tactics in the *barrios*, such as the provocation of street battles with police.[50] Some, later criticized as politically counterproductive, included the "kill a cop a day" policy, which allegedly was maintained for 500 days.[51]

But the importance and success of the urban struggle notwithstanding, it would be in the cities, Caracas in particular, that the key battle of the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle would soon be lost. On December 1, 1963, a mere two months after the public outrage that greeted the El Encanto attack, presidential elections were held. Foolishly, the guerrilla forces called a general strike a mere ten days before the election, a strike that, despite its tactical success, set the stage for a strategic defeat that Teodoro Petkoff called "the swan song of the FALN."[52] "We announced a strike to block the general elections, and we were able to paralyze the city. We paralyzed the city in an absurd way, with bullets. That day nobody moved in Caracas . . . One leftist politician said that the elections were ruined, but what was actually ruined was the FALN. We had no munitions left for Election Day, so our promise to stop the elections could not be fulfilled."[53]

Despite this guerrilla policy of "militant abstention," the crucial elections —to choose Betancourt's successor and consolidate the system of representative democracy—went forward as planned. The result could not have been worse for the armed struggle: not only did 90 percent of the electorate go to the polls, but Raúl Leoni, an old-school *adeco* of Betancourt's own stripe, won. A revolutionary situation had been squandered once again, and the urban guerrillas, alongside their rural counterparts, spent the years 1964 through 1967 searching for a "new path."[54]

This path was far from tranquil, as Leoni sought to "pacify" the guerrilla struggle with both the carrot and the stick. According to Bravo, Leoni's preference for the former constituted a minority position within AD and the Armed Forces, and as evidence he cites the violence of the simultaneous government offensive, which represented "practically a state of exception" and involved a significant number of summary executions.[55] Despite Leoni's soft-spoken façade, a stark contrast to Betancourt's forceful demeanor, many agree that the later years of the armed struggle were even more violently repressive than those of Betancourt himself.[56] New theaters of operation (TOs) were established and included what many now term "concentration camps," and the colonial prison-turned-barracks at San Carlos was reopened to house political prisoners. One such TO was established at El Tocuyo in Lara State in 1964, and it was there that nearly every guerrilla from the Páez Front with whom I spoke had been imprisoned and tortured under the direction of an unknown American who barked out orders in English.[57] Some were burned with a hot iron, some with raw garlic, others were covered in feces, whereas most were simply executed or thrown from helicopters to their death.

The lessons of these early guerrilla failures remained unclear and contested, and the schism that would eventually divide the Party from the FALN was widening. Tensions boiled over into an openly factional battle at the Party's Seventh Plenum in April 1964, where, despite significant support for the armed struggle, some like Guillermo García Ponce and Teodoro Petkoff were increasingly suspicious of the FALN leadership.[58] For Petkoff, the FALN had taken over at the expense of the PCV: "A revolutionary cause after all cannot be run like an army. The militarization of the revolutionary organization generated a contempt for political considerations."[59] But the PCV hardly was in touch with the masses in a way that would grant it a monopoly over the political, and even less so as the party leadership was gradually rounded up and imprisoned. As early as 1964, the MIR's Domingo Alberto Rangel had begun to voice opposition to the armed struggle, in part on the basis of the country's increasing urbanization and the need for a mass base, for which he was pilloried as a traitor by the PCV and the *duros*, or hardliners, of his own party.[60] Two years later, however, Petkoff and other key leaders of the PCV languishing in San Carlos grew increasingly skeptical of the future of the armed struggle, only disagreeing on how the strategy of withdrawal should be carried out. The response from the mountains was clear: the PCV leadership was utterly out of touch with the daily struggles of the guerrilla combatants, and both sides were increasingly out of touch with the masses.

With withdrawal decided, the dissenting Douglas Bravo could no longer be tolerated. He was disciplined first for publicly contradicting the party line and siding with Castro by supporting the continuation of the struggle, and while his expulsion from the Party was only formalized in 1966, "they would have thrown me out earlier if they could," he tells me with a chuckle.[61] In a meeting with many of those commanders who shared his views, Bravo took the decisive step of founding the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV) on April 23, 1966. In attendance were Ojeda, Manuitt, and Francisco "El Flaco" Prada, among others.[62] "They abandoned us," one early member of the PRV told me of the PCV, emphasizing the fact that while the clear majority of FALN fighters favored a continuation of the armed struggle, the Party's withdrawal immediately left them without resources.[63] Bravo's forces took with them the entire Chirino Front in Falcón as well as a number of individual fighters nationwide and the entirety of the PCV's urban guerrilla apparatus, but the birth of the PRV was marked by loss almost immediately: less than a month later, Ojeda was captured by the Intelligence Services (SIFA), tortured, and killed in a mock suicide by hanging. This was a serious blow to the new movement, which was itself not yet consolidated: "Fabricio was the principal political figure of the guerrilla movement," Bravo recalls, "and the most widely known leader in terms of public opinion. His death created a profound deterioration for us. The desertions began."[64]

And not only desertions occurred. The PRV suffered immediate divisions among cadres sent to Cuba for training, with one sector forming the Movement for National Salvation (MOSAN) and another, younger contingent that had become frustrated with the slow pace of the struggle forming Punto Cero (Point Zero), named for their Cuban training camp.[65] Despite some symbolic successes, including the December 1966 landing of a group of international fighters under the leadership of Luben Petkoff, the armed struggle in Venezuela found itself in irreversible decline. In such desperate times, previous lessons were forgotten, and Bravo admits that the PRV fell once again into the isolated and vanguardist *foquismo* its members had ostensibly abandoned years earlier.[66] The MIR continued activity in the eastern part of the country, shifting its cadres from the Ezequiel Zamora Front in the central region of El Bachiller (reconstituted by Américo Martín in late 1966) toward the Sucre Front further east around 1968.[67] But most of the remaining guerrilla leaders would gradually assent to the "pacification" schemes, taking with them the last hopes of a sustained armed struggle.

"We Too Risked Our Lives"

Like many other young women of her era, Nora Castañeda would have been considered precocious by any standards. As a fourteen-year-old high school student amid rising opposition to the increasingly repressive Betancourt regime, she signed up for the newly formed MIR when it split from AD in 1960. Even by the standards of this youth-driven party, Castañeda was young, but in the context of the revolutionary 23 de Enero neighborhood, radicalism was something of a genetic inheritance, and within two short years she became an active participant in the party's clandestine activities. That things have changed is clear from the location of our meeting: I meet Castañeda in her office in Banmujer, the Women's Development Bank, a government-sponsored institution over which she currently presides as its president. She recounts her role in the armed struggle primarily as follows:

> The women from our organization organized the National Commission of MIR Women [CONAMIR], and our role was a fundamental one: firstly, to attend to imprisoned comrades, not only materially but also politically . . . and we also had to attend to their families, above all economically, and to support the *compañeros* headed to the rural guerrilla who needed solidarity and support. As you can see, women's rights were completely absent, and we weren't fighting for the human rights of women, but instead as a support for all the movements fighting for the transformation of society, which at that moment passed through the urban and rural guerrilla struggle.[68]

Thus, while many women participated directly in guerrilla warfare, Nora's role within the MIR was instead one of support. She recognizes the tension that this entailed, but does not mean it as an unqualified critique: in the era of guerrilla warfare, she and a number of other revolutionary women consciously chose to put broader societal transformation first.

Lídice Navas, who also now works at Banmujer, embodies the direct participation by women in the guerrilla struggle in a poignant way, and she has given more to that struggle than most. Navas began as a young MIR militant in 1966, following her brothers into the armed struggle, and she kept up the fight longer than most: joining the nascent Bandera Roja (BR) when the MIR divided in 1969 and remaining in the armed struggle well into the 1980s.[69] In the context of massive government repression, Navas' husband Julio Cesar Guzmán, whom she had met in the trenches of 1966, fled into exile, only to give his life to the struggle in El Salvador. Navas recalls, "My husband fell in combat in San Vicente, in the ranks of the FMLN, on December 29, 1981." Navas herself only left Venezuela in 1986, after which point she would be out of the country for nearly a decade, working in Cuba, Nicaragua, and El Salvador toward the ideal of proletarian internationalism and the struggle against neoliberalism.

But it was not only her husband who was lost to the struggle for international solidarity; as Navas recalls: "Later, my two children began to learn, to develop their human sensibility, their solidarity with the poor. . . . This led one of my children, Julio Cesar Guzmán [Navas], to also decide to join the struggle of the Salvadorean people, and at one point when he came down [from the mountains] to the city he was detained by the army in Santa Clara and executed on October 30, 1991. I returned after the Peace Accords to see where he had been killed."[70] Guzmán Navas was a mere twenty years old.

Having seen the participation of thousands of women in the Salvadorean struggle, Navas insists that women participated fully and even showed a greater capacity for resistance than did men. She recounts incidents in which women were forced to watch in silence from underground hiding places as their children were executed. "That's a limit situation," Navas insists, " having to cover your mouth to not be discovered, that's an extremely painful experience for any mother." That women and men had exactly the same responsibilities "doesn't mean that there was no *machismo* . . . I repeat that in terms of participation in the struggle, women were equally valued as men," and it was in the process of the struggle itself, by the heat of its crucible, that gender relations became malleable and saw their most radical transformations.[71]

While Castañeda and the CONAMIR worked more directly on women's issues and in a support capacity, Navas insists that theirs was but a single struggle; after all, in this context one could be detained, tortured, and killed just as easily for providing support as for picking up the gun. I found this sentiment to be echoed by the group of (all male) guerrillas I interviewed from the Páez Front, who, without prompting, inserted enthusiastic praise of women who participated both directly and indirectly, emphasizing the spontaneous wall of silence that many would turn toward the forces of order to protect loved ones. Such quiet displays of force led many to realize that "here was a people with the *madera*, the strong wood necessary to support a revolution."[72] To neglect the participation of women in the guerrilla struggle is to neglect the very real claims of solidarity and ideals that would lead women like Lídice Navas to risk their own lives and sacrifice their families on the altar of proletarian internationalism, but this chapter of women's history in Venezuela is inexplicably absent from most predominant accounts of both the guerrilla struggle *and* the mainstream women's movement.[73]

Revolutionaries Without Masses

It was amid the guerrillas' turn toward prolonged warfare in late 1963 that the French intellectual Régis Debray penetrated the military encirclement to visit the Chirino Front. While *Revolution in the Revolution* would not appear for another four years, Bravo recalls that, during discussions with the writer, the guerrillas were introduced to the arguments that would later compose the book: Debray's exaggerated emphasis on mobility, the privileging of the military over the political, and the rejection of urban combat.[74] In other words, Debray's Cuba-inspired doctrine would emphasize those very elements that the Venezuelan guerrillas had already been forced to abandon in practice, but despite this, the remaining traces of vanguardism and *foquismo* would come to be the Achilles' heel of the later armed struggle as well. Partly in recognition of these errors, Bravo now insists that "*foquismo* is a deviation that divorces vanguard action from the bulk of the popular masses," and to his credit he founded the PRV in an effort to transition from a vanguard struggle to a people's war.[75] Furthermore, Debray had not even faithfully represented his object of inspiration: "The Cuban revolutionary epic appeared as a caricature" because the popular masses were actively involved and the urban fronts played a key role.[76] What Bravo fails to mention, perhaps, is that this was a "deviation" to which many Venezuelan guerrillas had all-too-readily succumbed, first through the euphoria of emerging struggle (in 1962) and later in a desperate effort to grapple with defeat (after 1966).[77] Much as imported whisky warms the belly, the intoxicating optimism of a self-identified vanguard was often the best way of resisting the cold reality of objective defeat.

Although Bravo insists that "we never shared Debray's point of view," his own description of their early errors suggests differently.[78] The most serious of these, a "general error," was the decision to send isolated *focos* to the mountains rather than connecting guerrilla units to existing *campesino* struggles, such as the more than three hundred sixty "Fronts for the Right to Bread" formed by 1960, which had seized local haciendas and occupied the lands with "machete and rifle in hand." But blinded by vanguardism and *foquismo*, the young guerrillas neglected existing struggles, choosing instead to create their own out of thin air. The second and related error, for Bravo, was of politically induced overreach: "You can't start out with ten fronts if you haven't even consolidated one," he tells me.[79] The original PCV strategy —deemed the "beehive theory"—would have seen a single front in Lara State, which would then radiate struggles outward. However, because of political territorialism, "each person wanted to create their own structure in their own way," and the result was a proliferation of ill-prepared fronts led by headstrong *comandantes*, sowing the seeds for later divisions that would plague the guerrilla struggle to the very end. Another abandoned policy that would have counteracted both errors was called "the 500," which advocated training 500 young party militants in agrarian production, management, and political-syndical organization, who would then be distributed alongside the rural guerrilla fronts to reinforce the ties between the *focos* and the rural masses. Again, this plan was abandoned with only a few dozen of the 500 trained.

This is not to suggest, however, that the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle was entirely lacking in mass support. During the early years, the Bolívar Front under Argimiro Gabaldón enjoyed significant support from local *campesinos* — in part inherited from Gabaldón senior — but Argimiro's accidental death in 1963 in many ways doomed the front.[80] Further east, guerrillas under MIR leadership engaged in innovative experiments that broke severely with the vanguardist tradition and in many ways ploughed the soil for contemporary movements. Carlos Betancourt was to the guerrilla struggle in eastern Venezuela what Douglas Bravo was to the west: under the alias "Jerónimo," Betancourt was a *comandante* of unquestioned authority. But today I meet him in a small office in the basement of the newly founded Bolivarian University, where he has been contracted to teach workshops about ideological education. For a man who once commanded hundreds of hardened fighters, he is humble in both appearance and manner, especially in contrast to Bravo, and as we enter he bustles around the office preparing coffee for me.[81] Despite his political roots in the MIR, of which Betancourt was a founding member, he served several years under Gabaldón in the west before establishing the Sucre Front in four eastern states. These MIRistas in the east were immediately critical of *foquista* orthodoxy and began experimenting instead with mass-based approaches to guerrilla warfare.[82]

Rejecting columns for smaller and more mobile detachments, Betancourt pioneered a combined form of struggle. This aging *comandante* grabs a scrap of paper to sketch out the structure of the Sucre Front: the main detachment — named for recently deceased Fabricio Ojeda — was a mobile and offensive unit much like those operating in the west, but one that worked in close conjunction with the Juan Chacón Lanza ("Juancho") and Gatico Ahmadaray detachments, which were more geographically fixed. It was these latter two detachments that constituted the Sucre Front's most serious break with *foquismo*, serving not only as rearguard bases, but more importantly as spaces for serious mass work, including cultural schools, literacy programs, local economic development including support for *campesinos*, and the formation of local militias. According to Betancourt, these spaces allowed the guerrillas to "capitalize" politically on military offensives. Moreover, while the leadership of the Ojeda detachment was fixed, the local base areas allowed fighters to elect their own leadership, who then were held accountable in popular assemblies (this applied even to Betancourt himself), and even sought to fight gender discrimination within the armed units (Lídice Navas was a key participant in this struggle). This experimentation in mass-based struggle and prefigurative popular democracy would prove important as the years and decades wore on, but even with the support that the guerrillas enjoyed in the east, the struggle was unsustainable in the face of mass disenchantment and the carrot and stick of legalization and government repression, and the MIR would undergo a series of splits in the early 1970s (see chapter 2).

What, then, were the lessons of the failure of the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle? There seem to be as many explanations as there were guerrillas, and each of these seems partial. It was not simply the romanticism or adventurism of the guerrillas, who had soon given up on their early expectations of rapid victory and set about building an apparatus for sustained struggle. Nor was it simply their petit-bourgeois or student makeup, which some blamed for that romanticism.[83] While this might have been an accurate description of many MIR militants, it does not hold for the many working-class revolutionaries who threw their weight behind the cause, like the PCV guerrillas I spoke with in Portuguesa. Gonzalito, for example, had been a shoe-shiner, a drunk, and a street vendor, only later to become a Communist "without reading *Capital*" and insisting that "the streets are the best book." But even they could not deny the impact of the influx of students, and they joke with me about having to tell aspiring combatants from the UCV that "this bus to the mountains is full, wait for the next one."[84]

It was not simply a misjudgment with regard to either the popularity of democracy or the role of the traditional military. It was not simply a misplaced emphasis on a depopulated countryside.[85] It was not simply the importation of foreign models for revolution, which does not explain the similar fate of imported opposites: first an ostensibly Cuban *foquismo* and later Chinese-inspired prolonged warfare.[86] And it was not simply, as Bravo put it, the PCV's "policy of giving up"; by that point, the struggle had long been lost. It was not simply any of these elements that doomed the struggle, and yet it was all of them, or rather that element that drew them all together: vanguardism, the assumption that an enlightened leadership had but to show the way and the people would follow, and that if the masses did not support the struggle, so much the worse for the masses. It was vanguardism that led romantic young students from the MIR to believe that they could lead a revolution and that the masses would flock to support them. It was vanguardism that bridged such disparate extremes as the PCV's oscillation from supporting small rural *focos* to military putschism and its internal debate over military versus political leadership, seemingly opposed extremes that shared a neglect for mass work. Above all, it was a vanguardist temper that dictated that certain foreign theories could simply be chosen and applied regardless of context, geographical or human. Even *foquismo* was but an extreme variant of this same vanguardism, one that shunned the people on purpose and according to which the absence of mass support for the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle was alchemically "transformed into a virtue."[87]

Almost any former guerrilla fighter will tell you that the defeat was not military: *it was political*. Ironically, although many young romantics would be the first to renounce the armed struggle, those cadres who opposed the decision to take up arms tend to celebrate it. Back with the Páez Front, I am told that the armed struggle was "a beautiful and heroic experience, which touched the heart" despite its ineffectiveness at taking power. As we discuss, a younger PCV militant interjects to praise his revolutionary elders, insisting that "*ustedes abrieron una brecha*," their efforts had opened a breach that, despite their failure, proved crucial as time wore on. It is this idea of finding victory in failure that best describes the legacy of the guerrilla struggle because it expresses the unbounded optimism of those who embody that legacy. The armed struggle was like a school of militancy in which young fighters could cut their teeth, preparing for the more protracted struggle that history had in store. But each new lesson was like Minerva's Owl, arriving too late to be of any use. To paraphrase Hegel, this gloomy picture was increasingly clear to the struggling guerrillas, but its lessons arrived too late to rejuvenate a form of struggle grown old. And so, at the end of the long decade of the 1960s, the guerrilla movement was utterly divided, isolated from any serious mass support, and confronted a repressive state that enjoyed ever-increasing levels of legitimacy. While the strategies for confronting this situation would vary in the decade to come, all would seek to correct what was perceived as the original sin of the Venezuelan guerrillas: the lack of mass support, itself an outgrowth of vanguardism. As we will see, not only was recognition of these errors too late in coming, but some errors would persist and be repeated in the decades to come.

Two. Reconnecting with the Masses

> The people are wise and patient,
> say the elders who know how to keep time
> when singing to the *guacharaca*.
> They say to cheer up because the time is coming,
> Bolívar left yesterday, but today he is returning.
> Let's go, let's go to meet him!
> —Alí Primera

The Venezuelan guerrilla struggle was dashed to pieces on the surprisingly treacherous rocks of the masses. After initially riding the tiger of massive anti-Betancourt sentiment, the guerrillas, for a number of reasons not entirely within their control, saw their support dissipate rapidly in the late 1960s. Leoni's government, recognizing that it was largely Rómulo Betancourt himself who sparked the armed struggle, implemented a successful policy of "pacifying" former fighters, which within a short period had divided the PCV, divided the MIR, and divided even the FALN, thereby allowing repression to continue unchecked. In the reputed words of their archnemesis Betancourt, the remaining guerrillas were little more than "chicken and rice without the chicken," Marxists without workers, socialists without *campesinos*.[1] This fact slowly dawned on those who remained in the armed struggle, generating a slow and painful process of self-examination in an attempt to figure out what had gone so terribly wrong and why the people had failed to respond to their clarion call to topple the young democracy.

All the while, the Venezuelan people continued to struggle: 1967 saw the beginning of an upsurge of popular grassroots resistance, starting with public workers in Maracaibo but quickly spreading nationwide, a wave of struggle that "coincided paradoxically" with the failure of those seeking to control and lead such a movement.[2] Paradoxical, to be sure, for those still harboring lingering vanguardist pretensions, who could not grasp the potential for autonomous action from below. But who were the Venezuelan masses toward which these guerrillas yearned, who were now beginning to act on their own, thereby disproving in practice the elitism of reactionaries and revolutionaries alike? They were, as some dissident guerrillas had already begun to note, largely *urban*. Decades of government neglect and half-measures such as the 1961 Land Reform — itself a response to *campesino* rebelliousness — conspired with the deformation inherent to the oil economy to produce a mass exodus from the countryside (see chapter 8). Venezuela was already more than 60 percent urbanized at the onset of the guerrilla struggle, and by the period of reflection that followed its failure, more than 70 percent were living in the cities (this trend has continued to this day, with a current urbanization rate of more than 90 percent).[3]

Here again Régis Debray's impact is central because his defense of the guerrilla *foco* is closely intertwined with his defense of the rural as that *foco*'s proper sphere of operation. He mounts this defense through a peculiar phenomenology that distinguishes the countryside categorically from the city. While recognizing the importance of urbanization in Venezuela and the "explosive social contradictions" created by the "rural exodus," Debray nevertheless cites as "irrefutable" Che Guevara's critique of the urban guerrilla.[4] In a tone that echoes Frantz Fanon's analysis of the colonial world as a Manichean realm of absolute oppositions (without, it would seem, integrating Fanon's insights into the political implications of urbanization), for Debray the rural comes to reflect almost mystically the alchemical processes of armed struggle: struggling in the countryside breeds proletarians, the city petit-bourgeoisie; the countryside is the weakest link, the city the strongest; in the country the guerrilla enjoys unlimited mobility and can decide how and when to attack, in the city the pace is set by the enemy amid inhospitable terrain.[5] It is worth asking, however, to what degree this qualitative opposition between urban and rural actually holds up in practice, and we can do this by first wondering which "urban" Debray is speaking of. Doing so, it becomes clear that Debray never distinguishes the urban proper from the semiurban *barrios* into which this mass urbanization has been funneled, thereby neglecting the fundamental continuities that exist between the rural *campesino* and the uprooted ex-*campesino* of the *barrios* (see chapter 9).

Teodoro Petkoff, who at the time was one of the main proponents of the centrality of urban warfare, argued that, contrary to Debray's strategic rejection of urban guerrilla warfare, "a city like Caracas has an excellent topography for urban combat." After all, as the 1960s came to a close, the Venezuelan capital was far more than the wide avenues, open plazas, and right angles that one might find elsewhere. The poor and densely packed *barrios* with their cardboard-and-tin *ranchos* often had far more in common with the mountainous guerrilla zones from which their inhabitants had recently migrated: copious amounts of cover, tiny passageways requiring detailed informal knowledge, and a population density capable of harboring armed combatants.

> In this way a single man who fired his weapon, then moved swiftly and fired from another point could paralyze an entire *barrio*. The idea was not for him to win battles with the police, but to form part of the insurrectional complex of the city. In this the participation of the masses was absolutely essential, and it came in this way: when our combatants were withdrawing from the police, they found all doors open. A housewife would appear at her door and say, "Take a glass of water." Or "I'll keep your weapons." Or "Hide in here." Or "You can escape that way."[6]

While the urban guerrillas of a previous decade had squandered this spontaneous support, the strategic importance of mass work in the *barrios* would only increase in the decades that followed. Nevertheless, this slow and partial process of rediscovering the popular masses did not only take the form of abandoning the armed struggle; several strategies were attempted, each a complex combination of success and failure, of lessons learned and errors repeated. During the 1970s, parties were formed for electoral participation, open fronts were formed for mass work, and even those who continued the clandestine struggle were breaking with old schemas and attempting to reformulate the guerrilla experience in a new context and with an eye to the failures of the past.

The PRV*: Bolivarianism and Dissolution*

The first serious experimentation would begin within the heart of the PRV itself, as a direct result of its formation. Despite splitting from the PCV over the question of the armed struggle, the PRV immediately attracted a variety of dissident sectors into its ranks, including prominent founding members of the PCV who later had been expelled, such as Salvador de la Plaza, expelled for attacking the Communist Party USA policy of "peaceful coexistence" and Ángel J. Márquez (aka "The Anarchist"). The PRV further included a current influenced by Juan Bautista Fuenmayor, the first general secretary of the PCV, who was expelled for opposing the failed alliance with Betancourt and AD.[7] Alongside these historic currents, several intellectual and artistic groups also joined the PRV (including the avant-garde group El Techo de la Ballena and the revolutionary artist Chino Valera Mora), as did many of the PCV's military cadres, the non-Marxist but antidogmatic current led by Fabricio Ojeda, and a large contingent from the Communist Youth (JCV).[8]

Amid such a varied group, "polemics were inevitable, we couldn't avoid it," Bravo tells me. But it was precisely this climate of tense intellectual ferment that began to generate one of the PRV's most powerful legacies: "It was there that we began to discuss, with the comrades from Falcón, the question of Bolivarianism." But in the late 1960s as today, Bolivarianism had more to do with a generalized process of rediscovering and reclaiming a national revolutionary tradition than with Bolívar himself. According to Bravo, colonization destroyed the "spiritual and religious matrix" of the indigenous and enslaved African population, and this cultural genocide—along with the 80 million deaths it provoked—represented "the biggest crime that capitalism has committed in the whole world." In the absence of these precolonial belief structures, what remained were the legacies of the liberation leaders who had fought against Spain, who themselves "came to be religious figures." Bolívar and other liberation leaders, according to Bravo, therefore represent both "an authentic truth and an authentic lie," embodying both the *concrete* anti-imperialist struggle and a *fetish* into which the people deposit their own revolutionary aspirations. While Bravo insists that a similar process is underway today with the adoration of Chávez, he seems unwilling to admit the positive and necessary aspects of this process as he does for Bolívar.

By 1970, the PRV had defined itself as a Marxist-Leninist-*Bolivarian* party, and one of the first trailblazers of Bolivarianism was PRV cadre Cornelio Alvarado — subsequently "disappeared" by the state — who published a newspaper under the title *El Bolivariano*. This rediscovery of a domestic revolutionary tradition coincided with and was nourished by the study of subjugated Marxisms elsewhere, as Rafael "El Negro" Uzcátegui, currently of the Patria Para Todos (PPT), or Homeland for All Party, explains to me.[9] A gregarious but soft-spoken man whose striking visage is a contrast of dark skin and a white beard, Uzcátegui was among those who made the transition from the PCV to the PRV alongside Bravo. After joining the JCV in 1959 and "being legal for a very short period," he began fighting in the "political-military teams of the Communist Youth" in Caracas before heading east in 1964 to fight in the Manuel Ponte Rodríguez Front in Monagas, then under the leadership of Alfredo Maneiro. According to Uzcátegui, the PRV's separation from the PCV was a liberation of sorts because it "allowed us to get to know the various socialisms that existed in the world," socialisms that were at the time multiplying as a result of the growing Sino-Soviet split.[10] "This all allowed us to break with preconceived structures and was one of the elements that led the PRV to be one of the parties with the greatest theoretical structure." "We made an effort to learn Venezuelan history, the history of our past," and this influenced both the PRV's understanding of the potential of the traditional Armed Forces and of Chávez's 1992 coup: "When I listen to Chávez now, his speeches, his anguish, his way of expressing things, I see a portrait of my young militancy during those times, jumping from a quote by Mao Tse-Tung to a quote by Gramsci, to a quote by Toni Negri, to a quote by Rosa Luxemburg, to a thought of Che Guevara, or that of a Latin American patriot." Indeed, the "three roots" that Chávez and others would later claim as the historical and ideological foundation of the Bolivarian Revolution — comprising Bolívar alongside his mentor Simón Rodríguez and the peasant agitator Ezequiel Zamora — derived directly from their links with the PRV (Adán Chávez, Hugo's elder brother, was a PRV cadre, and many vestiges of the PRV, including those like Uzcátegui in the PPT and Kléber Ramírez Rojas, would support the coup).

For Isidro Ramírez, who joined the PRV-FALN later at age 16 under the *nom de guerre* "Armando," only to find himself promoted to the party leadership after many in his home state of Carabobo were arrested, this debate and this vision also had a religious component that was rooted in liberation theology and linked to the reconsideration and valorization of the different cultural histories that influenced the Venezuelan context.[11] "We had to accept that part of our reality and part of our cosmovision, besides the Catholic and Christian, also includes the African and indigenous contributions, a plurality of spiritualities." Ramírez even recalls a time when Francisco "El Flaco" Prada, second commander of the PRV, asked him to organize a visit to the shrine of María Lionza at Mount Sorte in Yaracuy State. Similar in some ways to Santería, the worship of María Lionza blends Catholicism with local, pre-Columbian, and Afro beliefs. Prada "was very open" to such ideas, and so they traveled to the shrine in 1981, with the objective of "digging through these roots of the spirituality of our people." This all took place "with a bit of a *Mariáteguista* vision, a rediscovery . . . a recuperation of collective cultural memory" so long forgotten and erased by Eurocentrism.

As this mention of Peruvian communist José Carlos Mariátegui might suggest, such questions of cosmological memory are not limited to the religious sphere but speak to a spiritualization of Marxism itself. When asked about the current relevance of the PRV-Ruptura experience, Ramírez responds: "If there's one thing I know about the PRV, it was its ethic, its devotion, something which has to do with ideals more than the material realm." Whether it be the individual materialism of corruption or the collective materialism that centers brute productive capacity, such a spiritualization is fundamental for the Bolivarian process of the present. "Yes, we need to work toward the prosperity of the people, and socialism needs to be materially prosperous . . . but socialism can't cease to be spiritual, precisely because it needs that wisdom to know how to manage the material, because if not *it will devour you*." This critique of the purely material and openness to the ecological aspects of socialism would lead as well to the PRV's most significant theoretical contribution: a three-volume critical study of the Venezuelan oil economy published in the late 1970s, which remains a seminal reference point for the present.[12]

If one area of theoretical innovation was most fateful for the PRV, it was the party's study of nonparty organizations and its eventual rejection of the Leninist party form as the most useful tool for revolutionary change. "We even saw the party as part of this old, capitalist tradition," Ramírez argues, and the PRV itself officially dissolved in the early 1980s.[13] Uzcátegui, on the other hand, attributes the division and dispersal of the PRV more to Douglas Bravo's own theoretical development: through his unbridled heterodoxy and increasingly ecological focus, he "liquidated the party without meaning to do so . . . and the revolutionary process lost an important organization . . . with a great spirit." Many who were hesitant to abandon the party-form passed into similar, smaller organizations such as Patriotic Hope (including Dimas Petit and Rafael Ramírez), other leftist groups such as the Socialist League, Bravo's later Tercer Camino (Third Path), Maneiro's Radical Cause (including Uzcátegui), New Autonomous Movements, Gente 80, and the Revolutionary Tendency (which briefly included Alí Rodríguez Araque, who later went on to join the Radical Cause and PPT before joining the Chávez government).

In the PRV, many theoretical experiments were set into motion, but the dissolution of the party intervened before they could be completed. From recovering the "three roots" to thinking about spirituality and materialism, to emphasizing the cultural and interrogating the party form, to questions of ecology and the oil economy, in these years the PRV was, above all, an unprecedented crucible of theoretical experimentation. Although some—notably, PRV dissident Carlos Lanz—question the true depth of this process of reflection, there remains little doubt that it was the PRV that set the process into motion and that the momentum gained in this process of experimentation contributed to bringing Chávez to power. As former PRV member Héctor Vivas (a self-professed architect of the 1975 escape from San Carlos) would later put it: "The Venezuelan revolutionary process did not begin with Hugo Chávez. The revolution that the *comandante* is leading is a continuation of what was embarked upon by Simón Bolívar. And besides, he comes out of the PRV."[14]

MAS and La Causa Я: The Rebirth of the Electoral Left

Cuartel San Carlos, an eighteenth-century colonial fortress tucked amid modern architecture not far from the old city center of Caracas, is not what it used to be. Or, rather, it has been many things: military barracks, the bloody site of an attempted coup in 1945, and, most notoriously, a prison and torture chamber reserved for the political opponents of Venezuela's repressive democracy. But now it is something quite different. As I enter, a massive FALN flag drifts lazily overhead. This former prison has been taken over by ex-PRV guerrillas and now serves to educate the public on the horrors of the old regime.[15] To call it a "museum" does not do it justice; run by those who themselves have been political prisoners, the San Carlos of today is a monument to the memory of their suffering and their struggle. As I walk through the old cells, many still etched with makeshift graffiti scratched into the plaster and concrete walls, I am told how, upon its liberation, the basement of the prison still contained the remains of the colonial torture chambers—known by prisoners as *tigritos*, or "little tigers"—that had been again put to use under the Leoni government.

San Carlos represents not only the mute suffering of a people, however; it also stands for the dignity, and indeed, cunning, of resistance. It was from here that, in 1967 and again in 1975, spectacular escapes were orchestrated. This is the basis of its new significance, and today its walls are emblazoned with the faces of heroic escapees, some of whom are well-known members of the government (and opposition). In February 1967, it was here that the leading lights of the PCV—Pompeyo Márquez, Teodoro Petkoff, the Machado brothers, Freddy Muñoz, and Guillermo García Ponce—found themselves. This was not the first time Petkoff had seen the inside of San Carlos, and it would not be his first escape. In 1964, he had escaped from the nearby Military Hospital after drinking a liter of blood, which he then regurgitated to fake a gastric hemorrhage; but, after making his way to the western front, Petkoff was recaptured, arriving once again at San Carlos later that same year.[16] A new escape plan was in the works almost immediately: codenamed "the book," the plan included a young Syrian known as "Simón the Arab," who assisted in digging the more than 200-foot tunnel from a kiosk across the street over a period of nearly three years, guided only by the faint tapping of a typewriter from within the cell.[17] In what *L'Humanité* deemed "the escape of the century," Petkoff, Márquez, and García Ponce escaped through the tunnel on February 5, 1967.[18]

But the divisions that emerged within San Carlos ran deep once on the outside. While the imprisoned leadership agreed on the decision to withdraw from the armed struggle, arguments about how this was to be done were soon conflated with a new challenge: how to react to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Petkoff clashed with the established leadership of the PCV, arguing that the Czech experience had been an attempt to develop a new form of socialism, and that rather than merely resisting imperialism through popular frontism, the PCV should attempt to construct socialism in the present. Against the stageist logic of "Democracy Today, Socialism Tomorrow" (the same logic that had led to the PCV's fatal hesitation toward the armed struggle) young party cadres, echoing their MIR counterparts a decade prior, were clear: "Socialism Now!"[19] The same Teodoro Petkoff who only a few years earlier had condemned Douglas Bravo for violating "the sacred principles of organization" and encouraging "factionalism" was now himself beginning to question those same principles openly, and in December 1970 the young radicals left the PCV to form the Movement toward Socialism (MAS).[20] Shortly after the split, Petkoff described the aspiration of those comprising the young party "to create a revolutionary organization that would be sufficiently open so as not to attempt to impose a rigid model on the society in which it lives." In this "open organization," there would be no firm division between hardcore militant and sympathizer, no insistence "that we are men of a special temper, that we communists are made of a special kind of steel." The MAS sought to infuse socialism with the spirit of the New Left, with its internal democracy and rejection of vanguardism and two-stage theories of revolution, seeking to construct "a very horizontal organization in which the distance between the leadership and its base is very small."[21]

But words are one thing and actions another. Ellner notes that the "new" MAS was born of old-style opportunism and "Machiavellian" maneuvering: Petkoff and others initially had framed themselves as proponents of PCV unity in a cynical attempt to do as much damage to the party as possible before leaving.[22] The strategy paid dividends immediately: the young dissidents were surprised when PCV elder Pompeyo Márquez opted to leave with them. As would become clear over the years, this sort of Machiavellian opportunism has made it difficult, if not impossible, to know if Petkoff meant what he said, and this characteristic infused the wildly inconsistent policies of the MAS. The stroke of strategic genius that brought Pompeyo and others into the nascent MAS, moreover, entailed its own dangers, which former guerrilla commander Alfredo Maneiro recognized earlier than most. According to Ellner, "The MAS was born with two defined ideological currents," the "left" of Petkoff and the "center" of Márquez, and from the beginning Maneiro "argued that the presence of the 'centrists' in the new party would slow the process of revising the doctrine and practice of orthodox communism."[23] Thus it was that Maneiro, considered by many a "natural member" of the MAS leadership, walked out of the MAS founding conference.[24] Meanwhile, his concerns would be substantiated inside, and the centrists were recompensed royally for their willingness to abandon the old party, traditional positions on the working class and factionalism were inserted into party statutes, Márquez himself was named general secretary, and the new party even endorsed the slogan, "We are, more than ever, communists."[25]

The MAS was born as a heterodox alternative to PCV orthodoxy, but it soon became clear that such heterodoxy did not necessarily position it to the left of its predecessor. First, the MAS sought to rethink the concept of working-class centrality in a country like Venezuela, where the "workers" proper constituted a small and relatively privileged class (see chapter 7). However, Petkoff, who saw this as extending the lessons of the guerrilla struggle and therefore advocated updating of the concept of the proletariat to encompass as well the "marginal" informal class (see chapter 9), oscillated between this position and an open celebration of the middle class.[26] Regardless of this variation in position, the party itself remained demographically middle class, drawing its membership largely from students and professionals. But given that the Venezuelan middle classes were relatively privileged at the time of the 1970s oil bonanza, the political implications of this class makeup were decisive: "The MAS, as would have been the case with any other left-wing party emerging from privileged sectors and accepting this social base, was destined to move to the right as time passed."[27] This rightward shift was exacerbated by the party's a priori electoralism and the opportunism that this would engender, with heterodoxy here becoming a new orthodoxy: "The MASistas have almost always seen electoral results as the best way to determine the correctness of their positions."[28] If the task was to reconnect to the masses, the MAS could only see those masses through an electoral lens.

The MAS's rightward shift was as swift as it was forewarned. Shortly after its founding in 1971, the party abandoned the immediatism of its demand for "Socialism Now!" and opted instead for a language of partial reforms; in its zeal to please voters, the word *socialism* was nearly absent from the 1978 presidential campaign.[29] As the poet and critic Luis Britto García told me, he was with the MAS "until they became social-democrats," and this certainly did not take long at all.[30] But what was most ironic — and most revealing — about the MAS's obsessively electoral strategy was its impressive failure. Despite nominating the charismatic and widely respected journalist José Vicente Rangel, who was best known for revealing extrajudicial killings by the government and later serving as vice president under Chávez, the MAS garnered a paltry number of votes, and even this number declined when the party turned inward, nominating Petkoff himself in 1983. Where much of the Venezuelan population sought honesty and responsibility in a time of corruption, the MAS appeared in a 1983 opinion survey as the *most dishonest* party on the Venezuelan political horizon, truly an accomplishment given the stiff competition.[31] But as economic crisis set in, even this party seemed an attractive alternative to the prevailing two-party system, and the MAS saw significant success during the 1989 municipal elections. But where many sought an outlet for their total opposition to the corrupt and elite two-party democracy, the MAS appeared as an apologist for and even functional reinforcement of that system, celebrating the contributions of the AD and COPEI to the nation's democratic heritage. When the Venezuelan party system found itself in free fall after the 1992 Chávez coup, MAS threw its lot in with the candidacy of COPEI founder Rafael Caldera, a dinosaur from the old system whose political extinction was delayed only by his opportunistic recognition of the true significance of the 1992 coups (see the Second Interlude).

But the modest successes of the MAS would soon be eclipsed even on the electoral plane by a very different sort of party, one that better represented the MAS's own nominal critique of the party-form and one whose devotion to bottom-up organizing was more sustained: La Causa Я, or "The Radical Cause" (LCR). When Alfredo Maneiro walked out of the founding conference of the MAS in January 1971, it was not to form a new party, and while the newborn MAS was approving statutes critical of "the Party as an end-in-itself," Maneiro was putting this skepticism into practice by *not* initially forming a party or even a movement but rather a loose grouping known as Venezuela 83.[32] This "antiparty attitude" combined a persistent hostility toward corrupt representative democracy with a firm recognition of the vanguardist errors of the guerrilla struggle, and in so doing was more in line with the later political mood of the country than the MAS.[33] This "remainder" left by the PCV-MAS split would be as frustrated with the old as with the new, and whereas the MAS made every effort to incorporate itself to the existing rules of the representative democratic system, the LCR broke more decisively with those rules, choosing, at least initially, to rewrite the script in favor of a bottom-up, more directly democratic organization that would work within and alongside social movements.[34] Closer in some ways to the PRV than the MAS, Maneiro and others extended the lessons of the guerrilla failure, insisting that "the mass movement can take into its own hands the task of producing . . . a new leadership."[35] Despite the recognition of leadership that this view entailed, it was nevertheless a serious rupture with the vanguardism of the past and, equally, with the contemporary vanguardism of "the MASistas [who] maintained an almost mystical faith in their own capacity to direct the struggle."[36]

Toward this end, Venezuela 83 identified three key areas of existing struggles on which to focus their energies: the student movement at the Central University in Caracas, where Maneiro had begun to study philosophy, the sprawling Sidor steelworks in the steamy Venezuelan East, and the historically combative *barrio* of Catia in western Caracas. The groups operating in these areas under the Venezuela 83 umbrella dedicated themselves primarily to establishing newspapers: *PRAG* at the Central University, *Catia 83* in Catia, and *El Matancero* at Sidor (named for the industrial area of Matanzas). Of these, only the last would have a significant and lasting impact, and

Venezuela 83's antivanguardist refusal to fix ideological positions would be the cause of most of its later problems, making its fate ironically similar to that of MAS. The *PRAG* grouping was expelled in 1976 after demanding greater ideological clarity; a similar fate befell its 1980s successor, an intellectual grouping known as "The House of Calm Waters."[37] More dangerous still was the later political transformation that this hostility to ideology would make possible. When Maneiro died suddenly and unexpectedly in 1982, he was in the process of steering the organization that had been renamed LCR in 1979 toward the center, and the ensuing struggle for leadership led to the departure of the Catia group.[38] The result was twofold: the party that had recognized the importance of the *barrios* so early on had lost its urban wing, and this, combined with the prior alienation of intellectuals, facilitated a "workerist turn."[39] Maneiro, who had once attacked MAS for evacuating socialism of its content and described them as "sheep in wolves clothing, tired sheep" for attempting to conquer the center rather than uniting the left, would himself come to a similar conclusion from the opposite direction: moving toward socialism—as worker control and local participation—without ever using the word.[40] While LCR's experiments in local governments and in the workers' movement were significant (see chapter 7) and contributed to the Bolivarian Revolution's emphasis on participatory democracy, they too would soon be overtaken by events.

While the MAS always remained a marginal force and threw in its lot with Caldera in the 1993 election, the LCR experienced a sudden explosion in that election due to the intransigence of its critiques of the old system and attempts to replace it in practice.[41] But this was not all it showed; although many assume that the LCR laid the groundwork for Chávez's eventual victory, a much more subtle dialectic was at work, one driven from below and that involved divisions within the party itself. When LCR head Andrés Velásquez was first elected governor of Bolívar State in 1989, he needed to invoke the specter of mass popular violence and the Caracazo to force the reigning two-party elites to even recognize the election, and when he was reconfirmed in 1992, it was in the wake of the February and November coups, which themselves were the result of the Caracazo.[42] The LCR's biggest upset in 1992, however, was the unexpected victory of Aristóbulo Istúriz as mayor of Caracas. This victory did not come out of nowhere: Istúriz was one of two members of Congress who, after Chávez's February coup attempt, refused to condemn the coup and instead critiqued the political system and neoliberal policies that had generated it (the other was Caldera himself). This reveals not only a fundamental difference between the LCR and MAS (Petkoff sharply condemned the coup), but also a deep-seated division *within* the latter: a considerable segment of the LCR had maintained contact with both the armed underground and dissident currents within the military such as Chávez's MBR-200. Although the LCR would publicly split over the question of supporting a Chávez candidacy—with the majority forming the PPT—the real split already had occurred around the 1992 coup attempts.[43]

The Death Throes of Vanguardism

If the editors of *L'Humanité* once called the first escape from San Carlos in 1967 "the escape of the century," they would need to eat their words less than a decade later. As the violent process cynically termed *pacification* took root, those formations choosing to maintain the armed struggle suffered severe losses, and as happened a decade earlier, the majority of those captured alive wound up in San Carlos. Juvenal was not one of them: he has never been captured, despite the central role he played in the 1975 escape from San Carlos and in the waning stages of the armed revolutionary struggle. I first meet Juvenal in the stifling heat of Maracaibo in oil-rich western Venezuela. Ducking into an air-conditioned café to escape the 105-degree noontime sun, we begin to discuss his history and reflections on the guerrilla struggle. From a long line of communists, Juvenal joined the MIR in 1964 at age 11, rising to the youth leadership by 14. Despite his youth, he recounts that his "education was completed by revolutionary practice," as the party trained him in political subjects and combat preparedness. "We young people were linked to the struggle at that time for *romantic* reasons . . . but in life and in the unfolding of your militancy you make certain decisions under pressure . . . repression reinforces rage, and that rage is converted bit by bit into consciousness."[44]

As an urban tactical combat unit fighter in Caracas, Juvenal always harbored a slight resentment that the urban struggle was treated as secondary, as a rearguard providing supplies and fighters for the countryside. When the PCV withdrew from the struggle in 1966, the MIR continued on, but not without strain on the organization and simmering tension between the MIR and Bravo's nascent PRV-FALN. In late 1968, MIR founder Domingo Alberto Rangel left the party to seek legalization, and a year later those who remained active divided into three groups: Américo Martín led the "Authentic" group toward pacification (later joining the MAS in 1988), while the remaining armed elements divided essentially along generational lines.

More experienced cadres from the eastern fronts created Bandera Roja (BR; Red Flag) under Américo Silva, Carlos Betancourt, and Gabriel Puerta Aponte, whereas the younger members of largely urban detachments, such as Jorge Rodríguez, Fernando Soto Rojas, and Julio Escalona, formed the Organization of Revolutionaries (OR).[45]

Political divisions in Venezuela, according to Juvenal, who himself identified with the OR, are very emotional events, and the division of the MIR transformed their initial comradely love for one another into an enduring and "visceral hatred" between revolutionaries that has lasted even until today. Although there was an effort afterward to create a unified structure comprising the guerrillas from the PRV, BR, and OR, "this never crystallized," and throughout the 1970s guerrilla actions continued without even a minimal degree of coordination between fronts. Juvenal grasps for an explanation, struggling palpably: "*Compañero*, *cónchale!* . . . We Latinos are stupid about these things, I don't know if it's the indigenous blood, the Spanish blood, the Caribe in us, *no sé qué vaina es* . . ." Within the OR, as had been the case in the PRV before it, vanguardism and *foquismo* had been rejected on paper but persisted in practice, as they "kept seeing the same repetition of the guerrilla struggle according to the same framework, with no link to the masses." Above all, it was this repetition of old errors that led Juvenal to part ways with the group around 1973, heading to Caracas in search of kindred revolutionary spirits.

It was there, in the cool breeze and political heat of the capital, that Juvenal encountered one of the more controversial figures of recent Venezuelan history: Carlos Lanz Rodríguez. Alongside Lanz, a longtime guerrilla who at that point was still affiliated with the PRV, Juvenal turned his attention to the Cuartel San Carlos. At the time, the notorious prison was swelling to capacity with political prisoners, holding the majority of the leadership of *both* BR and the PRV, as well as members of the OR and the early PRV offshoot Punto Cero.[46] Arguably the most active group at the time with the highest degree of tactical capacity, BR began to organize the digging of a tunnel from within the prison, inviting the participation of the imprisoned PRV cadres, including "El Flaco" Prada. The mission was dubbed Operation Jesús Alberto Márquez Finol after a Bandera militant, alias "El Motilón," who had, like Petkoff, staged a spectacular escape from the Military Hospital only to die in a hail of bullets in an ambush in 1973.[47]

Juvenal and Carlos Lanz provided the muscle on the outside, with the not insignificant aid of an entire detachment of BR guerrillas, approximately sixty fighters. Six of these commandos seized a building across the street to provide armed cover for the escape, and after waving a white towel from the balcony, a second unit began to move. Armed with a stethoscope, a power drill, and a sledgehammer — not to mention automatic weapons — their task was to connect to the tunnel from a neighboring house above it: "We sent the signal and awaited a response from our comrades who were, at that moment, some three meters below the foundation of the house and more than fifty meters from their cells . . . we heard three distant strikes, timid, cautious, beneath the floor; I repeated the code and the response became more audible; there was no doubt: we were above our objective."[48] Under the cover of a neighbor's blaring television and the excited distraction of a showdown between perennial baseball rivals the Caracas Leones and Magallanes, the guerrillas labored for two hours to drill through the cement floor. Furious digging gave way to the gentle collapsing of backlit earth and the face of a long-imprisoned comrade, and just before midnight on January 18, 1975, an astounding twenty-three political prisoners from the various besieged guerrilla organizations escaped through the narrow tunnel (including Rafael Uzcátegui of the PRV and Carlos Betancourt of BR).[49]

But the exhilaration of such a momentous victory could not conceal underlying divisions, tensions, and disagreements. Shortly afterward, Juvenal and Lanz approached "El Flaco" Prada to discuss the possibility of shifting PRV strategy and tactics, especially toward the still-elusive task of direct mass work. These discussions broke down, however: "we discussed and discussed, and said, *coño*, we're in the same situation, the *compañeros* don't want to understand us, this forced us to create *una vaina nueva*, something entirely new, or supposedly new, and to walk according to what we believe, and so we regrouped." It is ironic that, despite their recognition of the errors of the past — of vanguardist arrogance and self-isolating *foquismo* — Juvenal and Lanz would largely repeat those errors. Juvenal tells me with a sort of exasperated humor, "we were talking, saying 'we're going to change things,' and we fell into the same *vaina* as before because we came together precisely for the purpose of a *military* operation, the Niehous operation." On February 27, 1976, the first night of carnival and exactly thirteen years before the Caracazo, Lanz, Juvenal, and several unnamed others appeared at the door of American businessman William Niehous. When a maid opened the door, Niehous, already suspicious, quickly shouted for her to close it, but it was too late. An assailant blocked the door with his foot and the other members of this still unnamed formation that would later be known as the Revolutionary Commando Groups (GCR) entered, taking Niehous hostage.

In a text published under the obvious pseudonym Gaspar Castro Rojas (i.e., GCR) and titled *How We Kidnapped Niehous*, the operation is described in detail.[50] Asking that I leave out details such as their exact numbers and the operational codenames, Juvenal explains to me the genesis of the operation. They had been inspired by the successful 1969 kidnapping of a U.S. ambassador by the Brazilian Revolutionary October 8th Movement (of which current Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff was once a member). In an effort to overcome their own "dogmatic sectarianism," Juvenal and Lanz sought support from the OR and BR, the latter of which was in the process of dividing yet again. The operation was named for none other than Argimiro Gabaldón, the legendary leader of the early guerrilla struggle in the Venezuelan Midwest who had enjoyed an unprecedented degree of mass support, but this was a severe misnomer: despite Juvenal's and Lanz's recognition that the absence of mass support had been the Achilles' heel of the armed struggle, their new operation would not correct this error.

The urban commandos had previously infiltrated Niehous' corporation, Owens-Illinois, discovering a veritable treasure trove of documents testifying to corruption at the highest level of the Venezuelan government as well as the efforts of multinationals to interfere in domestic politics. Adding to these the documents seized from Niehous' home, the guerrillas issued a public denunciation of both multinationals and the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez. In the predictably hysterical terms of the U.S. press: "The terrorists identified themselves as part of a little-known leftist movement named the Argimiro Gabaldon Revolutionary Command. Instead of asking for a cash ransom, they demanded that Owens-Illinois 1) pay each of its 1,600 Venezuelan employees $116 as compensation for its 'exploitation'; 2) distribute 18,000 packages of food to needy families; and 3) buy space in Venezuelan and foreign newspapers for a lengthy manifesto, written by the extremists, denouncing the company and the Caracas government. Otherwise, they implied, Niehous would be killed."[51]

For a time, the commando strategy proved successful, effectively driving a wedge between the corrupt Venezuelan state and Owens-Illinois and setting into motion a strange dynamic: in an effort to free Niehous, Owens-Illinois fulfilled these three demands, but in fulfilling the third it provoked the anger of the Pérez government. According to a government statement, Owens-Illinois had "offended the dignity of the country and promoted the subversion of our constitutional order" by printing the kidnappers' statement, and was promptly nationalized.[52]

But while a pristine operation in military terms, as the longest political kidnapping in Venezuelan history wore on, it soon became politically unstable and eventually disastrous. In July 1976, several Liga Socialista members were detained, and its most important leader, Jorge Rodríguez (father of a recent vice president of the same name) was tortured to death by the government's intelligence force (DISIP).[53] Now flailing wildly, the DISIP began to arrest anyone in sight, even members of congress who had been attempting to negotiate Niehous' release. As the one-year anniversary of the kidnapping approached, Lanz himself was detained at a police checkpoint in eastern Bolívar State, not far from where Niehous would be discovered alive more than two years later.[54] Lanz was returned to Cuartel San Carlos, of all places, to serve more than eight years in a prison from which he had helped twenty-three revolutionaries escape only two years earlier. But if the Niehous kidnapping was a tactical success of some sort, and even a political success in some aspects, few would argue that it was worth the backlash it provoked: some four hundred revolutionary leaders were arrested and many killed as a direct result.[55]

Lanz's account of the infamous Niehous operation and its aftermath—published from his cell at San Carlos—is a sharply polemical but theoretically convincing and original analysis of the phenomenon of corruption from within a strict Marxist framework of the expropriation of labor and commodity fetishism.[56] According to Lanz, corruption tends to be treated as "a problem of morality, of virtue," but "this explanation conceals the economic and social conditions that make the phenomenon of corruption possible, providing it with a cover, a moral alibi."[57] In his trial defense, Lanz echoes Fidel Castro's epic *History Will Absolve Me*, denying participation in the kidnapping but seizing the opportunity to denounce the corruption that the operation had revealed. "I take pride in becoming the accuser of the regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez, because anyone who reviews my life will find nothing but revolutionary consistency and sacrifice. I fully assume the consequences of having behaved and continuing to behave like a revolutionary communist, [and] if this Tribunal considers such conduct to be worthy of a conviction, I can say that I will endure it with firmness because I have faith that the future is ours, *hasta la victoria siempre*."[58]

The context in which I meet Carlos Lanz is a testament to the incredible truth of his "faith" in the future. In a skyscraper towering over the Metro station at La Hoyada in central Caracas, an impatient Lanz whisks me through security and up the elevator to the Ministry of Higher Education, where he has recently been named vice minister. As someone familiar by this point with Venezuelan government ministries, I nevertheless am taken aback by the luxury of the Ministry of Higher Education, which boasts smooth hardwood floors and minimalistic, modern furnishings. Stunned by the surreal situation — meeting a convicted "terrorist" amid such decadence, sponsored moreover by a "revolutionary" government — I nevertheless muster a clumsy joke: "Well," I say nervously, "it's better than San Carlos." Lanz is prodigiously effective; I do not even need to ask the questions, he simply offers forth information faster than I can process it, information about his past, his influences, his intellectual and political trajectory, his views on workers' autonomy, his time as head of the state aluminum company Alcasa, and his role in formulating the Bolivarian Revolution's educational reforms. "You can get this in the documents," he insists, "but I lived it in my practical experience."[59]

Lanz first entered the armed struggle by way of the Communist Youth in 1961, finding himself in the Sierra de Falcón by 1965 alongside Douglas Bravo, with whom he would go on to found the PRV-FALN a year later. For Lanz, those involved in the armed struggle reflected an eclectic multiplicity of viewpoints — from a Debray-style *foquismo* to a rural Maoism, from a military-oriented putschism to his own Red Brigades-inspired approach, which he defined according to a strict class content. But all of these ostensible alternatives shared one key element: their vanguardism. For all its efforts, Lanz feels that the PRV's theoretical experimentation was, in reality, quite limited: the various prevailing Marxist dogmas — from Stalin to Mao, Vietnam to North Korea — merely sat uncomfortably alongside one another, with little space for a diminutive and lame Mariátegui. Lanz describes this approach as "Vatican" because in all their disputes and divisions, the guerrillas merely "left one church to set up another, left one paradigm to establish another. There was no real search for our *own* way of thinking."[60] More damningly, Lanz insists that there was never a true strategy of guerrilla warfare in Venezuela, understood as an accumulation of forces geared toward the eventual annihilation of the enemy. The armed struggle had served merely as a political fulcrum to foment a coup or, worse, as a political bargaining chip for those seeking "pacification." This was, in part, because it was strangely parliamentary in its ideological and demographic makeup: polyclassist, nationalist, and populist, with a petty bourgeois consciousness that was the legacy of Stalinist popular frontism.

Beginning around 1974, Lanz and others within the PRV had begun to delve deeply into ultraleft Marxism and specifically into Italian autonomism. Inspired by the radical class-centrism of authors like Antonio Negri — of contemporary *Empire* and *Multitude* fame — Lanz, like the Italian government, mistakenly associated autonomist theory with the radical practice of popular justice instituted by Italy's Red Brigades. It was this theoretical advance that led Lanz, Juvenal, and others to the Niehous operation.[61] Along with such sources, however, Juvenal adds that those involved in the GCR sought to deepen and extend the PRV's exploration of indigenous radicalism in search of "our own roots"; they studied the "three roots" of Bolivarianism long before Chávez, sought out indigenous inspiration from Tupak Amaru and the rebellious Jirajaras, and delved into liberation theology, all on a solid foundation of Mariátegui. If anything, Juvenal argues that they tended to bend the stick too far toward heterodoxy—"Like good Latinos and Caribes, we abandoned Marxism entirely!"—resulting instead in a *mezcolanza*, a hodgepodge even more chaotic than that of the PRV.

In the aftermath of the Niehous operation and the repression it brought upon the broader movement, a multiplicity of armed groups stumbled on, with Juvenal heading up the nationwide urban guerrilla organization known as Venceremos, which perfected hit-and-run tactics and bank expropriations without ever truly connecting with the masses: "and there we committed the same error," he adds with a desperate chuckle, "we continued with the *foquismo*." As Juvenal put it: "We began to speak of the fact [that] the struggle needed to be fundamentally political, and that it needed a deeper rapprochement with the masses, or we would disappear, and in fact, we *almost* disappeared." Toward the end of the 1970s, the Venezuelan guerrilla movement faced a situation of long, drawn-out defeat, a slow death. Repression had forced them into clandestinity, thereby contributing to their isolation from the masses, and these dwindling urban guerrilla organizations found themselves as isolated from the masses as their rural counterparts had been a decade earlier.

Mass Fronts and the Politics of Legality

While the central object of Lanz's critique was state corruption, he nevertheless issued a stinging critique to those representatives of the "opportunist left," who profoundly overestimated bourgeois legality in search of mass support and who therefore failed to foresee such a vicious backlash.[62] Most armed organizations of the mid-1970s sought to reconnect with the masses by carefully treading a fine line between clandestinity and openness through the establishment of semilegal mass front organizations. The hope was that these mass fronts would be capable of doing what *focos* had not: organizing the urban masses in a broad and dispersed "war of position" while avoiding, for the time being, a "war of maneuver," or direct confrontation with a zealously repressive state apparatus. In the mid-1970s, this vast space between clandestinity and electoralism was populated rapidly by groups such as the Liga Socialista, a legal front for the OR formed by Jorge Rodríguez in 1973 shortly before his death; Ruptura, a legal front for the PRV; and the Committees for Popular Struggles, Committees for Workers' Struggles, and Committees for Revolutionary Student Struggles, all legal fronts for BR. As founding documents of the Liga Socialista make clear, these mass fronts grew out of a double critique of the "errors and deviations of [both] *foquismo* and reformism," and their goal was to use legality strategically without falling into electoralism, as did the PCV and MAS.[63] Each mass front centered around its own newspaper: the Liga's *Bassiruque*, BR's *Quehacer*, and *Ruptura* itself.

In the words of two young militants of the period, this was a time in which "hundreds of militants opted to turn their gaze once again toward the struggles of the vast majority."[64] For a moment, it seemed as if these young heirs of the armed struggle were finally, at long last and after many frustrated efforts, "reconnecting with the masses," but when they began to do so effectively, Lanz's warning increasingly rang true. These mass fronts, according to Juvenal, "had in their hands the possibility of channeling a mass movement linked with the guerrilla movement . . . That was a magical political moment in 73–74: all universities and student centers in the hands of the left, in the hands of the *armed revolutionary movement* . . . workers' strikes directed clandestinely by the guerrilla movement." But this magical moment was lost, like so many before it, and though Juvenal cites internecine bickering nourished by vanguardist arrogance as the central causes, the decline of these mass fronts coincided directly with the post-Niehous backlash. In the chronology that accompanies Lanz's text, the death of Jorge Rodríguez stands as proof of the limitations of this strategy: "It became clear that bourgeois democracy on the one hand allows the legality of struggles, and on the other represses with all available force any mass action that threatens security."[65]

But perhaps it was Lanz and Juvenal themselves who were guilty of overestimating bourgeois legality by failing to foresee the severity of the consequences that *their* actions would bring down upon the mass fronts. They had certainly not solved the central enigma of such legality: how to build a mass movement *without* it? Bourgeois legality was a double-edged sword: much like the state itself, it could be neither wholeheartedly embraced nor entirely neglected, and indeed, few embraced legality naïvely. Isidro Ramírez explains to me the complex relationship that existed between the clandestine PRV and its nominally legal mass front, Ruptura: when an above-ground member of Ruptura came under suspicion of the police, they would pass into clandestine work in another region, and, conversely, if a clandestine member of the PRV was detained and released for lack of evidence, that member could then pass back into the legal structure that was Ruptura. The latter occurred with Ramírez in 1977 when, after being caught in Maracay hanging a PRV flag, he was tortured for several days with electric shocks before being released. "Everyone knew that PRV and Ruptura were linked," and this "everyone" included first and foremost the repressive apparatus.

The Venezuelan armed struggle was in many ways a richly fertile experience that generated much of what has come since, but because this generativity came as much from its failures as from its successes, it required profound self-criticism. While Juvenal insists on the "historical debt" that the Bolivarian Revolution and contemporary organizers of all stripes owe to those who gave their lives in the guerrilla struggle, he nevertheless recognizes that "we haven't reflected individually or collectively on the defeat of the armed struggle of that period." In particular, there are many who insisted on and continue to emphasize the military aspect of that defeat, whereas Juvenal insists that it was almost entirely political, "since the proposals and the form the struggle took, instead of bringing us closer to the masses pushed us further away from the masses." Even on a military level, he now wonders, "What better than the masses to protect a movement? What we didn't understand at the time was that *the masses were our best protection*." And this criticism is also a profound self-criticism as well, coming as it does from someone who remained an urban commando well into the 1990s. This turn toward the people helped to consolidate a developing if inconsistent critique of vanguardist conceptions in which the revolutionary leadership "always possesses the truth which it seeks to teach to the inexperienced masses."[66] The lessons of the 1970s would sink in slowly for some, generating a qualitative leap in the 1980s, but even today Juvenal insists on the danger of overlooking the mass element of the Bolivarian Revolution: "The struggle is in the street, and even today we don't recognize that if we're not in the streets, the government will become bureaucratic and move to the right."

Much like the guerrilla struggle itself, these strategies for reconnecting with the masses were, on the surface of things, at least, resounding failures. The PRV had dissolved into a loose milieu without ever solidifying what was meant by its “Bolivarianism,” the electoral left remained marginal (barely exceeding a combined 5 percent during this period), and both the remaining armed *focos* and their mass legal fronts remained on the defensive in the face of a rising tide of state repression. Guerrillas would continue to reach out toward the realm of legality, occupying a sort of gray area between clandestinity and openness in an effort to rediscover the people in whose name they often claimed to speak. If many attempted to heed Lanz’s warning, strategically taking advantage of legal openings while not fooling themselves about the inevitable backlash, they also found the very category of legality to be a profoundly political one in constant dialectical motion, around the edges of which they would be forced to dance. But the floodgates of repression were blown open by the Niehous operation, and the more successful later organizations were in establishing linkages with the urban masses, the more they came under the bloody scrutiny of representative democracy in decline.

Three. Birth of the "Tupamaros"

The verses of the people
can be flowers or bullets,
the bullet that defends them,
or the bullet that kills them.
—Alí Primera

From Ñangaras *to Tupamaros*

They were called *Ñangaras*. As the Metropolitan Police flooded up the Avenida Sucre and surrounded the first blocks of the Monte Piedad neighborhood of 23 de Enero, which perch strategically on a bluff overlooking the ostensible seat of Venezuelan political power, the young residents of Block 5 were prepared. They crept swiftly up the dark and narrow stairway, grimy from decades of disrepair, and onto the roof of the hulking, thirteen-story structure. As a police helicopter shuddered toward the building, the young Rodríguez brothers produced a makeshift rocket launcher, which they quickly attempted to stabilize, aimed, and fired. These three brothers —Ricardo, Carlos, and Sergio, the last of whom would be martyred but a few short years later—were known affectionately in the neighborhood as *los cepillini* because their short, flat-top haircuts resembled nothing so much as the bristles of a broom. The projectile flew wide, missing the helicopter, but this was not all that had gone wrong: in the commotion, Ricardo had lost half of his thumb. It was painful, certainly, but more dangerous than the blood spurting from his damaged artery was the unmistakable evidence of a political crime. Ricardo rushed down to his apartment, where he quickly attempted to bandage the wound, but within a few short minutes, having received word of the botched attack by the *Ñangaras* of Block 5, police stormed the building. Given their history of militancy, the Rodríguez brothers were automatically the prime suspects and so the first to receive a visit. Ricardo had no other option than to lie because the truth would see him in the gulag of Venezuelan democracy at best, and in the torture chamber of the nearby Metropolitan Police outpost at worst.[1] He had been feeding his newborn, he explained, with his bandaged thumb concealed behind the frightened creature and pain concealed behind his calm façade.

Even many years later, relief is still visible on his face as he recounts this close brush with the forces of neoliberal order: "if they had found me, I might have been disappeared for good!" Ricardo holds the remains of his mangled thumb close to my face, as if to emphasize the severity of the injury as well as the exceptionality of his fate: all were not so lucky, although under such conditions luck is, at best, a relative measure. Many were permanently disappeared, and many, like Ricardo's brother Sergio, were shot down in plain view (see chapter 4). Members of the Block 5 Collective tell me of people being shot execution style and thrown off the roof of the building as a warning to others, reminiscent of the Southern Cone's Operation Condor but a forceful reminder that such atrocities were not limited to formal dictatorships. Many more suffered an intermediate fate. As Ricardo tells me his story, an older Afro-Venezuelan man looks on quietly before volunteering the information that he had been disappeared for two months at one point, and that this had not been his only brush with the violence of the state; he spontaneously lifts his shirt to show bullet wounds in his side to match those on his chin and arm. His name? He'd rather not say. Can we take a picture? "If you want my picture, ask the DISIP," the notorious state intelligence service. Did they consider themselves "Tupamaros"? My question evokes a contemporary term of both celebration and condemnation, one that reveals as it shrouds, and for which I am given only partial (and inevitably multiple) explanations. One onlooker, scarred physically by state repression and emotionally by the period of addiction that followed in its wake, puts it bluntly: "We're the *real* Tupamaros. Look, I don't have a belt! My apartment is full of cockroaches! This is the life of a revolutionary!"

Fuego en el 23

“Hay fuego en el 23,
en el 23 . . .”

When legendary Puerto Rican salsa combo Sonora Ponceña recorded their epic 1969 hit “Fuego en el 23,” they would have had little idea what revolutionary aims their words would eventually come to serve in distant Venezuela, despite the fact that the late leader of the Machetero independence movement Filiberto Ojeda Ríos was himself a member of the famed combo. But words are infinitely malleable, open to appropriation by others, and numbers even more so. Today, “Fuego en el 23” has become something of an informal anthem for one of the most revolutionary spaces in all Venezuela, the *parroquía* of 23 de Enero (January 23), situated in the sprawling *barrio* of Catia in western Caracas. Here “fire” serves as a two-sided metaphor for the role the zone has played: simultaneously as a staging zone for resistance and a recipient of repression, Alí Primera’s two “bullets” from which this chapter began. Perched in the hills just above Miraflores Palace in western Caracas, 23 de Enero has never been a trustworthy ally for those inhabiting the constituted power that the Palace represents, and its name on the lips bespeaks a different sort of power altogether. As Alí Primera puts it elsewhere, “the docile [*manso*] people are always corralled, but this doesn’t happen if they are fierce [*montaraz*].” This is a lesson that the inhabitants of 23 de Enero seem to have taken to heart, and this fiercely independent spirit is visible even in its self-chosen name.

Originally known as 2 de Diciembre (December 2), named in a self-aggrandizing gesture for the date on which Marcos Pérez Jiménez came to power in a 1952 coup, these towering apartment blocks were intended as the ultimate gift of a monarch, a veritable “Let them eat cake” moment. In the recent words of poet Luis Britto García, writing in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the dictator’s fall, “Pérez Jiménez used architecture as the symbolic expression of all unresolved problems”; hence the much trumpeted construction of 2 de Diciembre with its decadent expanse and wide open green spaces. “This luxurious display case awaited the poor, who would cease to be poor by the very fact of inhabiting it.”[2] Much like Marie Antoinette, however, Pérez Jiménez would not see this symbolic gift through to its conclusion. The still uninhabited superblocks of 2 de Diciembre were occupied forcibly during the rebellion that toppled his regime, the date of which — to add insult to injury — provided an occasion for a rechristening:

the area became known as 23 de Enero for the date in 1958 when Pérez Jiménez fled the country. That this group of buildings had already worn the rise and fall of a dictator on its very nameplate foreshadows the central role it would later play in Venezuelan political life. For 23 de Enero is indeed *montaraz*, in Primera's words, a fiercely free beast with no compunction about snapping off the hand that feeds it. This threat of betrayal is one to which Hugo Chávez is not immune, and any Venezuela leader not wishing to meet Pérez Jimenez's fate or worse must take this lesson to heart.

Originally intended to accommodate sixty thousand residents in some nine thousand apartments, Pérez Jiménez's delusion of tranquil modernity has since been replaced with the reality of urbanization: the wide open spaces between apartment blocks have been packed tightly with standard Venezuelan shantytown housing, humble brick-and-tin *ranchos* squeezed between and stacked one on top of the other. Some now estimate the population of 23 de Enero at around five hundred thousand, a choppy and turbulent sea of *ranchitos*, the undulating surface of which is broken only by the surreal jutting cliffs of the bulky, multicolored superblocks which twice gave the area its name. This is the 23 de Enero of today, looming large in the Venezuelan psyche, foreboding for the few but inspiring for the many. Many an unashamed anti-Chavista contributes to the myth of 23 de Enero by investing it with his symbolic fears. One, who admittedly had never set foot in the place, nevertheless explained to me, with a self-seriousness that is not to be exaggerated, that "there you need to walk with bullets across your chest and a knife in your teeth." But the reality is far different. Although 23 de Enero is nestled within Catia, a sprawling *barrio* where some of the worst violence of the capital is concentrated, the prevalence of revolutionary popular militias in the area often means that it is far safer than the surrounding zone, safer even than many wealthier areas. This disconnect from opposition mythology does not mean, however, that the area does not also carry a symbolic weight for those who live there. Speaking anonymously near Block 5, a former member of Douglas Bravo's PRV tells me that "at work, people think that I'm an extremist simply because I live in 23 de Enero," adding with a wink: "as a matter of fact *I am*, but they would think so even if I weren't."

For Juan Contreras, founder of the Simón Bolivar Coordinator, a broad front of militant groupings, this hostility to the state and scorn for its petty gifts is but one ingredient in the "cauldron of resistance" that is today's 23 de Enero.[3] He credits this historically revolutionary posture to a number of elements, the first being that when Pérez Jiménez was toppled on January

23, 1958, many of these government-sponsored housing structures were occupied by poor residents from surrounding areas who had opposed the dictatorship. Second, even those granted housing in the area by the dictator replied to this faux generosity with open resistance, burning tires in the street, chasing out the police, and eventually advancing down the hills onto the seat of government during Pérez Jiménez's final moments. The third element, itself deeply intertwined with the first two, is that "the guerrillas were here in 23 de Enero," and this presence played a major role in making 23 de Enero the "*barrio* of resistance, *barrio* of struggle" that it remains to this day. The FALN, and later the PRV, BR, and OR, all played a role here, as did many members of Punto Cero, most notably their leader Rubén Álvarez, affectionately referred to as "El Cabezón," who was executed here by the DISIP in 1972 after being captured by Cuban-Venezuelan exile and terrorist Luis Posada Carrilles. This guerrilla presence in 23 de Enero was both cause and effect: after first seeking the shelter and support of this historically militant zone, their presence served to further radicalize the population through ideological education and practical example.

Here, the transition from resisting the dictatorship to resisting the new democratic regime was surprisingly seamless. Betancourt was trounced electorally in the capital and humiliated by its residents at his inauguration, and for this he never forgave the radical *caraqueños* concentrated in 23 de Enero. Teodoro Petkoff recalls the spontaneous hatred that many residents of the *barrios* of western Caracas exhibited toward the nascent elite democracy: ". . . at times some fifty or sixty persons would stand in line on the roof of the 23 de Enero housing project, waiting their turn to fire a rifle [one shot each] at the army barracks that stood across the road. The army would respond by spraying these apartment blocks with machine gun fire, so for safety people slept on the floor of their apartments. You can still see the bullet marks in the apartment buildings."[4] As we will see in the First Interlude, the phrase "you can still see the bullet marks" is one that resonates to this very day in a 23 de Enero that still bears the visible scars of the Caracazo.

Other times, urban guerrillas deliberately provoked confrontations with police, in which local residents gladly participated, sometimes battling for days on end. Nevertheless, despite mass enthusiasm for such actions, Petkoff recalls a growing hesitance and even hostility to these vanguardist *focos*: "by 1964 and 1965 we began to find that our urban combat groups were provoking rejection instead of solidarity from the population. While before many would stand in line to fire a rifle, now they were hostile to these urban combats because of the police reaction they generated. After the guerrilla combatants fled the *barrio,* the police would come and crack down on everyone." Thus, while avoiding capture was essential to the urban guerrilla's tactics, this strategic necessity soon came into conflict with another essential element that had proven similarly essential in the countryside: relations with the community. Residents of the poor and combative *barrios* soon began to feel that they were bearing the brunt of the repression brought about by the hit-and-run tactics of the guerrillas.[5]

Although this would lead some community members to sit out the street battles of the late 1960s, thereby dooming Venezuela's experiment in urban guerrilla warfare, the specter of *barrio* conflict inevitably reared its head again with the rise of a double violence, the structural violence of economic scarcity and the "socially repressive" violence of the neoliberal state. When it did, this spontaneous hatred of the police and the state would give birth to an organizational form very distinct from the *foquismo* of the urban guerrilla struggle. Now it would not be small units of well-heeled former university students or intellectuals or even members of the traditional working class, but rather local residents themselves who would engage in mass street skirmishes in defense of their own neighborhoods. This qualitative development did not emerge only from pragmatic resistance to the very real risks that the guerrilla struggle presented for the community, however, but equally from a confrontation of strategic viewpoints and a deepening of the critique of vanguardism and *foquismo*, the material embodiment of which was that shadowy, mythical force with a name as foreign as its causes are indigenous: the "Tupamaros."

The Socialization of Repression

this guy sure can walk,
he leaves a corpse on every corner[6]

The movement that came to be known cryptically as the "Tupamaros" emerged from the radically transformed political, social, and economic context of the 1980s and the incessant dialectic of resistance and repression in which the state and revolutionary movements struggled for control of the new conjuncture. This struggle would, as struggles do, lead to a drastic reorientation of strategies on both sides. Whereas the Venezuelan state previously had engaged in isolated skirmishes with an equally isolated guerrilla force, we have seen how some revolutionary organizations found success by reaching out to the population through legal front organizations. It was these efforts in conjunction with the onset of precipitous economic crisis that generated the emergence in the 1980s of mass resistance movements among the poorest sectors of Venezuelan society, against which there emerged a qualitatively new strategy of repression.

It was in the heart of the period of profound disillusionment and debate among former guerrillas that economic crisis hit: beginning with the 1983 devaluation of the bolívar known as "Black Friday," part of the Venezuelan government's first heterodox effort at neoliberal reform, the economy went into a tailspin.[7] Structural adjustment efforts meant that the popular masses would bear the brunt of these macroeconomic pains: as median incomes crashed and unemployment increased, everyday costs skyrocketed and, unsurprisingly, levels of social violence followed.[8] Before the "socialization of repression," then, there was the socialization of a violence of a much more banal sort: the socialization of scarcity, the socialization of hunger, and the socialization of a newly flourishing drug trade in the *barrios* (as will become clear, however, this social violence was not clearly distinguishable from state violence). As the macroeconomic crisis deepened, the Venezuelan government would respond in the increasingly strict neoliberal terms of the International Monetary Fund, and with both its capacity and willingness to provide for the population in free fall, the country became a veritable tinderbox of resistance.

Unable and unwilling to govern through popular consent, a succession of presidents turned instead to force, unleashing onto the popular classes—by now the vast majority of the population—a sort of repressive violence previously reserved for the small *focos* of armed insurgents. Whereas the guerrillas had been met with the occasional targeted massacre, longtime revolutionary organizer Roland Denis insists that this new period saw the state shift not only the object of its repression but also its scale: the state "socialized repression, distributing it across society as a whole."[9] As popular rebellion spread horizontally throughout society, so too did repression cast a wide net, giving birth to what Denis terms the *socially repressive state*, which instead of fighting the guerrillas themselves began to fight the people whose demands it could not meet. Confronted with the specter of an unprecedented popular rebelliousness, the government sought desperately to prevent any cooperation or collaboration between revolutionaries and the masses. At first, it was precisely those who had best absorbed the lessons of the guerrilla struggle who would bear the brunt of this broadening state violence.

In this context of socialized violence and groping toward a resolution of the central contradiction of the guerrilla struggle, many revolutionaries skeptical of electoral centrism turned to what was dubbed the Social-Historic

Current (CHS). This current, according to Denis, who was a key participant at the time, brought together various sectors, from nonorthodox Marxists to radical Christians to Afro and Indigenous movements, all united broadly under a renascent Bolivarianism, and many drawn — not coincidentally — from the ranks of the now-defunct PRV.[10] Walking the fine line between openness and clandestinity, this was a movement that sought to resurface as a public current, a groundbreaking effort at constructing a locally rooted, bottom-up method of organizing the masses. In its socially repressive phase, the Venezuelan state could not allow mass organizing among these newly rebellious sectors, and therefore it trained its sights directly on the CHS. First, however, there was Cantaura. On October 4, 1982, fifteen hundred army regulars encircled forty-one alleged members of the Américo Silva guerrilla front in the eastern Venezuelan state of Anzoátegui while four aircraft dropped a total of seventeen 250-pound bombs on the location. Twenty-three guerrillas, mostly from Bandera Roja, were killed while participating in an unarmed meeting between guerrilla and student leaders. While it was true that the victims "were members of a revolutionary group that showed no mercy," former MIR guerrilla Domingo Alberto Rangel emphasizes that "not even they were armed."[11] Foreshadowing later tactics, the meeting had been infiltrated by government intelligence agents, and in a perverse precedent to Colombia's "false positives" of today, the victims were dressed in military garb to simulate armed combat.

After Cantaura came Yumare, an event that would indelibly scar the youthful optimism of the CHS both physically and metaphorically. As with Cantaura, infiltration was the method, and, as with Cantaura, the objective was extermination rather than arrest. In fact, it was the DISIP infiltrators themselves who proposed the meeting, the stated objective of which was nothing more subversive than to discuss the future of the CHS, and who selected a secluded location for the fateful event. On May 8, 1986, the organizers arrived at the chosen location, driven by the infiltrators themselves, and were promptly captured by the DISIP, tortured, and executed. There is evidence that DISIP planning for the massacre began in March 1986, a full two months earlier, and autopsies showed that the victims were shot through the head and chest with military weaponry, some execution-style at point-blank range. At some point, other members of the CHS who were captured and tortured elsewhere also were brought to the site and executed. After the fact, a guerrilla ambush was simulated, and the corpses again were dressed in military fatigues and paraded before an uncritical press, which duly repeated the official line regarding the massacre.[12]

The total death toll was nine, but the fact that quantitatively fewer died at Yumare than at Cantaura should not blind us to the fact that the later massacre suggested a pattern of broadening repression. It was, after all, the CHS that was targeted rather than Bandera Roja, its novel hope, its breadth and aspirations, its creativity and antidogmatic open-mindedness that was embodied in the mutilated victims of Yumare.[13] In other words, while the 1982 Cantaura massacre targeted some actual combatants (who were unarmed and meeting with legal organizers), the events at Yumare in 1986 represented, in contrast, an attack on above-ground social and cultural leaders whose activities had been forced into clandestinity by an increasingly unstable state. Moreover, this noticeable shift between 1982 and 1986 marks a turning point within a longer trajectory, one that begins with many individual victims, such as Alberto Lovera and Fabricio Ojeda in the 1960s and Jorge Rodríguez in the 1970s, and that leads up to and through the bloody aftermath of the Caracazo. While this may seem to be a transformation in degree and not in kind, there is a point at which quantitative shifts in the numbers of cadavers embody and reflect a radical qualitative transformation. This is why Denis, who lost some close friends at Yumare, deems Cantaura "the end of the guerrilla struggle." Those gathered at Yumare were not guerrillas, but Yumare itself was the result of a dialectical process whereby the most inspired elements of the armed struggle sought out a new form within which it could develop.

But there was nothing progressive or inevitable about this dialectic, and state violence would fold this process onto itself, forcing the struggle into newer and untested waters. Just as the struggle pushed ever forward, so too did the state unleash a furious wave of repression that before long burst its banks and destroyed itself in the process. If violence was becoming socialized, it had yet to reach the limits of this socialization, and Yumare, with its unashamed killing of noncombatants, prefigured the Amparo massacre two years later in 1988, in which fifteen fishermen were slaughtered in Apure under the bogus claim that they were preparing a guerrilla attack.[14] Both of these bloodbaths, moreover, represented a perverse prelude to the 1989 Caracazo riots, the bloody if inspired cataclysm in which government troops would be sent to the poor *barrios* to slaughter thousands.

Here, then, are the rough contours of this dialectic: after the defeat and dispersal of the guerrilla struggle, armed organizations sought to reestablish a connection with the poor masses through legal fronts operating largely in the *barrios* (the 1970s). The threat that this connection posed to the state apparatus, the specter of large-scale armed struggle that it represented, led to the gradual deployment of the socially repressive state, and the targets of repression were no longer isolated armed *focos* but rather the rebellious masses as a class who rose up in the Caracazo (the 1980s). But the crashing crescendo of 1989 was far from the end of this dialectic of repression and resistance; this broad offensive against the masses pushed *barrio* residents toward new organizational forms oriented around self-government, the elimination of the drug trade, and armed self-defense (the 1990s), which remain central to the Bolivarian Revolution.

From Urban Guerrillas to Tupamaros

This qualitative shift assumed a particularly acute form in the "cauldron of resistance" that is 23 de Enero, and the effort to overcome the strategic errors of the guerrilla struggle set the parameters for an entire generation's political coming-of-age in the rebellious *parroquía*. This generation included Juan Contreras, who describes his youth as a veritable crucible in which an almost literal "heat" nourished revolutionary ferment. "My generation—and I have been here since the day I was born—we grew up in the heat of the struggles that took place here, in the heat of the police raids, in the heat of the repression, in the heat of the tear gas, in the heat of the gunshots. Then, a decade later, we repeated almost as if a carbon copy everything we experienced as children here in 23 de Enero, and we made it our own struggle. We joined the political-military organizations and nuclei that remained here in the mid-1970s."

For these young guerrillas, however, it was not the crisp mountain air and the solitude of the isolated rural *foco* that marked their entrance into the world of political struggle. Rather, as we saw vividly with the Rodríguez brothers, "the rooftops were our trenches."[15] According to Contreras, his generation confronted the same double-sided violence identified by Denis: on the one hand, the lack of necessary services, and on the other, the open repression that was meted out to those demanding such services. Citing the "right to life" that Venezuelan democracy enshrined in words but trampled in practice, Contreras echoes guerrillas of prior generations: "We had to rise up in arms even to defend our own physical integrity, and this is why we don't regret anything that we have done." It was this very material starting point that distinguished the class composition of these organizations from some of the past: these were not petty bourgeois students headed to the hills, half-inspired by a sense of romantic adventure, but rather a revolutionized poor fighting for their lives.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, these young *Ñangaras* of 23 de Enero, like the armed organizations they had joined, operated on two levels simultaneously, combining open sociocultural work with bank expropriations—Contreras insists that to call them "robberies" is a "vulgar" misrepresentation—and other offensive measures. But as repression pushed the urban guerrilla organizations, one after the other, toward either extinction or irrelevance, and as the contradictions of vanguardist *foquismo* became more apparent, this younger generation began to think on its own. Contreras refers to this literal re-generation as the moment in which "Papa and Mama disappeared," by which he means the verticalist political organizations of the past "that told you what to do and even how to do it, passing on to you the entire political line and you just obeyed. But beginning in the 80s, we started to be critical, we began to construct our own organization and our own future, and we became the parents of this child, this open social movement which sought contact with our community." It was in seeking contact with the community that these young *Ñangaras* drifted away from the strictly political-military objectives of the urban guerrilla struggle toward tasks that were more properly *social* and that responded to the everyday concerns that had driven them to act in the first place.

Central among these tasks was confronting the drug trade, and if there is one single struggle that marks the birth of the Venezuelan popular militia movement, it is the battle against drug trafficking. But what might initially seem to be a battle on two fronts—against a repressive neoliberal state and against the infiltration of drug traffickers—was in practice but a single struggle. In a striking parallel to the fate of the Black Panthers in the United States, Contreras documents the role of the state in making drugs available and the political objectives of so doing: "It was the DISIP who brought the drugs into 23 de Enero in the early 80s. We must put it this way: it was part of a state policy and it was a dirty war, a low-intensity war seeking to destroy the resistance which had developed in 23 de Enero."[16] Even those who doubt that the drug trade was part of a high-level strategy of the state could not deny its operation on the micro-level; underpaid police seized the opportunity afforded by their petty sovereignty to line their own pockets by providing drugs and looking the other way. In practical terms, the effect was the same: police and drug traffickers became but two faces of a single target that these nascent groups sought to exterminate.[17]

Neither entirely clandestine nor fully open, small groups began to spring up to defend local *barrios* from this double menace. This began informally, with semipublic appearances by armed and black-masked *encapuchados* who would publicly out those selling drugs and present them with a clear-cut ultimatum: either you stop selling drugs or you will be killed.[18] This was and remains more a dispersed culture of self-defense than any kind of centralized organizational strategy; a member of the loose Block 5 Collective explains to me how they stamped out the local drug trade in their area without the need for a name or a flag: "If we catch someone dealing drugs in our neighborhood," he tells me, "first they get a warning. If they show up again, they get a beating. And if they show up a third time. . . ." He trails off, indicating with a hand gesture that the outcome will not be pleasant. He also recounts a recent situation in which members of the community caught a local *malandro*, or delinquent, robbing the Cuban doctor in the local Barrio Adentro health module: an unarmed crowd of neighbors seized the man, beat him, stripped him naked, and sent him on his way.[19]

While actively confronting the drug trade in semiclandestinity, local organizations such as La Piedrita, with which we began, and Contreras' own Simón Bolívar Coordinator simultaneously began to engage in aboveground cultural work aimed at preemptively undercutting the basis for social violence: they painted murals, rehabilitated sports fields, and reclaimed music and culture, all in an effort to mobilize local youth toward more positive pursuits than drug peddling. This openness, however, this decision to take strategic advantage of "bourgeois legality," did not mark the end of the state policy of repression but merely the beginning of a new stage. As Contreras recalls:

> Even then we were persecuted, even then we were harassed . . . this was an irrational and intolerant state that would criminalize anything that smelled like the left or like an organization. So the youth of 23 de Enero were criminalized, stigmatized. First they called us guerrillas, in the decades of the 60s and 70s they called us *Ñangaras* here in 23 de Enero . . . Then, after around 1985, they began to call all of the youth who participated in organizational political activity and sports, in resistance, they began to call them "Tupamaros."

Many, even locals, do not know this side of the story, and Contreras is eager to correct the history; according to him, it was the police themselves and the DISIP that invented the term. In a textbook deployment of the "outside agitator" trope, security forces painted these zealous youngsters with the brush of the Uruguayan urban guerrillas of the same name in an effort to stoke community fears:

> It was the political police, the DISIP, that baptized this entire rebellion, all of these social organizations that emerged, that categorized them as "Tupamaros" . . . This was a nomenclature designed to stigmatize the youth of 23 de Enero, so that the people would stay away from us, so that the social work that was developing and being carried out by those young people would be rejected by the community. Because then, if you are linked to those idealistic young people who painted murals, who defended the community from delinquents, who confronted police in street battles with bravery and courage, the goal was to cut off their social base, their support base, by calling them "Tupamaros."[20]

If all struggles are both ideological and military — in Gramsci's terms, hegemonic and coercive — then this smearing of youth movements with the ominous label of Tupamaros was merely the ideological and hegemonic face of the socially repressive state; desperate to prevent any connection between the urban masses and the organized heirs of the guerrilla struggle, the neoliberal state feebly attempted to win hearts and minds while stacking up corpses on the side.

But if this effort succeeded, it was more for coercive than ideological reasons; many local residents feared the very real threat of material reprisals for even erroneous association with these *Ñangaras*-turned-Tupamaros, reprisals that ranged from violent searches to imprisonment, torture, and death. Despite such police efforts — or perhaps because of them — relations between these nascent self-defense militias and the remaining urban guerrilla units — which were arguably more worthy of the name "Tupamaro" — were tense. Juvenal of Venceremos recalls that while he had been close with Juan Contreras in the past, this period saw a deterioration of that friendship. "We had a unit in 23 de Enero, but Juan at that time, he didn't even want to see our faces, *coño*. For them, we were *foquistas*, adventurists, anarchists, *vaina de ese tipo*, which wasn't our intention. Our intention was to say to them: look, the armed struggle is still the way." He argues that Contreras and others saw self-defense as more local, directed against *malandros* or delinquents, and not as fundamentally linked to the national armed struggle. "In the worst moments of repression," he adds, "none of those groups helped us. They closed the door to us."

But this question of precise origins had little bearing on the practical function of the term: the Tupamaros became a myth, a new code word for both sides, the meaning of which constituted an arena of struggle in its own right. Like all nomenclatures of stigmatization, the Tupamaro moniker, once established, escaped the control of those who first deployed it. The police used the term to denigrate; local residents to express an amalgam of respect, awe, and uneasiness; and the militants themselves to symbolically unify their many struggles into one. This symbolic unification would become formal in 1993, with the establishment of the Simón Bolívar Coordinator. Its function lay in the name: this was a broad organization seeking to coordinate and unify the activities of the various armed militia collectives that had emerged spontaneously in response to the rising tide of state and parastate violence. It was only in the late 1990s that the moniker "Tupamaro" became an official label for a variety of groups and even political parties, which Contreras insists are really "neo-Tupamaros." These Tupamaros — their myth as well as their reality (the two being not entirely separable) — are key to grasping contemporary Venezuelan reality and the dynamic of conflict that drives forward and deepens the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Mass Military Line

While the mass repression of entire communities by the neoliberal state forced a turn to self-defense in practice, these communities also took the initiative, often in conversation with former guerrillas, transforming this practice of mass self-defense into a theoretical breakthrough that grew out of the central lesson of the guerrilla war: the "mass military line." This was a perspective that vehemently rejected the tendency to seek out the masses through electoral politics, instead insisting that "only the violence of the organized people constituted the natural channel for social revolutions," which in practical terms entails "the construction of mobile urban militias to carry out both peaceful-legal and violent-clandestine tasks."[21] If Carlos Lanz had been slow to break with the vanguardist tendencies of the Revolutionary Commando Groups that carried out the Niehous kidnapping, he did so more fully in the 1980s; Bonilla and El Troudi identify the theoretical origin of the contemporary Venezuelan militia movement in the "fusion" of the Revolutionary Commando Groups with the Guevaraist currents in 23 de Enero under the leadership of José Pinto.[22]

Lanz explains to me how their Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MRT), a precursor to Pinto's controversial Revolutionary Tupamaro Movement of the same acronym, constituted a deepening of previous experiences. Like the CHS, they continued to develop and reaffirm the Bolivarian project of the PRV, with its dedication to indigenous forms of struggle in the spirit of Mariátegui and the construction of a truly "Indo-American socialism." This heterodoxy extended even to their Marxism; the MRT began intensive study of "the forgotten Marxisms, the disqualified Marxisms, left Marxism," leading them to a rejection of the Leninist view of vertical democratic centralism and toward an emphasis on crafting horizontalist organizational forms drawing upon the council tradition. They broadened their understanding of military strategy by linking it with local conditions in the insistence that "combat is concrete but also an everyday occurrence, and violence is not limited to armed combat," giving rise to a new understanding of the intermediary space between legality and clandestinity. In addition, the MRT sought to develop a deeper understanding of resistance on the basis of gender, race, and other non-class-based struggles while situating these in conjunction with the theories of worker control that Lanz would later put into practice during his tenure at Alcasa (see chapter 7). Above all, and as the crowning lesson, the MRT firmly rejected vanguardism, thereby constituting a hybridization of discourses that some have deemed a "qualitative leap in the national left" that "catapulted" Lanz, Pinto, and the MRT beyond the limitations of the traditional armed struggle.[23]

While the MRT as a specific organization was short-lived, this theoretical breakthrough nevertheless "set into motion a spiral of permanent creation (unity and diaspora) which permeated various collectives and the theoretical episteme of an important part of the left for two decades."[24] When asked about the relationship between the MRT and the later Tupamaro movement, Lanz is clear that the MRT was not an armed group or a militia in itself, but once the organization dissolved, its remaining cadres in 23 de Enero joined Pinto's Tupamaros. Whereas Pinto embraced the Tupamaro phenomenon, Lanz pushed the implications of this "qualitative leap" in a slightly different direction, linking up with the student upsurge in the mid-1980s to develop a strategy of "street action" under the name Popular Disobedience (DP), the importance of which should not be underestimated (see chapter 4). DP channeled the growing unrest toward the state into direct conflicts with the forces of order that were distinct from the guerrilla struggle both in their location (the streets) and their composition (these were mass, not *foquista*, actions). "While many people don't see it this way," Lanz insists, DP was a "precursor to the Caracazo . . . because over several years we prepared the conditions for urban violence to be considered legitimate." In other words, if Pinto and the Tupamaro-style groups were pushing a strategy of mass self-defense, Lanz and DP were developing the offensive side of the mass-military line. While Lanz is clear that DP did not *lead* the events of February 1989, they immediately recognized this mass rebellion as a practical manifestation of their own theory, joining immediately in what they realized would be a historic unfolding.

In the years after Caracazo, DP folded into a new project known as Proyecto Nuestramérica, or the Our America Project, which was dedicated to a reconsideration of the concept of hegemony and the need for struggles on the terrain of culture. But once a guerrilla, always a guerrilla, and Lanz insists that Proyecto Nuestramérica would never abandon the strategy of accumulating the necessary forces to annihilate the enemy and would certainly never cave to the MAS/Radical Cause temptation of electoralism. Both positions proved crucial once 1992 arrived. "These new urban movements were the children of the armed struggle," explains Roland Denis, who was himself a member of both DP and Proyecto Nuestramérica. But as with any children, the resemblance borne by these young rebels to their guerrilla parents ("Papa and Mama," as Contreras describes them) was partial at best.

Popular Militias and the Revolution

If the failures of the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle centered on the dangers of vanguardist *foquismo*, the most notorious theoretical proponent of which was Régis Debray, then the organizational forms that emerged in the wake of that failure constituted yet another related break with Debray. In *Revolution in the Revolution*, Debray had sparked a heated debate within the revolutionary left by openly denouncing the strategy of armed self-defense then practiced by the Colombian guerrillas and Bolivian miners of the 1950s. Debray simply could not contemplate why a guerrilla army would confine itself to a fixed territory: armed self-defense zones or base areas, he thought, were essentially sitting ducks waiting to be annihilated, and this was a danger that he saw played out in practice.[25] According to Debray, the defeats suffered by Colombian self-defense zones in 1964 and 1965 marked "the death of a certain ideology," to which he added cavalierly, "Today, self-defense as a system and as a reality has been liquidated by the march of events."[26] But it was Debray's own *foquismo*, and not armed self-defense, that had proven most disastrous for Venezuelan guerrillas, and this disaster led to the forging of new strategies, central among which is a renovated conception of urban self-defense capable of confronting the socially repressive state.

Among the most adamant proponents of armed self-defense and the establishment of popular militias is the Alexis Vive Collective, a Tupamaro-style organization whose zone of influence lies not far from La Piedrita and just around the corner from the Simón Bolívar Coordinator. That Alexis Vive takes self-defense seriously is evident to anyone who pays attention while approaching: before coming within a block of the compound, I see and am seen by rooftop lookouts. One dropped to his stomach, barking a message to a teenager below, who immediately sprints off. Rather than ignore this telltale sign of airtight security, I approach the single open kiosk beneath the lookout point and utter the magic words: "Carlos Betancourt." It was none other than Comandante Jerónimo himself, veteran leader of the eastern guerrilla front, who sent me. A barely perceptible glint in the eye indicates a metaphorical key has turned and a formerly closed realm has opened to me. I am directed toward the compound. That Betancourt's name would hold such weight and open doors in the *barrios* is not as surprising as it might at first seem. After all, it was Betancourt himself who broke most severely with *foquista* doctrine, experimenting with new forms of revolutionary organization, integrating zones of mass support and armed self-defense into the activities of the eastern Sucre Front, and even arguing that it was the rural areas that should serve as rearguard for the urban and not vice versa.[27] These days, Betancourt works with a group whose name is as revealing as it is unsurprising: the Communards. Their mission is to radicalize the current system of Communal Councils, transforming these into truly independent organs of revolutionary popular power. For the Communards, the establishment of popular militias is central to achieving such independence.[28] This objective explains Betancourt's relationship with the Alexis Vive Collective, for which he serves as a theoretical elder and ideological mentor.

For Betancourt, the question of militias is a question of principle. Echoing Lenin's critique of the state as an alienated apparatus separate from and standing above the people, Betancourt insists that the question of security cannot be dealt with by a special force because it is a "collective problem" that affects everyone. Taking aim at Venezuela's new National Police Law, which seeks to transform a notoriously violent and corrupt system of policing through greater centralization, Betancourt insists that the Chávez government has missed the point. "Security isn't a question of centralization or decentralization. Any national police force will just be the same corrupt cops in a national uniform." Knowledge in the *barrios* is managed collectively: everyone knows who sells and consumes drugs, who is armed and unarmed, so why put security in the hands of anyone other than the people themselves? By establishing popular militias, Betancourt insists that not only will the security situation improve — this much is evident from the experience of 23 de Enero — but these militia structures will also function as a "political school for the armed people." In contrast to this attempt to centralize security from above, militia groups in 23 de Enero and elsewhere have taken a distinctly different strategy: expelling the police by force or, more recently, by agreement with friendly mayors.[29]

But the question of centralization versus decentralization brings us back to the central paradox of the Bolivarian Revolution: How do these antistate revolutionaries reconcile themselves to a Bolivarian Revolution in which the central state plays such a decisive role? Revolutionary militants, particularly those engaged in localized self-defense under the broad if ill-fitting "Tupamaro" umbrella, do so, I argue, through two distinctions. The first, one common among most Chavistas, is the distinction between Chávez and those who surround him. Chávez has proven himself and gained the people's trust, so the argument goes, but most of his advisors are merely corrupt opportunists who want nothing more than to constitute a new ruling class.[30] While this argument reaches the level of self-delusion among many Chavistas, allowing them to reconcile psychologically the radical rhetoric of the Bolivarian Revolution with the often disappointing continuities of daily reality, the most revolutionary of militants supplement this distinction with one that arguably supplants it entirely: the temporal distinction between the present and the future expressed in a distinction between Chávez and the Revolution, the *presidente* and the *proceso*.[31] Whereas the first often serves to excuse Chávez for all his revolution's ills, the second maintains the possibility of moving decisively beyond the president if conditions warrant it.

Valentín Santana of La Piedrita expresses these overlapping distinctions clearly: while recognizing Chávez as the "maximum leader" of the revolution, without whom "we'd all be at war or 'disappeared,'" he is quick to add that "from him on down, those *carajos* are worthless, and that's the reality." With their taste for fancy cars, cologne, and women, "they don't smell like revolution." He pauses thoughtfully, then adds, "In practice, they're nothing like Che." I ask what he would say to Chávez: "I would say, look, *Comandante*, read your history. The first ones to betray Salvador Allende were his ministers . . . Who has betrayed Chávez? His ministers." But Santana is quick to insist that the process extends far beyond Chávez and that "the revolution doesn't belong to that little group [of leaders], not even to Chávez, it belongs to my mother, to my child, to you, to a people who truly dreams of a better world." Their relationship to the process is "critical, but *duro*," a hardline critique: "we follow the steps of the process . . . but we need to be the ones who administer it here." Nevertheless, the question of what to do with those useless *carajos*, commonly known as the "endogenous right," the more moderate sectors within the revolution, raises the specter of a renewal of revolutionary violence that has come to be both a caricature and a truth of the Tupamaros.

"This place was a dump, a drug zone," Santana explains. "Here in 23 de Enero, if you wanted to occupy a space it was necessary to use revolutionary violence. *I* had to use revolutionary violence." It was only through such violence that the drug trade and even drug use was stamped out and that La Piedrita and the local community established "total control" of the area. This is the sort of popular security apparatus of which Carlos Betancourt speaks, in which neighborhood kids participate, alerting members of the collective when they notice strange cars, strange motorcycles, strange people. "The kids in the *barrio* know everything." Do they consider themselves a militia, I ask? "Yes, we consider ourselves *milicianos*. The true militias are in the *barrios*, in the countryside," Santana asserts, adding a pointed critique of the official militias established in recent years: "not in the barracks." When struggle breaks out, such official militias—a contradiction in terms—will be the first to desert, whereas Santana insists that it is much more difficult to desert when you are defending your home, your block, your neighborhood, and your loved ones.

Under the Bolivarian process, however, Santana suggests that revolutionary violence has taken on a new meaning that echoes Fanon in its creativity, shifting from self-defense to militant offensive: "This Revolution is dirty," he says in clear reference to those surrounding Chávez, "I think we can cleanse it, strengthen it, but we might need to pass through a bit of a bloodbath first."[32] As he tells me this, a comrade nods solemnly in agreement, chiming in: "it's unfortunate but true." Another Tupamaro leader known as Mao puts it in a characteristically inflammatory way: "Chávez is surrounded by a ton of bureaucratic sons-of-bitches who should be shot. Chávez came along with this history of peaceful revolution, and boy has it worked out for him. But for me, the revolution doesn't have to be peaceful at all. What needs to be done with those oligarchic sons-of-bitches and those bureaucrats is to kill them all. And then you can start the revolution . . . You know there are Ten Commandments in the Bible, right? Well mine has eleven. The last one is that everyone dies. That's it."[33] I worry that reproducing such quotations contributes to sensationalism, but the truth is that many of these so-called Tupamaros understand that such militancy of rhetoric and action functions to drive the Bolivarian process forward, by blows if necessary.

We need look only briefly at the broad strokes of the Bolivarian Revolution to see that there is some truth to this: this is a process that thrives upon conflict. The Enabling Laws of 2001 that jumpstarted the revolution, the short-lived coup against Chávez in April 2002 (see the Second Interlude), and the oil lockout of 2002 and 2003: it was these moments, not the elections, that cemented Chavista hegemony. It is conflict with the *escualidos*, the anti-Chávez opposition, that pulls Chavistas tightly together under the banner of the people by strengthening their collective identity, setting the parameters of what they are fighting *for* by clearly identifying what they are fighting *against*. But this is not all. It is these same pressurized moments of conflict between Chavistas and anti-Chavistas that radicalize the Chavista bloc by forcing people (even Chávez himself) to choose sides, thereby driving out moderates and waverers. In 2001, the man that many considered to be Chávez's puppet master, Luis Miquilena, broke with the president only to join in coup efforts a year later. During that coup, a whole litany of high-ranking Chavistas, both political and military, jumped ship. More recently, in the run-up to the failed 2007 constitutional reform referendum, Chávez ally General Raúl Baduel also "jumped the divider" over proposals to transform the military.[34] It is this process more than any other that is responsible for the Revolution's radicalization in recent years. In short, every moment of heightened tension has resulted in the strengthening and radicalization of revolutionary forces, and it is this that the radical Chavista left understands better than most.

As a result, many have embraced their role as an accelerant and detonator of revolutionary conflict. Much like the students, the unemployed, and the *campesinos* whose intransigent demands and direct street action triggered the dynamic of anti-Betancourt conflict that ultimately unleashed the guerrilla war, so too do many radical Chavistas in 23 de Enero seek incessantly to push the process harder, faster, and in more overtly revolutionary directions. "Every revolution needs some joy," Valentín Santana explains to me, and La Piedrita and others joyfully assume this incendiary role, tossing gasoline on the flames of social conflict. "Like Alí Primera said, we exist between rage and tenderness." It is this function that explains the central role that such groups play in the unfolding of the Bolivarian process despite their seemingly small numbers; this dynamic of conflict far exceeds the local autonomous zones for which the Tupamaro phenomenon is best known. It bespeaks instead a unification of the offensive elements of the guerrilla war with the defensive elements of the Tupamaros. Of course, the example of the guerrilla war shows that such dynamics of conflict depend on the prevailing balance of forces and can lead to either popular disaster or popular victory. It is also true that moderation can occasionally prove more powerful than conflict: the strength of the Chavista coalition in the aftermath of the 2002 coup resulted in part from the moral high ground that Chávez's moderate rhetoric allowed him to claim, whereas the opposition remained tainted with the specter of *golpismo*, coup-mongering, for years.

But mass, popular, and militant action in the streets remains the bedrock of this revolution, without which all would have been lost in 2002 (see the Second Interlude), and it is this practical action that binds the realities of the present to the aspirations of the future, a future in which Chávez's role is far from guaranteed. In the case of La Piedrita, this distinction between Chávez and the Revolution has been pushed to its most extreme limits, but even in cases in which Chávez seems to choose the wrong side — as when he recently called these revolutionary collectives "terrorists" and "fascists" — the faith many have in this dynamic of radical polarization is such that his errors are overlooked temporarily.[35] For Santana, Chávez is the only leader capable of staving off the threat of total civil war (although one might wonder whether Santana would see such war as entirely a bad thing). "If he isn't president, *hermano*, we would be talking about a war, because there isn't anyone else in this country that can maintain stability. Not on the right, and not on the side of the Revolution. The only one that can do that right now is Chávez . . . That's why we're preparing for an armed confrontation, because it's coming, it's coming. It could be right around the corner." But in no way is Chávez's leadership guaranteed, and these revolutionaries are prepared to push forward without him if necessary. Against the occasionally blind devotion of Chavista militant Lina Ron, who made famous the slogan "With Chávez, everything, without Chávez, nothing," the slogan of many revolutionaries might be paraphrased as follows: "With Chávez, hopefully, without Chávez, if necessary."

First Interlude. The Caracazo
History Splits in Two

Previous chapters have shown that the history of popular struggle in Venezuela began long before Chávez and that immediate dissatisfaction with the limited, elite representative democratic regime that emerged after 1958 gave rise to a sporadic wave of resistance — sometimes powerful, frequently dispersed — first expressed on the national level during the guerrilla war of the 1960s. Nevertheless, if part of my objective is to reassert the long term, to insist that what is going on today in Venezuela is nothing new, and to demonstrate above all the *continuity* of struggle generated after 1958, which has supplied both the context and the motive force behind Chávez's rise to power and the radicalization of the Bolivarian Revolution, this is not to say that individual moments are somehow unimportant. Quite the opposite, in fact: recent Venezuelan history has been punctuated by momentary ruptures and breakthroughs that represent qualitative leaps in popular struggle, crystallizing and revealing long-term developments, concentrating them into a single conflict, a unified image branded in the popular imaginary, a single turning point that becomes emblematic of the struggle, past, present, and future. However, once these moments are understood according to what they embody and what they set into motion, we immediately become wary of those very same historical dates that we have been told are most important: Chávez's 1998 election and his failed 1992 coup — in other words, moments in which the people enter the halls of power by the ballot or by the bullet. These moments are important, but their importance is as veiled expressions of other, more fundamental processes, pressures, and ruptures.

In this and the second interlude, I hope to destabilize 1992 and 1998 by drawing attention to two such moments of rupture, one prior to Chávez's election and one subsequent to it, arguing that from the perspective of popular struggles, *these* are the most crucial moments in recent history. The first, the 1989 Caracazo, was a full-scale insurrection whose participants stared revolution in the face only to suffer the crushing reply of the state's iron heel. But defeat notwithstanding, the Caracazo sounded the death knell of the old system, simultaneously reflecting and contributing to the inevitability of its collapse and thereby setting into motion the entire process that came after. In symbolic terms, it smashed in a single stroke the façade of "democratic exceptionalism," revealing the bankruptcy and the violence of the existing system for all to see. Neither completely spontaneous nor fully organized, the Caracazo was an instant in which widespread disgust and revolutionary capacity met on the streets, generating historical agency by emboldening the faithful and converting the waverers: it was 1989 that enabled 1992, and 1992 that enabled 1998.[1]

The second moment, which I discuss in the second interlude, was that of the massive and decisive popular response to Chávez's removal from power in a short-lived 2002 coup, which demonstrated to political elites — Chavista and anti-Chavista alike — where the true power in Venezuelan society, and the Bolivarian Revolution, lay. Moreover, for the moments discussed in both interludes, the question of communication will be central because it is no more and no less than the question of revolutionary organization writ large: just as the Caracazo's constituents would be forced to generate their own forms of coordination and communication in the very process of rebelling, so too would popular efforts to circumvent an opposition-imposed press blackout prove central to Chávez's brief removal and eventual return to power in 2002. For both, the question of spontaneity will come into tense interplay with organization as well, revealing the importance and shortcomings of both elements and privileging a street politics of tactical micro-organization that crucially operates in tandem with many of the long-term organizing efforts I have analyzed up to this point.

The Caracazo (known colloquially as "27-F") and the reversal of the 2002 coup (similarly dubbed "13-A") can, therefore, be understood as *constituent* moments, those rare and explosive instances in which the force of the people appears as *the* decisive actor. The importance of such moments therefore eclipses the importance of Chávez's 1998 election and even his failed 1992 coup (known as "4-F"), both of which, although undeniably important, represented but muted echoes and reverberations in the halls of constituted power of that constituent roar that made them possible in the first place.[2] In emphasizing the importance of the Caracazo, we can do no better than to follow one of the more critical and revolutionary voices of contemporary Venezuela, one we have discussed earlier and to whom we will return repeatedly. Speaking directly to our central task of constructing a popular history, Roland Denis writes:

> This is a history that began not in the barracks but in the street, and it is from there, from the streets as principal political actor, that we are going to attempt to assemble some clues that will allow us to reconstruct the genealogical development of the process. To do so . . . we will not begin with 4-F, and nor with the long tales of civil-military conspiracies that preceded it, but instead with 27-F, no longer as a simple historical reference-point for the crisis of *puntofijismo*, but instead as the foundational moment of what and who would embody the decisive form of struggle in the collapse of *puntofijismo* and the gestation of a new, democratic-popular way of thinking.[3]

Rather than merely reproducing traditional history in popular form by shifting the center of gravity from one set of petrified historical facts to another, the task as I see it is to construct a living history in which each concrete fact and moment expresses and is imbued dialectically with popular content. To shift from the barracks to the streets is, therefore, to do more than to simply change location. It is to turn our gaze away from already fetishized institutions and toward those flows and circulations that have breathed into them a new life.

The Fourth World War Started in Venezuela

The origins of the global rebellion against neoliberalism are not to be found in 1999 Seattle or even in the public emergence of the Zapatista movement on January 1, 1994.[4] Before all these seminal events, there was the Caracazo, an oft-overlooked upheaval that Fernando Coronil described as "the largest and most violently repressed revolt against austerity measures in Latin American history."[5] Carlos Andrés Pérez was inaugurated on February 2, 1989, for his second (but nonconsecutive) term after a campaign that maintained much of the anti-neoliberal rhetoric of his first, particularly his demonization of the International Monetary Fund as a "bomb that only kills people."[6] However, in what has become a notorious example of "bait-and-switch" reform, Pérez immediately proceeded to implement to the letter the recently formulated Washington Consensus. The precipitous nature of this about-face is evident from the fact that Pérez's neoliberal economic "package" (the "*paquetazo*," as it has been dubbed) was announced exactly two weeks after the inaugural speech that had attacked international lending institutions and preached debtor-nation solidarity. The country must prepare itself, Pérez warned in his speech on February 16, for a "Great Turnaround" (*Gran Viraje*). Little did he know how right he was or what would be the direction and severity of the coming *viraje*.

Venezuelan elites had been toying with neoliberalism for several years, and president Jaime Lusinchi had even enacted a heterodox neoliberal package in 1984, but Pérez's package was notable for its severe orthodoxy. In a Letter of Intention signed with the International Monetary Fund, the basic premises of the Pérez plan were laid out as follows: there was to be restriction of government spending and salaries, deregulation of exchange rates and interest rates (thereby eliminating what were essentially interest rate subsidies for farmers), relaxation of price controls, introduction of a sales tax, liberalization of prices of goods and services (including petroleum) provided by the state, elimination of tariffs and liberalization of imports, and, in general, facilitation of foreign transactions into and out of Venezuela.[7] In practice, this plan promised a potent cocktail of stagnating incomes, skyrocketing prices, and monetary devaluation; the lives of the many were going to get much worse. As might be expected in the face of such a severe economic shock, poverty peaked later in 1989, claiming 44 percent of households (a figure that had doubled in absolute terms during the course of five years), with some 20 percent of Venezuelans facing extreme poverty.[8] While rising prices had been a source of anxiety at least since the 1983 devaluation of the bolívar—a day still remembered as "Black Friday"—it was the common (and inarguably correct) perception that Venezuelans possessed a common right to what lies under their soil that fanned the angry flames of revolt as the earliest morning light broke over eastern Caracas on February 27.[9]

The Streets Rebel

February 27, 1989, was a Monday, but not just any Monday. On this day, the cyclically ill temper of the worker torn from her much needed rest collided with the cold realities of global capitalism. Over the weekend, Pérez's liberalization of petroleum prices had kicked in, the first stage of which entailed an immediate doubling of the price of consumer gasoline. Although the government had attempted to coerce small transporters into absorbing the majority of the increase, convincing the National Transport Federation to pass on to passengers only 30 percent of the increase, many smaller federations and individual bus drivers refused to respect this agreement.[10] Since their gas costs had doubled overnight, one can hardly blame them, but for a time it seemed as though a conflict over national policy would be displaced onto the individual drivers and the proverbial messenger shot. Thus, as the first protests kicked off during the early commute of informal workers into Caracas, many refused to pay the newly doubled fare, and rioting and the burning of buses was reported from a number of suburbs and in cities across the country well before six in the morning. Demonstrations in the eastern suburb of Guarenas, where looting was reported as early as 7:30 A.M., sparked off broader resistance in the heavily Afro-Venezuelan regions to the east of the capital.[11] By 6:00 A.M., students had occupied Nuevo Circo station in Caracas, at the other end of the Guarenas-Caracas commute, and were denouncing the drivers publicly with press clippings that listed the government-approved fare increase in hand. The conjunctural demand for affordable transport drew informal workers into a tactical alliance with the students, and the crowd at Nuevo Circo moved north onto Avenida Bolívar, erecting barricades in front of the bust of the Liberator to block traffic on this major metropolitan artery. By noon, blockades had spread eastward to Plaza Venezuela and the Central University, south to the Francisco Fajardo highway, and west to Avenida Fuerzas Armadas.

Revolutionary ferment united these students and informal workers with the hardened revolutionaries, who quickly appeared on the scene, many of whom were veterans of the armed struggle and later formations like Popular

Disobedience. The alchemical transformation that took place in this heated and swirling crucible was evident in the demands expressed by the protestors; the initial anger at increased transport prices was generalized quickly and successfully to encompass the entire neoliberal economic package, thereby channeling popular anger *not* at bus drivers but instead directly at the president, the party system, and the state. But who was the subject of such revolutionary demands? From what location were they enunciated? It was not the working class at its point of production or the peasant in her *fundo* that sparked this insurrection, and it was certainly not the traditional leftist parties who led it. Moreover, while students played a key role, it was not the student-as-student who was the subject of the rebellion, just as the university was not its locus. Rather, it was informal workers (see also chapter 9) who provided both the driving force and the battleground for this revolutionary moment. These urban poor, who eked out a living largely in the sphere of circulation, would take up this fight on their home turf: the streets. The structure of the informal economy provided more than just constituents and location: it also provided an infrastructure for the coordination and communication of the rebellion, with Venezuela's now-notorious motorcycle couriers, or *motorizados*, zipping back and forth across the city, drawing the spontaneous rebellion — as if with invisible threads — into a broader, coordinated picture that more closely resembles what we would consider a revolutionary situation.

Meanwhile, a similar pattern was appearing spontaneously in every major Venezuelan city: protests emerged early in the morning in San Cristóbal, Barquisimeto, Maracay, Barcelona, Puerto la Cruz, and Mérida and later in the afternoon in other major cities such as Maracaibo and Valencia. Some have argued, with some justification, that the common moniker "Caracazo" is misleading, concealing as it does the generalized and national nature of the rebellion, preferring the more general term *Sacudón*, whereby popular upheaval is translated as a sort of geological "tremor." But, like everything else in Venezuela, the oil-bloated capital would prove both detonator and center, and the rest of the country would, in the words of the national anthem, "follow the example that Caracas gave." As with most spontaneous popular rebellions, this heroic example was coterminous with mortal casualties, of which Caracas sacrificed more than its fair share, beginning as early as the afternoon of February 27, when police opened fire on students near Parque Central, killing Yulimar Reyes (known by her Popular Disobedience comrades as "la Yoko").[12] As night fell, sacking and looting became widespread (often facilitated by underpaid and impotent police), breaching the limitations of geographical segregation and touching even the generally untouchable sectors of wealthy eastern Caracas: more than a thousand stores were burned in Caracas alone.[13]

Many looted necessities, and most video evidence shows people hauling away household products and food. Large sides of beef seemed to be especially popular, with looters eerily using the same bodily motions, technique, and inexplicable strength that would later prove necessary to carry off their fallen comrades. While speaking with Alfredo Vargas Sr., in 23 de Enero, he tells me of how his son grabbed a side of beef on the Avenida Sucre and began to carry it up the hill toward Block 5. Passing neighbors proceeded to cut off large chunks of meat, and he was left with little more than a skeleton when he arrived. Lina Ron recalled seeing looters on the Avenida Lecuna, not far from the flashpoint at Nuevo Circo: "I remember seeing a person carrying a refrigerator and I remember asking myself: how was this possible? Under normal conditions it takes up to three men to carry a refrigerator and in this new condition a single man was doing it."[14] If necessities were the primary objective of the looters, however, this did not mean that luxuries were exempt; the two-sided nature that Marx discovered within the commodity was played out practically by the many *barrio* residents who seized the opportunity to enjoy a taste of the life so habitually denied, celebrating in the eye of the hurricane with fine food and imported whiskey and champagne.[15]

Between Spontaneity and Organization

I meet Roland Denis, a close friend and comrade of Yulimar Reyes, in a small café hidden away near Sabana Grande, where he insists that I try the *papelón con limón*, a typically Venezuelan beverage, if ever there was one, composed almost entirely of sugar (albeit the raw sort) with a touch of lime. For Denis, the Caracazo marked the birth of a new "mode of resistance," one that leaps from intimate spaces to mass rebellion with astonishing speed and ease.[16] Divided into "times of revolt," "times of constitution," and "times of government," Denis' book *Manufacturers of Rebellion* seeks to grapple with the same challenging questions as my own popular history, namely, how to pose the question of constituent rebellion and constituted, institutional power in a way that avoids the fetishization of either. In the context of the Caracazo, this task inevitably raises the traditional question of the relationship between spontaneity and organization, one embodied in the very title of Denis' book. After all, the overwhelming force behind the

Caracazo derived undeniably from spontaneous revolt, and the standard bearers of organized revolution, especially the political parties of the left, were notably absent. Nonetheless, this spontaneity simultaneously conceals while expressing a history of organization: according to Carlos Lanz and other militants from Popular Disobedience, such "spontaneity" had been practiced in the streets for several years before the revolt and in many ways resulted from conscious and organized efforts to overcome the failures of the guerrilla struggle.

Moreover, the influence of organized militants was not limited to prior example or tactical innovation; instead it emerged in the process of transitioning from rioting to rebellion to full-scale insurrection, a function only possible through a deep and organic relationship between militants and *barrio* residents, something earlier generations of guerrillas had notably lacked. Denis, who is to a younger generation what Lanz was to an older one, describes this process of street coordination as it emerged in one small corner of Catia during the Caracazo:

> Bit by bit, the efforts of those few to bring together a degree of coherence in the action and a less immediatist sense of what was being sought began to achieve their goal. Soon, weariness toward the pure disorder motivated by expropriative euphoria led to meetings by small groups which in a matter of minutes chose a particular approach in order to channel the actions of the multitude in a more resounding and effective manner. It was enough that agreements were rapidly reached for the massive activity to begin to take on a new appearance, drawing in by example an infinity of beings who, to the extent that they discovered the possibility of giving constructive meaning to their violence, simultaneously began to produce words, concrete and precise acts, with an increasingly rational level of action and organization.[17]

Even in their fragmentation, these groups linked up with one another, "converting indiscriminate looting into a mobilized multitude and into a powerful force."[18] But these spontaneously organized chains of human will were not fully prepared for what was to come.

The morning sun of February 28 revealed a mixed picture: in some zones, the police fired indiscriminately with automatic weapons, whereas in others, like the Antímano district of southwestern Caracas, they agreed to permit controlled looting. Elsewhere, the police engaged in a reverse-looting of their own, pillaging neighborhoods in search of "stolen goods" to keep for themselves. The government's first attempt to control the rebellion was a spectacular failure: the minister of the interior, Alejandro Izaguirre, appeared on live television calling for calm, only to promptly faint, thereby forcing the suspension of the broadcast. According to Denis, "it was on the afternoon of February 28, at exactly 4 P.M., that the murderous reply of the state abruptly cut off this gradual synergy of multitudes. Despite the resistance generated by some disparate armed *focos* and counter-propaganda networks that confronted the militia and the messages of the government, it was already too late."[19]

At 6 P.M., Pérez himself appeared on television announcing the fateful decision to suspend constitutional guarantees, establishing a state of siege and overnight curfew. His simultaneous claim that the country was experiencing a situation of "complete normality" was hardly credible given the decision, and this clear contradiction already suggested the momentous symbolic impact the Caracazo was destined to have. Had the rebellion been successfully contained within the *barrios*, it would not have merited mention by a news media whose only important audience was white and wealthy. After all, the Venezuelan government had never required a formal state of siege to shoot down the poor in the streets. But once "the hills came down," once the poor and dark-skinned had invaded the prohibited zones reserved for the wealthy — "swarm[ing] into the forbidden quarters," in the words of Fanon[20] — Pérez was faced with an impossibly contradictory task: to insist that nothing was happening ("complete normality") while reassuring wealthy elites that the government was taking care of the situation. But for a government that derived its legitimacy from a myth of social stability, the damage already had been done.

Pérez's declaration marked both a green light for widespread government repression and the beginning of the end for the popular insurrection that was 27-F. Those violating the curfew were treated as harshly as could be imagined, with repression at its most severe in Caracas' largest *barrios*: Catia in the west and Petare in the east. Police and the Armed Forces directed their attention to the former, and especially 23 de Enero, which the government suspected, with some justification, as being the organizational brain of the rebellion. Known organizers were dragged from their homes to be either executed or "disappeared," and when security forces met resistance from rooftop snipers, they sprayed entire apartment blocks with automatic machine guns. Just as the bullet holes left in these apartment blocks in the 1960s remained as scars and political reminders well into the 1970s, so too are the bullet holes from the Caracazo visible to this very day. Turning attention toward Petare, which today is the largest and most violent of

Caracas' slums, up to twenty were killed in a single incident when, on March 1, the army infamously opened fire on the Mesuca stairway. Much of the country was "pacified" after three days of such incidents, whereas Caracas saw rioting for more than five.

The human toll of the rebellion has never been fully revealed, especially because the Pérez government systematically obstructed any and all efforts to investigate the events. Subsequent government investigations set the official number killed around three hundred, whereas the popular imagination places it closer to three thousand.[21] A recent study has shown that some four million bullets were fired to quell the rebellion, and the Relatives of Victims Committee (*Comité de Familiares de Victimas*), an organization founded around the victims of the Caracazo, reports that 97 percent of the documented victims died in their own homes.[22] Rumors of mass killings led to the 1990 excavation of a mass grave in a sector of the Cemetery of the South known, perhaps not coincidentally, as "The New Plague." There, some sixty-eight bodies in plastic bags were unearthed, and no one knows for certain how many more deaths were concealed by government forces, how many nondescript bags of flesh were committed in 1989 to the national soil alongside the victims of Cantaura, Yumare, and El Amparo.[23]

From Caracazo to Coup, One Divides into Two

Where there had previously been one single Venezuela, there were now suddenly two. But as with any sudden shift, we are dealing more with the realm of appearances than reality. The "myth of harmony," according to which all Venezuelans enjoyed a singularly privileged and "exceptional" democratic existence when compared with their Latin American counterparts, had suffered an irreparable blow.[24] In the words of former human rights campaigner and later Chávez's Vice President José Vicente Rangel, "Venezuelan history split in two."[25] Internationally and domestically, the democratic façade that had obscured Venezuelan reality for decades was shattered in a single blow. Among other leaders, George Bush Sr. and Spain's Felipe González called Pérez directly to express not so much their condolences as their shock and dismay that such a dependable client state could have evidently unraveled overnight.

If the Caracazo represented the death knell of the old regime in political terms, it had done similarly irreparable harm to military unity, awakening a radical military current the likes of which had not been seen since the "Trejismo" of the 1950s and 1960s. According to former guerrilla and women's leader Nora Castañeda, the repression that followed the Caracazo was "the *pueblo* against the *pueblo*," as poor and dark-skinned military recruits were sent into the *barrios* to slaughter their brothers and sisters.[26] Perhaps unsurprisingly, many refused to fire, including some members of a clandestine revolutionary movement that had coalesced within the armed forces years earlier as the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (MBR)-200. Throughout the 1980s, these conspirators worked to recruit lower-level officials to their cause, but the MBR's plans to foment a coup were still in the early stages when the Caracazo caught them completely off guard. The polarizing effect of the rebellion and subsequent massacre was as powerful within the ranks of the military as in the general population. Just as there were now two Venezuelas, two armed forces appeared as well: one comprising powerful elites, the other those poor and dark-skinned recruits and mid-level officers called upon to defend privilege by gunning down the people and who now prepared for mutiny.[27] It was only after the Caracazo that, according to Chávez, "the members of the MBR-200 realized we had passed the point of no return and we had to take up arms. We could not continue to defend a murderous regime. The massacres were a catalyst."[28] "Without the Caracazo we wouldn't have been able to do it," Chávez would later insist in an interview with Aleida Guevara (daughter of Che), noting that the Caracazo "reactivated" a waning MBR-200, sharpening the movement's opposition to the prevailing political system and providing it with new military recruits and civilian allies.[29]

As revolutionaries scrambled to maintain the potent popular energies of 1989, their search for the most effective combination of elements meant that none of the strategies developed during earlier decades—military or civilian, armed or electoral—was discarded completely. Among the electoral elements, the Movement toward Socialism was the most blindly election-oriented, whereas Radical Cause (LCR), faithful to the roots of many of its members in the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV), maintained a degree of contact with the armed underground. However, this complementarity of tactics would not prove to be sustainable, and in December 1991 LCR had all but divided over the question of how to relate to the impending military action; those who supported the coup, including Rafael Uzcátegui, later went on to form the Patria Para Todos (Homeland for All) party. Those who remained in LCR would pursue electoralism and eventually move toward the anti-Chavista opposition.[30] "Life has demonstrated that they were a minority," Uzcátegui insists. Simultaneously, and from the opposite direction, the various legal fronts for remaining armed factions—

"legal" in name only—continued to deepen their base among the rapidly expanding segments of society that were dissatisfied with and even enraged by the economic crisis and the neoliberal response: the rebellious constituents of the Caracazo.

Along with the turn toward mass struggle and the "mass military line" in the 1980s, former guerrilla leaders Douglas Bravo and Kléber Ramírez Rojas had pursued a much more traditional Venezuelan strategy: that of infiltrating cadres into the Armed Forces to provoke a unified civilian-military insurrection that they had deemed the "third way" between insurrections and elections. This strategy had passed from the Venezuelan Communist Party to the PRV and on to Chávez, and while he and his comrades prepared their coup, previously dispersed PRV cadres came together to support it.[31] Kléber Ramírez was even tasked with drafting dozens of preemptive declarations to be issued by the coup leaders in the event of success, as well as a general outline of the new state they would attempt to institute.[32] For the moment, however, history was not on their side, and both Chávez's February coup and another attempt in November were crushed.

For Carlos Lanz, who himself participated in a fundamental way in clearing the ground for what would become the Bolivarian program, the "putschism" of the civilian-military "third way" spearheaded by Kléber and Bravo was always questionable in theory and in practice. He and other revolutionary militants from the Social-Historic Current and Popular Disobedience were well aware of the planned military rebellion, but their skepticism prevented them from participating until the very last minute. As the guerrilla struggle dissipated, Lanz, Juvenal, Denis, and others had begun to study Gramsci's theory of hegemony in more detail, and as a result began to place an increasing emphasis on ideology and culture. For Gramsci, what is often determinant in the seizure and maintenance of power is not so much the instrument of that power—that is, the state—but rather the "powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" that surround it and reinforce its strength.[33] Lanz's concern was that by centering the struggle on the military, the mass hegemonic element would be lost, thereby casting doubt on even its chances for immediate success, but more importantly, in the absence of a more fundamental struggle, he worried that this "putschism" would take the state but nothing more. "February 4 was a 'Winter Palace' moment," he explains, with reference to the Bolshevik seizure of power, "it lacked the truly organic elements necessary for a revolution." If the movement was to prevent a severe and repressive backlash, the sort with which Lanz and others were well-acquainted, such "organic elements" must be developed and deepened. “What was lacking was a grassroots, organic vision,” he insists, adding what had become a damning indictment of lessons not learned: as late as 1992, “military *foquismo* predominated.”[34]

Nevertheless, like any good revolutionary, these concerns did not prevent Lanz from taking up the fight and throwing his weight behind the coup. After Chávez’s arrest, Lanz traveled to the prison in Yare to explain his concerns and to chart a path forward. He and others participated more fully in the November coup, one that boasted a more substantial mass component in part due to Lanz’s own efforts to transmit the concept of the “mass military line” to some within the military. Rather than clinging dogmatically to his theses regarding mass street rebellions or workers’ autonomy, rather than insisting on a single path forward, Lanz now sought a “synthesis” of the guerrilla, the military, and the mass elements. Despite his more serious reservations toward elections, he even participated in Chávez’s 1998 electoral campaign, all the while insisting on the need for profound hegemonic transformations to shore up the gains already made and to project these radically in the future. As Lanz puts it in a recent work of the same name: “the revolution must be cultural or it will reproduce domination.”[35]

All the while, the popular “earthworks” sought by Lanz were springing up like mushrooms in the aftermath of the Caracazo in the form of an explosion of popular assemblies that was, like the Caracazo itself, simultaneously spontaneous and organized. While the immediate aftermath of the slaughter generated a period of denunciations of state repression, Denis notes that such denunciations quickly translated into organized direct actions under the slogan *no hay pueblo vencido*, “there’s no such thing as a defeated people.” The defiance of this phrase was clear in a massive demonstration on the first anniversary of the massacre, which was dispersed only when soldiers opened fire from nearby rooftops, causing the crowd to scatter (this scene would be repeated “nearly identically” on the second anniversary in 1991).[36] By 1991, the Barrio Assembly of Caracas had emerged as a sort of general assembly representing local groupings and functioning “as a center for the inauguration of social power in the country and as a coordinating agent for popular struggles.”[37] In other words, long before Chávez’s election, long before the communal councils, and long before even the Bolivarian Circles and the Patriotic Circles that had preceded them, there were *barrio* assemblies, the fruit of a long history of revolutionary failures and experimentation and the motor force of a new Venezuela.

In the end, all these divergent strategies proved useful in the run up to the attempted coups of 1992 and, during this process, the Caracazo and the

1992 coups would become inextricably linked, surging forth as both did from the same primal source. As one former guerrilla puts it, "this history wasn't born on February 4."[38] In the words of revolutionary poet Luis Britto García: "The repression that had nearly dismantled the radical vanguards was useless in the end. Without being called together by any vanguard, the people rose up spontaneously on February 27, 1989, and their mobilization — without any plan or precise objectives — was only subdued after a bloody week. This mass charge without a vanguard was followed by a vanguard that was not able to immediately coordinate its masses: the rebellions of February 4 and November 27, 1992." Britto insists, however, that "these were not merely military rebellions," but events that themselves served as "detonators" for subsequent popular rebellions: "they showed that a social movement can catalyze a military movement, and vice versa, in order to finally become synchronized and crystallized in the arrival in power by the institutional, electoral path, to then set into motion a revolutionary project."[39] Thus, if the previously excluded people appeared explosively in the social life of the nation on 27-F-1989, these rebellious soldiers erupted into political life on 4-F-1992. As former president Rafael Caldera explained in a 1992 speech that would earn him reelection amid the smoldering ruins of the Venezuelan party-system:

> When the events of February 27 and 28, 1989, occurred, I observed from this very podium that what was going to happen could be very serious. I did not claim to make prophetic claims, but it was clear that the consequences of that [neoliberal] package that produced the first explosion of those terrible events would . . . continue to bore deeply into the consciousness and the future of our people. I said in an article around that time that Venezuela was like a showcase window for Latin American democracy. The inhabitants of the Caracas hills smashed that window when they descended, enraged, in February 1989. Today it has again been broken by the rifle-butts and the weapons in the hands of the revolting soldiers.[40]

But we should be clear on one thing: it was the former that *caused* and *made possible* the latter. If the revolutionary fruit that had been germinating since 1958 would not fully ripen until after Chávez's failed 1992 coup, the 1989 Caracazo rebellion was its necessary fertilizer, and, as we know, fertilizer is both nutritious and highly explosive.[41]

"The Beginning and the End"

As Luis Britto has long argued, "World War IV began in Venezuela." If the third world war (the Cold War) ended with the apparent victory of neoliberalism, the fourth "began in Venezuela on February 27, 1989, with the first rebellion by an entire nation against a neoliberal package," thereby proving the impossibility of neoliberalism's global spread. However, Britto adds that this rebellion teaches us as much about ourselves as about our enemies because it was "entirely popular" and "did not take its orders from any political or intellectual vanguard. That's the signal that Venezuela sends: once again, the people are the beginning and the end of everything."[42]

While the power of the people to act openly and rebelliously had always existed in potential form, as I have shown in the multiple minor skirmishes described in the previous chapters, what is equally clear is that something had changed drastically in the blood and fire of February 1989. Despite the fact that "History was broken, its actors dead or terrified, and the *pueblo* was forced to withdraw," Roland Denis argues that this was a *pueblo* that had "gained its own personality, that had seen the measure of its own massive power and capacity for self-organization." As so often occurs, the repression of the Caracazo generated exactly the opposite effect from that which its purveyors had intended: "In the years that followed, despite repression, collective and 'spontaneous' violence became a recurrent form of struggle among communities (above all on the peripheries of large cities) and protest groups (especially students) . . . Street violence was its image, the stone and the momentary control of space its most common instruments of struggle, and the struggle against poverty its primary *raison d'être*."[43]

According to Britto, the Caracazo was an example of what he calls "instantaneous social movements," a form of organization that "has proven central for the death of the two-party system, Chávez's election, and Chávez's return to power in 2002." When I ask what it means precisely for a social movement to be "instantaneous," his response echoes analyses by other noted decolonial thinkers like C. L. R. James and Frantz Fanon, who emphasized the potent self-activity of the popular masses: "for several decades now, the Venezuelan masses have surpassed their leadership." "I don't believe that one should depend on spontaneity, but it is a good resource to have when everything else has failed," he adds.[44] In the aftermath of the guerrilla war, all else had indeed failed, and here Britto does his best to turn a vice into a virtue. Although this spontaneous capacity for organization expressed in the Caracazo would in many ways generate both Chávez's 1992 coup and 1998 election, its importance as a profound expression of constituent energy would only increase once constituted power was formally in the hands of the revolutionaries.

FIGURE 1. Douglas Bravo, 2008

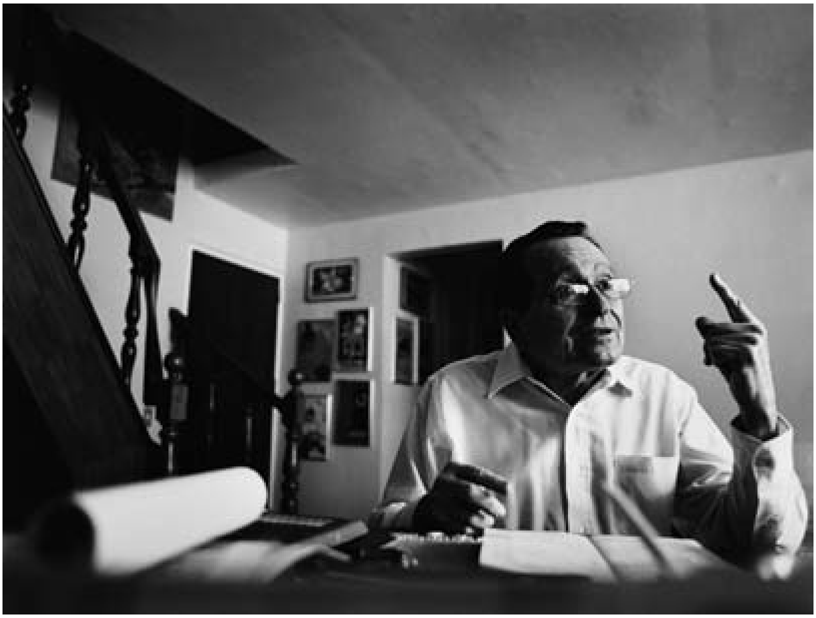
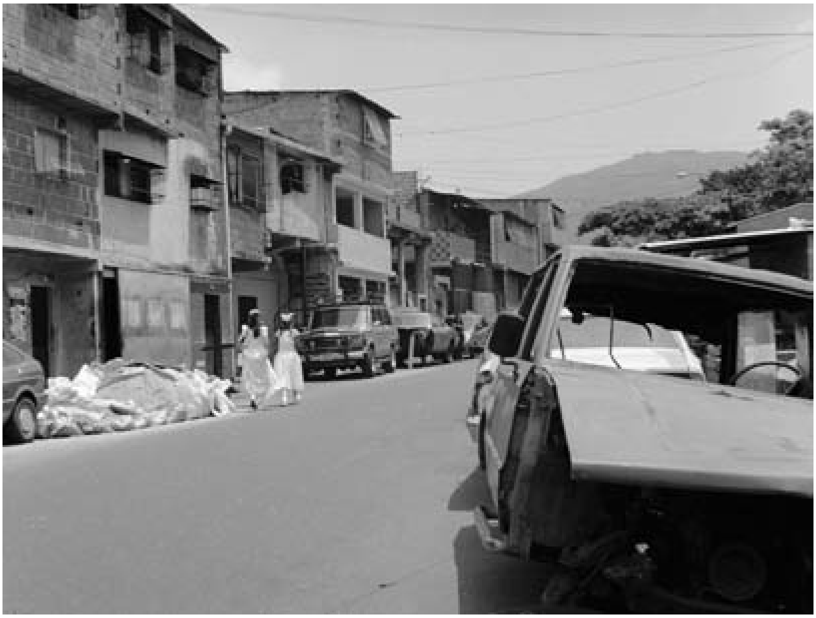


FIGURE 2. Chavista Bedroom, 2008

FIGURE 3. First Communion, 23 de Enero, 2008



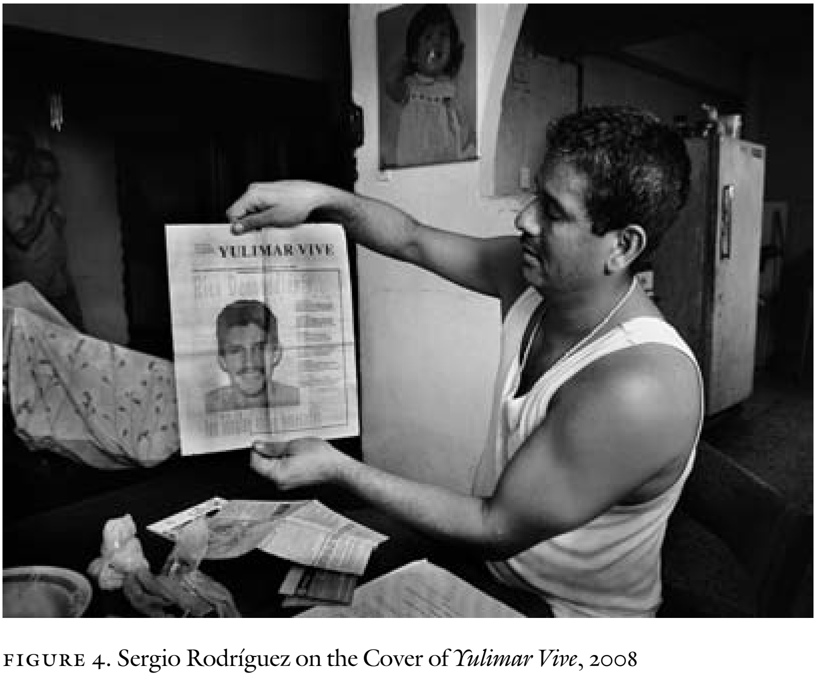

YULIMAR VIVE

FIGURE 4. Sergio Rodríguez on the Cover of *Yulimar Vive*, 2008

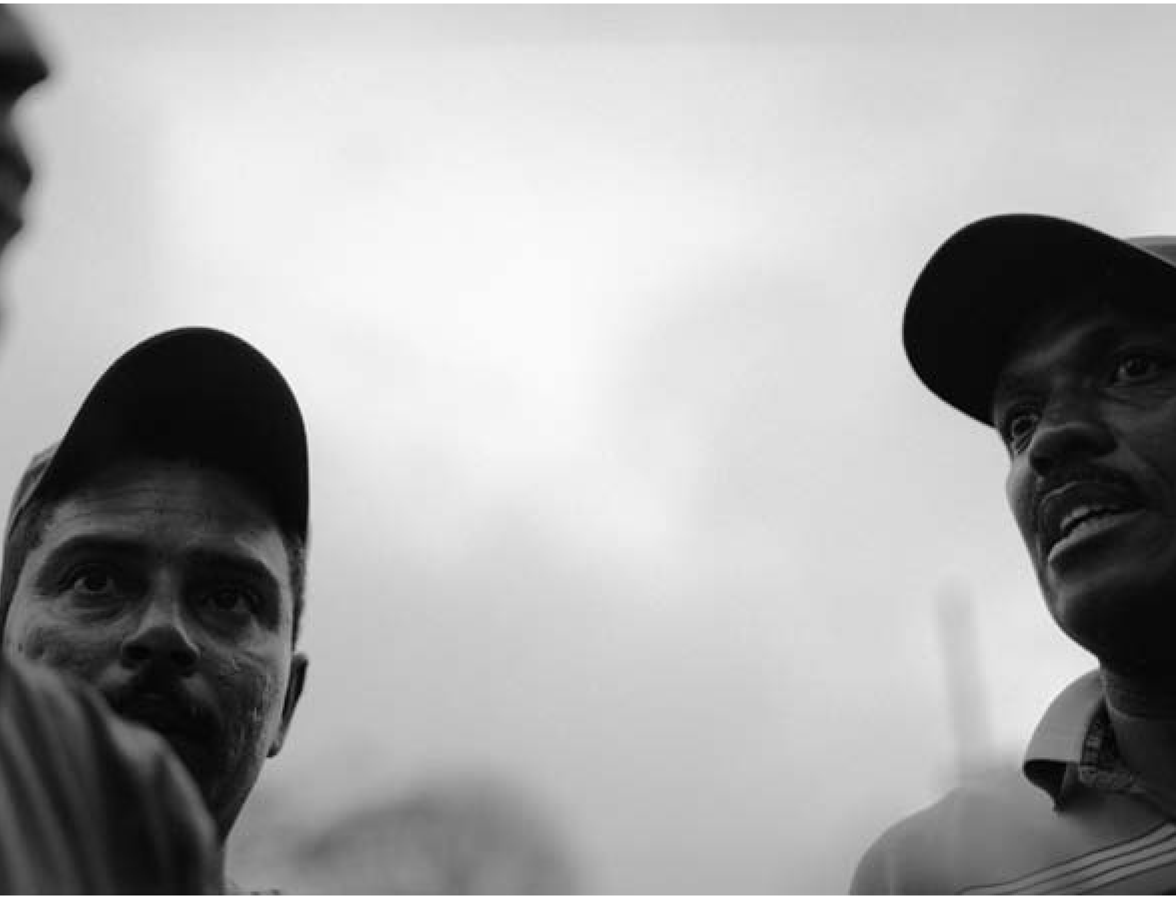
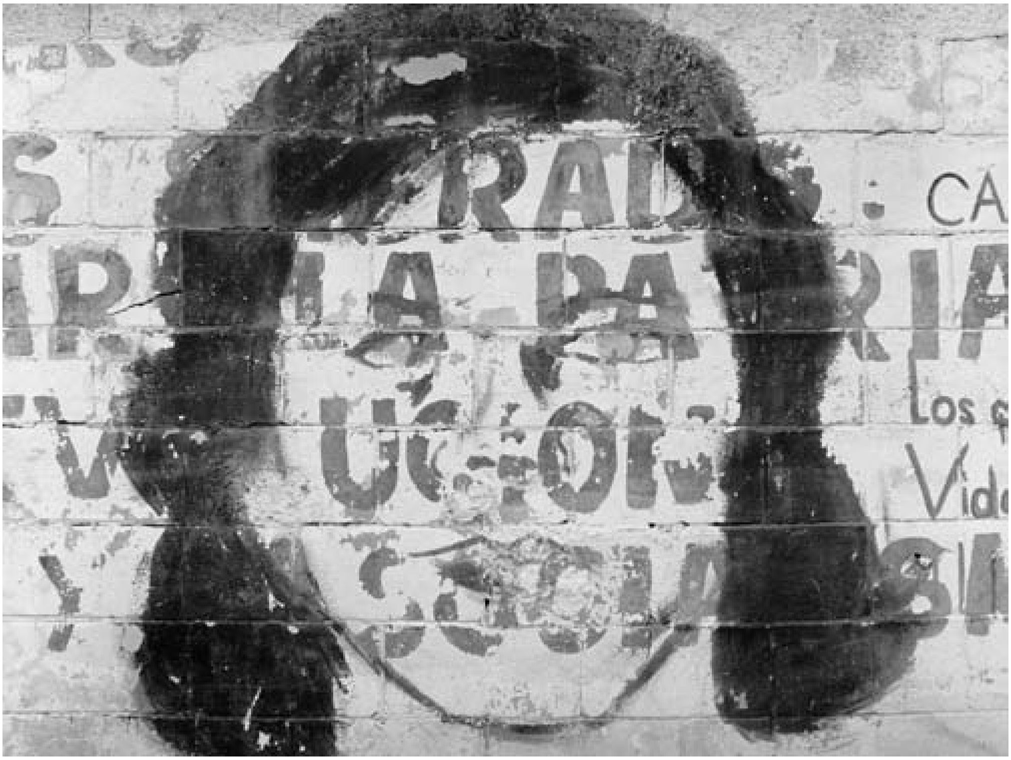


FIGURE 5. Political Conversation #1, 23 de Enero, 2008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CA
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Vid

FIGURE 6. Wall of Martyrs, Monte Piedad, 23 de Enero, 2008

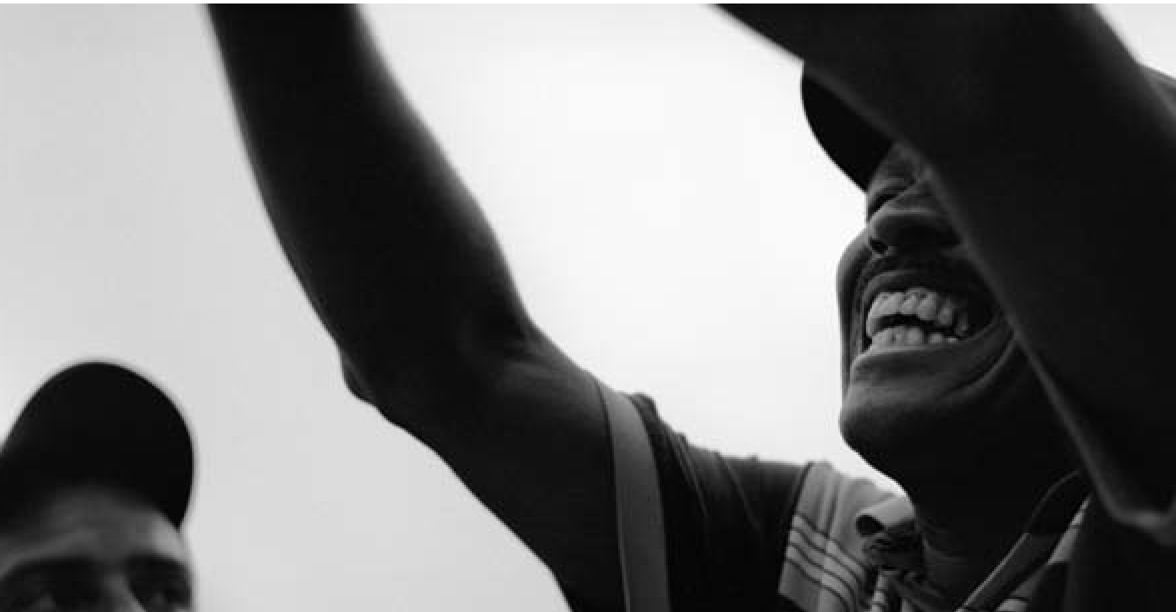
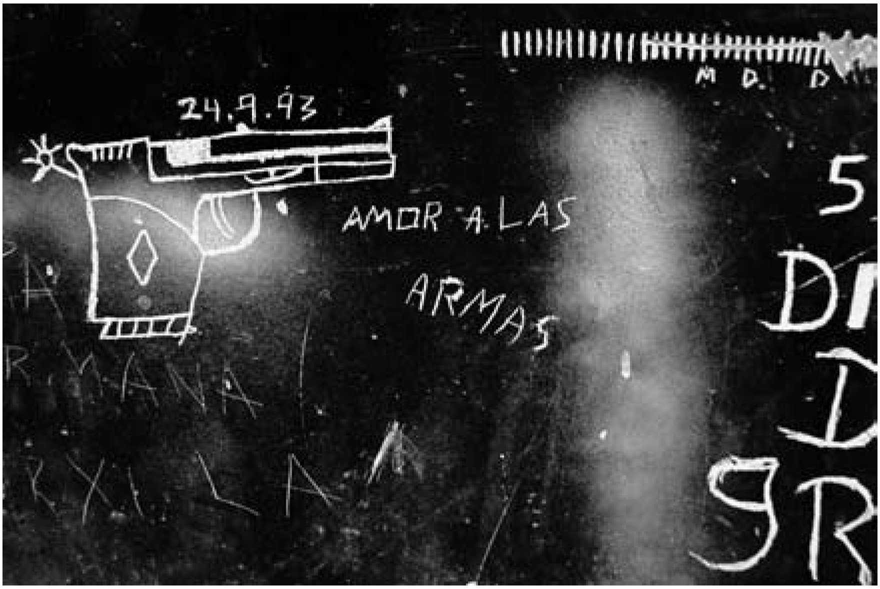


FIGURE 7. Political Conversation #2, 23 de Enero, 2008

FIGURE 8. Graffiti inside Cuartel San Carlos, 2008


M D. D
24.9.93
AMOR A LAS
ARMAS

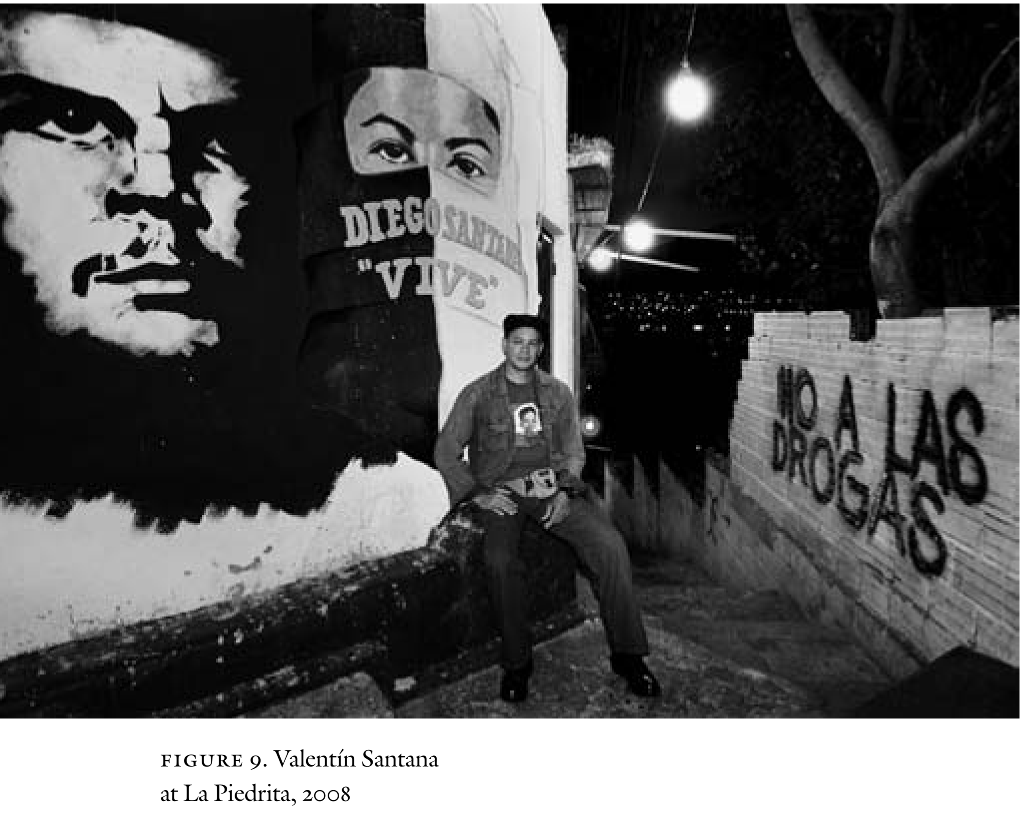
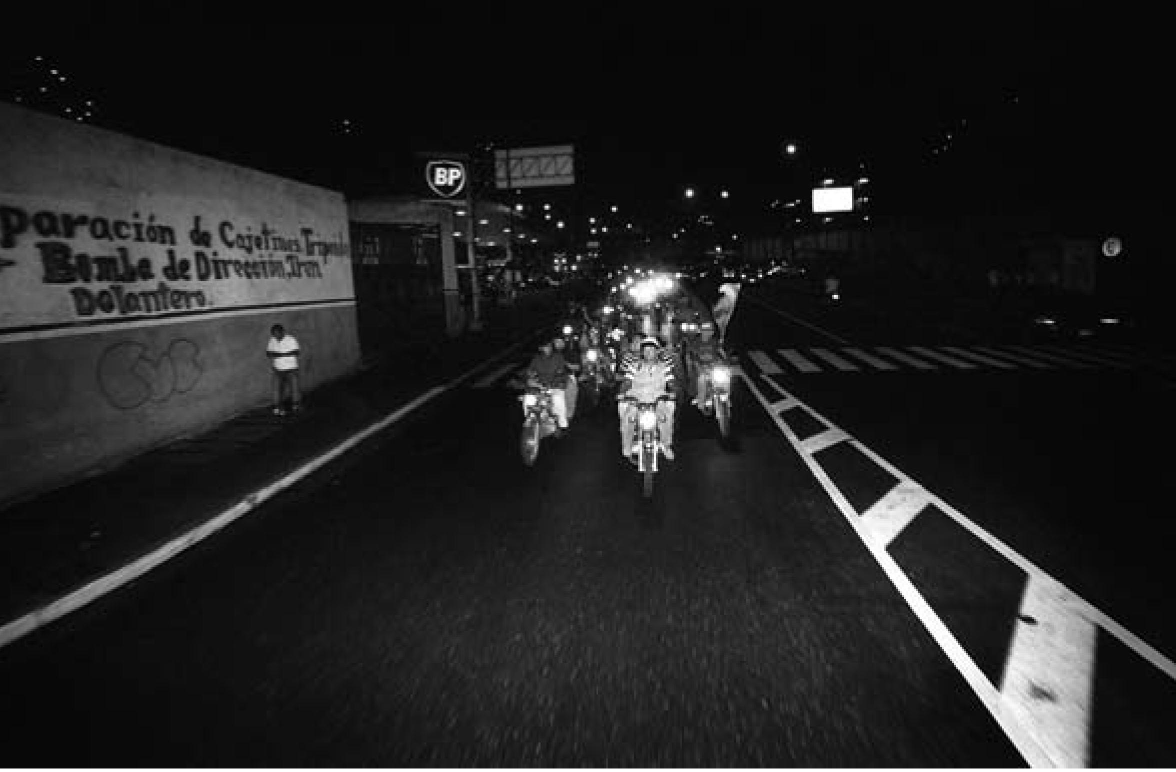

DIEGO SANTANA
"VIVE"
NO A LAS
DROGAS

FIGURE 9. Valentín Santana at La Piedrita, 2008


paración de Cajetines Tripode
Bomba de Dirección, Tren
Delantero
BP

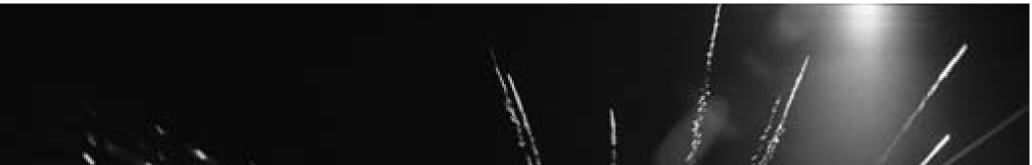


FIGURE 10. Tupamaros Approach, Catia, 2008
FIGURE 11. Tupamaro Explosion, Catia, 2008

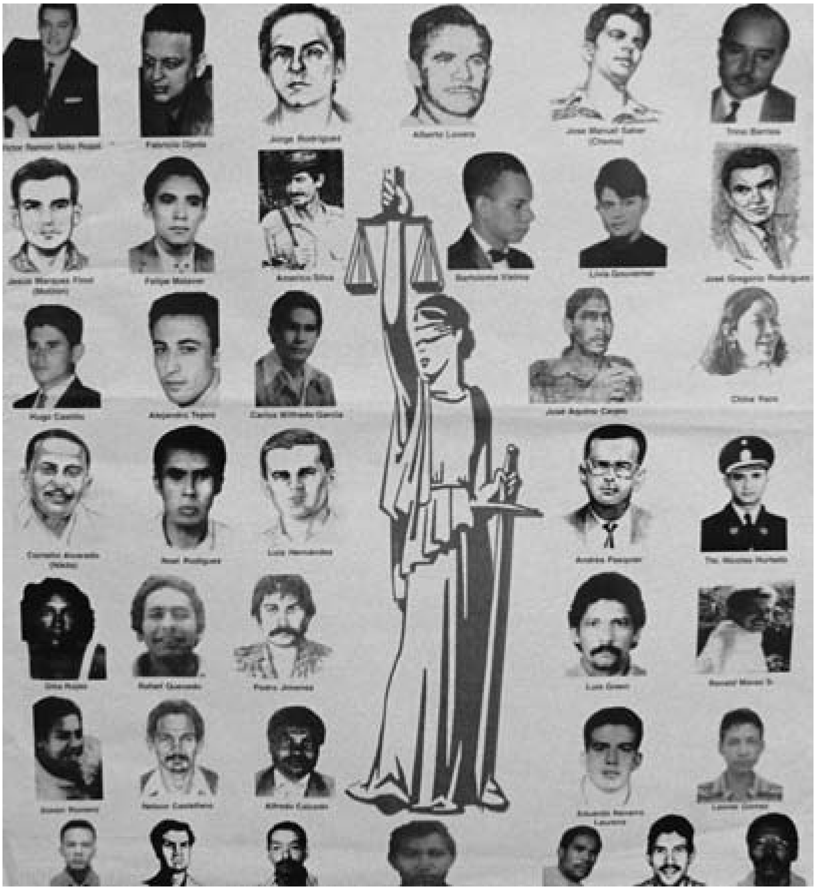

Victor Ramon Soto Rojas
Fabricio Ojeda
Jorge Rodriguez
Alberto Lovera
Jose Manuel Saher (Chema)
Felipe Malaver
Americo Silva
Livia Gouverneur
Jose Gregorio Rodriguez
Hugo Castillo
Alejandro Tejero
Carlos Wilfredo Garcia
Jose Aquino Carpio
Noel Rodriguez
Luis Hernandez
Andres Pasquier
Rafael Quevedo
Pedro Jimenez
Nelson Castellano
Alfredo Caicedo

FIGURE 12. Tupamaros, Catia, 2008 (left, above)

FIGURE 13. Victims of Democracy Poster inside Cuartel San Carlos, 2008 (left, below)

FIGURE 14. Chavista, 23 de Enero, 2008

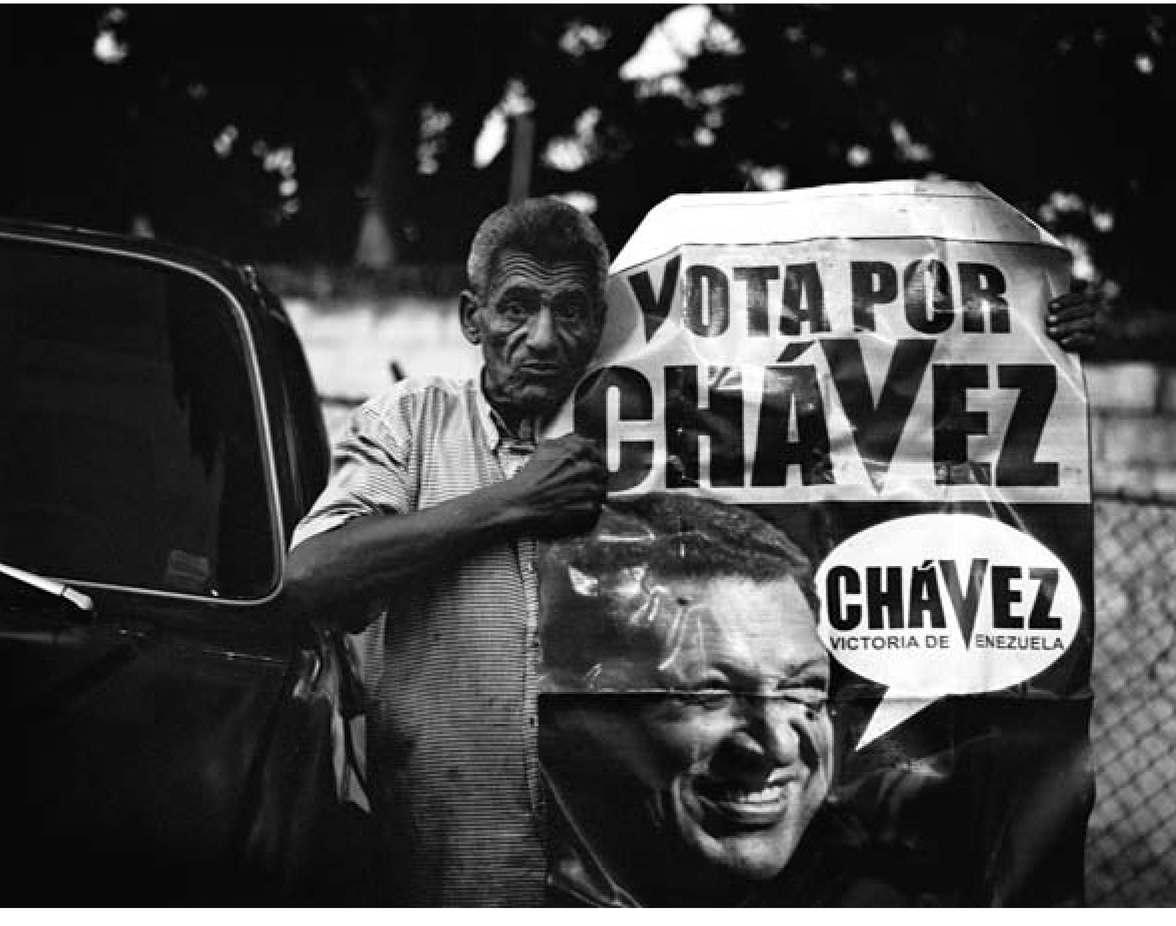
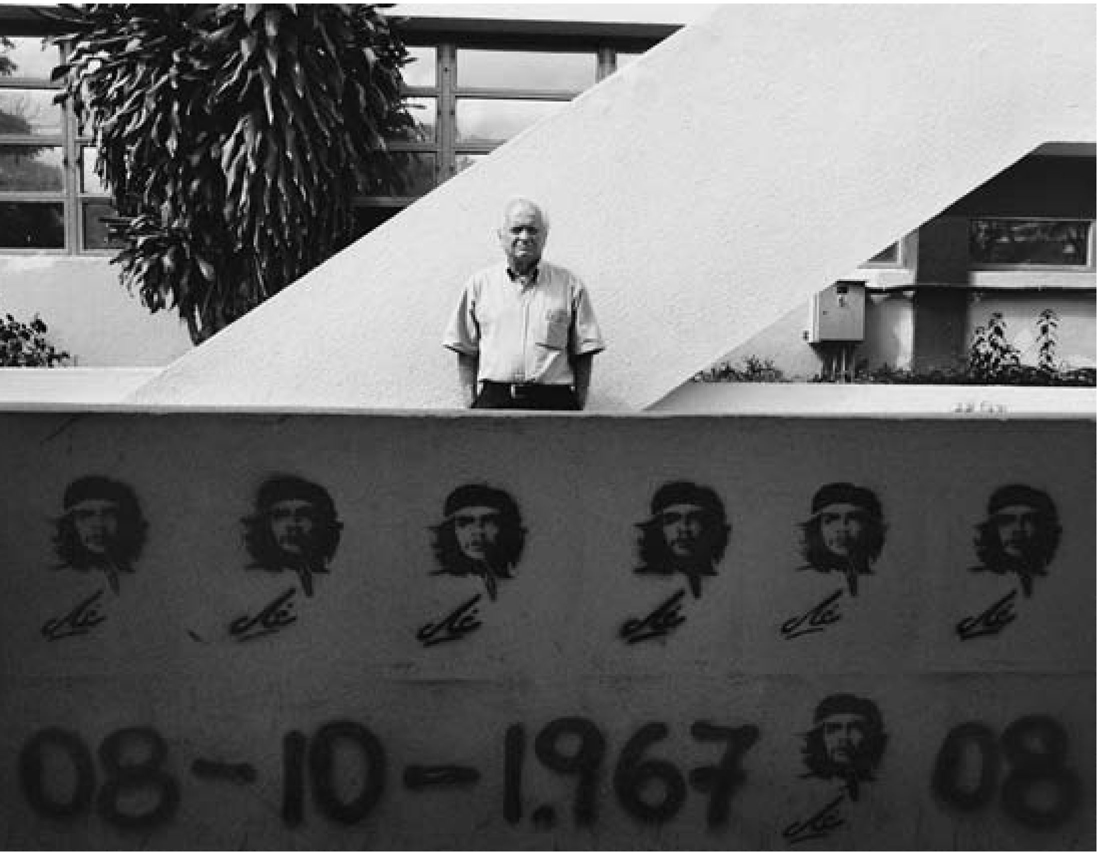

VOTA POR
CHÁVEZ
CHÁVEZ
VICTORIA DE VENEZUELA

FIGURE 15. Carlos Betancourt, 2008


08-10-1,967
08

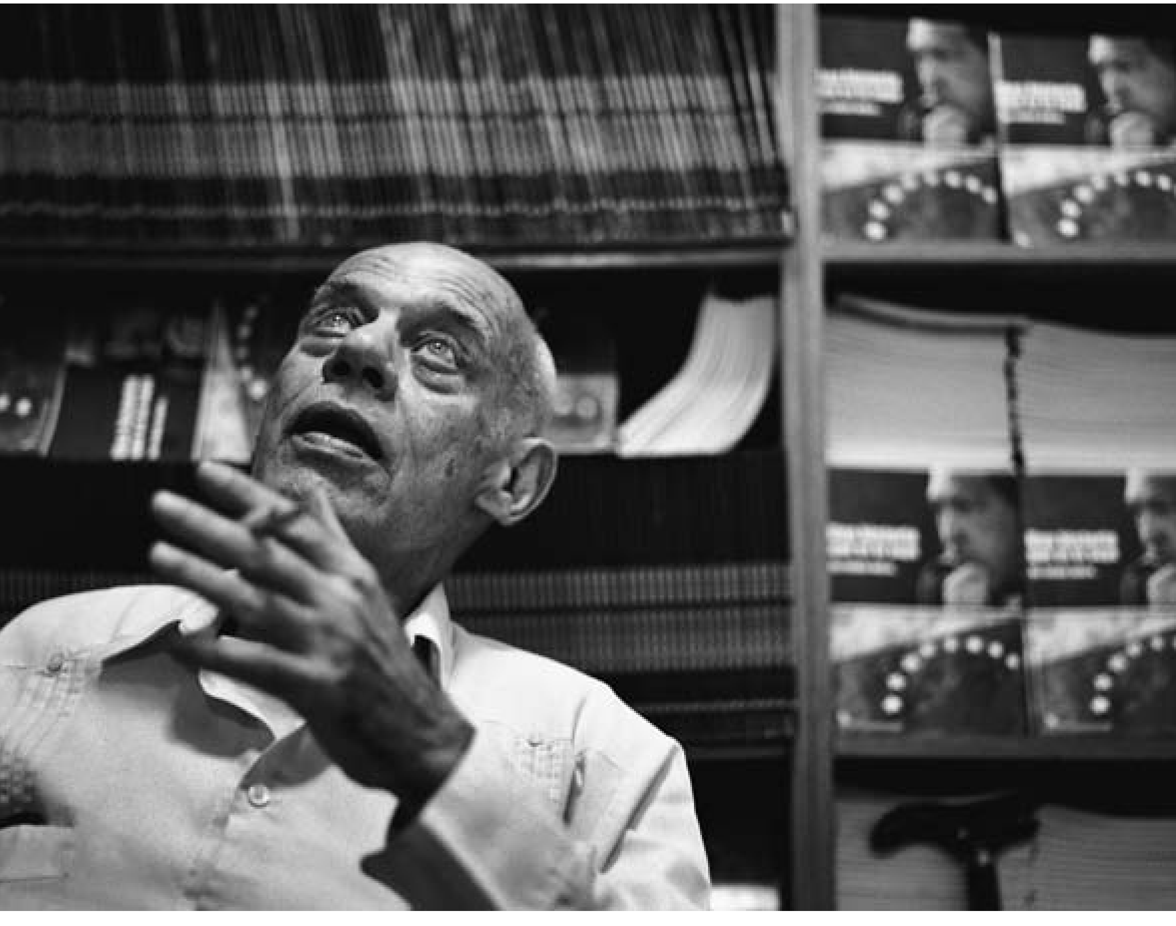


FIGURE 16. Alberto Müller Rojas, 2008

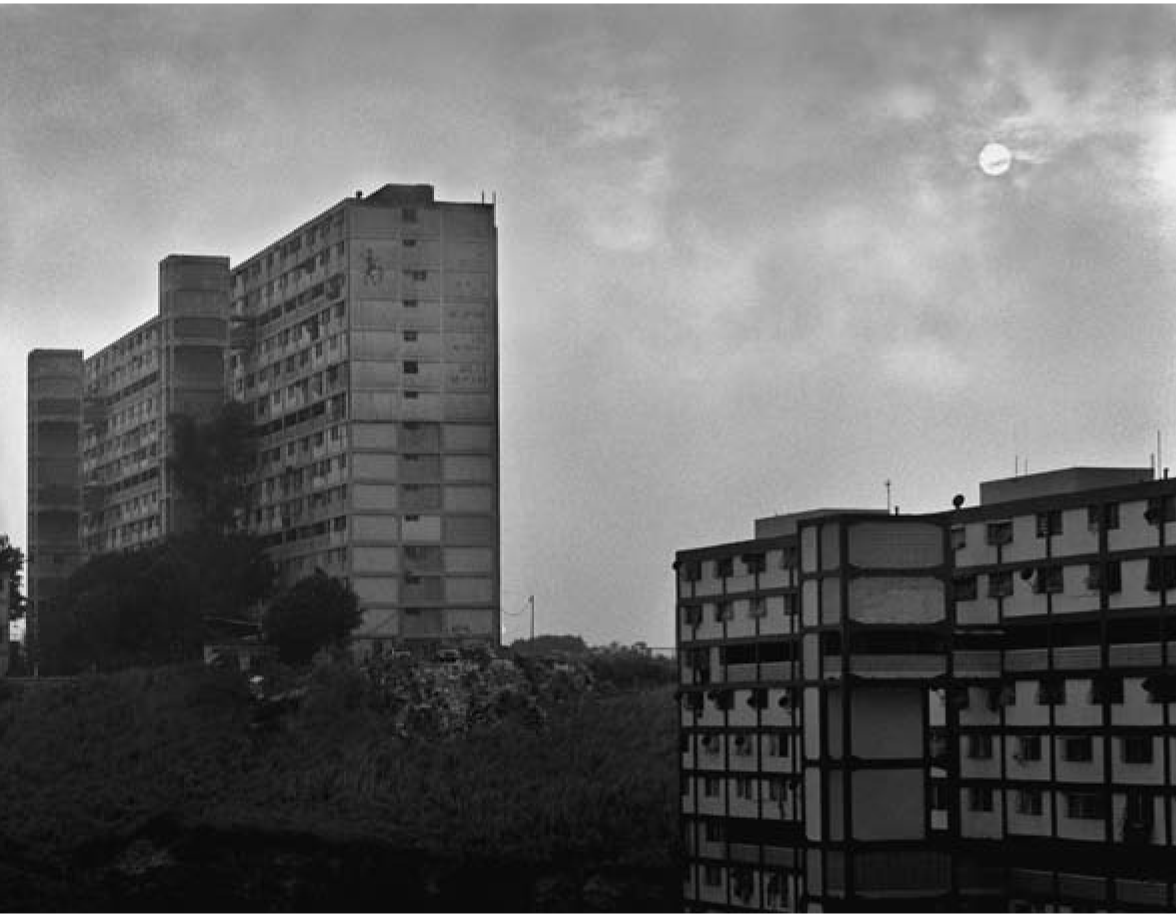


FIGURE 17. Block 22, La Cañada, 23 de Enero, 2008

Four. Sergio's Blood

Student Struggles from the University to the Streets

> Student, a great heart in your chest,
> your homeland Venezuela
> awaits much from your determination.
> Seek out the working class
> with which to make the Revolution.
> —Alí Primera

In mid-1993, the Venezuelan political system was in a veritable free fall. The Caracazo—predictable for some of its participants but utterly astonishing for elites intoxicated by their own myths—was followed soon after by a pair of attempted coups in February and November 1992. While the nominally social democratic ruling party Democratic Action (AD) succeeded in closing ranks against this military intervention into politics, a schism quickly emerged within the ruling class as others saw political opportunity amid the turmoil. If AD supported Cartos Andrés Pérez in 1992, they would sell him up the river in 1993 to save their own skins, and if, as in the case of AD, the party abandoned the leader, the opposite would be true of the Christian Democrats (COPEI): the party's founder, Rafael Caldera, one of the architects of Venezuela's exclusionary two-party system, effectively jumped ship with a speech in the Congress that certainly did not support the coup attempt but nevertheless explicitly connected it to the same popular rage that had fueled the Caracazo. Wistfully sensing popular ambivalence toward the institutional order, Caldera insisted that “there can be no democracy if the people cannot eat.”[1] This was a truly visionary bit of opportunism, one that catapulted Caldera back to power in the heavily disputed election of 1993.[2]

September 23, 1993

A large march set out from the Central University (UCV); a joyful combination of music and street party to the observer’s eye. But the tension was in the context, and behind the playfulness of the samba there lay the very real and imminent threat of a state violence that did not begin or end with the Caracazo, the last deadly gasps of a decadent and flailing system. As Roland Denis, then a young student leader, puts it, “Joy and combat are never separable in good popular mobilizations.” This is not to say that these are the same, of course, but if it was joy that inspired the students, combat was the inevitable result of seeking the joy of liberation under a socially repressive, neoliberal state. “This great parade of joy” wound from the UCV toward the old city center, and as the telltale signs of impending attack manifested themselves in the subtleties of police maneuver, the “forever warriors” took the lead while the “forever defeatists” attempted to dissuade them.

As the march arrived at the Esquina del Chorro, it was clear that the students would not reach the Congress. But this was no surprise, and for a moment it seemed as though the day would be merely a repetition of skirmishes past, another expression of the violent street tactics that had become coterminous with Popular Disobedience. “Tear gas, bullets rubber and real, stones, burning tires, Molotov cocktails, scattering and regrouping, the resumption of battle at other points of the city center’s perimeter, some street vendors joining in, the solidarity of the *motorizados*, even some broken windows, injuries, arrests, and a police contingent or two surrounded. But in this case something would change. The repressive strategy would not merely seek to disperse, control, and detain, but instead some assassins would be added to the ranks of the police with precise extermination missions.”[3] The traditionally repressive intelligence forces of the DISIP were present, carrying with them death sentences that had been decided beforehand and simply awaited execution.

While Denis was escorting his young daughter out of harm’s way, one such sentence was carried out. The executioner loaded a large steel nut into a shotgun and fired it. The victim was Sergio Rodríguez Yance, a student revolutionary well known for embodying, in Denis’ words, the “joy and combat" of Venezuelan popular struggles. The executioner, too, was joyful, leaping with glee in untelevised video footage when the metal lump punctured Sergio's chest. A close personal friend of Sergio, Denis' retrospective lament and homage is touching: "Poet, salsa singer, dancer, joker, friend, lover, child, disobedient, warrior, solidaristic, and with an always smiling but almost exasperating humility. Sergio was life itself, its creator as its product; he was what that marvelous goddess granted us as a prize for all the irreverent and liberating pressure that had exploded and could not be stopped. Albert Camus and his Rebellious Man would have certainly found in Sergio one of his best characters, but one for whom existential melancholia was completely foreign. Sergio was our earth."[4]

Rodríguez always insisted that he would die with a smile on his face, and that's just how he looked when Roland Denis saw him later that afternoon in the morgue, grinning a challenge to the world he had just departed. Just months earlier, as it became clear that the shame of the old system was devouring it and that the Fourth Republic was wheezing its last breaths, this young revolutionary had penned the following words, which have become something of a mantra among those who celebrate his life, adorning the walls near his childhood home in Block 5 of 23 de Enero:

> Here I go, like a fleeting comet, a kite without strings ready to fly (without shackles or chains) toward the unknown.
> I move through the world perhaps justifying my discourse on the integral nature of the human.
> Seeking the equilibrium of man with nature.
> Breaking the usurpation of the vanguards.
> Here I am, a single individual, universalizing my existence.
> Here I go, like a joyful madman, giving away my rags to the dispossessed, sharing the bread of libertarian ideas.
> Here I come, like a silent Quijote, giving over my love like bread with a piece for all, adopting the dialectical nature of life.
> Here I come, with my shining sword, piercing the phantoms of contradiction and egoism.
> I raise my sword against the chemically pure, impostors of honesty.
> Here I am, friends and enemies of mine, *compañeros*, with my warrior's armor, prepared to give my life being certain and convinced that death doesn't exist.

Sergio's death was met immediately by a torrent of tribute from local revolutionary collectives, with the newspaper *Yulimar Vive* (named for the first victim of the Caracazo and edited in part by Denis himself) celebrating his "disobedient laughter" and the newsletter of the nearby La Piedrita Collective invoking the title of Sergio's own newspaper *El Hombre Nuevo* in its insistence that "Sergio, new men don't die."[5] While the highest of human ideals expressed in Sergio's poem have assumed many a human form during the past fifty years of struggle in Venezuela, few have embodied the student demand for national relevance, for the opening of a porous breach between university and society, more fully than Sergio Rodríguez.

Born and raised as one of several brothers in Block 5 of 23 de Enero (one of the same *cepillini* we met in chapter 3), Sergio cut his teeth at the rapidly gentrifying UCV. He fought a battle on two fronts — in the *barrio* and on campus — but in both, his antagonists were largely the same: repressive police on the one hand and "vanguardist usurpers" on the other. "He was the total package," local residents of Block 5 tell me within sight of one of the many murals of Sergio that surround the building, "a pure revolutionary" who had participated in the popular organizing in support of both 1992 coup attempts shortly before his death.[6] It was somewhere between these two battlefronts during the march that left the UCV and headed toward the seat of government, beyond which his home peered just over the hills, that Sergio was shot dead by police. While it may seem strange to begin an analysis of the Venezuelan student movement through the lens of such an interstitial figure as Sergio Rodríguez, one whose existence was so fully marked by the in-betweenness of student and *barrio* struggles, I hope my reasons will become clear. Not only is it the case that the best student organizing often takes its cues from Marx's self-abolishing proletariat, rejecting strictly student demands and seeking nothing so much as to tear down the walls separating university from society and to fuse with the broader revolutionary struggle, but this intersectional focus also helps to draw out the deep continuities that connect the chapters of this book. Nor did student struggles emerge from the aftermath of the guerrilla struggle, as revolutionary cadres experimented with the realm of legality; an earlier wave of student struggles had served to catalyze the armed struggle itself.

From Students to Guerrillas and Back

Students have long played a central role in radical politics in Venezuela, but not always *as students*. Rather, Venezuelan students have long sought to project their experiences onto the national stage, sometimes embracing their status, sometimes abandoning or rejecting it, and often circulating between campus and community life, leaving and returning for the evening, the year, or in periodic waves according to the political demands of the moment. An exhaustive catalog of political leaders of the past century from across the political spectrum shows that the vast majority have been drawn from the ranks of student activists, and this phenomenon has its historical roots in the transformation of the Venezuelan university itself.[7] In the decades after liberation from the Spanish, landed elites gradually wrested control of the reins of power, which notably included the Church-influenced educational system, formerly the central hegemonic apparatus of colonization. This new oligarchic university, itself a continuation of the colonial university in many senses, sought to educate a new class of citizens "to serve as legitimating agents of the instruments of coercion and as mediators between oligarchic power and the totality of the dominated classes."[8]

But these traditional intellectuals, to continue in Gramscian terms, would lose their privileged position in the early twentieth century after the discovery of oil, the exploitation and state mediation of which undermined the power of the landed oligarchy and generated a ruling class whose power was more political than economic.[9] This shifting economic structure favored the development of an urban middle class, and as a result a new intelligentsia organically linked with this rising class. These intellectuals sought the reins of national power under the banner of the celebrated "Generation of '28": "Student Week" in February 1928 sparked renewed opposition to the Gómez dictatorship and gave rise to a failed coup only months later. Many student leaders, including Rómulo Betancourt himself, went into exile shortly thereafter, but after the dictator's death, this shifting constellation of power was reflected in a modernizing reform of the university system that opened the institution to the urban classes.[10] The university population began to grow and with it the influence of its constituents, an influence that spilled over the limits that the rising elite had placed on it, especially after university autonomy was declared in 1958.[11]

From the very beginning, then, the student movement that emerged from this structure was not merely a superstructural outgrowth of new economic realities, but instead reflected a mix of various perspectives and positions, from liberalism to technocratic developmentalism to anti-imperialist communism. It was the radical students who would, in the early years of Venezuela's two-party democracy, find themselves in the driver's seat, enjoying a degree of influence that far transcended the walls of the university. When Betancourt came to power, he sought to channel all social struggles into official representative organs, and the student struggle was a central target of this domestication campaign. But the movements would not be so easily straitjacketed, and much less the students, who were not pacified by having dispensed with a dictatorship and who instead "became the principal questioner of the vices of the democratic regime initiated in 1958."[12] This president, who previously had admired the university as the battleground for a "permanent conflict between the nation and those governing against its will" now assailed it as a "den of terrorists."[13] When students continued to mobilize autonomously, Betancourt responded with characteristic force, occupying the campuses in clear violation of the very autonomy he himself previously had championed and forcing students to choose between docility and fierceness, between compliance and guerrilla war.

The Academic Renovation

Alma Mater, they want to kill you with arrows of darkness . . .
they want to close you off from your people with keys of darkness,
they want you to build machines to kill butterflies.
—Alí Primera

Betancourt's invasion of the UCV was but the first in a long series of incursions that would see tanks rolling through the crown jewel of Venezuelan education, prompting Alí Primera to pen the chilling words quoted above some decades later.[14] Here, "darkness" is *oscuridad*, which plays a double function as "obscurity," suggestive of the gentrification of the university, its separation and alienation as an "ivory tower" of no relevance to the poor. Primera also shows immediately how this gentrification was accompanied by a technocratic turn in the university, one concerned more with producing machines of death—the same machines that had cleansed the university in the first place—than people full of radical hope. If many revolutionaries were forced out of the universities by repression, many more would be forced to return for the same reason, seeking refuge as the guerrilla war reached a dead end, and transforming the universities once again into a central battleground for the future of the country.

In the oppressive-looking blocks that house sociology and economics at the UCV, I meet with Fernando Rivero, a longtime student leader with the M-28 Movement. A political philosopher by training, Rivero skillfully cites Montesquieu and Marx to explain the history of Venezuela's student movement as students stream by us.[15] The point of departure for this post-guerrilla student history is the 1969 movement for "Academic Renovation," a slightly tame name for what was, in effect, an effort to revolutionize academic institutions from the bottom up as *puntofijista* governments attempted to "pacify" the remaining guerrilla fighters and demobilize society from the top down. But the *Renovación*, as it is called, was more than just student politics; Rivero describes it as "a sort of insurgency *against* the institution," one led by workers as well as students, the goal of which was to both radically democratize the university itself and give it "national relevance," both practically and theoretically.

On the practical plane, the student movements engaged in the Renovation sought to develop participatory organizational structures within the university, in part to resist the traditional elected institutions of the universities (the Federation of University Centers, or FCUs), which had long served as direct proxies for the two-party system. Instead, radical students formed alternative, directly democratic council structures and fought for the creation of a general university assembly. As López puts it, "It would horrify party leaders — accustomed to deciding the destiny of the university community behind closed doors — to confront multitudinous student assemblies which would cast into doubt their very status as leaders."[16] While the proposed assembly would have equalized faculty and student participation (the current weight of a faculty vote is forty times that of a student vote), it would also and more radically have included university employees and workers on an equal footing. It was in this sense that the Renovation became an "insurgency *against* the institution," attempting to break down the walls that separate the university from the society as a whole while being careful never to sacrifice its prized autonomy. In reality, this was a radicalization of the very notion of autonomy itself, one that asserted autonomy from the government while insisting that the university be subservient to the needs of the wider society of which students and workers were a part.

This radical and participatory praxis then nourished the Renovation's chief theoretical breakthrough, by which it "called into question the prevailing mode of knowledge production."[17] Students began to argue that the university functioned as what French Marxist Louis Althusser would call an "ideological state apparatus," reproducing the hierarchies necessary for the division of labor as well as the ideological foundations of expertise, competition, and meritocracy that would uphold such divisions. Because the divisions in question were not merely internal to the student-faculty hierarchy and the disciplinary structure of the university, but also included the division between social classes and the university-society distinction itself, a broader response would prove necessary.[18] Thus the Renovation posed a direct challenge to AD's and COPEI's efforts at technocratic university reform, one that would have heightened the institution's role in perpetuating a new division of labor by undermining the principles of liberal education.[19] But if Venezuelan students embraced the French critique of the ideological function of the university, they would explicitly reject the pessimism that some attach to that critique. In part due to the irreverent history of the Venezuelan student movement, the stifling view of education as mere reproduction of hierarchy would never gain much traction in Venezuela. Carlos Lanz, who, since his days as a guerrilla, has insisted on the importance of the hegemonic apparatus, and education in particular, would therefore insist on balancing the insights of the education-as-reproduction model with the radically liberatory education of Paolo Freire. For Lanz and others, even the most repressive of educational structures contain the potential for spontaneous resistance, and "it is possible to unveil the hegemonic function in study plans, combating the hierarchized being, fragmentation and reification," thereby creating a "counter-hegemonic, or counter-cultural space" within the educational sphere.[20]

Some have argued that the Academic Renovation movement was too powerful to be confronted head on, but Rivero reminds me that the state certainly did its level best, and the student insurgency of 1969–70, like that of 1960–61, was put down "*en sangre y fuego*, in blood and fire," this time by Rafael Caldera, who sent tanks to close the UCV.[21] This time, however, there was no substantial guerrilla alternative toward which the students could turn, and the immediate effect of the repression was to reveal the theoretical and organizational weakness of the students' council structures, pushing them back into the hands of the more durable FCUs and to the uncritical defense of autonomy as a minimal program. This is not to suggest, however, that the Renovation was a failure; student resistance forced the Caldera government to adjust, adopting both a war of position and a series of outflanking maneuvers to defeat the students and carry forth its technocratic offensive.[22] The first of these, the war of position, took the form of both symbolic reforms that emptied the Renovation movement of its radical content and, more insidious still, a subtle and long-term policy of ethnic cleansing within the public university by limiting popular access and returning the institutions to their previous status as refuges for the most elite segments of society.

Second, the government outflanked the university movements by encouraging private education and putting its technocratic energies into a new, alternative system of "experimental" universities, the first of which—the Universidad Simón Bolívar—was founded, not coincidentally, in

1969.[23] Contrasting views exist with regard to the success of Caldera's long-term strategy of pacifying the universities (as he and others had pacified the guerrillas) through this sinister combination of carrot and stick. Some note the progressive decline in the mobilizing capacity of student movements as the universities became more elite in their social base; Fernando Rivero argues that by the 1990s the student movement was "conspicuously absent from national life." Others such as Roberto López insist that the student movement has nevertheless represented a consistent reservoir of revolutionary energies, citing periodic explosions: the Renovation movement would be followed by the university rebellions of 1987–88, to which we could add the more recent "Toma," or Takeover, of 2001, which birthed movements like Rivero's own M-28.

Popular Disobedience and the 1987 Strike

This radical continuity of student movements did not stop at the walls of the university, and its success or failure must, therefore, be measured in broader terms as well: in the dynamic interaction between university and *barrio*. Specifically, many of the central actors in the chain of events leading from guerrillas to the Renovation and later *barrio* assemblies, and the victims stretching from Cantaura to the Caracazo, were one and the same. One leader who had left the realm of student organizing only to return many years later was Carlos Lanz himself: after a decades-long hiatus that would see him move from the rural guerrilla front to urban *foquismo*, spending several years in prison in the aftermath of the Niehous action, Lanz would be among those spearheading a new form of popular mobilization that sought to unite student radicalism with a mass base in the *barrios* under the name Popular Disobedience (see chapter 3). Alongside other former members of the PRV and the Liga Socialista, as well as active members of Bandera Roja, Popular Disobedience sought to reclaim the mantle of popular democracy in the university that had first been raised by the Renovation by resisting official structures of representation and demanding instead direct democratic self-governance for students and workers alike.

By the mid-1980s, these base organizations had consolidated their anti-party hegemony to such a degree that in many universities they were able to defeat traditional parties and take control of the FCUs, snatching the leadership of a smoldering student movement.[24] The spark was provided by the death of a student at the University of the Andes in March 1987, triggering what some deemed the worst violence the country had seen since January 23, 1958, only this time it was AD itself that bore the brunt, its Mérida headquarters burned to the ground. The rector of the UCV, Edmundo Chirinos, prefigured Caldera's response to the Caracazo, describing this rebellion, deemed the "Meridazo," as a "collective manifestation of the exhaustion of the dispossessed classes and the disapproval of the political leadership," with the far more subversive addendum that, "if well-channeled, the rebellion might generate a new alternative."[25] For now, however, innovations were to be, above all, tactical in nature, and during subsequent rebellions in Caracas that April students began to incorporate the practice of looting and redistributing goods to the urban poor as well as a closer coordination with neighborhood organizations in the *barrios*.[26]

Before the summer was over, nationwide rebellions saw several students killed and dozens facing charges before military tribunals, but the political landscape of the country had been altered irreversibly. As López Sánchez describes it: "It was in the universities that the bipartisan forces of AD and COPEI first began to suffer massive defeats, and where the vices and corruption of the political system were also called into question . . . The actions by the student movements in one way or another dignified violent street protests, while simultaneously establishing by example organizational practices that questioned the way politics was done under *puntofijismo*."[27] The delegitimization of the two-party system, antiparty critique of representation, rejection of formal channels for protest, cultivation of links with the popular masses, and willingness to resort to street violence against the structural violence of the prevailing system were all ways in which the student rebellions of the mid-1980s prefigured not only the Caracazo of 1989, but also the attempted coups of 1992.[28]

This dynamic was not limited to the rebellious side of the equation: if the militant street action of students and organizers paved the way for the Caracazo, the military side progressed as well in a dialectical refinement of repressive forms, with the minister of defense stating publicly that the student rebellions had taught the government to be ready to "restore public order" when necessary.[29] The human cost of this lesson became perfectly clear in February 1989. If radical students had previously been either forced out of the university through repression or cleansed through tightened entry requirements, the aftermath of the 1987–88 rebellions would see a more voluntary form of exodus as many young students, enamored of their deepening contact with the urban poor, left the university voluntarily to focus their attention on *barrio* organizing. This was overwhelmingly the case with Popular Disobedience members such as Sergio Rodríguez and

Roland Denis. Denis now characterizes this decision as a serious political error that left the universities in more conservative hands for many years to come.[30]

From Relevance to Absence

The 1990s were a tough row for radical students to hoe; the center of gravity for societal rebellion shifted decisively outside of the university and students "became divorced from popular struggles."[31] Meanwhile, the neoliberalization of education continued full-steam ahead, slowed only slightly by the disintegration of the old political system. After all, it was Caldera who had spearheaded this elite technocratization of the university during his first term (1969–74), and during his second term (1994–99) he attempted to finish the job. Where Caldera had previously revoked the right of workers to participate in university governance (a key victory of the Renovation), shortened school terms in an effort to "disrupt cohort solidarity to atomize the student body," and cleansed the universities of the poor (who by the 1990s represented less than 7 percent of students), in 1997 he put forth a Draft Law for Higher Education (the PLES) that would have entailed a sweeping privatization of the university system, especially on the level of services.[32] The election of Chávez thankfully stalled this privatizing offensive, but Rivero notes that it has continued unabated in the autonomous universities. The 1999 Bolivarian Constitution has meant serious gains for students, but as with other sectors these advances have been partial at best, and the formal rights promised in the Constitution would prove difficult to implement in practice.

Moreover, this gap between the Constitution and reality severely undercuts the traditional aspiration of students to national relevance: "The public university today represents a sort of ghetto . . . alienated from the problems of society and the problems of the poor," Rivero insists, pointing emphatically to the very ground on which we are standing, "*This university doesn't have social pertinence*." It was this alienated institution that he himself had entered, and he recounts that when he arrived in the late 1990s the students were already "reified" and "mediatized," wholly unlinked from popular struggles. "The sense of the political," he recounts wistfully, "the Greek sense described by Aristotle, the *polis* and the Greek citizen, was totally lost." In the Aristotelian equation of human *as* political, it was not only the latter term that was under attack, but also the very question of the human itself within the bounds of the university. The PLES, particularly in its proposal to eliminate philosophy, constituted a frontal attack on the humanities according to Rivero: "The authorities had decided that the humanities, the study of the human, was no longer profitable. Do we situate man as a predicate of things, as in reification? Or as an end, as in anthropocentrism, viewing humanity as the alpha and omega of everything, of the economy, of society?" For Rivero, this conflict between the study of the human and the fetishization of technology represents a "clash between two different views of civilization," and this clash — simultaneously epistemological and political — provided the context for the 2001 "Toma," or "Takeover." While the *tomistas*, as they would be known, maintained the directly democratic demands of their rebellious predecessors of 1969 and 1987, Rivero emphasizes the epistemological side of the Toma, one "based on the 'why' and the 'for what' of knowledge production."

The Toma comprised students, workers, and local community members (notably the Chavista Patriotic Circles, predecessors to the Bolivarian Circles). It began with a general assembly on March 28, from which the M-28 movement was born and derives its name, and would later see the seizure of the Rectorate and, in the end, seventeen expulsions (including one professor and one worker). Rivero himself was expelled for five years on charges of "irreverent behavior toward authorities," "rudeness," and, ironically, the "destruction of national property," but behind these charges he sees a far more sinister effort to criminalize protest more generally and to "bury critical thought." While today's students must continue to make demands within the university, especially with regard to internal democracy, admissions, services, and curriculum (all of which carry radical potential), Rivero insists that they must never forget that "social relevance" remains the central objective: "the student movement must be considered as a part of the broader totality of struggle, because its stellar moments, be they right or left, are when the students insert themselves into national life." As Rivero and I were having this conversation, it seemed as if some students were indeed preparing to reinsert themselves into national life, but in ways that Rivero and others on the left would neither anticipate nor celebrate.

Which Students? Which Movement?

Given the historic aim of the Venezuelan student movement — to transcend the walls of the university as actors in an essential struggle over the shape of society as a whole — it was ironic at best when, in 2007, the student movement leapt once again to center stage. Why ironic? Because rather than revolutionary students spurring on the radicalization of the Bolivarian Revolution, those who brought the student movement once again to a position of national relevance represented instead a newly organized and more conservative sector of the Venezuelan student population. The irony of student politics reborn from the right would not persist, however, as the "whip of the counter-revolution" set into motion a dynamic that radicalized a new generation of students, some hailing from entirely new institutions.[33] Whereas the material basis for this peculiarity lay in the gentrification of the university and was exacerbated by the voluntary withdrawal of many revolutionary students, in the context of mass disillusionment with traditional parties their replacements would not be drawn from the traditional proxies of AD or COPEI. Rather, recent years have seen a peculiar campus alliance comprising the far right (in organizations such as Primero Justicia, sponsored by the United States' Department of State) and the former-far-left-turned-far-right in the guise of a newly reborn Bandera Roja.[34] In the context of the utter desperation of the anti-Chavista opposition after Chávez's crushing victory in December 2006 and the rising participation of conservative students in this new generation of opposition parties, the stage was set for a new student showdown.

Like radical students of the past, this emergent conservative hegemony within the university only needed a spark, a cause around which to rally, and this it found shortly after Chávez's 2006 reelection, when he declared that the broadcast concession for opposition mouthpiece RCTV would not be renewed upon its expiration on May 27, 2007. I recall well the middle- and upper-class rage that greeted RCTV's disappearance, whose class-basis became obvious when rioting was restricted to wealthier neighborhoods and eventually sputtered out. One of the few truly fearful moments I experienced while living in Venezuela occurred as I was walking through a wealthy area late in the evening after RCTV went off the air. I had joined the celebration with some of my own students from the embryonic Venezuelan Planning School, who unanimously supported RCTV's replacement by TVes, a new national station that would, they hoped, represent more directly the aspirations of the majority. Crossing the burning barricades with my red shirt carefully concealed, I nevertheless was visually interrogated by the crowds of well-to-do teenagers burning tires in the street, enjoying a rare moment of sovereignty that spelled danger for anyone with a different perspective.

Despite the short-lived nature of the RCTV protests, opposition students were energized and the universities tossed forth new leaders, from Yon

Goicochea (subsequently of Primero Justicia and a fitting recipient of the Cato Institute's Milton Friedman Prize) to the aptly named Stalin González (formerly of Bandera Roja and currently of Un Nuevo Tiempo). As a struggle emerged over who precisely "the students" were and what it was they stood for, this gentrified shadow of a formerly radical student body would attempt to seize the mantle of that legacy. But if physics teaches of equal and opposite reactions, political dynamics are often unpredictable in magnitude, direction, and effect, and this effort was met by opposition both within the traditional university structure and outside of it, with the latter revealing a Chavista twist on the "outflanking" strategy previously used by Caldera. Whereas Sergio's generation was cut down at Esquina del Chorro, this new generation of Venezuelan students was invited into the National Assembly, some four blocks west near Esquina la Bolsa, where the central showdown of this symbolic battle would occur.

When conservative student leaders diffidently demanded the right to address the National Assembly regarding the nonrenewal of RCTV's broadcast license, they hardly entertained the possibility that their demand would be accepted. But in a stroke of tactical genius, Chavista National Assembly president Cilia Flores *did* accept the challenge, thereby simultaneously challenging both the conservative students' claims of political exclusion and—by inviting Chavista student leaders as well—their claims to represent *all* students. In anticipation of the reverberations this debate was bound to have, I headed to the National Assembly, located at the heart of the old Caracas city center, where large screens were erected for those outside to watch the debate going on inside.[35] Hundreds had gathered, and the most militant—here I am boasting without apology—were my own students, who had arranged the production of signs and whipped the crowd into furious chants:

> Education first for the children of the workers!
> Education second for the children of the bourgeoisie!

It was then that a roar went up among the expanding crowd, alerting those gathered outside that there were "*escualidos* [i.e., opposition] dressed as Chavistas!" Sure enough, we were able to glimpse several leaders of the anti-Chavista student movement being escorted into the Assembly wearing red t-shirts, the traditional uniform of supporters of the Bolivarian process.

At first we assumed that the donning of red shirts was merely a means for the students to sneak undetected into the Assembly, but this was about far more than safety: the shirts were an integral part of a professionally designed media strategy. The first speaker to the podium was Douglas Barrios, an opposition student leader and economics student from the private (and notoriously elite) Metropolitan University. His speech, although well crafted, contained no arguments, only vague promises of continued struggle for RCTV's broadcast license and, somewhat paradoxically, a process of national reconciliation. As he finished, Barrios said: "I dream of a country in which we can be taken into account without having to wear a uniform." At this point, he and other opposition student leaders in the chamber removed their red t-shirts, revealing instead white shirts bearing a variety of pro-RCTV messages. The opposition students then began to withdraw from the Assembly, and it was only the entreaties of the Chavista students and Assembly members that convinced them to stay to hear the speech by the first revolutionary student, Andreína Tarazón of the revolutionary M-28 movement at the UCV.

Tarazón began by attacking the opposition students' antidemocratic threats to withdraw from the debate. Comparing their performance with the recent behavior of Condoleezza Rice at the summit of the Organization of American States, in which Rice had attacked Venezuela before withdrawing to avoid criticism, Tarazón observed that "they had a march, they demanded freedom of expression, and when it is granted to them they leave." Tarazón continued, demanding that the opposition students clarify their concepts: they seem to be confusing, she argued, in a clever play on words that was greeted with resounding applause, "libertad de *prensa*" (freedom of the press) and "libertad de *empresa*" (the freedom of private businesses).[36] After Tarazón's speech and a brief speech by Yon Goicochea, in which he again asserted the nonpolitical nature of their intervention, the opposition students withdrew from the chamber and the debate, their exit carried live on a national *cadena* broadcast simultaneously on all channels. After having demanded the right to speak in the Assembly, conservative students had abandoned that right, refusing to debate with the Chavista students. This was the first time in Venezuelan history that student organizations of any stripe were invited to address the Assembly, and their departure rightly shocked both Chavistas and anti-Chavistas alike. From the perspective of their claim to represent all students, however, a claim that was undercut by the very presence of two opposing groups of students in the Assembly, the move was understandable.

But the most interesting part of the day was yet to come. As the opposition students were making defiant press declarations before being hustled out the Assembly's back door to avoid the masses of pro-Chavista students gathered out front (who were, at the time, shouting "Cowards! Cowards!" and "Victory, victory, victory of the people!"), they failed to notice that they had forgotten something. When it was his turn to speak, Chavista student leader Héctor Rodríguez of the UCV stepped up to the podium with a sheet of paper that he promptly held up in front of the gathered deputies. It was the last page of the opposition's scripted performance in the Assembly, which laid out the text of Barrios' speech and the exact moment at which he and others were to remove their red shirts. And this was not all: the script was signed by ARS Publicity, a company owned by none other than the Globovisión media empire.[37] Together with Globovisión (as well as all other private media outlets), ARS was directly implicated in the planning and execution of the 2002 mediatic coup against the constitutional order (see the Second Interlude). Not only had the debate in the Assembly revealed that these opposition students were only one part of the student body, they also now appeared as a part that, against all claims of independence, was tied directly to the rabid anti-Chavista opposition; this was confirmed later when most of these opposition student leaders joined anti-Chavista parties.

A New Student Movement

The National Assembly fiasco was a serious blow to the opposition student movement, but it soon became clear that they would not go quietly. With RCTV off the air, opposition students turned their sights on the proposed constitutional reform scheduled for December 2007, and a wave of street violence in early November showed that they were drifting into desperation. On November 7, as frustrated opposition students returned to the UCV after a march to the Supreme Court, their on-campus adversaries were caught off guard. A group of Chavista students, including M-28 militants and my former students, were pursued by a horde of opposition students, taking refuge in the radical School of Social Work. The opposition students surrounded the building, pelting it with stones, lighting a fire at the entrance, and even shooting through open windows in an effort to pick off their Chavista counterparts. One of my students was shot in the incident, but luckily it was only a large piece of shrapnel, not a bullet, that had entered his abdomen. The Chavista students were rescued only when, in a testament to the deepening student-community relations of recent years, armed militants from nearby *barrios* arrived on motorcycles. The international press predictably ran with the wrong end of the story, propelled by an

Associated Press dispatch claiming incorrectly that "gunmen opened fire on students returning from a march," alongside a sensationalistic photo of Chavistas brandishing handguns.[38] Evidently, journalists in the United States did not wonder why the gunmen appeared to be *inside* the burning building attempting to get out, and even when confronted with video proof of their error, some refused to print retractions.[39]

The day after the assault on the School of Social Work, members of the Presidential Students' Commission — themselves revolutionary leaders at various public and private universities — issued a stark warning. In the words of Roberto Serra, a law student at the elite Andrés Bello Catholic University, recently elected to the National Assembly: "Some sectors have told us that they are only waiting for us to say the word to take over the universities . . . everything under the sun has its time . . . To the opposition: don't speed up time, because if you know how to count, you should already know who has the majority. I don't think it would take much for the Venezuelan people to take over the UCV or the [Andrés Bello Catholic University], whichever gets in their way!"[40] This optimistic image of Chavista students biding their time, simply waiting for the right moment to strike, is certainly a positive counterpoint to the picture of demographic gentrification that we have seen up to this point, but in the years since the Revolution began, it has gained some truth. Moreover, it was no coincidence that Serra spoke these words from the Bolivarian University, the central institution in the Chavista outflanking maneuver, one that follows Caldera's blueprint precisely.

Upon coming to power, the Chavista movement faced a peculiar difficulty. University autonomy had always been the banner of the left, one proudly held aloft in opposition to the historically repressive incursions of the established antidemocratic order. Certainly, many in the student movement had long combined the negative demand for autonomy *from* the government with more substantive positive demands: *for* direct democratic control within the university alongside a total transformation of society outside the university walls. But from a position of power, how could a radical leader intervene toward the positive transformation of the university without appearing to violate its autonomy? This paradox of university autonomy has led the Chavista government to adopt a different tack, a "war of position" that avoids frontal attack while constructing alternative institutions in preparation for the "war of maneuver" against the traditional universities that was predicted by Serra. But whereas Gramsci viewed education and ideology as the terrain for such a war of position, here was a struggle for the very *instruments* of that ideology. Just as Rafael Caldera undermined radical students by establishing alternative “experimental” institutions, so too would Chávez seek to outflank an increasingly conservative movement by establishing alternative “Bolivarian” institutions.

The Bolivarian educational system grew out of the educational missions established by the Venezuelan government beginning in 2003, but it has more distant roots in Plan Bolívar 2000, which saw the military deployed into poor communities to confront poverty without significantly increasing the government’s budget. It was only after the recovery of the oil industry from its autonomous board of directors in early 2003 (see chapter 7) that the country’s massive income could be made available for social programs. The first educational missions focused on basic literacy (Mission Robinson) and primary (Mission Robinson II) and secondary (Mission Ribas) education, but within six months this new, alternative educational system had reached the university level with the establishment of Mission Sucre, at the center of which stands the Bolivarian University.[41] The result of these educational missions has been astounding: 1.6 million illiterate adults were taught to read and write; by 2007, nearly 350,000 had completed primary schooling and more than 450,000 had completed secondary schooling in the alternative mission system. Perhaps most striking and relevant to our discussion is the increase in higher education, where the number of matriculated students *has nearly tripled* in a decade.[42]

Traditionally, nearly three-fourths of Venezuelan university students are drawn from the wealthiest 20 percent of the population, whereas those added by the mission system derive almost entirely from the lowest income bracket. It is this net gain in students — more than a million at the university level alone — that offers the best indication of the “outflanking” strategy in revolutionary education, to which the Planning School where I taught also contributed. In recent years, this process has extended beyond access to transform the structure of even primary education through “Bolivarian primary schools” that are still in the pilot stage, in which students from kindergarten on participate collectively in administrating their own educational process.[43] Thus it was that Metropolitan Mayor Juan Barreto appeared on television during the opposition student upsurge to brutally mock, as was so often his manner, the self-seriousness of the opposition students. In Barreto’s estimation, anti-Chávez students had managed to mobilize only around 5,000 in a city boasting more than 200,000 students, but this figure already shows that he is speaking of a very different student body, one that is not limited to the traditional elite institutions of higher education.

Emphasizing the importance of this outflanking strategy, this "war of position" in the educational sphere, is not to suggest that — in a repetition of the mistakes of a previous era — struggle *within* the traditional universities has been abandoned entirely. Rather, while these new students mobilize outside and around the traditional universities, radicals within the universities have been busy doing the same, specifically through efforts to chip away from within and ultimately collapse the walls that separate the universities from society. The M-28 movement, for example, has been actively demanding equal voting representation for professors and students, as well as the inclusion of workers and staff in the voting process. This internal effort has coincided with the rejection by the M-28 of the *cupo*, or quota system, which, by limiting the number of spaces available, has long been seen as a violation of the constitutional right to education. By organizing simultaneously both accepted students and those *bachilleres sin cupo*, those students not guaranteed a space, the M-28 is struggling to break down the hierarchical barriers that divide accepted and rejected students. Other radical organizations such as the former Revolutionary Fogata Movement (some members of which more recently founded Bravo Sur) have equally sought to break down the barrier that separates secondary from university education through the mobilization of *liceistas*, or high school students. As one organizer, Fidel, tells me, "we have discovered that high school students are less ideologically invested in the political system . . . they are more energetic and less opportunistic . . . they have not yet undergone the disciplinary specialization that occurs at the university."[44]

Small indications have recently emerged suggesting that the shift from war of position to war of maneuver might be underway. In early 2011, the National Assembly approved a radical new University Law that would have brought the fight to the traditional universities by reviving some of the most potent demands of the Renovation of more than four decades ago. According to the proposed law, student votes would be equivalent to those of professors, participatory and democratic councils including workers and community members would be instituted, administrative records would be made public, and services would be guaranteed. Perhaps hesitating because of the backlash that the law might unleash and the claims of the opposition that it represented an attack on university autonomy, Chávez refused to sign the law, instead sending it back to the Assembly for revision and popular consultation. Against opposition claims that such a law would impinge upon university autonomy, however, radical students continue to insist that "true autonomy" is predicated upon "education for everyone . . . education for the liberation and transformation of our people."[45]

For Fernando Rivero, whether it be in the war of maneuver to take over and transform traditional universities or the war of position to create new, alternative institutions, the crucial challenge is to not reproduce the Eurocentrism and the positivism of existing institutions. "Here we know everything about the Greeks," he exclaims, "and yet we know nothing of pre-Hispanic societies, even the most important ones like the Incas!" Citing UCV professor Edgardo Lander, Rivero sets as a fundamental task "to break with the coloniality of knowledge!"[46] Breaking with Eurocentrism and "coloniality" is more than mere history; it also has to do with method and the rejection of the positivist transposition of methods from the natural to the social sciences and its segmentation of knowledge into disciplines that prevents the Marxist aspiration to grasp the totality. "That's why we don't speak in terms of scientific socialism, we speak in terms of socialism, period: revolutionary socialism." It is only by placing "insurgency" at the very heart of educational institutions—as Kléber Ramírez places it at the heart of political institutions—that the educational system will truly embody the needs and aspirations of the new society.

"A Song for Sergio"

There is something satisfying about meeting urban guerrilla-turned-educator Carlos Lanz at Esquina del Chorro, the same corner where Sergio was murdered but that today hosts the Ministry of Higher Education. As a founder of Popular Disobedience, Lanz, like Denis, knew Sergio well. In the years since Popular Disobedience's "erroneous" abandonment of the university for more directly popular action, Lanz has returned to the question of education. Like Rivero, Lanz is openly critical of the "positivist encrustations" that continue to plague some Marxisms, specifically the division between intellectual and manual labor that these often imply.[47] He has worked to eliminate such divisions in both the economic and educational spheres: addressing the former during his tenure at state aluminum plant Alcasa as a fervent proponent of direct democratic control by workers (see chapter 7), and the second as a central participant in the "educational constituent" in the run-up to the 1999 Constitution and later as a key player in efforts to overhaul the educational system. The educational system that the Bolivarian

Revolution received from its predecessors was, according to Lanz, one whose central function was to proliferate divisions "between school and community," professor and student, and a "fragmentation and atomization of knowledge" and its monopolization by experts.[48] This sort of fragmentation was the antithesis of the "new man" for which Sergio Rodríguez's organization was named and the "integral nature of the human" of which he spoke in his poem, embodying both in practice through his desire to tear down the walls separating the university from the people. It was fitting, then, when this same corner hosted a tribute entitled "A Song for Sergio," in which Roland Denis himself participated, noting in his speech that "Rodríguez's ideals of struggle germinated and today flower in the thought of an entire people, which is every day more conscious of its destiny and of the defense of this revolutionary process."[49]

There was an old legend about this corner, la Esquina del Chorro. Around 1812, it was on this same corner that the Canarian brothers Pérez sold *guarapo*, a "sublime indigenous nectar" that was all the rage. According to legend, the brothers invented a clever device — the first automatic dispenser in all Caracas — that would pour a cup of pineapple or sugarcane *guarapo* through a spigot in the external wall, and it was this spigot, this *chorro*, that gave the corner its name. But the backroom of this *guarapería* also served as the meeting place for reactionary royalist conspirators plotting against Francisco de Miranda. In the popular imagination, the political affiliations of the Pérez brothers gave rise to a second and more sinister legend: after one brother was executed and another disappeared, the spout — the *chorro* from which *guarapo* was meant to flow — instead gushed forth with the blood of patriots, "blood that was still warm."[50] There was never any explanation for such a "bizarre metamorphosis," an ominous transformation paralleling a Christian miracle, but parables aside, we know for certain that the blood of at least one patriot flowed on this spot: his name was Sergio.

Five. Manuelita's Boots

Women between Two Movements

A plane is heard in the sky, the bombs fall to earth
a rooster crowed, a child cried
she gave birth painfully, she birthed the future . . .
Woman of blood and of sun, your soul is a song
—Alí Primera

September 25, 1828

Three dozen conspirators forced their way into the Government Building in Bogotá, intent on assassinating Simón Bolívar. Through a characteristic combination of folly and misinformation, the Liberator himself dismissed the warnings of his long-time mistress Manuela Sáenz, convinced that the conspirators had backed out of their widely known plan. When the attack finally came, he was thoroughly unprepared. In *The General in His Labyrinth*, Gabriel García Márquez describes this moment in imaginative detail: "Manuela helped him to dress as quickly as possible, put her waterproof boots on his feet since the General had sent his only pair of boots to be polished, and helped him to escape . . . With the same shrewdness and courage she had already demonstrated during other historic emergencies, Manuela Sáenz received the attackers. . . ." Here, playing a role reminiscent of Odysseus's Penelope, Sáenz held off the assailants with clever replies to their interrogation, toying with their self-seriousness while "puff[ing] great clouds of smoke from the cheapest kind of wagon driver's cigar to cover the fresh scent of [Bolívar's] cologne that still lingered in the room."[1]

Manuela Sáenz — or "Manuelita," as she would come to be known — was not the first to save Bolívar, but her sheer daring and presence of mind on this occasion would see her deemed "The Liberator of the Liberator." Therefore, one might expect the legacy of Manuelita, who had herself rescued the rescuer and saved the savior of the Latin American nation, to have a tremendous impact on gender relations throughout the continent were it not for two factors. The first is her near-complete erasure from much of what passes for Latin American history and, more specifically, the misrepresentation of this, her most visible historical act.[2] Second, while "liberating the liberator" might seem to place Sáenz in a position of momentary superiority, the importance of her act nevertheless depends entirely upon her relation to Bolívar. The limitation of this dependency is one that weighs heavily upon women's movements in Venezuela, where women's contributions have long been measured in terms of the great men they support, Chávez included.

But is this the only possible reading of Manuelita's role in history and her symbolic significance for the present? Returning to that smoky room in 1828, if only for a moment, would suggest otherwise. There we find Manuela, barefoot and unarmed (having given both her boots and weapons to Bolívar), confronting with cool serenity a gang of assassins, all the while puffing on a cheap cigar. Contrast this with the image of the Liberator himself: huddled under a bridge, soaked to the bone, and wearing women's boots. His own vanity — sending out his only boots for shining, bathing himself head to toe in cologne — would have meant his undoing were it not for Manuela's cool rationality and tactical sense. Prevailing gender roles are symbolically disrupted and reversed, and even liberating the Liberator seems to have been a complexly gendered process in which Sáenz momentarily usurped Bolívar's position. This was more than a mere moment, however: Manuela, to Bolívar's great disgust, habitually smoked these same cheap cigars, dressed in men's clothing, "rode horseback like the men and smoke and drank like a soldier."[3] He regularly consulted her on strategic and military matters, and she was promoted to the rank of colonel (García Márquez describes her as frequently entering soldiers' barracks in Bogotá in a uniform worthy of this rank).[4] When her arrest was finally ordered by anti-Bolivarian forces, moreover, the bedroom scene of 1828 was repeated, only this time "she was waiting for them with a pair of cocked pistols."[5] This was hardly the passively loyal companion that history might suggest.

Marianismo or Manuelanismo?

In an effort to grasp what distinguishes Latin American gender relations, many have turned to the concept of "Marianismo," a counterpart to "machismo" derived from the Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary. While teaching that women are "morally superior" to men, this superiority manifests as the infinite self-sacrifice, patience, chastity, and submissiveness observed in some Latin American cultures.[6] While we cannot dismiss Marianismo entirely, there are some immediate reasons to doubt its centrality for the situation of Venezuelan women.[7] First, the Catholic Church is notably weaker in Venezuela than in many other Latin American countries; but second, and more importantly, Venezuelan history is so littered with alternative "Marías" to provoke skepticism about any single model of femininity. From María Lionza, a local goddess who sits atop a giant tapir holding a female pelvic bone while presiding over an entire pantheon of cult religious figures (within which Bolívar is but a lesser deity), to María León, longtime communist militant and the first minister of women's affairs, we are left wondering which María matters most or, indeed, why we should privilege María Magdalena over Manuelita herself.[8]

Furthermore, while the image of Manuelita as the "liberator of the liberator" might at first glance seem to mimic Marianism in the dependent position it entails for women, we have already seen how complex even this dependency is, and it is this complexity—the oscillation between dependent savior and autonomous political actor—that is embodied in the relationship between women's movements and the Bolivarian Revolution. Bound by a history of colonization and imperialism to the promise of the nation and its almost exclusively male leaders, Latin American women have been forced to walk a tightrope rarely crossed by their Euro-American counterparts. As it emerged in the aftermath of the guerrilla struggle, the Venezuelan women's movement was one heavily divided by class, race, and ethnicity, by political priorities, and by the term *feminism* itself. In such a context, the figure of Manuelita remains relevant not *despite* her ambiguity, but *as a result of it*, embodying as she does many of the same hopes, contradictions, and radical possibilities that define the contemporary women's movement.

As I noted in chapter 1, the women's movement drew many members from the ranks of the armed struggle, but while this contribution is rarely discussed in most histories of either the guerrilla war or the women's movement itself, it had serious implications for women's organizing.[9] It was only with the collapse of the guerrilla struggle that what Nora Castañeda describes—half seriously and half tongue in cheek—as the "real women's work" began, but not without inevitable conflict over what this meant.[10] The debates over the character of the women's struggle in the 1970s included "feminists and non-feminists alike," and Castañeda counted herself among the latter: a fighting woman, a party member, and an avowed communist, not a "feminist." At the time, she recalls, to be a feminist meant to approach revolutionary work in an unacceptably one-sided fashion that seemed incompatible with both her principles and background: "I lived in 23 de Enero, and there we worked for the rights of the community. We were clear that the motor of this entire process needed to be the workers, women *and* men." The biggest bone of contention dividing feminists from non-feminists during this period was the question of autonomy, which in practical terms often referred to the relationship women had and ought to have with political parties: "The feminists argued that we, the women of the parties, were sort of backwards, because we defended patriarchal parties. We, the party women, said that the feminists were contributing to ideological diversionism. That is, we felt that what was most important was the class struggle. They remained on the level of the struggle between genders, which was for us a reactionary position." Despite such profound differences, however, the debate led to an agreement, or at least a détente: "that one could be a feminist and at the same time a militant fighting for the total transformation of society, and that as a result, the class struggle and the gender struggle should move forward and be developed jointly."

Alba Carosio, an exile from the Argentine dictatorship, emerged from this more rigidly feminist position, or what she deems the "line of *feminist* feminists." Admittedly middle class, more often than not academic, and largely consisting of foreign exiles, this "true" feminism came into immediate conflict with party feminism (which some pure feminists would even see as a contradiction in terms), and its critique of the latter was stern:

> We felt that . . . despite having participated both in the guerrilla struggle here in Venezuela and leftist struggles in the Southern Cone,

> we were always passed over. They had us make the food, put up the posters, *callate un poco*, quiet down a bit. And we also felt the contradiction, since we were a generation of professional women, for whom it was very difficult to exercise our profession due to the subject of the *doble jornada*, the second shift. So we began to work on the subject of the second shift, the subject of the enjoyment of sexuality, and the effort to be included and heard. And so small discussion groups began to form.[11]

Here, Carosio's collective "we" obscures the fact that she herself did not participate in the armed struggle and, more importantly, that those like Castañeda and Lídice Navas who did join the guerrilla chose to do so despite their concerns regarding the role of women.[12]

Despite such an ostensibly inclusive "we," however — or perhaps as a result of its uncritical and imperious inclusivity — during this early period of struggle in the 1970s, some "party women" felt excluded by their more academic "feminist" counterparts. As Castañeda recounts:

> The women from the rank-and-file and from the political parties said, "We are all feminists," but some feminists said they were the only true feminists, above all the theorists, the academics . . . but we said no, you *aren't* the only feminists, and we reached a conclusion: there is no single feminism. To the contrary: there is a reactionary feminism, and there is a revolutionary feminism. We ascribe to revolutionary feminism . . . we want to transform society so that there is gender equality, so that there is social justice, so that there are no social classes, no hunger, no misery . . .

Turning Toward the Masses

As Venezuelan guerrillas were reaching out to the masses through legal fronts in the 1970s and 1980s (see chapter 2), so too were Venezuelan feminists and women, guerrillas or otherwise, attempting to establish similar mass relationships outside official efforts to co-opt the movement. But given the division threatening to separate "party women" from "feminist feminists," mass work proceeded along distinct paths for a time. According to Carosio, this process of reaching out to the masses, to the poorest women in Venezuelan society, developed only after autonomous women's organizations, like her own Maracaibo Women's League, composed almost entirely of philosophy professors from the University of Zulia, had proven their strength. Many academic and middle-class feminists harbored leftist and socialist leanings, "a concern to reach out to the popular sectors," despite their hostility to party participation. So, from around 1976, "we of course began to realize that this, *bueno*, this wasn't only for us . . . we visited the *barrios*, the popular sectors, to discuss contraception, the right to decide how many children we wanted." This outreach gave rise to the *Casas de la Mujer* (Women's Houses), which Carosio describes as "a way of reaching the popular sectors, so that the women of the popular sectors would approach us, in order to help them" by providing medical, gynecologic, and even legal advice to poorer women, all the while proliferating radically feminist ideas. But given the class distinctions involved and the almost condescending tone of "teaching" the masses, it should not be surprising that these efforts, valuable despite their limitations, soon reached the limit of their growth.

Although such "exclusively feminist" efforts to connect with the masses peaked around 1979, more popularly rooted strategies continued to flourish, especially in what were known as Popular Women's Circles (*Círculos Femeninos Populares*, or CFPs).[13] Drawing upon Paolo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed," these circles embodied the principle that poor women were capable of organizing themselves and therefore operated in a more grassroots and democratic fashion than many organizations at the time, feminist or otherwise.[14] For the hard-line feminists, however, these CFPs had two strikes against them: they were not avowedly "feminist" and they had their origins in the Catholic Church. While these origins should be qualified, the "mutual suspicion" felt by the two sides was, in part, justified; for example, the CFPs largely opposed such cornerstones of Western feminism as abortion rights. Instead, by situating the struggle of poor women in the concrete context of life in the *barrio*, they sought to tackle *machismo* and the position of women as an "integral phenomenon" comprising a multiplicity of aspects, most notably class.[15] Thus, in 1979, the CFPs described themselves as "a popular women's organization which seeks . . . the solution of the problems of the popular class in general and *not a feminist organization* which works only for women's rights."[16]

There was little more threatening to the prevailing order than such attempts by radical political activists and guerrillas to establish substantial relationships with the swelling masses of urban poor. But whereas efforts by groupings like the Social-Historic Current were met with overt repression, the women's movement met more with the velvet glove than the iron fist. The two parties comprising *puntofijista* democracy—and Democratic Action in particular — were by now expert in their ability to incorporate previously oppositional movements into their fold, and thus it was that Carlos Andrés Pérez, under pressure from women in his own party, established the Women's Advisory Commission to the President in 1974. In 1979, true to the Betancourt tradition, President Luis Herrera Campins continued the effort to fully incorporate women into Venezuela's institutional structure by creating a women's ministry that bore the revealing title of Ministry for the Participation of Women in Development. Despite the clearly conditional and dependent role of women, who seemed to be valued only insofar as they might "participate" in "development," Carosio nevertheless expresses what was a widespread sense of relief, since "at least women were there."

Not only were women "there," they would use whatever small institutional footholds were provided as a strategic fulcrum for more radical developments, rendering government attempts to take the wind out of their sails only partially successful at best.[17] The establishment of the ministry set the stage for the women's movement's first big legal struggle: the 1982 reform of the Civil Code, which received the support of many institutional sectors, including President Herrera Campins himself. While the concrete activity of pushing for the reform helped to bring women together and establish the basis for more radical activity, this did not mean that the divisions that previously had racked the women's movement had dissipated, and Friedman notes the overwhelmingly middle-class character of many of the reform efforts: by focusing their attention on property, marriage and divorce, and labor outside the home, such reforms tacitly favored the more privileged women to whom such formal protections would be afforded.[18] Where such cross-class unity did indeed develop, it was often the result of concrete cases rather than organized reform campaigns.[19]

It was out of both the co-optation efforts of the Women's Advisory Commission to the President and the concrete struggle for Civil Code reform that arguably the most important single movement of women in recent Venezuelan history emerged: the Coordinator of Non-Governmental Women's Organizations (or Women's CONG). As the third United Nations Conference on Women approached in 1985, a small group of radical women and feminists came together to establish an alternative umbrella organization capable of drawing together these two distinct threads of the women's movement in defiance of efforts toward their institutionalization. Despite the "mutual suspicion" that existed between "feminist feminists" and popular women's organizations, Carosio insists that in the CONG, "many different ways of doing feminism converged." But despite this insistence on "different ways of doing feminism," this convergence was not without its conflict; the division between pure feminists and party women reared its head almost immediately. When feminists attempted to exclude party women from the CONG entirely by prohibiting double militancy, Nora Castañeda and Movement toward Socialism founder Argelia Laya (also a Communist Party guerrilla) successfully beat back this early threat to the unity of the women's movement.

Despite the persistence of divisions, however, by beginning to work through these occasionally fraught questions with an aspiration to unifying the women's struggle, according to Carosio, "women began to come together, *ca'vez más*, *ca'vez más*, more and more all the time." Despite its initial anti-institutional energy, however, the CONG was pulled immediately in two seemingly opposing directions: toward women's participation in the state (what some have called the new "femocracy") and toward the provision of those services abandoned by that state in its "minimal" neoliberal turn. For Carosio, it was this division and specialization of the 1990s that meant the real "institutionalization of feminism," in which "the anti-establishment character of feminism was placated . . . and its anti-establishment capacity was deactivated to some degree."

For party women like Nora Castañeda, double militancy allowed some room to sidestep this process of institutionalization. She remained in the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) even after it abandoned the armed struggle, only leaving when it joined Petkoff's (and Laya's) Movement toward Socialism (MAS) in the early 1980s. After spending more than a decade as a nominally independent women's organizer, Castañeda would later reunite with other former MIR comrades Lídice Navas and Fernando Soto Rojas in the re-founded Liga Socialista (Socialist League), but her decision to rejoin a party was not without its conditions. "I joined on the condition that I would develop a double-militancy — as a member of Liga Socialista and as a member of the women's movement — and that Liga Socialista wouldn't try to trap the women's movement within the party. To the contrary: it was Liga Socialista that would be *at the service of* the women's movement. This was a commitment that was fulfilled." While fulfilling this commitment to the women's movement, Liga Socialista and a multitude of other organizations were simultaneously fulfilling a commitment to the Venezuelan popular sector more generally by participating both legally and clandestinely in the popular upsurge that propelled Chávez to the presidency.

In a pattern that would be recreated in many movements under the

Fourth and Fifth (Bolivarian) Republics alike, efforts to control the women's movement gave rise to new forms of resistance, which used what institutional leverage they had to push increasingly radical demands. Thus the Ministry for the Participation of Women in Development led to the reform of the Civil Code, thereby providing the basis for the organizational supersession of government co-optation attempts (with the CONG in 1985) as well as the effort to reform the Organic Labor Law (1990), the creation of the Women's Ministry, proposals for a Domestic Violence Law (put forth as a proposal in 1990, as a draft in 1996, and finally approved in 1998), the creation of a National Women's Council (Conamu, 1992) to replace the Women's Advisory Commission to the President, and the reform of the Suffrage Law to include quotas of women on party tickets (1997). This was, therefore, not an inevitable progression as liberal historiography would have it, but instead a process marked by a dynamic and often conflictive interplay between movements and the state. This dynamic would be most visible in relation to the drafting of the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution, the replacement of Conamu with Inamujer and the creation of the Defender of the Rights of Women (2000).

Chávez and the Constitution

Like so many other social movements in Venezuela, the women's movement, despite its critiques, has greeted the Bolivarian Revolution with a near-unanimous degree of enthusiasm. In Alba Carosio's words: "Before Chávez came to power, it was like a stone was on top of society weighing it down," as the generalized energy of the 1970s had given way to the dispersal of struggles. With Chávez's 1998 electoral victory and the impending constituent assembly, this stone was not lifted immediately, but the relationship between movement and state — the intricate dance whereby women attempted to take advantage of institutional support while avoiding its dangers — assumed an entirely new form. This was largely due to the importance of the new constitution itself, which represented for women, as for other movements, not merely another small reform in a long history of partial steps, but a massively important qualitative leap that provided, in turn, a foothold for further radicalization. According to Carosio, women — especially leftist women — pushed for four major provisions in the new constitution: the constitutionally binding nature of international agreements, affirmative action and reparations for women, sexual and reproductive rights, and recognition of the value of domestic labor.

As Nora Castañeda describes the process, in so doing, the women involved rejected a strictly feminist approach, seeking to foreground "the human rights of women, but not just any women: women in poverty, from the perspective of gender and class." While the CONG played a significant role in putting forth the women's demands, Castañeda adds that a leading role was played by Afro-Venezuelan women, by women rooted in Liberation Theology, as well as by party women from the Communist Party and Liga Socialista. For her part, Castañeda refuses to speak in terms of "demands," but instead "what we're going to push [*impulsar*] . . . This was a *propositive* relationship, and not one of demand and wait for them to give us something." And so the radical women's movement embarked upon a dual strategy of pressuring the Assembly through Conamu, which had recently come under the leadership of CONG member María León, and directly through the mobilization of "women's base organizations" in the streets.

With regard to women's presence in the streets, Castañeda insists that "we had a strategy: to be present *every day* in the Constituent Assembly . . . we were *always there*, and the indigenous movement had a similar strategy," which contributed to the striking success both sectors achieved. While some prominent Chavistas within the Assembly attempted to shrug off women's demands as they had shrugged off those of indigenous and Afro-Venezuelans, the women's movement also confronted some of its most serious opposition in the streets. Despite the fact that many of the women involved identified as Catholic,

> the Catholic Church, or rather the Catholic Church *hierarchy*, tried to make us out to be abortionists, [to say] that we were there to make sure that abortion was included in the Constitution. But we had already decided that we weren't going to deal with this subject for the Constitution . . . What we *did* deal with were the sexual and reproductive rights of women . . . The hierarchy insisted that behind this, we were going to push for abortion. And so they showed up there with horrendous photos of a terribly mutilated aborted fetus.

While this scene is certainly reminiscent of the anti-abortion movement in the United States, the response by Castañeda and others was one that might fit less comfortably within a North American feminism but it was arguably more successful in controlling the terms of the debate. They appeared outside the Constituent Assembly with flowers in an effort to present themselves according to maternal imagery as "life-givers" who sought to contribute to "a Constitution that would guarantee the lives of women . . . In the end we were successful, because every day we gave the assembly deputies pamphlets and every day we gave them flowers — that was so expensive for us! The Church hierarchy gave them . . . symbols of death and we gave symbols of life!" It was this effort in the streets that would prove decisive to their success, and this success was resounding: all four proposals were included in the Constitution. With regard to these successes and the "nonsexist language" in which the Constitution was drafted, Castañeda is veritably exultant: "We believe that this is the most revolutionary constitution *in the world* at this point in time, both in its content and in its language, but this was *because the organized women set themselves to work on it*."

After the drafting of the new Constitution, "some of the most important and committed feminists began to form part of the state, the new state." María del Mar Álvarez de Lovera (widow of the "disappeared" communist Alberto Lovera) was named first National Defender of Women, Nora Castañeda was chosen to head up Banmujer, and María León, former head of Conamu, took the reins of the latter's successor institution, Inamujer, and was eventually named first minister of women's affairs. In what follows, I will discuss in detail two elements of the state action that ensued. The first, embodying simultaneously the hopes and frustrations of the Constitution, is Article 88, which enshrines wages for housework for the first time in any country on earth. The second, on what Carosio calls the "reparative" side, is the establishment of the Women's Bank, although, as we will see, there is much debate as to the merely "reparative" status of this project.

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

No victory of the recent women's movement is so fraught with both expectation and discouragement than that of wages for housework, enshrined in Article 88 of the 1999 Constitution according to the following brief words: "The state recognizes work at home as an economic activity that creates added value and produces social welfare and wealth. Housewives are entitled to Social Security in accordance with law." How is it that it took a revolution in Latin America to legally enshrine wages for housework, one of the most radical elements of the European revolutionary feminist tradition? Part of the answer to this question revolves in a coincidental way around the figure of Selma James, the former partner and comrade of the late C. L. R. James and a participant first in the Trotskyist Johnson-Forest Tendency and later in the European revolutionary women's movement. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, a 1971 pamphlet penned jointly with Italian feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa, James sought to confront the traditional Marxist blind spot toward unpaid labor in the home (an exclusion of the sphere of reproduction that parallels the Marxist exclusion of circulation, which is discussed further in chapter 9).[20] Because household labor constitutes a necessary precondition for the functioning of the capitalist economy and because the entire working class rests on the backs of unwaged labor, specifically that of women, activists in the 1970s began to demand that this labor be recompensed.

But Venezuelan women did not merely import the framework of wages for housework from European feminism. In fact, exactly the opposite was the case; what emerged as an organic demand of the Venezuelan women's movement was initially opposed by their European counterparts: when the CONG and other Third World feminists had put forth a demand for recognizing domestic labor at the international women's conferences in Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), this was firmly rejected by their First World colleagues, who allegedly feared that it would provide the basis for Third World women "to demand what is theirs." It was this kind of response to the demand for wages for housework that led some activists to characterize Article 88 as "anti-imperialist."[21] While many of the "feminist feminists" of the 1970s were likely familiar with James' and Dalla Costa's work, Castañeda had not even heard of the book until decades later, when Selma James — in her more recent incarnation as head of the international network around reproductive labor known as Global Women's Strike — threw her weight behind the Bolivarian Constitution and Article 88.[22]

However, by demanding wages for housework, women from Europe as well as those from the Third World often faced (and still face) the following concern: if the wage is the basis for capitalism, how does this demand that housework be waged not re-inscribe women within capitalism? For James and Dalla Costa, this question reflects a misunderstanding of the wage itself, which, true to the autonomist tradition, they interpret not as the basis of capitalist power but as a moment of struggle and a *measure* of the power of the working classes. As James is fond of saying, "wages for anyone is bad for business," or, in other words, capital would pay workers nothing if this were possible (as is and has been the case with reproductive labor in the home).[23] What matters most is that the wage is a material starting point for a struggle for women's power more generally understood, and *having* a wage plays a strategic role in that struggle.[24] This is precisely how many radical women's organizers in Venezuela understand the promise of Article 88: not as ensuring that capitalism successfully incorporates women as well as men, but as providing a material basis for women's liberation from the economic conditions that often lock them into relations of dependency; not as trapping women's labor within the labor market but instead "totally revolutionizing the concept of work" itself.[25]

When asked how it was that women from a so-called underdeveloped country were able to succeed in demanding wages for housework where European women had largely failed, Castañeda is clear: "We were revolutionary militants for 20 years before becoming feminists, that's the difference between here and 1970s Italy." While the same could be said of Selma James, I take Castañeda's point to be a collective one rather than an individual one: it was the power and perspective of revolutionary movements that made seemingly reformist measures possible and filled them with more radical content, and in Venezuela, many such movements find their origins in the revolutionary armed struggle. But while successes on the level of the Constitution have been significant, a vast gulf exists between enshrinement and execution. After all, if every homemaker is promised a wage, where does the money come from? In ways that have been both understandable and unacceptable, budgetary restrictions have limited the impact of Article 88 up to this point. It was not until *six years* after the Constitution was drafted and approved that Article 88 was implemented in the form of the Mothers of the *Barrio* Mission, and even this Mission was limited both quantitatively and qualitatively: at best, it sought to provide a temporary salary to 300,000 poor homemakers, and it is unlikely that even this figure was ever reached in practice.

Although some feminists might regard the very name of the mission as essentializing the household and women's role therein, and although some revolutionaries might complain that such a mission is oriented purely toward social welfare, Castañeda's response to both concerns is the same: "You can't tell a woman with three young children and no access to work that she needs to be independent. . . . To do theory is one thing, but when you arrive at reality, you need to have human understanding . . . without support, many women will *never* leave such a position." And besides, she adds, the fact that middle-class women have largely rejected Article 88 and many of those embracing it have been poor, single mothers suggests that, in practice, it does little to reify the bourgeois family.[26] However, by limiting these incomes to women who were poor and who frequently participated in additional social work in their communities, the powerful impetus of *universally* valorizing domestic labor threatened to disappear into simply another social program.[27] Castañeda recognizes, of course, that Mothers of the *Barrio* was not the best way of concretizing Article 88, but she insists that it does have the potential to politicize domestic work and radicalize women. Thus, while functioning on the one hand "like a palliative, *mientras tanto*, in the meantime," it is also the material and political precondition to the liberation, politicization, and empowerment of many of Venezuela's poorest women.

THE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT BANK

Similar debates surround the other forms through which the revolution has institutionalized and implemented the women's demands incorporated into the Constitution. The Women's Development Bank (Banmujer), for which Nora Castañeda currently serves as president, was founded to provide microcredits to poor women for the creation of small production collectives.[28] While broadly supportive of institutions like Banmujer, however, some revolutionary feminists like Jessie Blanco fear the impact of institutionalizing the women's movement and the danger that it might be relegated to a function of "administrating poverty rather than attacking it."[29] "We have been administrating poverty for more than 70 years!" she exclaims, insinuating that this continuity has escaped many women leaders. "Social achievements aren't made by ministries, but by social movements, by education, by the people, by a popular women's revolution," she insists, indicating with no trace of ambiguity that a systematic approach to eradicating poverty — a poverty in which "women are the poorest of the poor" — requires nothing short of a total revolution.

Institutions such as Banmujer, however, serve a double function, and even Blanco recognizes this: "I value very much the work of Nora Castañeda, but not for the question of poverty, a conception I don't share, but instead because her work isn't only that, she has contributed to an entire process of women's education and self-organization. Because requesting a credit to set up a sewing business, that's not going to create transformation or revolution, it puts food on the table, it's the most basic thing, *me entiendes*? This government is trapped by the repayment of the social debt of past governments, and that's not revolution. . . ." Indeed, this is a dual function that Castañeda admits: Banmujer provides both the financial credits necessary to pull women out of the worst of poverty and reduce gender dependency while simultaneously packaging these credits alongside a revolutionary political education and the self-empowerment that comes with organizing collectively. Here, Lídice Navas is clear about how she sees the function of the Women's Bank: "We don't administrate poverty," she insists, seeing financial credits almost as a sort of bait that attracts women for the "cardinal purpose of education and organization."

This dual character of institutions like Banmujer results both from those who have been chosen to run it — drawn largely from the ranks of longtime revolutionary militants — as well as the organizational model it has assumed, which has far more in common with the CFPs than with previous state institutions.[30] "Banmujer was built according to the experiences of the women's base organizations," Castañeda insists, adding that "everything that we had fought for in those organizations, we have now incorporated as policies of the Venezuelan state . . . The idea is for us to empower the women's movement *from* the government, but always bearing in mind the entire experience developed by the bases." Navas uses a similar language of empowerment to describe the function of the Women's Ministry, as well as the "push" and "support" that Chávez himself has provided women, which is not paternalistic but rather comradely and encouraging, freeing their hands and urging them to seize the opportunity to throw themselves into constructing a new society: "Women have a very important role to play in training the new generations in a new socialist ethic, a distinctive perspective, one of solidarity, mutual respect, co-responsibility, transparency. Women have shown that they have these capacities, and at this moment it is our task to take on that responsibility." Thus, while many revolutionary women are not blind to the potential dangers of institutionalization, a perennial risk to social movements in general and the women's movement in particular, they nevertheless insist that the current phase is qualitatively different from the situation confronted under previous, reactionary governments.

The Autonomy Question

According to Jesse Blanco, "The biggest issue for the women's movement . . . is the appearance of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the question of institutionalism," which, in line with the subtext of this entire book, is another way of saying that the fundamental issue is one of the relationship between movement autonomy and the Bolivarian Revolution as a whole. While she identifies as a socialist, Blanco's anarchist background leads her to worry that the movement is today being co-opted and demobilized as a result of the presence of a revolutionary government.[31] Many feminists, she argues, "make the mistake of thinking the battle is already won" simply because Chávez was elected: "We end up talking as though *we* were the government." Blanco's critique is aimed less at grassroots revolutionaries like Castañeda than at those like María León, a longtime communist and women's leader who currently leads the newly established Women's Ministry.

While Blanco supports the Bolivarian Process and the establishment of a ministry tasked with embodying the women's struggle on an institutional level, in an article entitled "Is Our Socialism Feminist?" she takes aim at some controversial statements by León. In a 2005 interview, the then-president of Inamujer described the relationship between the women's movement and Chávez in the following eulogistic terms: "There is nothing above the President's leadership in this country, God and God alone stands with Chávez. And if our President takes on the decision to unite the women's movements, they need to unite . . . uniting women is a task of President Hugo Chávez, as was the task of uniting our people . . . [32] By making such profoundly uncritical statements, León and others fall into what Blanco calls a "dangerous trap": "they have delegated their autonomy, they have delegated all of those things which predate Chávez, which were the result of historic social struggles, construction and contradiction, how to advance and when to withdraw," or, in other words, the entire history that fills these pages.

Rather than delegating movement autonomy, Blanco insists that now is the time to insist more than ever on that autonomy since future gains will not be made without continued struggle. In fact, in Blanco's view, there has been nothing *but* struggle since Chávez took power: struggle infused with a new hope and optimism, struggle fired by victories large and small, struggle *alongside* and *with* many sectors of the revolution, but struggle nonetheless. It has been this struggle above all others that Blanco has attempted to foster and deepen in her articles and through her participation alongside (but not as a member of) the women's section of Patria Para Todos, aptly named for none other than Manuelita Sáenz. "As feminists or as female Venezuelan fighters for socialism, we are ourselves governed by the contradiction inherent in fighting the battle against all forms of oppression and discrimination, both of gender and of social class, against patriarchy and against capitalism . . . For that reason we have a great historical task: to conceive and give birth to a socialism that is not only anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist but also, above all, anti-patriarchal."[33]

In other words, autonomy for Blanco does not mean, as is the case for some bourgeois or academic feminists (for whom she has equally harsh words), autonomy from social struggles or the autonomy to be "pure feminists." It is instead an autonomy that is fundamentally intertwined with the intersectional position that many Venezuelan women occupy, and Blanco is concerned that the state "is becoming increasingly controlling, and it's encouraging the people to withdraw. . . . A new system of political exclusion is being created, and that's an error." Thus, while recognizing in no uncertain terms that "it's not the same thing to have a leftist feminism in the context of a leftist government as a rightist one" and that "the Venezuelan situation is much more complex" than many in the opposition recognize, there is nevertheless a danger that movements might lose their momentum and autonomy in the face of a creeping state bureaucracy.[34]

When I ask Nora Castañeda, herself veteran of more than 50 years of revolutionary struggle, about Blanco's concern for autonomy, she seems perplexed by the very terms of the question. Why is it the women, and not Chávez, who are losing autonomy in this process? Is her confusion rooted in the unbounded optimism and exhilaration of the present moment? Such optimism would hardly hold up to the decades of disappointment and repression that she and others have faced in their lives. As we have seen, the failures of the guerrilla struggle vaccinate against just this sort of optimism, and this is a lesson that Castañeda knows the consequences of better than others. Rather, it seems more likely that these decades of experience—experience in the trenches and alongside the people, not in the halls of power or among the vanguardist elite—make Castañeda and others like her peculiarly qualified judges of popular power, its realities, its potentials, and its setbacks.

Pointing a worn fingertip at her desk and drawing a triangle connected by bidirectional arrows, Castañeda describes how Chávez made possible the closure of the triangle of the Constitution, the organized people, and their leader. The role of the individual in history is a central one, she insists, and Chávez operates as a centripetal pole, drawing the struggle together, concentrating it like a single fist or the point of a spear: "So we're talking about a leader, yes, but also about the organized people and a platform for struggle, a program *around which* we united." Here, dissenting from María León's exaggerated Chavismo, she insists: "We didn't unite around the President, but around the program"—and this program in fact developed *against* the president at certain points—"but that program and those people need the leader: it's a trilogy." This gathering together of elements around this "trilogy" of forces, this closed triangle of the Bolivarian Revolution, is a process that Chávez is as much *subjected to* as he is a *subject of*: "The President can give speeches, but if those speeches don't find an echo among the people: *¡olvídalo!* Forget about it!"

The determining weight of popular revolutionary social movements, the imperative need for Chávez to "find an echo among the people," leads Nora Castañeda to a very different understanding—indeed, a total inversion—of the question of autonomy as posed by those more suspicious of the president and the state more generally: “So you could say that we are losing our autonomy, or you could say instead that the President is losing *his* autonomy. Why not? . . . One day the President asked me: ‘Nora, I want to strengthen Banmujer, with new programs, programs for disabled women, for the women . . . what is it that you call them? Sex workers?’ I said to him, ‘Yes, President, but that’s a very complicated, prickly subject.’ And you know, when he spoke he said ‘for the sex workers.’ So he’s the one who’s losing his autonomy, not us.”

This forced shift in the president’s consciousness is perhaps best expressed in the words he shared about none other than Manuela Sáenz at an international women’s forum in 2003: “Manuela was truly a great revolutionary, but in that badly written history that they told to us, that imperialist history, that *machista* history, that exclusionary history that they sold to us, that they injected into us for a long time, Manuela was presented as Bolívar’s lover. But while she was of course Bolívar’s lover — and *Bolívar her lover as well* — she was much more than that . . . Equality is no trick [*Lo que es igual no es trampa*] . . . We cannot fully understand Bolívar without Manuela Sáenz.”[35] To those like Blanco, for whom the loss of autonomy is the primary concern facing the women’s movement under Chávez as it was under reactionary governments, Castañeda is blunt: “What I want to say is that the *compañera* doesn’t understand a thing.”

Manuelita Reloaded

It is May 2007 and tensions over the nonrenewal of RCTV’s public broadcast license have reached their apex; the city of Caracas is divided between the fireworks of celebration and the burning barricades of outraged elites (see chapter 4). A march led by anti-Chavista students has left the Central University, winding westward in an attempt to reach the seat of power in old Caracas. The marchers pause halfway, in Plaza Morelos, to compose their forces and steel themselves for what is expected to be a confrontational passage through Chavista territory. As they prepare to depart, pushing out into Avenida México, these opponents of the Chávez regime confront not only riot police, but one of the president’s most vociferous supporters: Lina Ron. Riding at the head of a phalanx of motorcycles that trail the maroon and yellow flags of her Venezuelan Popular Unity organization, flags that, not coincidentally, also bear the image of a fist punching a palm (an informal symbol of the Chavistas taking the fight to the enemy), Ron is flanked by a group of burly men with weapons drawn. The police, uncomfortably positioned between two forces, are unsure how to proceed and finally negotiate an end to the standoff.

I cannot help but be reminded of yet another description of Manuelita Sáenz who, in the words of García Márquez, "her lance at the ready . . . pursued those who distributed broadsides against the General," physically attacking those sullying Bolívar's name "in the company of two of her warrior slavewomen."[36] Ron, who died of a stroke in early 2011, was not a "liberator of the liberator," however, but a "*comandante*" in her own right, as Chávez frequently referred to her. She openly disrupted gender norms with her image as with her behavior: her hair bleached blonde but pulled up into a cap, she spurned Venezuelan beauty standards while ruling over her largely male organization with the iron fist of a dictator. Her relationship with the president, moreover, was far from smooth: Chávez would oscillate between publicly serenading her from the stage at rallies to having her arrested for provoking and even attacking the regime's opponents, as when Venezuelan Popular Unity and others stormed opposition media outlet Globovisión in August 2009, throwing tear gas canisters.

This image of a new revolutionary femininity, one among many possible variants, also combines in the most paradoxical form the tension that exists over Chávez's role in the revolutionary process. Well known for her occasionally blind support for the maximum leader of the process, as expressed in her popularization of the phrase "with Chávez, everything, without Chávez, nothing," Ron nevertheless simultaneously stands behind another more militant slogan that many would consider to be its exact opposite: "Only the people can save the people." When asked what it means to be a Bolivarian woman, she responded: "It means to be golden in your words, clean in all your actions, a lover of the weak, courageous against evil, a friend of the good, and always dedicated to service. It means to give everything without expecting anything, it means having no time to sleep or eat, it means to be a prisoner and to suffer under all the humiliation and ill-treatment of the past, present, and future."[37] However, unlike *Marianismo*, this service is not undertaken and this suffering is not endured for a male counterpart, but for a revolution of society as a whole. If we could refer to Manuelita similarly as a "Bolivarian woman," which we could only do in constant conjunction with the insistence that Bolívar was a "Sáenzian man," we could say that she too reflected this same spirit of revolutionary discipline and service, only to be repaid more than her due in terms of the "ill-treatment of the past."

Of the neglect that Manuelita Sáenz had received at the hands of a history written by men, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda penned the following poignant words:

> I stopped a child, a passerby,
> an old man,
> and no one knew where
> Manuelita died,
> which was her house,
> or even of where, now,
> lay the dust of her bones.[38]

This final line was more than mere hyperbole or rhetorical flourish: in the poem's title, Neruda refers to Manuelita as the "unburied of Paita," for the Peruvian city in which she died of diphtheria in utter destitution, to be buried in an unmarked mass grave.[39] More recently, however, as the role of women in the Bolivarian Process has grown and as Manuelita has been reborn as a historical figure in her own right, this "unburied" leader of Latin American liberation and the "dust of her bones" that so preoccupied Neruda would, in fact, enjoy a proper burial. In July 2010, the symbolic remains of Manuelita Sáenz were disinterred for one final journey, passing through the countries previously comprising the Gran Colombia for which she and Bolívar fought — Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and, finally, Venezuela — to be, in the words of the poet Luis Britto, "reunited with Bolívar in Caracas."[40] In what can be seen only as a direct response to Neruda's poem, Britto writes of Manuelita's remains: "We have always known where they were: those ashes are the continent on which we stand. Neither the freedom they sowed nor the passion they felt have been extinguished. As Quevedo said in his 'Love Constant Beyond Death': dust they will be, but dust in love."[41]

Six. José Leonardo's Body and the Collapse of *Mestizaje*

It depends, *compañero*, on how the leather is used,
if it's a whip in the hands of the master
which makes you, the black slave, cry.
If the drum is leather, this is something else, *compañero*,
the laughter of the drum reconciles you with Mandinga.
—Alí Primera

December 1552

Long before Toussaint L'Ouverture, what was quite possibly the first serious rebellion by black slaves in the Americas nearly became a genuine revolution. But the first shot in this protracted war against conquest and slavery was fired in 1499 by Venezuela's indigenous population at Puerto Flechado, whose name derives from the torrent of arrows that rained down upon the explorer Alonso de Ojeda as he approached the coast.[1] The two thousand warriors who met Ojeda, armed with "clubs, bows, and arrows," were considered at the time a "strange novelty" compared with the "hospitality, benevolence, and respect" the invaders purportedly had encountered elsewhere.[2] This jutting stretch of Falcón State, between Puerto Cabello to the east and Coro to the west, would prove one of the most rebellious areas of Venezuela for centuries to come, and while resistance might have seemed a "novelty" at the time, the Spanish were in for much more of the same:

when Ojeda returned a decade later to conquer the stretch further west near the coastal border with Colombia, his entire crew was slaughtered.[3]

Just as my history seeks primarily to disrupt the "myth of harmony" that prevailed during the 1970s and 1980s — a myth premised on the erasure of all disruptive voices — so too have previous critical historians sought to debunk similar myths, specifically the claim that the early phases of the Spanish conquest were "more or less calm" and even "idyllic."[4] Such myths are as tenacious as they are pernicious, a perennial temptation for elites seeking to assuage a guilty conscience. For one such critical historian, Manuel Vicente Magallanes, "Venezuela has always been inhabited by peoples with a chronic love for liberty"; he sets about revealing those intermittent explosions that disrupt self-congratulatory historical accounts that serve power rather than liberation, tracking in minute detail those moments in which indigenous Venezuelans and kidnapped slaves demonstrated their equality by practicing it in rebellion.[5]

During this earliest stage of indigenous rebellion, the fiercest and most notorious were without a doubt the Jirajaras, who reduced local colonists to an almost perpetual state of terror for nearly a century.[6] Their fierceness notwithstanding, however, the Jirajaras were eventually forced back from the coast, settling in the mountains near Nirgua in what is today Yaracuy State, just southwest of Puerto Flechado itself. It was but a few short miles from Nirgua, in the small gold-mining town of Buría, that Venezuela's first "revolution" exploded into history only to be quickly erased.[7] In late 1552, Miguel del Barrio, a Puerto Rican–born slave recently sold into mine labor in Buría, led some twenty slaves and Jirajara Indians in a frontal attack against the Spanish troops guarding the mine. Victorious in these initial skirmishes, the rebels retreated into the nearby mountains, where they established an independent state that was ostensibly patterned on the colonial order but nevertheless imbued with an entirely new content: now numbering several hundred, this Afro-indigenous army crowned Miguel their king and his wife Guiomar their queen.[8]

The rebels then proceeded to mount an even more significant offensive against the colonists in the valley below, and in this the participation of the Jirajaras was both material and symbolic: their faces painted black with the juice of the *jagua*, a local fruit, they provided a squadron in support of Miguel's attack on New Segovia.[9] Although arguably customary at the time, it is worth imagining the terror of the Spanish when confronted by this specter of Afro-indigenous unity worn on the skin. It is unclear how long such unity lasted and how precisely the rebellion was crushed: some estimate that King Miguel ruled over this small and mobile nation-in-rebellion for more than two years, terrorizing the colonists all the while.[10] If the Haitian Revolution would later be systematically erased from historic memory, the rebellion of King Miguel has been purged even more fully, despite its continuing resonance among some Afro-Venezuelan organizers to this day.[11] But this resonance should not be limited to Afro-Venezuelans: Miguel's revolution was one in which slaves and indigenous people played an equal part. While thousands of miles away, Spanish priests like Bartolomé de las Casas defended the humanity of indigenous peoples while condemning Africans to the purgatory of perpetual enslaveability, Miguel and his compatriots embodied unity in the struggle for liberation itself.

Was this rebellion against slavery and colonization merely preemptive, and was the unity it engendered but a naïve dream to be deferred indefinitely? Perhaps, in the words of the Venezuelan poet Manuel Rugeles:

Still another century, King Miguel,
lost perhaps in the heavens,
looking for mines of gold
to adorn the hair of your queen.
Still another century, King Miguel,
King of the Blacks.[12]

If the Venezuelan masses would fire the first shot of the Fourth World War in their explosive 1989 response to neoliberal reform, then it is also true that they had fired the first metaphorical shot against global colonialism and slavery more than four centuries earlier. And this first shot was followed by a second, a third, as the flame of rebellion—here flickering, there burning brightly—leapt back and forth between slaves and indigenous people, eventually circulating throughout the Caribbean and across the Atlantic. Almost immediately, Miguel's rebellion emboldened the "valiant but haughty" Jirajaras, and, his defeat notwithstanding, the mines around Barquisimeto "for seventy-four years burned with an intensity that made labor impossible."[13] This unity would be encoded, too, on the very rebels themselves, as a deepening of *mestizaje* rendered firm phenotypic distinctions something of the past, but it would be more than two hundred years before the unity that Miguel had crafted in the heat of battle would be literally embodied in a new rebellion.

When Douglas Bravo took to the mountains of Falcón—not far from Puerto Flechado or Buría—he named his guerrilla front for José Leonardo Chirino.[14] Chirino himself was a product of *mestizaje* who wore Afro-indigenous unity on his skin and carried it in his blood: as a *zambo*, his father a slave and his mother indigenous, Chirino was born free. As the specter of revolution leapt from France to Haiti in the early 1790s, Venezuela was gripped by a spreading discontent: among slaves at their condition of enslavement, among Indians at the tributes they were forced to pay, and among the poor more generally over the increasingly severe *alcabala* taxes charged at customs houses. As in Haiti, rumors swirled that the Spanish had abolished slavery but that local leaders in Caracas refused to carry out the order.[15] However, this supremely flammable combination of discontents "would not have passed from agitation to the realm of action" without one additional element: the simultaneous examples of the French and Haitian Revolutions provided the spark.[16] This spark was carried by Chirino himself, who had traveled to San Domingo, met the rebels, and read their texts and those of their French contemporaries. C. L. R. James emphasizes how the Haitian revolutionaries both drew upon and re-signified the experiences of their continental counterparts, "constru[ing] it in their own image," but Chirino and his cohort continued to re-signify the importance of this generalized revolutionary wave to suit Venezuelan conditions, with a specific orientation toward Afro-indigenous unity.[17] On May 10, 1795, Chirino led hundreds of slaves in rebellion, calling for the establishment of a democratic republic based on the French model, the abolition of slavery, the elimination of tributes paid by the indigenous people and of the *alcabala* taxes, and the abolition of the white aristocracy.[18]

After seizing several local haciendas and killing a handful of whites, the slaves marched directly on Coro, but facing a serious counterattack, Chirino and his rebel army took to the Sierra of Curimagua, where he remained free for some months before finally being turned over for a reward in August 1795. When his sentence was passed down in December 1796 after an extensive trial that revealed the depth and breadth of the conspiracy, it became clear that Chirino's biracial body was not merely incidental to the crime. He was condemned:

> . . . to death by hanging to be carried out in the central plaza of this capital [Plaza Bolívar, Caracas] to which he will be dragged from the Royal Prison, and once his death [is] confirmed, his head and hands will be cut off and the former will be placed in an iron cage atop a post twenty feet in length on the road that leaves this same city toward Coro and the Aragua Valley, and the hands will be sent to that same city of Coro for one of them to be nailed to a post of the same height

> and set in the vicinity of the customs house in Caujarao, on the road to Curimagua, and the other in the same fashion high in the sierra.[19]

The precise status of the rebellion — whether it was the beginning of a struggle for independence or a battle for freedom for the slaves — is still debated to this day.[20] Perhaps this question is impossible to answer or wrongly formulated. Or, perhaps the answer is, in fact, "both": that what was sought was a creative ideological fusion generated on the basis of both revolutionary European ideas and the realities of slave existence, or what Afro-Venezuelan leader Jesús "Chucho" García deems "the construction of a specifically African idea of 'independence' in Venezuela."[21] After all, why should a slave not also want independence from a colonial master? And why, conversely, should that slave entrust her freedom entirely to the forces fighting only for national liberation?

These two simultaneous demands — for unity with nationalists and autonomy from them — reflect in many ways the broader dialectic that drives this book, translated into the terms of the Afro-indigenous struggle in the context of the Bolivarian Revolution. How to balance autonomous demands for one's own community with the broader demands of national liberation, of socialism, of a Bolivarian Revolution with a record toward such struggles that is patchy at best? In this struggle, moreover, *mestizaje* has come to play an even more complicated and even double role, representing both the potential for unified struggles and an ideology deployed *against* those struggles (even by some Chavistas), one that, rather than revealing the operations of power, serves instead to conceal them.

Two, Three, Many Indigenous Struggles

It is difficult to speak of the "indigenous struggle" in Venezuela as though it were a single and unified phenomenon. Despite long-standing cooperation and coordination on a national scale that would later give rise institutionally to the National Indian Council of Venezuela (CONIVE), there are ways in which aspects of this struggle could not be more distant from one another in terms of both history and the everyday challenges confronted by communities. This difference is personified in many ways by two high-profile indigenous leaders with whom I spoke: José Poyo and Liborio Guarulla. Poyo — until recently an indigenous representative to the National Assembly — hails from Anzoátegui State in eastern Venezuela and identifies as Kariña, one of the many indigenous communities that Europeans had lumped under the umbrella category of "Carib." While maintaining his Kariña identity, however, Poyo is among many who reappropriate and resignify the term *caribe* to denote all those who engaged in militant clashes with the Spanish colonizers, and it is this that sets more coastal indigenous communities like the *caribes* apart from more geographically and historically insulated ones. Given their location, the Kariña could not avoid conflict, and earlier than many others they learned the need to understand and master society's instruments of domination. "The invasion led to a hundred-year frontal battle," Poyo recounts with more than a little pride, and in reflecting on the defeat of the indigenous, he notably echoes the self-criticism of the Venezuelan guerrillas some centuries later: "when all was said and done, we were not defeated militarily." Rather, it was internal conflicts and divisions, often harnessed and manipulated by the Spanish, that proved their undoing.[22] They were divided and they were conquered: lessons for the present resound.

Guarulla, a renowned artist and current governor of Amazonas State in deep southern Venezuela, speaks of a very different and more recent history of domination. Born among the Baniva (a Maipurean-Arawak community), Guarulla explains how his people did not experience colonization until more than three hundred years after the *caribes* had begun their struggle and nearly a century after that struggle was definitively crushed. The Amazonas region, which borders similarly remote parts of Colombia and Brazil, was explored systematically by Alexander von Humboldt only around the turn of the nineteenth century, and when serious intervention by the white *criollo* Venezuelan population began, it centered around what would become the state capital, Puerto Ayacucho (founded in 1924); the importance of this area for the transport of rubber along the Orinoco River led the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez to construct the first road to the region. While Guarulla characterizes the effect on the surrounding areas as nothing short of "a massive genocide," areas further afield — such as eastern Amazonas, home to the Yanomami and others — remained largely untouched even into the 1960s. Thus, compared with the fate of the Caribes, conflict arrived much later to the indigenous Amazonians, and it was not with the Spanish but with their *criollo* descendants and the evangelical orders they empowered to intervene into the zone.[23]

The political implications of this divergent history are significant: these communities did not participate in the war of independence alongside the *criollos* as had many Caribes, and thus their experience with the predominant forces of Venezuelan society — and the national state that embodies those forces—has been marked by distant suspicion rather than any sense of collaboration in a shared national project. By contrast, Poyo is emphatically proud of indigenous participation in independence struggles; he cites specifically the close alliance between the *caribes* and General Manuel Piar, a mulatto who he claims was fluent in indigenous languages, and urges the reclamation of this history against prevailing efforts to erase it. Such differing histories find an echo in the tension between autonomy and collaboration that characterizes indigenous relations with the Bolivarian Revolution. The very different origins and histories of Poyo and Guarulla, which represent only two extremes among a far greater variety across Venezuela as a whole, have yielded in turn very different political trajectories. After early experiences in labor organizing between 1977 and 1979, where the Matancero movement, led by Radical Cause (LCR), "awakened his class consciousness and commitment to social struggles," Poyo turned his attention to indigenous organizing. He founded a number of indigenous youth organizations before playing an integral role in establishing the national structure that would become CONIVE in 1989, and in 2005, Poyo was elected as an indigenous representative to the National Assembly, where he has worked alongside the Chavista Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and, more recently, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.[24] Guarulla, by contrast, rose through more strictly political channels, joining the Movement toward Socialism during its "golden age" before abandoning it for LCR, whose decentralizing politics he felt more suited Amazonian reality. When LCR split, Guarulla followed the pro-Chávez majority into the Patria Para Todos, serving as a representative to the 1999 Constituent Assembly. Later, he ran for governor of Amazonas in the "mega-elections" of 2000, initially losing to the Democratic Action candidate, but after convincing the Supreme Court that the elections were fraudulent, he was elected successfully as governor in 2001.

As is so often the case, however, such differences are reduced to the same under the heavy weight of contemporary racism, and it is this dynamic opposition between homogenization and distinction that will mark both the indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan struggles as well as the occasionally fraught relationship between the two. Whereas colonial laws in Venezuela had long sought to prevent the "mixing" of African slaves with indigenous peoples as a mutually corrupting practice, such *mestizaje* soon came to be viewed by elites not as the *cause* of the country's ills, but as its *solution*. By the twentieth century, *mestizaje* had become a two-pronged state strategy aimed at encouraging white immigration from Europe on the one hand and the "destruction of collective forms of communal property" on the other.[25]

The Indian was to become a peasant as the country as a whole became whiter. The ideological reverberations of this very material policy of *mestizaje* remains powerful in the present, serving to conceal Venezuelan racism beneath the oft-repeated mantra: "We are all *mestizos*."[26]

The Cimarrón Front

Before meeting Jesús "Chucho" García, founder and leading figure of the Afro-Venezuelan Network, I had discovered something about his past that was surprising at the time but perhaps should not have been. García, too, was a guerrilla, a member of the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV) operating largely through its legal front, Ruptura. When I mention this to him in a room full of Afro-Venezuelan leaders, the jig seems to be up: there are chuckles and exclamations, "*pero, coño*, you must have been reading my DIGEPOL file!"[27] His laughter reveals that this was something of an open secret, but in this strange period of Venezuelan history, one of ostensible openness paired with anxious clandestinity, it sometimes seems as if every secret is open and every openness cloaks a secret.

García hails from the historically black zone of Barlovento, a loosely defined region spanning more than half of Miranda State, just east of Caracas, and known historically for cacao cultivation. It was between Barlovento and the capital that one of the more serious slave rebellions of Venezuelan history — the 1747–49 insurrection fomented by Miguel Luengo — left behind a lasting impact and a fierce culture of resistance.[28] Given its location between the coast and the mountains, Barlovento was strategic for the guerrillas and therefore for the government as well: it was here that the Revolutionary Left Movement's (MIR) Bachiller guerrilla front would sink its combative roots, and here that, in 1967, Cuban-supported guerrillas seeking to reinforce the rebels landed and were apprehended near the town of Machurucuto. In response, president Raúl Leoni's government placed its contradictions on full view, carpet bombing the region as a part of its "pacification" campaign. As a result, many Afro-Venezuelans found themselves integrated into the guerrilla struggle by mere geographical circumstance, and García recalls the presence of a "Cimarrón Cell" under Fabricio Ojeda's leadership, many of whose participants followed Ojeda into the PRV. However, despite their identification as *cimarrones* — invoking a long history of escaped slaves — many participated in the armed struggle without linking it to any kind of identity as Afro-descended peoples, and this disconnect of politics from identity is one that worries García even today.

Once in the PRV, García dedicated himself largely to cultural work through the less clandestine channels of Ruptura, organizing militant cultural resistance first in Barlovento and later in the southwestern outskirts of the capital itself, where he founded of the Caricuao Cultural Front, at the time the first cultural network in all Venezuela. There, in an important suburb surrounded by an ever increasing *barrio* population, he and others dedicated themselves to "fighting the racist-fascist regime of Carlos Andrés Pérez" during the latter's first administration in the 1970s. Inspired by Amilcar Cabral's writings on culture, García considered their work on the cultural front to be "*the* key work of the revolution, because it allowed for the linking and unification of all the *barrios* under a single umbrella," and the stakes were certainly as high as any military action: "During that period, if they caught you painting graffiti, they would kill you." For their efforts, which included a full shutdown of all Caricuao, García and others were rewarded with imprisonment and torture.[29]

It was within the PRV that García and other Afro-Venezuelan guerrillas made a key strategic discovery that remains relevant to their struggles up to the present. When I ask if it is true that the PRV fostered a greater openness to heterodox questions of ethnicity and culture than previous organizations, García agrees, but, like Carlos Lanz and Juvenal, he adds that this reputation for theoretical experimentation is exaggerated. He himself raised the subject of Afro-Venezuelan struggles within the PRV, but, as he recalls with an exasperation that has not faded with the decades, at the time it was far easier for the guerrillas to talk about the Palestinian struggle than struggles in their own backyard.[30] Yes, such debates *began* within the PRV, García insists, but they were hardly finished there. Moreover—and here is the crucial strategic point for the present: "It was *only* as a result of us fighting them and all of the *coñazos*, the blows that we gave them that some openness developed." In other words, it was only as a result of the autonomous struggles of Afro-Venezuelans—their capacity to force their comrades to take their concerns seriously—that their demands were incorporated into the PRV program, and this dialectic of autonomous conflict is one that is central to grasping more generally the relationship between unity and autonomy in the Bolivarian process today.

For Chucho García, the history of the Afro-Venezuelan movement can be divided into two stages, marked by the watershed event that was the creation of the Afro-Venezuelan Network. But this is more than mere organizational nationalism; what was important was not so much the formal establishment of the organization, but the substantive shift it reflected in Afro-Venezuelan politics. Previous Afro organizations had dedicated themselves primarily to cultural survival, to the maintenance of inherited cultural and musical traditions such as the African dance and *tambór* drumming for which Barlovento is known. But, although he recognizes the value of such work, García insists that such organizations tended to remain aloof from the needs and demands of the communities that it claimed to represent culturally, in some ways doing the work of colonialism itself: "This is *exactly* what colonial discourse wants to see of the Afros, that they play drums, that they participate in witchcraft."

After his experiences in Caricuao, García and others would contribute to shifting Afro-Venezuelan organizing *away* from such strictly cultural limitations and *toward* the present-day needs of the Afro community, needs that were not strictly political but would inevitably become so. In the late 1970s, a series of ecological struggles were sparked in Barlovento, giving rise organically to a new form of organizing tied to the question of the land: "Barlovento was a central *foco* in beginning a turn in cultural struggles of Afro-descendents linked to struggles around the territorial aspect, which was simultaneously ecological and cultural." In fact, he goes so far as to insist that "you can't speak of Afro-Venezuelans without dealing with the question of territoriality," both echoing and broadening Mariátegui's insistence that "the problem of the Indian" is a problem of land in a way that establishes the basis for Afro-indigenous unity around territorial struggles.[31] García speaks of fighting the use of napalm to defoliate the region and successfully preventing the draining of a lagoon by placing strategic pressure on the UNESCO to intervene; it was out of such concrete, territorial struggles that the first Afro-Venezuelan Federation emerged.

During the 1980s and 1990s, García's own Afroamérica Foundation had been engaged in joint work with the Union of Black Women in ways that deepened their strategic unity and theoretical frameworks. For García, this alliance meant that "gender was a part of our struggle from the very beginning." In the 1990s, these groups fought to resist the demonization and forced deportation of Haitian immigrants by then Mayor of Caracas Antonio Ledezma — who, in a blow to the revolution, once again has assumed this same position today — and although this struggle was nominally defeated, with more than one hundred Haitians deported in early 1998, it nevertheless contributed to the development of what García calls a "diasporic alliance against deportation." From a narrow focus on cultural memory, the Afro-Venezuelan movement had transitioned in a few short years to locally based economic and political struggles that, through their territorial focus, have since provided the basis for an ever-broadening circle of alliances, one that would eventually beg the urgent question of the relationship between Afro and indigenous struggles.

After Chávez's election and the creation of a Constituent Assembly to pen the new Bolivarian Constitution, Afro-Venezuelan activists hoped that this momentum might carry into the halls of power and the word of the law. In this they were satisfied only partially, and the contrast with indigenous organizations such as CONIVE became glaringly apparent. Like the indigenous communities, Afro-Venezuelans put forth proposals regarding both legal recognition as communities and control over ancestral lands, but unlike indigenous demands, theirs would go unfulfilled. García recounts the details of this process with frustration, embodied in a litany of names — Aristóbulo Istúriz, Claudio Fermín, "La Negra" Antonia Muñoz, Elías Jaua, Braulio Álvarez — of those who are either themselves Afro-Venezuelan or associated with the struggles in Barlovento and yet just did not grasp the importance of Afro struggles when the time came. Lacking political capital and support from established leaders within the Constituent Assembly, Afro-Venezuelans are noticeably absent in the 1999 Constitution.

Most indigenous demands, by contrast, were incorporated successfully into the 1999 Constitution, and in an effort to explain the success of indigenous demands in the Constituent Assembly, Guarulla notes that: "We met Chávez on the road." By 1999, he argues, indigenous communities and leaders already possessed a well-defined project that had been in the works for some twenty years, and as a result "the Constitution faithfully represents our program." While this may be an accurate representation of indigenous successes, Guarulla's tone changes in revealing ways when asked about the failure of Afro-Venezuelans in a similar effort to establish recognition and autonomy. Certainly, indigenous organizers had established a national network some twenty years before their Afro counterparts, and in purely institutional terms, CONIVE predated the Afro-Venezuelan Network by more than ten years. But the explanation Guarulla offers is quite different: "they didn't show up to demand their rights." We know this to be untrue, and it neglects not only the vocal presence of Afro-Venezuelan leaders at the Constitutional Assembly but also the historic efforts by activists from both communities to establish the basis for unity, specifically a 1998 meeting between eighteen Afro leaders and sixteen indigenous *caciques* who sought closer Afro-indigenous collaboration. Despite widespread support for such an idea among grassroots indigenous communities, García insists that "we received absolutely no support from the indigenous leadership for our demands." "We need to walk together," García maintains, but at the time, the Afro-Venezuelan community was isolated and fought on alone, and Guarulla's terse dismissal only further contributes to this isolation by erasing the recent history of black struggle.

Predictably, without popular support from other sectors or from sympathetic deputies inside the Assembly, the demands put forth by the Afro-Venezuelan community for inclusion in the new Constitution were "vetoed by the right-wing elements that accompanied Chávez at the time." It was in part this fight over the new 1999 Constitution, its disappointments and its lessons, that forced Afro-Venezuelan leaders to recognize that they "lacked a political structure" necessary to wage such battles, and it was out of this recognition that the Afro-Venezuelan Network was born in 2000. In fact, as yet another indication of the relationship between autonomous struggles and the Bolivarian "process" as a whole, García emphasizes that the Network used the promise of the new Constitution itself—and specifically Article 62, which establishes a basis for participatory intervention into public policy—as a foothold for launching the organization. Although Article 62 looked good on paper, however, the Afro-Venezuelan struggle remained for the moment on the defensive, many ears deaf to their claims precisely through the traditional declarations of *mestizaje* and the denial of racism: "The state did not accept the term *racism*, they said that this is a *mestizo* society." When Chavista leaders proved unwilling to call out racism, García and others were more than willing to do so for them, but they insisted on combining their critiques of overt racism with a diagnosis of its internalized form, what they call "endoracism," among those who would deny their own background in favor of *mestizo* status: "I denounced them all, a total *vaina*, when I declared there was racism in the Bolivarian process."

The Pot Boils Over

Nothing reveals a society's latent racism as potently as crisis and resistance, and if recent Venezuelan history is any indication, the two often work hand in hand to do so. The political crisis of Chávez's brief removal from power during the short-lived coup of April 2002 (see Second Interlude) tore back the thin veneer of *mestizaje* and the façade of equality it implied, generating a resurgence of palpable racism in Venezuelan society that repeated events of 1983 and 1989. When the economic crisis first hit with the 1983 currency devaluation known as "Black Friday," the middle and upper classes sought scapegoats in the most traditional of places, blaming "blacks," "Indians," and "Colombians" (all of which essentially meant the same thing).[32] This reversion to open racism under the pressure of economic crisis was both the cause and effect of an increasingly open ethnic identification by Afro and indigenous Venezuelans, and this feedback loop of racism and resistance would only deepen as the decade wore on.[33] As in so many other ways, the 1989 Caracazo represented a crescendo of this dialectic of racism and resistance, as the poor and dark-skinned masses made unprecedented incursions into forbidden wealthy sectors, leaving Venezuelan elites terrified and traumatized by their own worst fears.[34] If such racist fears were put aside briefly by many who voted for Chávez amid the collapse of the old parties, this détente would not last long, and elite paranoia would soon find in this dark-skinned president a focal point for its anxieties.

When García speaks of "right-wing elements" who supported Chávez early on, few are as notorious as former journalist Alfredo Peña. A well-known member of Chávez's MVR, Peña was elected mayor in 2000 with the support of Chávez and the MVR, but quickly turned against his former allies, supporting less than two years later the coup that temporarily removed Chávez from power (it is suspected that Peña, who at the time commanded the Metropolitan Police, was responsible for the bloodbath used to justify the coup). The Afro-Venezuelan Network was far ahead of the Chavista mainstream in suspecting that Peña was far from the revolutionary he painted himself to be, in part due to his unabashed racism. During his mayoral campaign, Peña, whose opponent for the MVR nomination was none other than Aristóbulo Istúriz himself, drew upon the racist criminological theories of Cesare Lombroso to stir up racial fear and justify a *mano dura*, or hard-line approach to crime. The Afro-Venezuelan Network publicly opposed Peña, despite that he was a prominent Chavista at the time, and they would continue to oppose him after he was elected and sought to institute the “Bratton Plan,” a data-driven policing strategy designed by former New York Police Department Chief William Bratton that García sees as laden with the same phrenological distortions as Lombroso’s theories.[35] “Here was the person most responsible for murdering Afros and Latinos in the United States, and Peña hired him as an advisor!” Given Peña’s later rightward break, the resistance that García and others in the Afro-Venezuelan movement offered against his candidacy proved to be a vanguard position. “I’m proud that we took the risk of being dismissed as right-wing,” García insists, adding that, “Our view was that we need to deepen the revolution. There can be no socialism with racism, *vale*!”

On April 11, 2002, however, “the pot of racism boiled over completely” as right-wing populism was unleashed by Chávez’s temporary removal from power and the subsequent witch hunt for his cabinet members. It seemed for a moment that all aristocratic manners fell to the wayside and tongues were loosed to say what they had long been wanting to. Especially in wealthier areas, walls were daubed with such heartwarming phrases as “Out with the vermin!” and “Death to the monkey Chávez!”[36] Open expressions of racism once again displaced the soothing discourse of *mestizaje*, becoming the norm rather than the exception: “‘Indian, monkey, and thick-lipped’ have been some of the more illustrative expressions of this racial contempt that the opposition has displayed when describing Chávez . . . An unprecedented classism can be added to this visceral racism . . . referring to the people of the lower strata as ‘vermin.’ ”[37] The president of the National Assembly noted that “the rabid opposition calls Hugo Chávez a ‘mixed-breed’ with fierce contempt,” and the Venezuelan representative to the Organization of American States observed that “the private media, when referring to brown or black-skinned high Venezuelan officials, openly call them monkeys, macaques, or chimpanzees.”[38] Some members of the opposition parodied Chavistas who refer to their leader as “mi Comandante” (my Commander) with the phrase “mico mandante” (monkey-in-charge), and Tariq Ali reported that “a puppet show to this effect with a monkey playing Chávez was even organized at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas. But Colin Powell was not amused and the Ambassador was compelled to issue an apology.”[39] Aristóbulo Istúriz, an Afro-descended leader who himself became a microcosm of the painful dialectic that catapulted racism to the forefront of the Bolivarian imaginary, was one who was subjected to the racist rage of those who felt themselves uniquely entitled to political power. “You who are a researcher, you can do this: read the speeches that appeared *before* April 11, 2002: Chávez is a *mestizo*, Aristóbulo is a *mestizo*, everyone is *mestizo*," García insists incredulously. But during the coup, "Aristóbulo was attacked, which allowed him to make a qualitative leap in consciousness," and from this point on, the Chavista mainstream began to increasingly confront racism.

As a result of their dual loyalty to both the Afro-Venezuelan cause in the face of such blatantly racist attacks and the Bolivarian Revolution as the vehicle toward a more just society as a whole, the Afro-Venezuelan movement rallied to Chávez's defense during the coup, taking to the streets like so many thousands of others to demand the return of their duly elected president and the restitution of their Constitution, however imperfect. Indigenous groups were not far behind, responding quickly with a declaration from CONIVE on April 17 denouncing the coup in the name of both a history of indigenous resistance and their more recent constitutional victories:

> In the spirit of our ancestors and heroes of the indigenous resistance and in the face of the painful events of April 11 . . . we condemn the coup launched against the constitutional president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías . . . We steadfastly condemn the attempt by the de facto government to eliminate the Constitution . . . which is recognized as one of the most advanced in the world in terms of indigenous rights, a product of the struggles and resistance by more than 30 indigenous peoples living in this country for 500 years.[40]

As should be abundantly clear by this point, the demand for Chávez's return was *not* a question of uncritical fidelity to a charismatic leader, but was instead about both the Constitution as a direct "product" of popular struggles and the president as the symbolic mechanism serving to unify those struggles in practice.

Between Autonomy and Opposition

The overwhelming support that Afro and indigenous organizations provided for the briefly deposed Chávez government during the 2002 coup is a partial testament to the benefits that their communities have received, and hope to receive in the future, from the Bolivarian Process. But if this support and these benefits are inarguable, both sectors nevertheless view the Venezuelan state — and the government currently in charge of that state — with a healthy dose of suspicion that doubtless is the result of a long history of betrayal and genocide. Despite cataloging the various benefits that indigenous communities have won in the process, José Poyo, a fierce supporter of Chávez and the Bolivarian process, is nevertheless clear: "*this is not our process*, but we still need to participate in this government to gain the benefits of the state while maintaining the survival of indigenous institutions." Certainly, some gains were accomplished before the election of Chávez in 1998, but these were not to be had through collaboration with the old parties. For example, the Christian Democrats established the Indigenous Confederation of Venezuela in the 1970s not to help the people but rather to co-opt their struggles to win votes. Instead, it was through their "conjunctural linkages" with leftist parties like MAS and LCR, alliances that granted the indigenous movement and CONIVE some leverage without compromising their autonomy in the long run, that the movement made gains.

According to Poyo, two elements characterize Chávez's own contribution to indigenous struggles. First, as a representative of the national state, he has recognized the "historical debt" that Venezuela owes to its original inhabitants. Second, as an individual who identifies as Afro-indigenous, Chávez has contributed to the development of identity and consciousness of historical roots. "*Lo importante es que lo asume*," Poyo insists, highlighting the powerful importance of Chávez himself adopting Afro-indigenous identity, but the relationship between Chávez's own "political will" and the state remains complex: "At present, we are accompanying a revolutionary *government*, but one which is slowed by a bureaucratic *state* . . . and as a result, while the law is progressive, it lacks implementation . . . We agree with the President, his political will, his discourse, and efforts to turn that will into practice. We disagree with the functionaries that surround him and their vision." Poyo's position, which notably echoes that of many on the radical wing of Chavismo, consists of pushing implementation of the law and the constitution—specifically with regard to the issuing of titles for indigenous land—while attempting to strengthen revolutionary elements within the Chavista bloc.

For Guarulla, however, these questions of political will and the dangers of the central government are ones that directly impact the indigenous movement itself, a movement that he insists has "lost its compass" through its exposure to and corruption by state power: "The indigenous movement contains powerful contradictions because many are in positions of power and this has had a fracturing effect. CONIVE divided in 2006 over political interests and lacks leadership. Its leaders are now National Assembly deputies, and they shouldn't keep running the Confederation. They must let new leadership develop, but people keep wanting to maintain power."[41] In what most likely is meant as a backhanded critique of Poyo himself, Guarulla adds: "being in positions of power consumes us," but I am left wondering whether he, the governor of Amazonas, is not subject to the same tendency he identifies in others.

The leaders of the Afro-Venezuelan movement learned long ago, during the waning guerrilla struggle and as members of the PRV during its period of self-reflection, that the best way to advance was by forceful but comradely blows. But this fierce autonomy and conflictive assertiveness never led the Afro-Venezuelan Network to break off relations with the government. For example, after the government refused to support their trip to the Third World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, then-Minister of Foreign Relations Luis Alfonso Dávila prepared a document pushing the traditional mantra that in Venezuela there is no racism, only *mestizaje*. Members of the Afro-Venezuelan Network confronted Dávila in Durban, attacking him and insisting that he had not read the document. Somewhat to their surprise, he agreed to change the document to better reflect their concerns, yielding an important lesson: "At that moment, we had to choose between confronting them directly and re-educating them," García recalls, using a term for re-education, *realfabetizar*, which evokes a process of rebuilding from nothing, from the very basics of political literacy: "we chose the latter."

Directly echoing Nora Castañeda's reflections on the women's movement, García insists with more than a touch of pride that, "We put the word *racism* in Chávez's mouth."[42] But the role of autonomous struggles in pushing the agenda of Afro-Venezuelans is not the only lesson here. The historic function of racism in Venezuela and the dynamics that led to the resurfacing of open racial conflict where *mestizaje* had once predominated also teaches a second and broader lesson: that autonomous struggles *within* Chavismo are not without their effects on the broader struggle between Chavistas and the opposition. In fact, these struggles can occasionally prove decisive, setting off broader chain reactions that accelerate and deepen the revolutionary process both in its internal development and in its external opposition to the *escualidos*.

Toward a Zambo *Socialism*

José Carlos Mariátegui once famously called upon Latin American socialists to avert their eyes from the shining gem of Europe and to seek out treasures of a more local sort. Breaking acrimoniously with the Stalinist strictures of the Comintern, Mariátegui advocated the cultivation of an "Indo-American socialism," which would draw upon indigenous communal traditions as the basis for the development of a non-Eurocentric socialist society. As we saw earlier, this Mariateguista vision had penetrated deeply into some sectors of the guerrilla struggle, especially during periods of wrenching defeat and desperate soul searching, and it is a vision that retains considerable weight for indigenous and Afro organizers today.

Liborio Guarulla insists that what he and others in Amazonas advocate is "not Marx's communism," and that profound dialogue is necessary around what "twenty-first-century socialism" will eventually look like. His own vision, loyal to his history in LCR and now the Patria Para Todos, is one that foregrounds decentralization. While indigenous communities cannot avoid interacting with power, he argues, they must always remember that the ultimate objective is to *transform* that power by altering relations both within communities and between those communities and the state. This requires "changing the paradigm of internal neocolonialism" that draws indigenous youth irrepressibly toward the cities in search of opportunities. Unlike in other states such as Delta Amacuro in the east, as governor of Amazonas, Guarulla claims to have gone some way toward stopping such emigration to Puerto Ayacucho and from there to Caracas by providing local employment opportunities and bilingual education. Education and nutrition have seen significant advances in Amazonas, but Guarulla warns that health care and provision of utilities are still lacking, as is overall economic development.

Even the Chavista government has a tendency toward centralism that Guarulla finds worrying. For example, he was critical of the failed constitutional reform of 2007, which, in its proposal for "socialist cities," he interpreted as an attempt to institute geographical change from above without consulting local communities, a gesture that threatens to repeat a long history of colonialism and contempt for indigenous people. While this contempt may be more subtle at present and manifest in different forms, "the central bureaucracy still believes that Indians aren't capable of thinking, and so doesn't consult them, but merely sends emissaries to explain policy decisions, whether it be communal councils, cooperatives, or socialist production enterprises." Nonetheless, despite whatever critiques he may have of the Chavista government, Guarulla insists that neither he nor those he represents are looking back to the Fourth Republic: under Democratic Action and the Christian Democrats, it was "support the parties or starve."[43]

"The majority of Venezuelans," he pessimistically observes, "ignore Indoamerican socialism; they are looking more to Europe than to ourselves."

He too believes that indigenous structures and practices can contribute to the content of such a socialism, and whereas Mariátegui and others emphasize structures like the Incan commune, or *ayllu*, Guarulla speaks in terms of the *shabono*, a communal structure used by the itinerant Yanomami Indians.[44] How, Guarulla asks urgently, can the existing structures of local government work for the Yanomami of Alto Orinoco, an indigenous community that does not hold property and rarely remains in one place for an extended period? The only possible answer lies in a radical reconceptualization of government: "If the people are nomadic, then the government must also be nomadic." But regardless of the particularities of this vision, it springs from a very basic and very indigenous foundation that is already—as Mariátegui had insisted—socialist. Guarulla insists that institutions such as the communal councils may be new to Venezuela, but they are not new to its indigenous populations, who already possess a consciousness of shared work and goods. "Our rules are very simple: this is socialism, it is sharing."

For Afro-Venezuelans, it is not only indigenous tradition that bears the potential to contribute to a future socialism, but also Afro-Caribbean traditions, some of which are rooted in Africa itself and some of which emerged as a strategic response to the demands of escaping and combating slavery in the Americas. Like Mariátegui's *ayllu* and Guarulla's *shabono*, Enrique Arrieta of the Afro-Venezuelan Network speaks of the *cumbes* that housed runaway slaves, or *cimarrones* (these are referred to elsewhere as *palenques*, *quilombos*, or in the Venezuelan *llanos*, *rochelas*).[45] "We need to look beyond the European tradition, studying not only the Paris Commune but also the *cumbes*," which functioned as a sort of mutual aid society for escaped slaves, arguably prefiguring socialist socioeconomic structures and systems for education and self-defense. In this sense, Arrieta sees even the turn toward Mariátegui—however necessary and fruitful—as problematic: "even Mariátegui said that blacks had nothing to contribute."[46] If this Indoamerican socialism is to benefit not only from indigenous Venezuelan traditions but also from the struggles of former slaves, and if these two racialized groups are to ever truly "walk together," then this sharp warning must be heeded. And if Mariátegui insistently tied indigenous struggles to the question of the land and territoriality, then *Cimarrón* struggles—from the *cumbes* of the past to the more recent environmental struggles in Barlovento—seem to hold some potential for drawing together Afro and indigenous organizations. There are some hopeful signs that such a rapprochement might be emerging. The proposed constitutional reform package of December 2007, among many other things, would have granted Afro-Venezuelans the same degree of recognition and rights that indigenous groups currently enjoy. This reform proposal provided an opportunity for closer collaboration; Poyo, who insists that the fact of shared slavery in the past and discrimination in the present generates an automatic affinity between indigenous and Afro-Venezuelans, is visibly proud that indigenous organizations were among those who came out most strongly in support of incorporating Afro-Venezuelan demands into the reform. While this effort failed in a national referendum, others have been successful, providing hope that the existing divisions between the two communities might be overcome.

October 12, previously known as the Day of Discovery and later Day of the Race, was renamed in 2003 as the Day of Indigenous Resistance, and in 2005 the Bolivarian government dubbed May 10 "Afro-Venezuelan Day." There was nothing random about the chosen date: it was on May 10, 1795, that José Leonardo Chirino first rebelled in defense of not only black slaves, but all colonized and enslaved Venezuelans. We know that memorialization is, like the state itself, a double-edged sword that can both empower and co-opt radical energies, and although some argue that Chávez only instituted the May 10 holiday in an effort to win the Afro vote, we also know that governments often are incapable of fully controlling the impact of the memorials they themselves establish.[47] Indigenous activists reminded us of this when, a year after the establishment of October 12 to mark their own resistance, they took the opportunity to destroy a contradiction standing in their midst by tearing down the statue of Columbus in Plaza Venezuela. Such ferocious insistence reminds us that the only worthy memorials are not to people but to the struggles that give them meaning.

Second Interlude. Every Eleventh Has Its Thirteenth

There is perhaps only one event more revealing than a coup, and that is a coup that, while initially successful, is eventually reversed.[1] Any coup serves to draw back the veil of polite society (however threadbare) to reveal the lines of force that traverse it, and a reversed coup is an even more powerful revelation of where, precisely, social power lies. It is in this sense that the mobilization of the Venezuelan masses in opposition to the coup of April 11, 2002 — a constituent show of strength second only to the Caracazo — represents the best evidence to date that the sovereign people of Venezuela have the will and capacity to defend their vision of a new society. But if the events of April 2002 revealed the ferocious will of the people and their constituent power, thereby mirroring the lessons of the Caracazo — this was the *same* people and the *same* power — in concrete terms the picture was a far different one. After all, here was an explosively constituent moment that was aimed not at *unseating* an established order but at *restoring* one, an almost unprecedented alliance of constituent and constituted powers. This peculiarity was visible in a curious circuit: ministers from the overthrown Chávez government fled into the warm embrace of social movements, especially the armed militias of 23 de Enero, while representatives of these radical elements of the Bolivarian process took to the streets to fight the coup and make a return to the constitutional order not only possible, but imperative. Thus, this was a central moment for grappling with the peculiar relationship that exists in contemporary Venezuela between movement and state, constituent and constituted. Again, however, an apparent paradox disintegrates once we recognize that it was not a constituted *order* but a *process*—itself comprising the dynamic interplay between constituent and constituted—that the most revolutionary elements of the Venezuelan people were defending on those fateful days.

A Planned, Mediatic Coup

On April 11, 2002, the Venezuelan opposition activated snipers who fired on a largely pro-Chávez crowd that had gathered near Miraflores Palace to defend the president from the threat of an approaching and aggressive opposition march. This march, which was admittedly massive, had counted on the unwavering and unanimous support of the private, anti-Chavista media for its numbers; for days the media had called on the population not only to attend, but to do what was necessary to remove the "tyrant" once and for all. On that day, opposition forces gathered at Parque del Este for a scheduled march to the headquarters of the state-owned oil company PDVSA. It was there that opposition leaders took to the stage, egging the crowd on to more militant action against the government, and it was there that Carlos Ortega, head of the discredited and corrupt CTV union confederation (see chapter 7), called for an unscheduled and unpermitted march on the presidential palace, some seven miles to the west, where thousands of Chavistas had already gathered. As the opposition march drew nearer to the palace, confrontation of some sort seemed almost inevitable, and chants of "Chávez, Fuera!" (Out with Chávez!) met with those of "No Pasarán!" (They Shall Not Pass!).

This was the point at which a society boils, and it was at this precise moment that bullets began to rain down on the crowds below. As innocents on both sides were mowed down by sniper fire, film footage of the ensuing gun battle, which showed Chavistas returning fire against the snipers from Puente Llaguno (Llaguno Bridge), was inserted into a prefabricated media strategy of repetition and voice-over to convince the Venezuelan population that government supporters were responsible for the deaths and that they had acted directly on the orders of Chávez himself.[2] If the Venezuelan media was consciously playing to its own population, it found the international press fertile ground for such misinformation as well, with media outlets in the United States and elsewhere uncritically parroting the now-discredited opposition line. Ray Suarez of PBS, for example, reported that, "Yesterday, Chavez ordered National Guard troops and civilian gunmen to fire on the nearly 200,000 protesters to stop them from reaching his palace."[3]

That the opposition planned to slaughter innocents is clear from the fact that a public statement by members of the high military command, which cited a specific number of casualties (five dead) and urged Chávez to resign, had been filmed long before the deaths had occurred.[4] That the role of the media was paramount is clear from the revelation that this statement was recorded at the home of opposition journalist and host of *24 Hours* Napoleón Bravo. Indeed, it was on that very same program that many Venezuelans would first learn of what had transpired overnight. Bravo opened his April 12 program with the following statement, astonishingly saccharine under the circumstances: "Good morning, it is 6:14 A.M. Thanks to society and the armed forces, today we awake differently. Good morning, we have a new president." Bravo continued, reading a falsified letter of resignation from Chávez and discussing the seemingly successful coup with some of its leaders, who, in an unprecedented display of honesty, expressed their indebtedness to "all the private media" for having made the coup possible.

The media is a force to be reckoned with, and this fact had long been recognized in Venezuela, where even sitting presidents have suffered the wrath of the "mediatic veto."[5] As the old party system collapsed, however, this critical "veto" power became a more substantively proactive one, with the private media effectively stepping in to fill the vacuum left by the discredited parties and constituting what Luis Britto García has called a "fourth power."[6] The 2002 coup was the crowning achievement of this rising mediatic force, which one of the coup leaders openly declared to be their "most powerful weapon." But equally clear in retrospect is that these *golpistas*, these coup-mongers, had overestimated the hegemonic control that these media outlets exercised over the population as a whole. Demonstrating a common if hubristic neglect for the poorest segments of Venezuelan society, one based on the assumption that the popular masses are essentially inert, stupid, and incapable of autonomous action, those in charge of the illegitimate coup government assumed that having control of the military and the media would be enough. If history is any guide, they seemed to be right: ninety-nine times out of a hundred, their strategy would have succeeded, as it no doubt would have succeeded in almost any other place and at any other time.[7] But despite the carefully calculated media strategy, despite the collusion of almost every media outlet, and despite the media blackout that ensued in the aftermath of Chávez's ouster, the coup was short-lived. The fundamental question we must ask is, Why?

The answer lies in the recently popularized phrase: "every eleventh has its thirteenth." Popular rebellion against the coup was immediate; millions of poor Venezuelans streamed in a seemingly spontaneous fashion down from the *cerros*, the hills surrounding Caracas. For Samuel Moncada, former Minister of Higher Education and professor of history at the Central University, this massive popular response shattered in an instant centuries of elitist ideology: "Those intellectuals who said that this was a government of brutes and that they represent the enlightened part of the country, well as it turns out, the 'darkest,' the people from the *barrios*, recognized that they had woken up without rights on that Saturday [April 12]. The Venezuelan people understood that we were being enslaved." Indeed, despite media distortions, those present at the initial mobilizations on April 12 demonstrated a remarkable grasp of the situation: signs could be seen blaming the "fascist right" for the deaths of Chavista protestors on April 11 and demanding that the human rights of Chávez's ministers be respected.

At a recent commemoration of the deaths at Puente Llaguno, I spoke to someone who participated in the popular uprising that day. What he remembers most vividly was the sheer quantity of people flooding down from the poor *barrios*, blocking every highway and street and converging on the historic center of Caracas to surround Miraflores Palace. That this onlooker would be shocked in a country that regularly sees more than a million in the streets speaks to the magnitude of the rebellion. As we are chatting, several hands tap me roughly on the back, inviting me to "meet a hero." I turn to find Jorge Recio sitting in a wheelchair. Recio had been taking photos on the bridge the day of the coup when a sniper's bullet tore into him, lodging in his back and leaving him permanently disabled. He and other photographers embodied a very different kind of media, risking life and limb both taking photos and hiding spent film from the police in an effort to reveal the truth of April 11.

Along with mobilizations outside the presidential palace on April 12, 2002, a large crowd also gathered near Fuerte Tiuna, a military base in the south of the city that was the site of frenetic negotiations among coup participants, civilian and military alike, and outside the military base in Maracay, which housed Chávez's old parachute regiment. Former guerrilla and radical women's organizer Lídice Navas recalls receiving a call from Nora Castañeda at 7 A.M. on April 12 urging her to join the mobilization at Fuerte Tiuna. By the time Navas arrived on the scene at 9:30 A.M., there were only about thirty people gathered, but the crowd swelled exponentially as the day wore on. Agustin Prieto, an electrical engineer who helped to organize the mobilizations outside Fuerte Tiuna, recalls the shock that the coup caused as well as the determined struggle that it sparked: "This process, for many Venezuelans, has meant a heavy sacrifice and years of struggle. This is why we will never erase from our memories what happened on April 11 and 12. . . . We began to mobilize the concentration of all residents of Caracas at Fuerte Tiuna, and that's where it began, starting at noon on the twelfth."[8]

Repression was swift and severe. At Fuerte Tiuna, the Metropolitan Police waited until nightfall to attack the assembled crowd with tear gas, armored personnel carriers equipped with water cannons, and live rounds. Video documentation shows the crowds scattering at 10:45 P.M., with one victim in a nearby hospital declaring that "We are living in a dictatorship." As Moncada puts it: "On that day, more human rights were violated than had been violated in the past, not three, but thirty years," a point that rings true despite its hyperbolic nature. Illegal searches and detentions, a witch hunt and public flogging of Chavista leaders, the siege of the Cuban embassy, and dozens shot dead in the streets: such was the rabid fury of Venezuelan fascism. The smiling face of this fascism belonged to none other than Pedro Carmona Estanga, the head of the national chamber of commerce, Fedecámaras, and interim leader of the coup government. Before a rapturous crowd, Carmona gleefully dissolved all branches of government and categorically declared null and void the 1999 Constitution, which embodied the aspirations of decades of revolutionary movements and which had been ratified by nearly 72 percent of the electorate — although in doing so he overstepped the limits of even many coup supporters.

The hatred of this enraged minority could not compensate for their small numbers, however, and their fury could not compare with that of a people robbed of their legitimate representative. On April 13, despite the private media's continued blackout, this conflict reached a tipping point, aided in no small part by Carmona's shocking hubris. With millions in the streets, loyal members of the military were emboldened to act, thereby reconstituting the "military-civilian alliance" that has been so essential to the Bolivarian

Revolution from the beginning. But the opposition's claim that Chávez's return was a largely military affair simply does not square with people's memories of the event, be they civilian or military. The military acted, but it did so at the signal of the people, and despite a total media blackout, the closure of state-run Channel 8, and widespread police repression, this signal came across loud and clear to those on both sides of events. For the loyal sectors of the military, the presence of the masses in the streets was as decisive as it had been in 1989: it cemented their conviction not only that it was necessary to fight, but that the fight could be won.

Soldiers, Led By the People

In *Soldiers Alongside the People*, Marta Harnecker — herself no stranger to the dangers of military interventions in politics, having fled her native Chile after Pinochet's coup — interviewed several of the key military participants in Chávez's return to power. General Raúl Baduel, then commander of the Forty-Second Parachute Infantry Brigade in Maracay, was the first to openly reject the coup and arguably the principal strategist in the efforts to reverse it. This perhaps is unsurprising because Baduel was one of the founders of Chávez's revolutionary movement in the military, and it was from Maracay that Chávez and others sought to take power in February 1992. Baduel's declaration, however, only emerged on the afternoon of April 13, long after the popular masses had shown their strength in the streets. This announcement of a unified effort to return Chávez to power, deemed the "Plan to Restore National Dignity," represented for Baduel the "detonator" of the entire situation, giving the green light to loyal troops among the presidential Honor Guard, who put into motion a plan to retake the palace late on the afternoon of April 13.[9] This, too, was at the behest of the people: one member of the Honor Guard recalls that "there were no fewer than a million people" outside the palace, "demanding the President's return."[10]

When asked what lessons he took from the experience of the coup, General Jorge Luis García Carneiro, Commander of the Third Infantry Division at Fuerte Tiuna, responded that "The people speak for themselves, they say what they want, it is the people who give and the people who take away, it is the people who give the orders." García Carneiro admits that on the morning of April 12 he too was pessimistic, but "afterward, when I saw those people [outside Fuerte Tiuna], that multitude, fervently demanding the return of Chávez, of course this lifted my spirits."[11] After the Honor Guard had retaken the presidential palace, coup leaders began efforts to detain García Carneiro and others, who then fled to seek refuge in the gathered crowd. From there, within and under the protection of the people, they created a mobile command post to organize the retaking of various military installations and eventually, in collaboration with Baduel and others, the return of Chávez himself. As one participant recently recalled, at one point García Carneiro appeared before the crowd with tears in his eyes, thanking the people for making military action possible. Another officer, Ramón Silva, estimates that some 70 percent of those who turned out to return Chávez to power did so spontaneously, comparing the mobilizations explicitly to the one constituent explosion that loomed largest in the Venezuelan psyche: "It didn't surprise me that the people came down from the hills. It was nothing new, I experienced it in '89 when those defiant hills [*cerros bravos*] came down," just as they would do again in 2002, "returning their President, whom they had elected, to power."[12] Thus, to tell the history of April 13 strictly from the perspective of the military is to miss the point entirely, but neither is the correct alternative a naïve emphasis on the very same mass spontaneity that García Carneiro and others emphasize as being decisive for Chávez's return to power.

Just as a "people's history" requires, nay *demands*, the inclusion of April 13—despite that this was a day whose focal point was the president and the Constitution—so too does our examination of the mass rebellion that marked that day demand that we move beyond an equally naïve opposition between "the people" and "the state," constituent energy and constituted force. So, although Silva is likely correct that the vast majority of those who turned out did so spontaneously and in defiance of a total media blackout, and although this spontaneity speaks volumes, we must not neglect the decisive importance of the other, more organized elements that played a significant role in the events of April 13. Here, the implications of our previous chapters come into focus in that small percentage of die-hard revolutionaries—urban guerrillas and Tupamaros alike—who "came down from the hills" with a far more radical vision than the mere return of Chávez to his predetermined position of state power. If we have learned one thing from this book, it is that mass spontaneity, while fundamental in its importance, is often the result of serious organizing that, in the case of Venezuela, spans decades. As with the Caracazo, then, this spontaneous mobilization and its spontaneous grasp of the strategic realities of the situation it confronted should not lead us merely to a panegyric of spontaneity for spontaneity's sake. Rather, every moment of this spontaneity and every gesture of these spontaneous masses contained an aspiration toward increasingly conscious organization. In this explosive dialectic between spontaneity and organization that was resistance to the 2002 coup, such conscious effort would be especially important in the realm of mediatic and popular armed organizing.

Fighting the Information War

Just as the coup was carried out largely via the media, so too would the sphere of information provide a key terrain for resistance to it. Despite a complete media blackout, the spontaneity of the Venezuelan masses extended to their understanding of the role played by the media in the coup, and one banner visible on April 12 read "No to the mediatic dictatorship," while a printed flyer affirmed that "We will not tolerate this dictatorship of economic power and the media." Such informal efforts to resist and counteract the messaging (or more accurately, the nonmessaging) of informational blockade were fundamental: if the *motorizados* were crucial to the coordination of the dispersed explosions constituting the Caracazo, providing for their generalization and unification, in 2002 the physical coordination of bodies in motion was supported and facilitated by mass text messaging, alerting the population of events not covered by the media. Again, this spontaneity both reflected and contributed to existing organized currents: in the tension running up to the coup, popular forces in the *barrios* and the nascent popular councils came together to form what was called the Revolutionary Popular Assembly (APR), which participant Gonzalo Gómez later describes to me as an "articulation of popular power."[13]

Gómez, a longtime workers' organizer, had participated consistently in the radicalization of information, first as editor of *La Chispa*, a radical newspaper founded shortly after Allende's overthrow, and later in a series of radio programs and websites. In the context of the coup and the ensuing media blackout, the APR, which was officially established only on April 10, decided to prioritize the radicalization and democratization of information. As the coup approached, those gathered in the assembly got the sneaking feeling that "things weren't under control" and that this was partly because "state discourse wasn't mobilizing the people." In the early morning of April 11, several hours *before* the coup, the APR alone distributed some 100,000 flyers in the *barrios* around Caracas, calling on the population to march to Miraflores Palace and defend their government.[14] One opposition writer even credits the APR with having performed a crucial intelligence function, claiming that members of the Assembly had received information about the plan to divert the opposition march toward the palace.[15]

Less than a month later, the "contingency organization" birthed by the urgency of the coup would assume the form in which it has since become a permanent fixture of radical Venezuelan life: *Aporrea.org*. With its militant name invoking popular media as a metaphorical bludgeon with which to "beat" or "hammer" the opposition into submission, *Aporrea* is now one of the most visited websites in Venezuela, carrying a combination of news, interviews, opinion, and regular contributions from noted Venezuelan thinkers on the more radical wing of the Chavista movement. It sees as its task the maintenance of the spirit of insurrection that characterized April 13, 2002, as a permanent feature of the Bolivarian Revolution, driving its continued radicalization through the mechanism of popular mobilization. Given the origins of *Aporrea* in both the APR and the struggle against the media blackout during the coup, it would be no surprise to find that its participants subsequently dedicated themselves to the spread of popular assemblies and the nascent communal councils (see the conclusion).

But the role of the private media in this fleeting dictatorship was not limited to putting it into power, and press magnates such as Gustavo Cisneros of Venevisión, Marcel Granier of RCTV, and Guillermo Zuloaga of Globovisión did not simply abandon their posts once the military had removed the president. Rather, after misrepresenting the deaths that occurred on April 11, encouraging and supporting the coup, and insisting repeatedly that a coup was not a coup (according to those involved, Chávez's falsified resignation instead created a "power vacuum" into which they stepped), the private media immediately began to do all that it could to conceal the massive popular rebellion that was occurring in the streets.[16] In this, their tactic was silence: Jesse Chacón, later named Minister of the Interior, observed that "There are protests in central Caracas, Guarenas, Petare, and you are seeing soap operas and movies. Ask yourselves: Why aren't these protests being covered? Why didn't they report the twenty deaths last night outside Fort Tiuna? *Where is our media*?" The heads of the private media, as it turns out, were fully aware of the popular efforts to reinstate Chávez, but journalists were under orders to show "zero Chavismo on the screen" according to Andrés Izarra, at the time a contributing journalist to RCTV's news program *El Observador*.[17] While this mediatic veil was being circumvented by the proliferation of popular media and street mobilizations, it was also ruptured, briefly and crucially, when Attorney General Isaías Rodríguez took a page from Chávez's own 1992 playbook: having promised the opposition press that he planned to step down in favor of the illegitimate government, Rodríguez instead announced live to the nation that Venezuela had in fact suffered a coup d'état. But the people already knew that.

"A Revolution That Knows How To Defend Itself"

Most accounts of the 2002 coup, from the right as well as from the left, emphasize two — and only two — protagonists in the struggle: the people and the military. For the opposition, courageous officers responded to the call of the people to replace a failing government, whereas for most Chávez supporters the inverse was the case: an equally courageous sector of the armed forces responded to the call of the *bravo pueblo* in the streets to overthrow the powerful interests and cowardly generals who did their bidding. To these principal actors in the drama, Chavistas occasionally emphasize the pernicious role of the private media, and as we have seen, the *golpistas* occasionally even admit to the importance of their "secret weapon." But just as both sides tend to neglect the active role of popular media and the struggle over information in resisting the coup, so too do they neglect the popular military side of that counter-attack, one that provided the organizational face of rebellion in the streets just as *Aporrea* and others sought to break the mediatic blockade by organizing access to information.

The former urban guerrilla Juvenal tells this forgotten side of the story: while the masses of poor Venezuelans of the *barrios* were more than angry and prepared for action, there were nevertheless organized elements, ranging from active guerrilla units to the so-called Tupamaro militias, that spearheaded the insurrectionary movement of April 13. "The vanguard came first," he explains to me, "and then the masses followed with confidence." While we might interpret this statement as yet another reproduction of vanguardism, it also reflects an undeniable truth. On April 13, Juvenal was among those who were planning the direct takeover of governmental installations and ministries, all in an effort to "jumpstart a more radical process," one that would include Chávez, certainly, but under new and infinitely more radicalized conditions. Somewhat to Juvenal's chagrin, however, this same "vanguard element" made the tactical decision to hand power back to the Fifth Republic Movement party structure, sacrificing some of the explosive potential of the insurrectionary moment to the demands of immediate restabilization.

Somewhat characteristically, this still-vanguardist viewpoint is one that the Tupamaro-style groups only partially share. Valentín Santana of La Piedrita, for example, insists that "no one ordered the people into the streets on April 11; to say so would be an insult to the people." Santana's group instead "accompanied the people," dedicating itself to the "humble work" of defending 23 de Enero from the attack by the Metropolitan Police that was launched on April 12. When the police attempted to enter 23 de Enero — an area they treated, for reasons that should by now be obvious, as a "military target" — armed groups descended to Block 1 to stop them: "Simón Bolívar's *pueblo* did not let them enter." Like Juvenal, however, Santana too expected and hoped for a more radical conclusion to the events of 2002, rather than the cautious period of national reconciliation that followed. "We thought Chávez would come out chopping heads after that!" Like many other radicals, Santana was disappointed to find not rolling heads but a call for national dialogue: "I think the *Comandante* wants to win the Nobel Peace Prize, but he doesn't understand that the enemy will fight." However, reconciliation may have been strategic at the moment; the aftermath of the coup saw the opposition politically annihilated, and it would take the opposition parties nearly four full years — until the 2006 elections — to begin to shake the title of *golpistas*.

As with the Caracazo, the moment of rupture marked by Chávez's brief overthrow and return to power revealed in a flash a number of factors that until then had been concealed beneath layers of rhetoric and posturing at the intersection of political and economic interests. Above all, the events of April 13, 2002, the spontaneous popular insurgency that returned Chávez to power against all odds, provide the best proof of the popular character of the Bolivarian Revolution. If 1989 marked its most concrete origins and 1992 its will to seize the institutional manifestations of power, 2002 indicated a powerful refusal by the poorest sectors to stop there, to be content with seizing the state and nothing more, and, more than that, it indicated an insistence on picking up the pace in the forward march. In other words, 2002 proved both that the Revolution enjoyed a substantial degree of popular support *and* that it relied on this support for its very survival. Were it not for this support, Chávez would not be in power today, and were this support to be withdrawn tomorrow, given the constellation of forces arrayed against him, both domestic and international, his days would certainly be numbered. Paradoxically, the threat posed by the opposition, the material and ideological odds stacked against the Revolution, currently represent the best guarantee that the Bolivarian Revolution will continue to deepen according to the wishes of the emboldened masses.

But that is not all that was proven by the events of 2002. They also prove that "the people" are far more than the inert mass that many consider them to be, and this has severe implications for the Chávez government. The failure of the coup derived in part from the oligarchy's belief in this caricature, and the assumption that these poor "hordes," the "scum" of the *barrios*, the mindless lumpen, would not fight for their leader and their revolution (especially once anesthetized by the media blackout). Not only are the popular masses the driving force behind the Bolivarian process, as we have seen throughout this book, but they are the *deciders*: those who give and those who take away, those who put people in power and those who remove them. In other words, it is not merely a question of keeping the stupid masses content—this is the false image constructed by the opposition, in which the poor and backward peasant sells her support for a few measly crumbs—but of giving in to mass demands that have been percolating for many decades and the expression of which is as clear as day. Seen in this light, the myth of Chávez as a "great leader" largely dissipates; the most radical sectors of Chavismo are not bound to Chávez the man at all, but only to what he represents. As long as he represents what they represent, as long as there is proximity between the top and the bases, he will have their support. When combined with Chávez's need to maintain popular support at all costs, we have a situation that holds the potential for further radicalization as Chávez learns that his best defense—even if only to save his own skin—lies in the hands of the people.

But what is it that the people need in *their* hands? Contemporary Venezuelan political analysis is rife with comparison to the September 11, 1973, coup against Salvador Allende in Chile. One is told that the error of Allende's revolution is that it was "unarmed," and while this refers in part to Allende's rocky relationship with the traditional military hierarchy, it also refers to his unwillingness to arm the people and the workers to defend the government from right-wing aggression. The Peruvian revolutionary Hugo Blanco, one of the harshest leftist critics of Allende's strategy, recently suggested that the Venezuelan government has learned the lessons of the past. Citing the development of popular militias like the Tupamaros, the government's attempts to maintain what it terms *food security* by expropriating hoarders, and the appearance of communal councils, Blanco's optimism is clear: "That's how you respond . . . attack is the best defense."[18]

I am inclined to agree, albeit not wholeheartedly, because despite that Chávez's assessment of the Chilean experience generally lines up with that of Blanco—namely, that the government failed to arm the population—his conflict with armed radical sectors like La Piedrita has occasionally led Chávez to put forth a contrasting and erroneous interpretation of the Chilean coup: that rather than the result of the president's own failures in confronting the right, Allende's fall was instead the fault of the "ultra-left."[19] But just as this so-called ultra-left was Allende's only hope, Chávez should have learned by now that it was this very same ultra-left he sometimes dismisses as CIA-infiltrated provocateurs that proved to be his salvation on April 13. If the Bolivarian Revolution is, indeed, one that "knows how to defend itself" (to borrow the words of Lenin and Castro), this defense must not be understood in conventional, military terms, but instead in terms of the popular and armed mobilization of the masses. As the popular saying goes: "If they bring it like the eleventh, we'll give it back like the thirteenth."

"¡Ese pueblo creció!"

If Chávez himself has not fully assimilated the lessons of either September 11, 1973, or April 13, 2002, there are nevertheless many within the radical wing of Chavismo who have. For Lídice Navas, the former Eastern Front guerrilla who insists that the armed struggle gave her a "*mística*, a spirit, a confidence in the people and the need to organize them," the widespread refrain "only the people can save the people" is one that relies on precisely that: organization. Navas recalls a bitter disappointment in 1995 with regard to the Venezuelan people's capacity to self-organize in contrast to a Salvadorean people seemingly capable of overcoming any obstacle, whereas she sees the events of April 2002 as marking a qualitative leap. "*¡Ese pueblo creció!*" she exclaims, "Our people grew! In 1989 there was no maturity, the people were simply sick and tired," but 2002 marked a new stage in the development of popular organization; the return of the president served as the condensation point for popular demands. Roland Denis agrees, describing this moment as a "qualitative leap by the masses," who, despite demanding the return of the Constitution, were nevertheless capable of "cutting themselves loose from all constituted order."[20]

Unsurprisingly, former guerrilla *comandante* and Chávez critic Douglas Bravo does not agree with this progressive interpretation of the period between the two popular explosions that punctuate this history. In fact, rather than an advance from 1989 to 2002, Bravo sees exactly the opposite. The former was an *hecho constituyente*, a constituent event, an expression of popular sovereignty at its very moment of emergence, and this anti-institutional and anti-constitutional (in the sense of constituted power) rebellion sparked the mass expansion of popular assemblies that sprouted up across cities and the country. By contrast, Bravo sees the failed 1992 coup (which he had, in fact, supported during the early stages of its planning), and by extension the events of April 13, 2002, as precisely the opposite: “people said, ‘why do I need to do it if they will do it for me?’ This is the tragedy, and the bourgeoisie keeps ruling . . .” Although Bravo has certainly learned the military lesson of 2002, insisting elsewhere on the importance of the communal councils for defending the revolution, and although there is reason to believe that he recognizes April 13 for the popular insurrection that it was, he nevertheless seems stubbornly incapable of grasping in a more general sense the complex relationship between insurrection and institution, between constituent moments and constituted power, that lies at the heart of Venezuelan history and this book.[21] Bravo himself withdrew from the planning of Chávez’s failed 1992 coup, and he certainly did not support Chávez’s 1998 electoral campaign, but the institutional *appearance* of those moments does not fundamentally negate their constituent *content*. In reality, without recognizing 1992 and 1998 for what they were—*extensions* of 1989 and the entire history of struggle that preceded it—even the momentous events of April 13, 2002, the mass power expressed in the demand to return Chávez and the Constitution, lose all meaning.

Seven. Venezuelan Workers
Aristocracy or Revolutionary Class?

Look for the worker in the factory
and take him by the hand,
tell him that the struggle is a long one
that we need to lighten the load
to blaze the path of the world he dreams of.
— Alí Primera

January 23, 2003

It is the forty-fifth anniversary of Venezuela's return to formal democracy, and the country is in the grips of an unprecedented economic and political catastrophe: an oil industry lockout has dragged on for more than 60 days, crippling the country in an ill-conceived effort to again oust Chávez where the coup had failed. Leftists worldwide are initially hesitant, unsure of which side to take in the conflict: that of the self-professed "workers" or a suspicious "populist" leader with a military background. This event more than any other throws into sharp relief the peculiarities of the Venezuelan union movement; the Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV) stands proudly alongside the business federation Fedecámaras — as it had during the coup — in the hope of bringing down a nominally leftist leader, all the while attempting, with some success, to convince the workers of the world that the oil shutdown was a labor issue.[1] But in the words of Steve Ellner, this was merely a "middle class revolt" disguised as a general strike, one that "stands Marx on his head."[2] The oil lockout, or the *paro*, as it is widely known, was an emblematic moment for Venezuelan labor, one that crystallized its difficulties and ambiguities, pointing toward the imperative need for radical change *within* that movement. Its lessons, however, were not limited to the labor movement; more broadly, it marked a watershed moment in the Bolivarian Revolution. If the reversed coup marked the *political* destruction of the anti-Chávez opposition, then the defeat of the oil lockout effectively crushed the opposition's remaining *economic* power, wresting the national oil company PDVSA — often referred to as a "state within a state" as a result of its *de facto* autonomy — from their greedy hands to be put instead into the service of the Revolution.

In reality, neither the working classes nor the majority of the Venezuelan population supported the oil shutdown. This much is clear from the extraordinary resilience demonstrated by the population; songs and games were invented to maintain a cheerful mood while standing in line for cooking gas or food, all under the recently coined slogan: "Con hambre y sin empleo, con Chávez me resteo," or "Even hungry and unemployed, I'm sticking with Chávez."[3] This resilience was equally clear among workers, and spontaneous resistance to the lockout, or the "sabotage," as some deem it, emerged from every corner. When I ask Williams, one of my young graduate students from a poor background in the *barrios* of southwestern Caracas, about his political experience, he is visibly uncertain of how to respond: "Well, I've never been a member of a party or a political group," he tells me hesitantly, "but during the *paro* my boss closed the shop I was working in, so I organized the workers to force him to open it." That he was uncertain whether this informal experience was sufficiently "political" is perhaps unsurprising in a country as full of professional revolutionaries in the present as it was full of party hacks in the past, but it is through these everyday acts of resistance that the real revolution can be glimpsed.

While the population endured and spontaneous resistance emerged from the cracks, resistance of a more organized sort developed at the heart of the lockout, from within the oil industry itself. But this was an uphill struggle: the largely white-collar walkout took with it those most skilled in the management of a highly technological industry as well as the passwords necessary to run the machines, acts of sabotage that make clear that this was indeed an unpopular lockout rather than a strike.[4] Against such odds, however, the oil workers prevailed — the real workers, not managers in workers' clothing — and the radical nature of this moment lies in the fact that they did so not only despite the bosses, but despite their own ostensible "leaders" in the CTV. For Orlando Chirino, an oil union representative and militant in the Socialist Workers Party, the defeat of the oil lockout was an event of unparalleled importance for the Venezuelan working class. "From my perspective, the triumph over the shutdown-sabotage was a new revolution, working-class in nature, where the workers were the protagonists and which called into question business leaders and their 'private property.'"[5] While this was not a revolution in the classic sense—strictly speaking, there was no power vacuum, no regime change—such crises did exist implicitly, in potential form, should the shutdown have proven successful (the opposition was transparent in its hope for a successful repeat of the coup). After all, if this book teaches anything, it is that the traditional story of revolution as simply a seizure of the state machinery is wholly insufficient to explain contemporary Venezuela.

For Chirino, the implicitly revolutionary nature of the popular response to the oil shutdown derives from the generalized revolutionary trajectory opened by the 1989 Caracazo, the key moments of which are marked by dates with which we are by now familiar: 1992, 1998, and especially 2002. "On April 13, it was already clear that a revolution had taken place. *There was a violent dispute for power in the streets*," and the popular actions that returned Chávez to power exceeded bourgeois legality and even the Bolivarian Constitution itself. "Look how profoundly dialectical this process is: the people have to pass over what they have to recuperate what they have and prepare to move forward."[6] But, for Chirino, even the decisive events of April 13 represented a largely defensive and restorative measure, whereas the true working-class offensive occurred only when oil workers rallied together to defeat the bosses in a violent struggle for economic power. In other words, if April 2002 represented a "dual power" situation—the moment in which two forces vie for power in a decisive confrontation—in the *political-military* sphere, the oil lockout later that year marked the appearance of a dual power situation in the *economic* sphere, one not strictly limited to the oil sector: "in 80 percent of the economy of the country a dual power or a dispute for control over businesses arose."[7] The bosses did not hand over PDVSA, Chirino insists, "we seized it . . . If that's not a revolution, then the experts on revolution need to come and explain to me what it was that happened between December 2002 and January 2003."[8] If this was indeed a revolution, then it was one carried out by workers *against* the official institutions of the working class, which prompts a series of questions that parallel my interrogation of the concept of the people itself, namely, What working class? Which union?

August 4, 1959

Perhaps the best way to approach such questions is to stretch a taut thread back in time to another emblematic moment when the formal organs of the working class were notably absent. Rómulo Betancourt took power in early 1959 largely through votes from the Venezuelan interior, having lost Caracas to interim President Wolfgang Larrazábal, best known for his Emergency Plan for employment and public works. Rioting greeted Betancourt's victory, and a variety of sectors immediately mobilized to ensure that the progressive gains of the Larrazábal presidency were not lost. Thus it was that fifty thousand unemployed workers converged on Plaza La Concordia in early August, only to be fired upon, with three fatalities. Shortly thereafter, the same happened during a student march, and again later, as *campesinos* occupied land. A complex constellation of students, *campesinos*, and the unemployed were all pressuring the new democracy toward radical reform, and were all put down violently.

But where, we might ask, was Marx's universal revolutionary subject, the working class? As guerrilla leader Douglas Bravo describes the situation, "the workers tried to hold demonstrations and even peaceful meetings indoors, but they were attacked violently, as occurred in Lagunillas, where the unions and the repressive apparatus of *Acción Democrática* (AD) attacked a meeting of oil workers."[9] Tensions were even higher between union leaders and the unemployed, and as early as February 1959, Juan Herrera, the notorious head of the AD-dominated construction workers' union, lashed out in an effort to distinguish the latter from his own skilled workers: "We can attend to our affiliates who are unemployed, but we are not going to convert the union into a national employment agency."[10] Without even realizing it, Herrera was pointing to a fundamental contradiction: the unemployed people marching in the streets for radical change vastly outnumbered his own union constituents.

Writing within a North African context, Frantz Fanon scathingly dismissed the formal working class of colonized and formerly colonized countries as being "pampered by the colonial regime." According to Fanon, setting out from an analysis of colonial reality leads not to a *confirmation* of Marx's eulogistic praise of the proletariat as the universal class with "nothing to lose but its chains," but to its complete *inversion*: "In the capitalist countries, the proletariat has nothing to lose and possibly everything to gain. In the colonized countries, the proletariat has everything to lose . . . by the privileged position they occupy in the colonial system [the proletariat] represent[s] the 'bourgeois' fraction of the colonized population."[11] While Fanon's dismissal of the colonized proletariat may seem intended to cause controversy—and this was indeed the predictable effect—Immanuel Wallerstein has argued convincingly that the heart of Fanon's point was far less controversial: in response to the Marxist insistence on the revolutionary potential of the European proletariat, Fanon "simply said, let us look again to see who has how many chains, and which are the groups who, having the fewest privileges, may be the most ready to become a 'revolutionary class.'"[12] Although the details of Fanon's analysis were in some ways particular to Algeria, his conclusions echoed those of Mariátegui, who had come to similar conclusions on the basis of "Peruvian (and in some ways, Latin American) reality" some decades earlier.

For Mariátegui, the international economic hierarchy blocks the development of a large and vigorous bourgeoisie in colonized countries because their interests lie more in *comprador* intermediation than domestic investment, and since it is the bourgeoisie who "creates" the proletariat, this blockage has severe implications for class structure.[13] While Mariátegui was not as venomously dismissive of the traditional working class as Fanon, he nevertheless turned his attention away from this small and stunted class and toward a broader alliance that included all kinds of workers and *campesinos*, as well as to the latent potential of the indigenous Peruvian population. It is only from this broad alliance and on the basis of preexisting indigenous communal structures that revolutionaries could build an "Indo-American socialism" that is mindful of and rooted in the particularities of the formerly colonized world. The novel revolutionary subjects that Fanon and Mariátegui would come to emphasize—the peasantry in alliance with the so-called lumpenproletariat—are dealt with in subsequent chapters, but here I focus more directly on the traditional working class. This distinction, however, only raises more questions: Who is part of the Venezuelan working class? Is it industrial or rural, formal or informal? Does it lead the revolution, does it follow, or, as Fanon occasionally suggested and as the oil lockout might at first glance concur, is it even counterrevolutionary?

Like Fanon and Mariátegui, we too must set out from local conditions; as in Mariátegui's Peru, the formal working class in Venezuela grew out of an extractive relationship, only this time it was not the guano and nitrates of the nineteenth century but the oil of the twentieth. As in much of Latin America, this burgeoning Venezuelan working class found institutional support in the import-substitution industrialization policies of a series of governments and the formal working class suffered disproportionately from the dismantling of these policies and the shift toward neoliberal reform.[14] But unlike much of the rest of the continent, the 1970s oil boom over which Carlos Andrés Pérez presided during his first term meant that, in Venezuela, this dismantling would come later than elsewhere, with the formal working class actually growing during the 1980s only to collapse in the 1990s with the neoliberal package of Pérez's second term.[15] As the millennium drew to a close amid the grinding pain of generalized pauperization and the shining hope for radical change, some estimates placed the manual formal working class in Venezuela at scarcely one-quarter of the working population.[16] It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that the relationship of both this formal working class and its institutions to a broader "people's history" was to be a deeply ambiguous one.

A Bureaucratic History

While the kernel of a workers' movement in Venezuela can be found already in the middle of the nineteenth century, a union movement proper would not emerge until much later. When this "movement" emerged, moreover, it was nearly coterminous with the single federation that dominated — critics would say "stifled" — working-class organizing in Venezuela for more than 50 years: the CTV. In the words of one critic: "Its importance is such that, since its foundation in December 1936, its history can almost be confused with that of the workers' movement as a whole."[17] This unquestioned hegemony is in part due to a historical particularity: whereas in many European nations the workers' movements predated the establishment of mass parties, in Venezuela the two emerged contemporaneously, and it could even be argued that the nascent mass parties were the most powerful motor for the development of an organized working class.[18] Nonetheless, the dangers of such a situation were not insignificant; the CTV soon would be severely dependent upon the developing two-party political system and specifically on the hegemonic influence of AD. As a result, this nominal vehicle of working-class power instead became an integral element of Betancourt's strategy of domestication, containing workers' struggles rather than supporting them.

This presents peculiar difficulties for my task of creating a people's history: if the predominant organization of the Venezuelan working class was simultaneously all-encompassing and so closely tied to the corrupt democratic system, then it would seem that there was little "outside" the CTV, and that access to the history of this outside would be limited at best. But as the task becomes more difficult, our attention to the in-between, the cracks in hegemony, must grow all the more acute, and this attention must be directed as much within the CTV as outside it; as Steve Ellner clearly has shown in his "from above" history of the Venezuelan labor movement, the confederation was never the uniform, monolithic, or homogeneously reactionary mass that it sometimes is made out to be.[19] In what follows, I attempt to remain simultaneously cognizant of these internal ruptures and tensions and of the constitutive outside to which they refer and to which dissidents would often be banished. This history, therefore, weaves in and out of the CTV (and later, the National Workers' Union [UNT]), recreating the same delicate dance toward official representative organs, party, state, or otherwise, that we have seen in previous chapters.

Indeed, to deduce a heroic history from the CTV's current appearance would be a difficult task, an exercise that would be comical were it not also a tragedy and a farce, but the confederation's early history was just that: heroic. Even the harshest critics insist that no amount of subsequent political error can "stifle the richness and vitality" of the CTV's long history.[20] The CTV was born of the early combativeness of the oil workers, who, under the leadership of students and communists and the influence of the International Workers of the World, undertook a radical strike directed in no small part against the transnational oil companies closely associated with the recently deceased dictator Juan Vicente Gómez.[21] The forty-three-day strike was a landmark in Venezuelan labor history, and although it resulted in more repression than victory, it nevertheless set the stage for national unity against repressive governments.[22] As former revolutionary MIRista Domingo Alberto Rangel put it recently: "it was not an oil strike, it was a strike by Venezuela as a whole."[23] By the time of the brief democratic interregnum that was AD's 1945–48 *trienio*, the party had sunk its roots deep into the labor movement, but its sectarian policy, which extended to labor as to politics, was blamed by many for the return to dictatorship, and workers stood instead at the forefront of a politics of unity after the fall of Pérez Jiménez.[24] This unity even extended to the Unified Syndical Committee's failed effort to nominate a single candidate for the 1958 election (Larrazábal), and immediate resistance to Betancourt must be understood in this context of organized, working-class opposition to his nomination.

The CTV was officially reestablished at its Third Congress in late 1959, and while AD was a majority presence, the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) and the Christian Democratic (COPEI) party also gained significant representation. As a result of this fleeting "labor unity," for a brief period the CTV maintained an autonomous and critical stance toward the Betancourt government, even rejecting the president's own hand-picked candidate for the Confederation's leadership. While labor leaders continued to push for a united front, Betancourt and his backers in the AFL-CIO sought to exclude the communists, and when Betancourt leaned on oil workers to sign a 1960 contract that was lacking in several key aspects, the division of AD and the birth of the Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR) was hastened (see chapter 1).[25] This tense state of affairs was exacerbated when the government devaluated the bolívar, eliminated Larrazábal's Emergency Plan, and reduced public sector salaries by 10 percent with what opponents were quick to dub the "Hunger Law." As pressure from below threatened to boil over, increasingly severe measures were required, and the massacres of the unemployed at La Concordia and elsewhere found their counterpart within the labor movement in AD's thugs and "shock troops." Central among these was construction leader Juan Herrera himself, whose *cabilleros* derived their name from the steel rebar rods they would wield against those workers who resisted AD hegemony.[26]

In 1961, Betancourt got the division he seemed to be hoping for, and as the left faced repression in the streets, it simultaneously suffered defeats within the CTV: first in a report sanctioning the PCV and MIRistas (approved only while many voting representatives languished in prison) and later in hard-fought union elections marred by continued AD thuggery. The left boycotted the CTV's Fourth Congress in late 1961, only to be expelled by the confederation's leadership body, setting up an alternative federation that later was formalized as the United Workers' Confederation of Venezuela.[27] With the MIRistas and the PCV excluded from the CTV as they had been more violently excluded from legal political life, the path was cleared for AD hegemony, but this would be won only at the expense of further splits in the party itself, many precipitated from within the CTV: both the ARS group (1962) and the People's Electoral Movement (1967) left AD, although the latter would remain within the CTV until it was too late.[28] As the guerrilla struggle wound down in the late 1960s, the government lost its main excuse to justify moderating labor demands, and as guerrilla leaders re-entered the factories—either through the front door with Caldera's "pacification" or through the back door in groups like the PRV's Ruptura front—a decade's worth of pent-up demands sought violent release.[29] Factory occupations, slowdown strikes (colloquially called *morrocoy*, or tortoise operations), and radical wildcat strikes led by "ultras" against "unionists" characterized the end of the 1960s. Counting only officially registered strikes, the number of man-hours lost in strikes increased nearly a hundredfold between 1968 and 1971: of 233 registered strikes, only five were considered legal.[30]

While this spike in initial strike activity coincided clearly with Caldera's presidency, during which AD initially allowed the CTV a free hand against the COPEI administration, the drastic increase in 1971 (following a bipartisan pact) was a testament to worker combativeness.[31] When Carlos Andrés Pérez rode to electoral victory in 1974 on leftist and anti-imperialist rhetoric and oil-drunk promises of full employment, the CTV was in no position to question his motives. But if the 1960s saw the CTV's further alignment with and dependence upon Pérez's AD, the late 1970s saw the party leading the union into the welcoming hands of business interests. At first, however, the oil bonanza masked this tendency, as Pérez instituted a number of pro-labor policies: Venezuela's first minimum wage, job security for low-wage workers, and price regulations on basic goods constituted real gains for workers. But these emerged within a corporatist framework that set a precedent for resolving conflict through tripartite commissions, including labor, business, and the government, rather than through autonomous worker mobilizations. When oil prices declined, however modestly, so too did Pérez's patience with the workers: in 1977 and 1978, not a single strike was declared legal by the government, and when Pérez's *Copeyano* successor Luis Herrera Campins devalued the bolívar in 1983, this pattern reemerged immediately: a spike in strike activity not witnessed since 1971 was met with total prohibition.[32]

Sidor and the "New Unionism"

While PCV splinter groups like Teodoro Petkoff's MAS, which eventually rejoined the CTV in 1974, were busy reincorporating themselves into the electoral and union mainstream, the grouping centered around former guerrilla leader Alfredo Maneiro instead dedicated itself to the task of rebuilding political organizing from the bottom up (see chapter 2). One of its key strategies for doing so was a similarly bottom-up approach to union organizing, and in 1972, the newly established Radical Cause (LCR) dispatched a single member, Pablo Medina, to the massive state-run Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor) steel plant in Ciudad Guayana. This remote eastern zone had recently proven its revolutionary credentials through its willingness to engage in militant strike action and, more importantly, to go it alone in a wave of wildcat stoppages between 1969 and 1970. Medina almost singlehandedly began to publish a workers' newspaper, *El Matancero*, successfully attracting new members like Andrés Velásquez, an electrical technician who became a frequent orator and agitator at the Sidor gates.

The popularity of the "new unionism" of the Matanceros was due largely to its insistent critiques of the AD-CTV complex and the tradition of corrupt, bureaucratic unionism: "Aside from the honesty they wielded against the corruption of traditional unionism, the *Matancero* group fought for such demands as the democratic participation of workers in the union decisions affecting them — something nonexistent in the regional unionism — and the hygiene and safety of the workers on the job, subjects untouched by other union leaders."[33] When the Matancero slate gained control of the SUTISS union in 1979, the threat was so great that AD and the CTV saw fit to intervene, dissolving the new grouping and sacking its leaders, who would return to the helm of SUTISS only after a long struggle in 1988, but this was only after Maneiro's death in 1982 and a serious division that separated LCR's workers in the east from their urban counterparts.[34] In 1989 and again in 1992, Velásquez himself was elected governor of Bolívar, where LCR governance was orientated around the idea of democratic participation, the fight against corruption, the provision of services, and the development of medium industries.[35]

Although LCR soon abandoned its radically critical orientation, the seeds planted by the "new unionism" at Sidor would bear fruit in a new generation of young militants who saw in Chávez's election the potential to topple the CTV entirely. But Chávez's election and the destruction of the two-party system notwithstanding, there was little initial support for the wholesale replacement of the CTV and, in Chávez's words, the "union mafia" that it represented. If anything, the initial strategy was a reformist one: a Bolivarian Workers' Force (FBT) emerged within the CTV to test the waters of worker militancy. Given its own critique of the CTV's intimate relationship with AD, however, the FBT would have to contend with fears that it was poised to become merely another party-dependent confederation, one subservient to Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement rather than AD. However, such hesitations and fears were overtaken by events. In May 2001, SUTISS president Ramón Machuca, an independent formerly associated with LCR, called a successful strike of steel workers at Sidor, which had been privatized in 1997 during the last gasps of the Fourth Republic. Although some, but not all, Chavistas supported the strike—which was, after all, directed against a multinational corporation rather than the new Chávez government—the CTV under Carlos Ortega attempted to turn the struggle into a political one aimed against Chávez.[36]

Ortega would pay dearly for this politicization of union affairs; the tensions he provoked carried over into the CTV elections of October 2001, in which the FBT decided to run a slate of candidates in the hopes of defeating Ortega's list. In a confrontation that reeked of all-too-familiar corruption, Ortega's list was pronounced victorious, but the victory was a Pyrrhic one, as Ortega was unseated as head of oil union Fedepetrol by the FBT-supported and former Copeyano Rafael Rosales, and a powerful independent sector emerged within the CTV comprising Machuca (who had since broken with LCR), Rosales, and Franklin Rondón. This sector would prove crucial, as Ortega immediately consecrated an alliance with Fedecámaras to initiate the series of general strikes against the government that led up to the ill-fated coup and oil lockout (Ortega remains an international fugitive for his participation in both).[37] While largely moderates, these independents were understandably perturbed by such an uncritical alliance with the bosses and the politicization of trade-union demands that were largely being met by the Chávez government. As a result, and with the firm push of the disastrous oil stoppage, these independent sectors spearheaded the creation of a new confederation: the UNT.[38]

The UNT Is Born

While Orlando Chirino insists that the UNT was actually born on January 23, 2003, during the waning days of the "oil sabotage" and on the anniversary of Pérez Jiménez's fall, the new confederation's founding conference was not until March of the same year. Since then, in the words of Jonah Gindin, the UNT has "grown astonishingly fast," and in 2003 and 2004, more than 76 percent of all collective agreements were signed with the UNT compared with a mere 20 percent signed with the hemorrhaging CTV. This growth was helped along by a 2003 government moratorium on firing low-wage employees, which allowed those workers critical of the CTV the "breathing room" to establish alternative unions without retribution.[39] But this growth has not been without its debilitating weaknesses. From the beginning, the UNT has been divided between "radical" and "autonomous" sectors led by Chirino and Machuca-Rondón, respectively. Neither sector is without its links to the government, however, and although the radical current comprises most FBT leaders, Chirino himself insists on union autonomy from the state (sometimes to a controversial degree), and it was because of this issue of autonomy that a new division emerged within the UNT in 2005 between Chirino's Unified, Revolutionary, Classist, Autonomous Current (C-CURA) and the Workers in Revolution Collective led by Marcela Máspero. This rift marred the Second UNT Congress in May 2006 during which, in alliance with Rondón, Máspero sought to delay UNT elections, ostensibly to prioritize the fight for Chávez's re-election, but more than likely also to prevent a C-CURA victory.[40] Inside the Second Congress, Máspero and Rondón were greeted with chants of "Elections! Elections! Elections!" by a crowd that evidently supported Chirino, and they chose to withdraw rather than face a losing vote on the floor.[41]

In the aftermath of Chávez's 2006 re-election and the launching of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), conflicts within the UNT have grown even murkier. Whereas Chirino resolutely opposed the PSUV and the 2007 constitutional reform referendum, the majority of C-CURA members, including Stalin Pérez Borges and Gonzalo Gómez, disagreed, forming a current known as Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide).[42] Moreover, tensions intensified after Bolivarian Socialist Workers' Force leader José Ramón Rivero was placed at the helm of the Labor Ministry, with allegations piling up that Rivero was using the post to favor his own minority current while delaying elections. According to Gómez, Rivero's tenure represented a return to the Fedecámaras-AD-CTV tripartite at its worst, "a recrudescence of shady dealings between the bosses and the bureaucratic stratum."[43] These tensions reached a boiling point in early 2008, in a familiar place of conflict: Sidor. After more than a year battling for a new contract, Sidor workers had come into conflict not only with the company's transnational owners and local Chavistas such as Governor Francisco Rangel Gómez (who violently repressed the Sidor workers), but also with the labor minister himself, who branded the workers as "counter-revolutionaries" and "falsely alleged they had supported the boss's lockout of December 2002, when in fact, they had heroically seized control of the plant to help break it."[44]

In early April 2008, under clear pressure from the workers' struggle, Chávez intervened directly, announcing that Sidor would be renationalized and named for LCR founder Alfredo Maneiro. This surprising victory has reinvigorated Venezuela's workers; in the words of public sector unionist Marcos García, "The workers movement, with the triumph of the Sidor workers and the people of Guayana, who achieved the nationalization of the principal steel producer in Latin America, has produced a change throughout the country."[45] Rivero, increasingly dismissed as the "minister of capital," seemed not to have learned his lesson: a mere two days after being overruled from above, the labor minister issued new attacks against the UNT, eventually calling for the formation of a new, presumably more government-aligned confederation. But Chávez seemed to disagree: speaking on the anniversary of April 13 — a symbolic date, as we have seen — he celebrated the triumph of the steelworkers before firing Rivero and replacing him with former Communist Party member Roberto Hernández. However, if the victory of the Sidor workers has shown that a strong push from below can have a dramatic impact above, it has done little to resolve the underlying tensions within the UNT and the formal working class as a whole.[46]

Optimism was running high in mid-2008, and only time will tell whether the momentum can be maintained, in part because of the ambiguities of the president himself, who, after declaring not only the nationalization of Sidor but also that of the strategically important cement industry and part of the banking sector, was making overtures to the national bourgeoisie in the guise of a "re-launch of production."[47] Despite the renationalization of Sidor, class conflict has not evaporated, and contract workers formerly employed at the plant continued to fight for back pay.[48]

The Comanagement Debate

Latent in these many complex conflicts and debates is not merely the question of working-class autonomy vis-à-vis the state and political parties; it also includes the far more important question of what society is to be created and how best to move toward it. Should workers prioritize — in a Leninist vein — a war of maneuver for the acquisition of *political* power with which to propel forward their economic demands? Or is it in the practice of *economic* self-management in councils that the working classes undertake the necessary Gramscian war of position that prepares them not only to seize power but also administrate a revolutionary society? This tension between the political and the economic-cultural aspects of workers' struggles persists in the debates swirling around the heavily contested term *comanagement*. Comanagement, or *cogestión*, has a long and checkered history in Venezuela, one tightly bound up with the corrupt class-collaborationism of the CTV. Indeed, early comanagement proposals within the CTV were opposed successfully by the PCV and other leftist delegates on the grounds that cooperation between bosses and workers would prevent socialist revolution.[49] As AD's platform shifted away from social democracy toward neoliberal reform in the late 1970s, the CTV followed suit, endorsing *cogestión* as a middle course between the twin dangers of state interventionism and working-class autonomy and celebrating the "Venezuelan tradition" of dialogue over conflict.[50] Given this history, it should hardly be surprising to find that many revolutionary workers see comanagement as a trap and instead demand authentic workers' control.

"Many self-professed revolutionaries don't like to use the term *cogestión*," says Chirino, "What's more, they try to satanize it."[51] In a characteristically dialectical fashion, however, Chirino insists that what matters is content rather than form, that "Marxism is movement, not a snapshot," and what matters is to gauge the development of the workers' consciousness and will and how they are bending institutions toward their own ends.[52] For Chirino, comanagement at its best constitutes a "dual power" situation within the factory in which workers and owners stand face to face in a struggle for control, a situation that can be resolved either by progress toward workers' power or retrogression toward capitalist domination. This, he argues, is what distinguishes contemporary Venezuelan comanagement from its prior manifestations: today's comanaged factories represent "spaces won through the effort and strength of the workers," whereas in the past it was part of a "bosses' offensive" and the "treason of the union bureaucracy." Revolutionaries cannot be blamed for fearing comanagement, given its past: "As they say where I'm from: *al que lo pica una culebra, cuando ve un bejuco brinca*, those who have been bitten by a snake jump when they see a vine, but we need to be able to judge its utility based on its content." The true value of comanagement, for Chirino, is as a process of working-class education that is simultaneously technical and political. "The capitalists live as much by cheating as by exploitation," and so it is urgent that workers understand the factories from within, to see how they are managed, to understand accounting and corruption, to "realize with their own eyes — and not because we told them — that their interests are incompatible with those of the employers . . . The workers need to 'rummage through' the garbage and disgrace of capitalism and arrive at the conclusion that this can't go on, that the bosses need to go, that the workers and the people need to be the owners."[53]

But this easy slippage between "the workers" and "the people" leads us toward an unavoidable worry: if comanagement is about workers learning the "tricks" of the capitalist, then what guarantees that some workers will not adopt these tricks as their own, with workers' control caving to technocratic temptations? This concern parallels traditional worries about comanagement and cooperativism and becomes even more acute in a context marked by a tendency toward a "labor aristocracy."[54] As Michael Lebowitz correctly argues, the "orientation towards higher wages" in some revolutionary trade unions is linked to "their tendency to act like a labor aristocracy in a society where so many people are poor."[55] Moreover, the implications of this concern far exceed the sphere of production with its questions of employment, wages, and outputs: in a society like that of Venezuela, arguments for workers' autonomy inevitably come up against the question of society as a whole. Put bluntly, the question is this: Do the products of a given factory or workplace belong *only* to the workers or to the broader community as well? Given the history of even Venezuela's recent "revolutionary" comanagement, it would seem that such concerns are warranted. Comanagement in the Bolivarian Revolution has taken different forms according to whether the company in question is state owned or recently nationalized, but the same questions and difficulties have arisen in both, and the dangers of both uncritical workers' autonomy and state intervention have reared their ugly heads.

Much of the debate regarding the potential dangers of privileging workers' autonomy under capitalist relations of production centers on the experience of cooperatives, especially the Mondragon Corporation in Spain's Basque region.[56] According to some, the danger is that there is nothing inherently anticapitalist about cooperatives, and when left to their own devices and evacuated of political content, many become perfectly compatible with capitalism. In the Venezuelan context, this danger has been visible in the experience of the Invepal paper company (formerly the privately owned Venepal). When Venepal went bankrupt in December 2004, the workers rallied around a militant slogan evocative of the recent Argentine experience—"Closed factory, occupied factory"—seizing the company and demanding nationalization. Once nationalized, the workers' assembly dissolved the union, forming a cooperative that would hold 49 percent of Invepal shares. However, according to Angel Navas of the national Federation of Electrical Workers (Fetralec), it was at this point that Invepal began to exhibit some dangerous tendencies:

> . . . they seem to be thinking like managers. According to what we heard yesterday, they want to own all of the company's shares. Eight hundred workers will be owners of a company. And if it becomes profitable, are these workers going to get rich? This is a company that is supposed to belong to the entire country; my company can't only belong to the workers, if we make profits they belong to the entire

> population. This is a responsibility that we all have — workers in the oil industry, those who make the most: how do we spread this to the rest of the country? These profits are not for me. It doesn't make sense that just because I work in the oil industry, for example, I can make 90 million bolívares [US$42,000] when the minimum wage is [4 million bolívares or US$1,900].[57]

These concerns have proven warranted in recent years; Invepal workers "began to contract out the work to casual workers, becoming bosses themselves in the process and reproducing capitalist relations within the factory."[58] Despite such temptations, however, Camila Piñeiro Harnecker has shown that the oft-maligned cooperative structure is not without its radical potential in practice.[59]

According to Joaquín Osorio, a leader in the Fetralec union at the state-owned electrical company Cadafe, a radicalized understanding of comanagement — understood as "power in the hands of the workers" — could help to counteract this tendency. As he describes it, comanagement is "a system of management and administration that includes the state, workers, and (in our case) the users, in equal conditions."[60] But the struggle to institute this reformulated and radicalized understanding of comanagement at Cadafe has revealed an equally pernicious threat from the opposite direction, from some sectors of the revolutionary state. As Fred Fuentes observed, "The management of Cadafe went out of its way to sabotage and defeat moves to introduce comanagement," with the ultimate result that, "if you go to most workers in the electrical sector and even mention the word comanagement, it sends a shiver down their spines."[61] Real worker participation at Cadafe has been curtailed even more since, with workers' committees essentially limited to "decisions over what Christmas decorations would fill the halls of administration offices."[62]

Between Autonomy and the State

In recent years, other currents, movements, and struggles have sprung up that have managed to unite, to some degree, rigidly political demands with working-class democracy and autonomy from the Chávez government. Despite these twin concerns regarding comanagement — the dangers of apolitical autonomy and state intervention — there remains a significant sector pushing for comanagement as a revolutionary step forward, crucially doing so outside the factional squabbles that have crippled the UNT. As with

Cadafe and Invepal, moreover, such experiments span the divide between state-owned and worker-occupied factories in such emblematic examples as the state aluminum corporation Alcasa and occupied valve producer Inveval (not to be confused with Invepal).

Just down the road from Sidor, Alcasa had been hemorrhaging money for more than a decade, since worker-state comanagement was introduced as part of Chávez's 2005 push for comanagement in basic industries. Under the leadership of none other than former guerrilla and education czar Carlos Lanz, managers were elected democratically by the workers but kept their previous salaries. This was not, however, simply a case of autonomous workers' control; according to Trino Silva, then head of Alcasa's union, "Alcasa does not only belong to the *alcasianos*, nor to Trino Silva and the Alcasa workers, but to all of the people."[63] However, the comanagement experiment at Alcasa has been plagued by the remnants of capitalist culture in the workplace, leading to monetarist demands by the workers, technocratic imposition from above, and factional power struggles in the unions.[64] Not only that: as a showcase for worker-state comanagement, Alcasa also became a target of more conservative sectors both within and outside Chavismo: "there are a lot of vested interests in ensuring it doesn't succeed."[65] Despite such inherent difficulties and opposition, in 2007 Lanz insisted that the model was not only stable but was actually moving forward into a third phase characterized by the establishment of a factory council, a participatory budget, the reduction of the workday, a critique of "production for production's sake," the humanization of the workplace, and an attack on the social division of labor through the decentralization and democratization of decision making.[66] Lanz himself would not see this experiment through, however, with more conservative and bureaucratic sectors practically running him out of town, according to one observer.[67]

At Inveval, this experiment in balancing workers' control with the needs of the revolution has taken place more from the bottom up, but not without clashing with some of the very same forces. In April 2005, workers who had been picketing outside the failing valve manufacturer took the step of seizing the factory with the assistance of elements of the Bolivarian government. On paper, Inveval might seem comparable to Invepal (the workers' cooperative in the former owns 51 percent of shares, whereas in the latter it owned only 49 percent), but in some ways their experience has been the opposite. According to Inveval treasurer Francisco Pinero, "Initially we never had in mind workers control, we were just struggling for our jobs." But such limited self-interest dissipated quickly during the course of the workers' struggle against their former bosses: "We spent two years picketing at the gates before we decided to take it over. Through this process we developed political maturity very fast, not just through our own personal struggle, but the broader political struggles of the constituent assembly and the recall referendum."[68] Soon, Inveval workers began to realize that "Cooperatives have a capitalist structure in reality."[69] Pinero insists that today the "real power lies with the workers' assembly"; not only that: Inveval workers have developed organic linkages between their own self-management within the factory and the self-management of the local community, developing a system of delegates who move between the assembly and nearby communal councils.[70] It is hoped that such a relationship will help to vaccinate the workers against the self-centeredness endemic among some cooperatives. Simply avoiding this danger from within, however, has not helped Inveval to avoid what is in some ways a more serious danger from without: economic aggression from many still-capitalist sectors within the state apparatus. As a valve manufacturer, moreover, Inveval has been subject to this danger even more than most: since the worker takeover, Inveval has had difficulty acquiring raw materials, and more ominously still, the state oil company PDVSA has flatly refused to purchase their previously contracted valves from Inveval, which the workers attribute to the persistence of corrupt elements within this nominally revolutionary corporation.

Workers encountered little support for their struggle within the ranks of the UNT either, where leaders "were more interested in factional struggles and winning elections," and so the workers founded their own Revolutionary Front of Workers in Occupied and Co-managed Factories (FRETECO) as a weapon to propel the struggle forward. The Front's first congress in 2006 comprised workers from fifteen occupied factories, and by 2007 FRETECO represented workers in twenty factories. With the support of FRETECO and others, the struggle for a revolutionary form of workers' autonomy took a major step forward in late 2006 when the workers at the ceramic factory Sanitarios Maracay not only took over their workplace but also became the first occupied factory in Venezuela to reopen their doors autonomously and restart production.[71] Despite having clearly demonstrated their capacity for autonomous control, however, even these workers have consistently demanded that the factory be nationalized, something that makes little sense from the strict perspective of workers' autonomy but that gestures instead toward a complex dialectic between autonomy and the state that parallels what we have seen in other chapters. This dialectic is as unavoidable as the dialectic of movements and state more generally; the most conscious workers occupying factories demand nationalization not as a relinquishment of their power but as a foothold for its multiplication. Inveval treasurer Francisco Pinero describes his aspirations in the same sort of paradoxical way that we have seen elsewhere: “We want the state to own 100%, but for the factory to be under workers’ control—for workers to control all production and administration. This is how we see the new productive model; we don’t want to create new capitalists here.”[72]

The workers of Inveval and FRETECO are not the only ones attempting to chart this difficult course between autonomy and the state, capitalism and bureaucracy. In steamy Barquisimeto, I meet with leaders of the Gayones Movement, a revolutionary workers’ organization that has been quietly building its strength in Venezuela’s industrial heartland of Lara State through a combination of rank-and-file organizing and ideological education. If their organizing is quiet, however, their symbolism is fierce: “We chose the symbol of the Gayones for their tactics,” Jackeline explains, herself more ferocious than her stature might suggest, “they were known for rapid attacks and strategic retreats that threw the Spanish into disarray, making them the most feared of the Venezuelan Indians.”[73] While Gayones participates in the UNT—and is actually predominant in the Lara UNT—they pull no punches when it comes to the prevalent model of trade unionism in both the confederation and the country as a whole. “We are not kidnappers of the will,” José Luis Pinto tells me, pointing out that they have incorporated constant oversight (*contraloría*) and recallable representation into the practices of their local UNT, which, as a result, is considered by workers to be far less corrupt than the national confederation.

But this is far more than merely a question of corruption, and Pinto explains how “the petty bourgeois unionism of the CTV has been reproduced by Chirino and others, who conceal their economism behind seemingly radical demands for autonomy.”[74] Such autonomy is a farce, he explains, little more than “autonomy to blackmail the workers . . . to separate the economic from the political.” Economic demands that improve the lives of workers are crucial, Pinto explains, but these must be understood as a means rather than an end. Ultimately, the issue is not a strictly economic one, but rather a political-ideological one tied to the Bolivarian Revolution as a whole but that exceeds it. Like FRETECO, the Gayones Movement would rather see a national workers’ confederation that is built from the bottom up and that is openly socialist: the workers’ movement, Pinto insists, must be willing to “play the *rosalinda*,” to risk it all as contradictions heighten, and “as the process sharpens, the masks of the pseudo-revolutionaries will begin to fall." In his view, this process began when Orlando Chirino came out in opposition to the December 2007 constitutional referendum (opposing the proposed six-hour workday) and in the conflict surrounding the PSUV.[75]

Workers' organizing must march in lockstep with political demands for broader social transformation in an effort to build nationally what FRETECO has instituted locally: an integrated relationship between producers and community (here we might look optimistically on the developing commune structures and the multiplication of council structures across Venezuelan society). While providing a fertile basis for the transformation of workers themselves, this relationship and the participation it entails must also be reinforced with ideological transformations; in many ways, consciousness has been the most fundamental limitation to the expansion and radicalization of workers' power.[76] However, were these tasks not sufficiently complicated in their own right, the struggle for workers' power must also confront its own conditions of existence in the rapid urbanization and neocolonial economic structure that wrench the population toward increasingly informalized, precarious, and circulation-based work.[77]

Eight. Oligarchs Tremble!

Peasant Struggles at the Margins of the State

Campesino of my people
I see you moving your hands
without trapping the wind . . .
And you are leaving behind
pieces of other people's land,
you have not fought for your footprints.
Who reaps without having sown?
—Alí Primera

December 10, 1859

As the Conservative Party's Central Army approached Santa Inés, rumors spread like the prairie fire that Federal general Ezequiel Zamora himself would later unleash on the enemy: the Federal troops, so went the rumors, were badly outnumbered and poorly supplied. Only Zamora was calm: "You haven't seen what I have done, and what I am doing, to receive the approaching *godos* [oligarchic conservatives]; if they fall into the trap as I believe they will, I will catch them all."[1] This "trap" was more than mere metaphor, and one participant in the battle described the scene as follows: "As dawn broke on the morning of December 10, Santa Inés was a labyrinth and an immense war machine capable of belching lethal fire from any location without putting its defenders at risk."[2] Antonio Guzmán Blanco, who would later govern Venezuela as an enlightened dictator, described the scene as "the labyrinth of Crete, prepared by a genius of war."[3] Untrained as a soldier, Zamora was nevertheless a guerrilla by instinct, and a brilliant one at that. In what Venezuelan General (and Chávez mentor) Jacinto Pérez Arcay later characterized as a classic delaying maneuver, Zamora had deployed a security squadron tasked with engaging the enemy at a distance, before tactically retreating and drawing the Conservative forces through a veritable thicket of guerrilla-style attacks that would whittle away at their superior forces before finally delivering a single, crushing blow.[4]

The victory at Santa Inés was Zamora's crowning achievement, and it sent the Central Army scurrying into Mérida to lick its wounds, but mere military victory does not make a legend to the measure of Zamora. Among Venezuela's founding fathers, none has been so controversial as he, a man deeply imbued with the class hatred expressed in his memorable slogan: "*¡Horror a la oligarquía!* Hatred of the oligarchy!" And it was from this hatred that Zamora's politics leapt with unusual ferocity: more than a decade prior to his victory as a general at Santa Inés, fed up with the abuses of rural landholders in the *llanos*, Zamora had pulled together a rag-tag bunch of slaves and indigenous people into what he christened the "Army of the Sovereign People" to lead an ultimately unsuccessful insurrection against wealth and privilege. For these reasons and others, many a Venezuelan revolutionary has sought the sort of inspiration in Zamora that could not be found in Bolívar and Francisco de Miranda: here was not a spirit of national reconciliation or a calculating politician, but a revolutionary driven purely by hatred of oppression and love of the poor. In other words, Zamora's legendary status was as much the result of his early rebellion "from below" as from his later military victories "from above." Thus it was that the MIR guerrillas would name their front in El Bachiller for Zamora, and thus it would be that a young cadet, raised in Barinas, would find himself similarly drawn to this potent figure whose blood still pumps in the veins of the Venezuelan *campesinado*.

For Chávez, the connection to Zamora was even more direct, the pumping blood more literal: his great-great grandfather, Pedro Pérez Pérez, fought alongside Zamora, and his great grandfather, Pedro Pérez Delgado, known as "Maisanta," followed in these footsteps by waging a guerrilla war against the Gómez dictatorship in 1914. Chávez's grandmother would often tell him the story of Zamora's crossing of the nearby Boconó River, in which he himself fished and whose waters flow directly from the Andean guerrilla zone that birthed Fabricio Ojeda. The young Hugo would often trek to Santa Inés "in the hope of finding old bayonets in the sand," and Santa Inés looms as large in the consciousness of the president today as it did those many years ago.[5] He has repeatedly deployed the lessons of Zamora's most important battle, dubbing first the constitutional referendum of 1999, his later 2004 recall referendum, and even his 2006 re-election campaigns each as "The Second Battle of Santa Inés." But while these were certainly important battles, Chávez's appropriation of the image of Zamora is not unproblematic since it allows him to transform his own errors and defeats into the sort of "tactical withdrawals" that brought victory at Santa Inés and, more importantly, threatens to replace the image of Zamora the insurgent with that of Zamora the general.

But Chávez is far from the only one to invoke the burning image of Zamora, and Barinas was home not only to the line of *llanero* soldiers stretching from Zamora and his comrade Pérez to Maisanta and Chávez. This peculiar region, where the mountains abruptly meet the plains, has proven to be a particularly potent flashpoint of conflict between *campesinos* and landholding *terratenientes*, in part because it contains 80 percent of Venezuela's best land.[6] Once known as Zamora State, Barinas was later stripped of that title in a spate of reactionary fury that would eventually see Zamora's ceremonial bust dumped quite unceremoniously in the San Domingo River, only to be recovered years later by a fisherman.[7] Zamora, it would seem, was never forgiven for his unrelenting hatred of the landholding classes, a hatred expressed most potently when he burned the local archives of land titles to the ground to aid peasant squatters.[8] Today, this same elite rage puts Barinas at the center of a low-level war between peasant and landlord, a war in which elements of the Venezuelan state often play an ambiguous role, although no longer squarely on the side of reaction. It would be in the heat of this conflict that Barinas would also generate what is arguably the most powerful embodiment of *campesino* power in today's Venezuela: the Ezequiel Zamora National Campesino Front (FNCEZ).[9]

The FNCEZ, which currently represents more than fifteen thousand families, is described by one member as "an organization of battles, of struggle, of strengths, and of tools for the war against the *latifundio*."[10] The "Frente," as it is described by members and admirers alike, is, like Zamora himself, an outgrowth of the severe and unrestrained class warfare occurring in the Venezuelan *llanos*, a struggle located at the margins of state power on that uncontrolled frontier that either rises precipitously toward the Andes or drops southward toward the Colombian border and where paramilitaries are more common than police. This is not a lawless land, as we will see; it is merely one in which a very different law rules, one whose organic relationship to brute force and economic wealth is less concealed. Alí Ramos of the

FNCEZ situates the phenomenon of *latifundismo* in the context of colonization and the "positioning of the oligarchic classes" that emerged in its aftermath and against which Zamora fought with such fury. Much as with the oil economy later, early land distribution in Venezuela passed necessarily through political hands as independence leaders became *caudillos* and appropriated vast tracts of land for themselves. Access to politics, moreover, was heavily controlled, and the dark-skinned *pardos*, who predominated in the rural areas and comprised the majority of the population, were virtually excluded. In the early part of the twentieth century, the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez continued this trend, scooping up vast expanses of land, so that by the end of his rule, Venezuela's largest farms occupied 88.8 percent of the country's arable land but were held by only 4.8 percent of the population. By contrast, the smallest plots served to sustain 55.7 percent of the population on the tiniest sliver (0.7 percent) of the national territory.[11]

But something else had happened during the Gómez dictatorship, something that would eventually spell the near-destruction of Venezuelan agriculture: oil. In what had previously been a predominantly agricultural economy, there was suddenly a new prize to be had, and private and state capital turned to face it, dragging an entire economy in tow. By the time of Gómez's fall, Venezuela was the world's largest oil exporter, but for the massive wealth this brought, something fundamental was lost: agricultural self-sufficiency, or what has been more recently dubbed "food sovereignty." Where agricultural production had once been predominant, it constituted a mere 22 percent of Venezuela's gross domestic product by the time Gómez left power.[12] While this shrinking percentage of the national pie still supported 60 percent of the population, it was a clearly unsustainable situation, and decades of state neglect of agriculture led inevitably to mass internal migration to the cities, and capital flight from the *campo* was followed in short order by population flight: from a country of 70 percent rural inhabitants at the close of the nineteenth century, Venezuela soon became one of the most urbanized countries in all of Latin America. In 1960, only 35 percent lived in the countryside, and by 1990, the tendency had picked up speed as a result of neoliberal reforms, with the increasingly proletarianized rural population plummeting to 12 percent.[13] As the population moved off the land and oil prices conspired with currency controls to keep imports artificially cheap, food production plummeted as well, and today Venezuela receives the lowest percentage (6 percent) of its gross domestic product from agriculture in all Latin America and is the region's only net importer of agricultural products.[14]

For Fanon, such dynamics are rooted deeply in the process of colonization and the global structure of inequality that this process left in its wake. Thus, extraction for the benefit of the colonial power and extraction for sale on the global market yield a similar demographic distortion in which "the towns and villages are deserted, the unaided, uneducated, and untrained rural masses turn their backs on an unrewarding soil and set off for the urban periphery, swelling the lumpenproletariat out of all proportion."[15] Their arrival in the capital, which we will discuss more in chapter 9, contributes to the deepening of what Fanon sees as a powerful and harmful legacy of colonization: the centrality of the national capital itself (a centrality all the more severe in an oil economy like that of Venezuela). Against such global odds, "the only way to revive regions that are dead, the regions that have not yet woken up to life," the only way to combat "the process of urban macrocephaly and the chaotic exodus of the rural masses toward the towns" is a concerted development plan that prioritizes decentralization and reverse migration to the backcountry regions.[16] Despite these massive transformations (and deformations) introduced by oil exportation, over the course of nearly one hundred years, little had changed when it came to land tenure: by 1997, only 5 percent of Venezuelans held title to 75 percent of the land, and the vast majority—some 75 percent of the population—were confined to 6 percent of arable territory.[17] Put differently, those *campesinos* remaining on the land at the dawn of the Chávez era faced a situation very similar to that which drove Zamora to insurrection. But where were their movements?

A Policy of Domestication

Folk singer Alí Primera once described the dynamics of popular power in terms familiar to any *llanero*: if the people are *manso*, tame and docile, they will be easily corralled and herded, but "this doesn't happen if they are *montaraz*," if they are wild or fierce. For a while, *campesino* movements in Venezuela were characterized by such fierceness, although you might not know it from reading most historical accounts. As the exiled Chilean radical Luis Vitale described it, "history does not register important *campesino* struggles prior to the death of Gómez," and this despite the fact that the many insurrections *against* Gómez—like those of José Rafael Gabaldón and Maisanta—were rooted in the Venezuelan peasantry.[18] Central to this hidden history is the spontaneous emergence, documented by Federico Brito Figueroa, of clandestine peasant organizations known as Cajas Rurales in the late 1920s, especially in the central-western states of Lara, Yaracuy, and Portuguesa (later guerrilla strongholds). After the death of Gómez, these preexisting underground organizations provided the basis for the emergence of Ligas Campesinas in 1936. In the radical ferment surrounding the first openings toward democracy and the "revolution" by coup of 1945 that put Rómulo Betancourt into power for the first time, the peasantry staged a march of five thousand in the capital in support of radical land reform, leading to the country's first collective agreement on rural labor. Vitale cites a government agency's concern that, as a result of debates surrounding the agrarian reform of 1946, "*campesino* agitation reached an insurrectional climate" and that it was all the Betancourt-led junta could do to "prevent the explosion of this *campesino* insurrection."[19] This same insurrectionary ferocity led organically to the creation of the Campesino Federation of Venezuela (FCV) in 1947.

After the return to dictatorship under Marcos Pérez Jiménez, peasants again rebelled in the western heartlands that had spawned the Cajas and the Ligas and in the eastern plains of Monagas and coastal Sucre, partly in response to the confiscation of previously redistributed lands.[20] But if dictatorship keeps alive the low flame of resentment and resistance, democracy is a powerful accelerant when tossed onto even the smallest of flames. Thus, the waning days of the dictatorship saw a powerful reemergence of the Ligas and land occupations that once again threatened to escape the domesticating efforts of Betancourt's Democratic Action (AD). Fronts for the Right to Bread formed spontaneously, occupying lands in a direct and combative challenge to landed elites, and just as Betancourt oversaw (limited) agrarian reform aimed at calming tensions in 1946, so too was he forced by the spontaneous actions of *campesino* organizations to do the same on a larger scale in 1960 in an effort to "put a brake on" peasant radicalism.[21] Just as Betancourt turned to land distribution as a tactical maneuver aimed at quelling the flames of rural dissent, so too did he see the FCV—formally affiliated with the Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV) from its very founding—as a mechanism for harnessing the all-too-*montaraz* peasant struggle into a dependable and *manso* support base for AD politics.[22] The result of this integration of working-class and peasant organs was an unusually centralized system of labor representation that was the very embodiment of Betancourt's dream of a fully compartmentalized society, a people thoroughly tamed (*amansada*) by institutional mediation.

Despite this strategy, however, the very nature of agrarian demands meant that the FCV was never as fully domesticated as the CTV, and FCV leaders repeatedly clashed with both the CTV and AD and threatened "the possibility of resorting to violence if agrarian reforms were blocked."[23] These tensions came to a head around two opposing understandings of agrarian reform: the first, championed by Betancourt and formally adopted in 1960, sought to avoid any and all possible conflict with landholders by instituting a series of steps prior to considering any private land for expropriation, and even then "productive and capitalist" lands were to be spared and only "unproductive and feudal lands" redistributed. Against this limited understanding of agrarian reform, one that notably sought to leave intact the *latifundios*, the large landholdings, the FCV argued that the key challenge was the social plague of landlessness rather than economic production and that its solution could only take the form of the destruction of *latifundismo* and widespread redistribution. In other words, whereas Betancourt sought the implantation of "rural capitalism," many in the FCV, including then president and AD member Ramón Quijada, pushed a more thoroughly anticapitalist vision. Betancourt's vision prevailed, and despite the clear contradiction posed by the reform, Quijada and the FCV leadership toed the party line, welcoming the reform as a step in the right direction, voting against Communist-proposed amendments, and critiquing those to the left of AD for supporting land occupations and attacking the reform plan.[24] But Quijada had held his tongue for too long, and by the time he and other prominent *adecos* left AD in 1961 as the ARS faction (see chapter 1), it was too late, and the peasantry was left largely to the able hands of AD and its official appendage, the FCV.

In announcing the 1960 land reform, Betancourt made its political motivations absolutely clear, insisting that his government would not "tolerate the violent seizure of lands" and that no individual was "authorized to take justice into his own hands."[25] However, such insistences ring hollow to those living today in the aftermath of this policy, one far more "violent" than any land occupation and one in which "justice" certainly rests in some well-funded and heavily armed hands and not other hands, poorer, darker, and scarred by years of hard labor. Indeed, as if to prove that he only responded to threats and that his resorting to land reform was more a matter of expediency than principle, Betancourt's reform essentially ceased land distribution after 1962, when land takeovers themselves had declined. According to Alí Ramos of the FNCEZ, as was the case in 1946, the 1960 land reform law "didn't affect [landholding] interests, it didn't touch anything, but only served to channel energies so that they wouldn't overflow."[26] Indeed, whereas some 200,000 families benefited from the reform, the majority of the lands distributed were uncontested public property, and large private landholdings in the countryside remained untouched as the law was essentially forgotten within two years of its passage.[27]

On top of this successful disarming of peasant demands, however, *campesinos* faced an additional challenge that undercut their movements: demographics. This historically rebellious constituency was shrinking at an alarming rate, and at times, to organize *campesinos* must have seemed as futile as collecting sand in a colander. The most rebellious spirits, those most impoverished and with the least to lose, simply up and left to seek opportunity in the city, whereas those peasants who remained would have confronted the same pressures that always assail a declining and desperate class: be forced to behave or be replaced by one of thousands in the "reserve army" of rural poor. When combined with the "bureaucratization of the FCV," we should not be surprised to find in Venezuela an absence of any sort of "national *campesino* movement" in the decades before the Bolivarian Revolution. However, this did not prevent the flickering flame of Zamora from manifesting in the spontaneous emergence of decentralized struggles for land.[28]

The War against the Latifundios *Begins*

Chávez was elected with the support of many individuals and *campesino* organizations, but Betancourt's AD had so effectively harnessed and coopted rural struggles that the Venezuelan countryside — today a Chavista stronghold — was the last bastion of power for the traditional parties, AD and COPEI.[29] This tide began to turn soon enough, however: as the Chávez regime came under unprovoked attack from the opposition in 2001–2, it began to radicalize, and this radicalization — expressed in government programs such as the Missions — brought with it a new support base drawn largely from the poorest segments of society. In the countryside, the key turning point in this rupture with AD hegemony and the attraction of especially small farmers to the government's side was, as it had been in the past, land reform. While the 1999 Constitution is unambiguous in its critique of the *régimen latifundista*, which it declares to be "contrary to the interests of society" (Article 307), its position on large, private landholdings is far more vague. This is because the Constitution does not define *latifundios*, but simply speaks in terms of *tierras ociosas*, idle lands, thereby implying that cultivated land of any size and structure is socially acceptable. Other elements of the Bolivarian Constitution are more subversive, however, such as the concept of "integral rural development," which seeks to increase production toward "food security" while enshrining new, "associative [i.e., collective] forms of property" (Articles 305–7).[30]

If the Constitution is purposely vague on the future of the Venezuelan countryside, the president himself would be less so. When empowered by the National Assembly in 2001 to pass a series of laws by decree, Chávez included among these the Ley de Tierras y Desarrollo Agrario (Land and Agrarian Development Law). The "Ley de Tierras," as it is known among supporters and detractors alike, was greeted with immediate hostility by the opposition, and this and the other decrees passed by Chávez in 2001 unleashed a series of increasingly acute confrontations that eventually led to the failed 2002 coup and the subsequent oil lockout. However, although the Ley de Tierras was clearly more radical than previous efforts at land reform in its provision that private lands could be targeted for redistribution, Gregory Wilpert is correct to note that, in comparative terms, the law was "not all that radical," since to be expropriated, private lands must be deemed idle and compensated at market value.[31] In 2002, moreover, the Venezuelan Supreme Court, still very much in the hands of anti-Chavista forces, struck down two key articles of the Ley de Tierras, one of which allowed landless peasants to preemptively occupy disputed land. Because this was the key tactic utilized by *campesinos* in Venezuela throughout the twentieth century, as well as by powerful movements elsewhere such as the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, the ruling threatened to severely undermine the effectiveness of the law, and the government was forced to skirt the decision by issuing *cartas agrarias*, temporary permits allowing occupations to continue.[32] Despite such setbacks, the president was committed to enforcing the Ley de Tierras, first through the aptly named Plan Ezequiel Zamora, which had distributed more than 1.5 million hectares of land to more than 130,000 families within a year (for a total of two million hectares by the end of 2004). In a surprising parallel to the 1960 land reform, however, this initial stage of the redistribution drew entirely from state-owned lands.[33]

In 2005, however, the approach became more ambitious and more conflictive, with Chávez inaugurating the similarly named Mission Zamora to undertake the redistribution of another two million hectares to one million farmers, this time drawing from privately held lands. Whereas the law made ample provision for expropriating "idle land," this rationale was blurred in well-known expropriation efforts such as the British-owned El Charcote Ranch; the government disputed the legality of the ownership of the land rather than simply seizing those portions that lay fallow.[34] By taking such an approach, however, the government assumed the contentious task of proving illegality while arguably neglecting the larger questions at hand. After all, what do "legal" ownership documents issued by corrupt regimes in the past actually prove? Legal claims to El Charcote, for example, date back to 1848, when Zamora himself sat in prison, sentenced to death for leading a rebellion against the unequal and undemocratic land tenure system.[35] Rather than seeking to determine the legality of such documents, Zamora had rightly viewed such legality as little more than the written expression of force and fraud, summarily declaring *latifundismo* illegitimate when he burned the archive house of Barinas to the ground. But while Zamora's name would be applied to such legalistic efforts under the Chávez government, his spirit would find more accurate and unmediated expression in the three hundred peasants who stormed onto El Charcote, taking matters into their own calloused hands. After all, they had been taught the hard lessons of the Venezuelan *campo*, namely, that even today what the landholder says is law and that no scrap of paper printed in distant Caracas can promise protection from his wrath. This lesson would soon be reinforced in the most brutal of ways.

"Where the State Doesn't Reach"

For Alí Ramos of the FNCEZ, it is with the Ley de Tierras that "the contradictions begin to generate," and the "bloody reply" of the landowners took the form of "class violence" that killed seventy-five organized *campesinos* in the seven months that followed, a figure that since has well exceeded two hundred.[36] Again, Barinas was a flashpoint. According to his wife, Pedro Guerrero was a "first-class fighter" (as his name might imply) who had been actively organizing local *campesinos* as well as documenting the rising tide of violence they were suffering at the hands of landlords. Guerrero had collected a file of evidence of that violence, which he was planning to bring to Caracas himself to make a public complaint, but after his murder on May 15, 2003, the file went missing. Just days earlier, the *terratenientes* had attempted to evict a large group of farmers from occupied land, and Guerrero — alongside Ramón Molletones, an organizer with the FCV — was targeted just days before the Chávez government issued *cartas agrarias* to the farmers, legitimizing their claims.[37] According to Braulio Álvarez of the Chavista Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinator (CANEZ), who himself later received a (nonfatal) bullet at the hands of the landed elite, their murder was "a display of force by leaders of the Ranchers' Association [FEDENAGA], headed by José Luis Betancourt."[38]

Betancourt, already notorious locally, became emblematic nationally when he publicly tore a copy of the Ley de Tierras to shreds in front of television cameras. While Betancourt (no relation to either the former president or guerrilla *comandante* of the same surname) soon left his post at FEDENAGA to take the helm of the national chamber of commerce (and central instrument of the 2002 coup), Fedecámaras, his cattle-ranching successor, Genaro Méndez, would not hesitate to embrace the same honest brutality of his predecessor. According to Méndez, Chávez was originally elected with the support of the ranchers, but the Ley de Tierras was the breaking point in that support "because it is a law that is destined to put an end to our properties."[39] As early as December 2001, FEDENAGA had taken its place as the rural spearhead of the anti-Chavista opposition, calling a national strike in the run-up to the coup, a full year before the oil lockout. Despite his insistence that the ranchers possess a "profoundly democratic sentiment," Méndez nevertheless is evasive regarding the coup itself, repeating what are now standard opposition shibboleths: that in 2002 Chávez "resigned" leaving a "power vacuum" in need of filling. When it comes to the land, however, all talk of democracy falls to the wayside, to be replaced by the rancid traditions of the wealthy: "we have sown our past, present, and future on these *fincas*, and we are not willing to hand that over," Méndez insists, adding ominously, "if there's no one to defend me, I will defend myself, and many of us are willing to give our lives defending our property."

As is so often the case, in the *campo* things are put more plainly, and the violence of reaction is rarely dressed in the rhetorical fineries of class. When asked whether the ranchers are armed (and about the presumed illegality of those weapons under Venezuelan law), Méndez insists that there is a long tradition of allowing ranchers to carry weapons because they operate in areas "where the state doesn't reach." While he admits that those weapons have been turned on *campesinos* in the past, he insists that this was in self-defense and that the cases are few and far between: "our sector has no intention of starting a war." But the war has already begun, or, better put, it never ended. Personal testimony of this war is commonplace: an escalation from threatening phone calls to visits, houses burned to the ground, warning shots, and finally targeted assassination, these are its chosen tactics, and they are deployed especially against those considered *campesino* leaders. Especially in those areas governed by the opposition — Zulia State as well as Yaracuy until 2004 — this vigilante violence by landlords often went hand in hand with the military and the police; political conflicts on the national level were played out locally, leaving dead *campesinos* in their wake (in both states, *campesinos* insist the governors, and especially Manuel Rosales of Zulia, were tied directly to assassinations). As one occupier of Hato El Charcote put it: "I'm a landless peasant. I've got land, but it's in the graveyard."[40]

In one case, members of the Barranquilla Cooperative in Zulia recount how the National Guard arrived in trucks owned by a local rancher to intimidate, attack, and finally arrest those legally occupying the land. The landlord had previously branded collective members with the traditional pejorative of the landholding classes: they were *invasores*, invaders, and despite appealing to the local judicial police with evidence that the land had been deemed idle by the national government, the police too called them *invasores*. The verdict thus given, the National Guard arrived to carry out the sentence, beating the farmers with rifle butts and even firing live rounds. The soldiers later denied the charge, but the farmers had collected the spent bullet shells: "this is from an FAL [military-issue rifle]," one farmer insists, displaying a handful of shells, "this is a weapon of war . . . we have proof."[41] The most perverse part, however, was that the National Guard lieutenant brought those arrested before the landowner as a display of the obedience of the military to economic power: "we've brought you these *robatierras*, these land thieves." To be able to beat these poor farmers under the approving gaze of the rancher was a sort of "prize" the young recruits were more than willing to collect: as one victim described it, "they felt big in front of the *ganadero*."

If many Venezuelan *campesinos* find themselves in a war against power and privilege at the margins of the Venezuelan state, this impunity extends as well to their demands for justice. Many a widow recalls appealing to the local and state authorities, to government ministers, to the press, and even to the president himself, for the most part to no avail: for the murders of more than two hundred *campesinos*, only seven have been jailed, and only one of them was a wealthy landowner accused of planning and funding the murder.[42] The late Willian Lara, a former Chavista minister and state governor, once spoke of "inheriting" a long tradition of impunity: "Certainly in Venezuela there exists a long history of impunity, particularly when those who commit the crime are economically powerful. And this is what we have inherited, not only as a culture of conduct by the powerful elites, but also in the structure of the state. When we manage to put those who pay to have *campesino* leaders killed behind bars, we will see impunity cease and we will manage to leave in the past these painful events, this mourning by *campesino* families for murders carried out by *sicarios*."[43]

While CANEZ and the human rights organization PROVEA approvingly note a shift in which it is no longer the government itself murdering peasants but privately hired assassins, they nevertheless lament a lack of government follow-through.[44] Here, at the margins of the Venezuelan state, power is more obviously political than elsewhere, and legal appeal to the courts is adjudicated in the violent practice of local petty sovereigns. This does not prevent the *campesinos* from appealing to the law; in fact, it was the Ley de Tierras itself that sparked renewed conflict in what in recent decades had been a relatively docile patch of earth. One widow of this low-scale war in Yaracuy insists that "everything [her husband] did, he did by the legal route," and another in Zulia notes how her late husband, in his defense of the Chávez government, would repeatedly insist that "Chávez is alone," that he cannot possibly accomplish everything on his own without support.[45] In other words, while appealing to the law, many *campesinos* fighting the war for land in the Venezuelan *llanos* recognize that the law in and of itself cannot protect them, and this recognition gestures toward new organizational forms gestating far from the seat of power.

Rural Militias or Guerrilla Army?

If there is one aspect that sets the *campesino* struggle apart from many of those movements discussed in other chapters, it is precisely this distance from the state of which Genaro Méndez, the unapologetic spokesperson for a murderous counter-revolution in the countryside, speaks. Indeed, the first wave of the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle was located in these and even more remote spaces, but it was also mesmerized by the lure of the capital — the seizure of power — and failed to connect with the *campesinos* in a sustainable way. Even the more recent urban militia phenomenon, which responded to a sort of lawlessness with autonomous self-organization and self-defense, understood the police as its most direct antagonists and sought to establish autonomy *from* the state. Many other movements, especially since Chávez's election, have been centered at the seat of government power — Caracas — and therefore justifiably have turned their attention to pressuring the state for increased protection and deepening reform, using the 1999 Constitution as leverage. While there is some parallel between such demands for protection by, for example, the women's movement and Afro-indigenous movements — demands that seek to protect the physical security of women from abuse and the racialized from discriminatory assaults—and while the *campesinos* have also clearly sought to leverage the law in similar ways toward a radicalization of their struggles, the *location* of these struggles at the far reaches of the state's periphery leads to some qualitative differences in the demands they express and the methods to which they turn.

In the vast grey area of the Venezuelan *llano*, where one is occasionally more likely to come across FARC guerrillas or right-wing paramilitaries from Colombia than representatives of the Venezuelan state itself (and where indeed it is more likely that these institutions themselves are intertwined), the question of self-defense and popular militia structures is posed with a heightened urgency. The Jacoa Cooperative in Barinas, one of the original land occupations that would later give rise to the FNCEZ, emerged out of the "beautiful battle" surrounding the 2001 Ley de Tierras.[46] But not all was beautiful; the occupants of the land soon faced off against the full weight of local landlords and state institutions, to which the only possible response was struggle and spontaneous recourse to self-defense: "The fight was hard. People were wounded. An encampment kept watch for more than four months to protect our *campesino* brothers and sisters . . . And when the courts ordered the land evictions, we had to get support *en masse*, with one hundred to two hundred people . . . There was no turning back. Armed, we defended our land with hammers, machetes, and pothooks. And that's as far as the police came."[47] In February 2003, after an extended period of occupation and conflict, Jacoa was one of many occupied areas handed over to their occupants by Chávez live on his *Aló Presidente* television program, but the fact that spontaneously organized self-defense was the concrete precondition for state action has not been lost on collective members.

In recent years, such spontaneous resistance in the countryside has developed alongside a variety of organizational forms, the most shadowy of which is the Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL), which made its public appearance with a spate of communiqués and photos (reminiscent of 1994 Chiapas) of masked *campesinos* armed with everything from hunting rifles to military FALs. While the history of the grouping is as murky as its present, the FBL seems to have been formed in the immediate aftermath of Chávez's 1992 coup as a traditional urban guerrilla unit: its first claimed action was the failed assassination attempt against CTV head Antonio Ríos on September 23, 1992, which soon was followed by a grenade attack on the home of former president Jaime Lusinchi and the stabbing of the national social security chief.[48] According to a communiqué and interview with

Comandante Zacarias published in *El Nacional* on September 24 and October 3, respectively, the FBL's early objective was to punish corrupt government officials whom, citing Simón Bolívar, they sentenced to death.

For more than a decade, the FBL was silent, "knees to the ground alongside our people" contributing to the "revolutionary hurricane" that brought Chávez to power and that then was strengthened.[49] When the group reemerged, it was with a very different tone: distancing itself from "terrorist" acts that had been attributed to it, the FBL now insisted on its dedication to the peaceful deepening of the Bolivarian Revolution. This was not the only difference: the FBL had relocated to the Venezuelan southwest, those very same *llanos* across which Zamora once marched. While this transition was not always a smooth one — press reports indicate intermittent clashes with the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN) for territory in Apure — the imperative need for a response to paramilitary violence at the hands of the landlords led the FBL to grow to a force reputedly of several thousand soldiers. While the FBL has suffered divisions as some key *comandantes* have opted to abandon the armed struggle entirely, they remain a shadowy presence in the Venezuelan *llano*; in the words of Lina Ron: "They are like God or the devil: no one knows if they exist until they appear."[50]

Another guerrilla *comandante* from a previous era — Carlos Betancourt — questions the strategy of the FBL in the countryside, which he sees as fundamentally contradictory: "they want to wage a guerrilla war with Chávez's support, which isn't possible. A guerrilla war attacks an established order, and there isn't a government in the world that would allow this. It's a rivalry with the state, and the state is obligated to strike at it." Betancourt, whose Communard Movement seeks to deepen the development of popular militias, is quick to distinguish between the two approaches, which many lump together. Whereas "the FBL as I understand it is a military apparatus superimposed in the countryside" without popular support, popular militias would ideally operate as organic outgrowths of the communities, providing security for the *campesinos* from both the landlords and Colombian paramilitaries while also contributing to economic redevelopment.

Zamora Takes Caracas

This emphasis on the development of popular militias in the countryside is one that is shared by the FNCEZ, which has recently thrown its weight behind the government's establishment of "national Bolivarian militias." It is on the basis of such a project that this organ of the rural struggle has begun to coordinate more closely with its urban counterparts, such as the Alexis Vive Collective (with which Carlos Betancourt works closely; see chapter 3), with the two recently constituting the "Revolutionary Bolívar and Zamora Current" within Chavismo.[51] Briggitte Marin, an organizer with the FNCEZ, agrees with Betancourt with regard to the contradiction posed by the FBL: she insists that Chávez cannot accept the existence of this rural guerrilla army because "he needs to take care of himself," especially with regard to support in the Armed Forces.[52] "The FBL isn't the path at the moment," she argues, "but it is a preparation for other scenarios which remain possible." Furthermore, Marin notes a dynamic interplay between the military and the political: without the military side, she insists, the political could not advance, and this is especially the case in a situation of low-level war against the *campesinos*. Despite their tactical disagreements, however, the FNCEZ "has the same objective and the same vision as the FBL."

According to Marin, the FNCEZ supports the development of a framework for "integral security" that would comprise the communal councils, the national reserve, and the territorial guard, but she recognizes that these government-sponsored institutions are not the "real militia": instead, the FNCEZ has organized their own security brigades in Apure and Barinas to respond directly to the immediate security needs of their members. "We can't wait for the law to arrive," she insists, reflecting the positive lessons of proactive land occupations as well as the negative experience of violence by landowners, and this spirit of impatience characterizes most of the FNCEZ's activities. It would be alongside those forces that agree about the need for self-defense in the countryside—and that similarly refuse to wait—that the FNCEZ occupied central Caracas on July 11, 2005, in an action deemed "Zamora Takes Caracas." In an unprecedented display that was repeated in March of the following year, some seven thousand *campesinos* marched through the capital with cows in tow, slowing traffic to a crawl to draw attention to impunity for murdered *campesino* leaders and to urge a relaunching of the war against *latifundios*.

This laudatory spirit of impatience, this refusal to wait for problems to be solved "from above" and the insistence on pushing demands "from below," also describes the FNCEZ's relationship with the Chávez government. After Chávez was first elected, there was a brief effort to "Bolivarianize" the FCV, and the FNCEZ emerged in part out of the failure of this effort.[53] As with the UNT, Chavistas then attempted to unify peasant organizations under CANEZ, but more radical groups such as the FNCEZ maintained a cautious distance, critiquing CANEZ for its relationship to the state, whereas CANEZ critiques unnecessarily provocative land occupations. As Marin explains to me, they see the potential in forming strategic alliances with sectors of the state to gain resources with which they can respond to the demands of their base, but the FNCEZ is under no illusions and recognizes that their power comes only and directly from the people, posing an inherent threat to the institutions. "There are right-wing elements in the institutions," Marin insists, but government ministries "are forced to work with the FNCEZ because of our power." Just like the workers at the Sidor steel facility in 2008, the FNCEZ, Marin boasts, was able to force the removal of a previous minister of agriculture and land, who was replaced by the more "radical and committed" Elías Jaua in 2006 (who was later and until recently vice president). "We fight from the base, not from the institutions," Marin tells me, and this is a fight in which no leader is safe: "Chávez is the only leader who can guarantee the revolution, but he's also human. We will have to make the revolution *with* Chávez, *without* Chávez, and even *against* Chávez."[54]

This constant and unswerving struggle—within, outside of, and against institutions—is perhaps the only true meaning of the "Second Battle of Santa Inés," and we might be able to discern in the recent FBL split and the conscious decision to reinforce popularly organized self-defense militias something of a "tactical withdrawal" similar to that of Zamora. Whereas Chávez has insistently mobilized the metaphor of Santa Inés for electoral challenges and deployed Zamora's name and image in association with much-needed reforms in the *campo*, there is something disingenuous about invoking such an insurrectionary figure in the name of state action. Neither Zamora himself nor the FNCEZ that today bears his name could deny the importance of such action, but governmental reform and the painstaking research of the legality of land titles hardly evoke the hatred of the oligarchy from which Zamora derives his mythical force. If anything, this Second Battle of Santa Inés has yet to even get underway in earnest. While the struggle within Chavismo continues, relations with the enemy remain on the level of a war of position (although not without its casualties). Alí Ramos notes that "the strange thing, or the paradox of all this is that the Land Law hasn't been implemented more than 30 percent, and it has generated this whole situation. If the political will of the institutions . . . combined to implement it, *bueno*, we could imagine a situation of powerful confrontations and powerful victories for the Venezuelan people if the government accompanies us with a single voice."[55] For Ramos, the true war of maneuver, that of frontal conflict with the enemy, will only emerge once the battle within the Revolution has been won or at least deepened. With a keen eye to lessons for the future, one FNCEZ member recalls the meaning of Santa Inés: "They fought from behind the mills, behind the trenches, behind the river, behind the mountain with their shirtless men, as the legend says."[56] This revolution within the Revolution is the basis for the FNCEZ's current push behind the Bolívar and Zamora Revolutionary Current, which recently marched on Caracas once again in a renewed push to radicalize the revolution.[57]

A "mysterious bullet from the oligarchy" took the life of Ezequiel Zamora, hater of oligarchs and mortal enemy of landed privilege, almost exactly one hundred years before Rómulo Betancourt would sign a land reform law whose intention was not to fulfill Zamora's legacy, but to betray it and rob it of its mythical force.[58] But the myth would not go quietly into the night, as Ruiz-Guevara passionately insists: "the living thought of Ezequiel Zamora is latent in the heart of the people of Barinas, and for every detractor to his principles, there are and there will be thousands of defenders who with revolutionary faith attempt, in one way or another, to continue the struggle initiated by this formidable gladiator."[59] Central would be those members of the Frente who bear his name, those for whom "hatred of the oligarchy" is a tangible reality, who insistently claim that "rage and hope also belong to us," and who echo Zamora's refrain:

> The overcast sky warns of the storm to come,
> while the sun behind the clouds loses its brightness
> oligarchs tremble, long live freedom!
> The troops of Zamora, at the bugle's sound,
> will destroy the brigades of the reactionary scoundrels.

Nine. A New Proletariat?

Informal Labor and the Revolutionary Streets

How sad the rain sounds
on cardboard roofs,
how sadly my people live
in cardboard houses.
— Alí Primera

October 13, 2002

The Chávez regime is perched precariously between two crises as the anti-Chavista opposition — discredited politically in the defeated April coup — prepares to flex its economic muscle in the run-up to the oil lockout to begin in December. Popular reaction to such open threats is resounding, giving rise to a migration paralleling that of 13-A, the day Chávez was returned to his leadership position through an unmediated expression of mass power in the streets. The capital fills with the poor and darker-skinned multitudes, arriving either on buses from the countryside or "coming down from the hills" as they had during the Caracazo. Such migrations are but a concentrated manifestation of an overlapping and twofold process comprising both the decades-long process of urbanization, which binds this chapter intimately with chapter 8, as well as the more mundane daily circulation of poor laborers within the Venezuelan capital. Moreover, both circuits reflect the impact of subaltern capitalism rooted in global economic dependency—what Andre Gunder Frank termed *lumpendevelopment*—on the sphere of human geography.[1] Therefore, to pick up where we left off with Fanon, the exodus from the countryside as a result of oil-drunk neglect of agriculture swells the *barrios*, the residents of which pause in their new homes only briefly to recuperate and collect their strength for the often grueling trek, the daily pilgrimage to the overpopulated valley floor in search of an economic encounter with the wealthy residents concentrated therein. These ex-peasants forced from the land "circle the towns tirelessly," with this circular motion coagulating tentatively in the geography of the shantytowns and their concentric, generational circles.[2]

Alí Primera spoke in heartrending terms of cardboard roofs and cardboard houses, but that was in 1974, and as the *barrios* gained permanence, their physical appearance would begin to change. Those first migrants who settled at what must have seemed an immense distance from economic opportunity some decades ago now hold a privileged position amid the bustling *barrio* centers—Catia, El Valle and Coche, San Augustín, Petare, to name just a few notable *barrios caraqueños*—which are the result of the collision of a bloated and expansive city with the developing internal market provided by the poor for their own reproduction as a labor force. Here, the houses are no longer cardboard, but rather solid structures built with cement blocks and often several stories high. To find cardboard, one need climb higher (although even here, tin is more common), to the more precarious and unstable soil that gives way periodically to flooding in torrents of mud, cement, and flesh. Thus it was in December 1999 that the human and manmade landscape of Vargas, on the down slope between Caracas and the sea, was redistributed forcibly by tens of thousands of bodies and the wreckage of homes transformed into a massive stain visible even in satellite images, a painful testament not to the power of "nature" but the failures of "society" (the parallels to Hurricane Katrina are not to be underestimated).

The complexity and multiplicity of this human geography are reflected in the labor force it engenders: some *barrio* residents are now established in formal employment or have even themselves built small capitalist fiefdoms that respond—at a profit, of course—to the demand of local residents for everything from basic foodstuffs to cellphones and bootlegged DVDs.[3] But the vast majority simply survive, eking out a living with informal labor and odd jobs, all the while dodging the *malandros* whose attempts to do the same by other means make these *barrios* some of the deadliest patches of soil on earth. This very multiplicity collides with occasionally orthodox and mechanical theories to produce deep and acrimonious debates as to the *political* importance of the *barrios* and those who live here. As I have shown, Venezuelan guerrillas failed to grapple quickly enough with the demographic transformation the country was undergoing, and when some finally did so in the 1980s, the state reacted as though a vital and painful nerve had been touched, and a cold layer of repression spread across society and the *barrios* in particular, a "New Plague" whose name marks the location of only the most notorious of mass graves fertilized during the Caracazo.

This double threat of state repression and social violence gave birth to the incipient popular militia movement, which played a crucial role in Chávez's rise and return to power. But old errors die hard, and some lessons are learned only when it is far too late. Today, the threat of misrecognizing the *barrio* residents remains, and despite Chávez's increasing reliance on these constituents as his most unshakeable support base, the comforts of power have led some Chavistas to reassert Marxist orthodoxy in a way that echoes elite denigration of the "horde" and the "scum."[4] However, the economic exclusion of *barrio* residents and informal laborers from the sphere of production and its concomitant struggles has led many of these urban poor to seek refuge in struggles located instead on the political and territorial levels, struggles that the Chávez government resists or dismisses only at its own peril.

"Lumpen? Me?"

As is often the case, it was the enemies of the Bolivarian Revolution who brought a necessary debate most forcefully to the fore, one whose resolution bears at least the potential for dialectical progress. Writing on the editorial page of *El Nacional* (known among detractors as "El Nazional") the day after this mass outpouring of support for Chávez and the Revolution on October 13, from which we began this chapter, anti-Chavista journalist Miguel Enrique Otero Silva, seething venomously at the display, sought to undermine the validity of that support in the most ad hominem of ways by calling into question the very status of his objects as *homini*. Those who had poured into the city center from the countryside and their advance posts in the shantytowns were simultaneously opportunists and dupes, "perennial bus riders" willing to sell their political loyalty for a trip to the capital, "a bread roll and a flask of rum." Otero branded his political opponents, these drunk, gullible hicks and hoodlums incapable of grasping either the fineries of culture or the art of governing others, with the worst label he could muster: "*el lumpen de siempre*, the same lumpen as always."[5] A political firestorm erupted, forcing *El Nacional* to apologize (which is striking in a country in which the opposition press has felt little need to apologize for seemingly more serious offenses).[6] Chavistas had long been accustomed to such pejoratives; "rabble," "mob," "hordes," and "scum," along with more openly racial epithets, had long constituted arrows in the opposition's rhetorical quiver. Such arrows, moreover, usually bounced effortlessly off the seemingly impenetrable armor of reappropriation, rendered all the more impenetrable by the unity such attacks tend to generate. Thus, when the opposition attacked the Chavista "rabble" (*chusma*), for example, Chávez's own response was as unequivocal as it was unhesitating: "Yes, we are the same 'rabble' that followed Bolívar!"[7]

But whereas in other instances this homogenization by the enemy yielded an equal and opposite closing of ranks by Chavistas, the accusation of being "lumpen" had touched a nerve, and rather than prompting a unifying rallying cry, the controversy instead revealed deep fissures within Chavismo and disagreements over which class was to lead the Revolution. As a result, outrage took the form of two opposing responses: whereas some Chavistas sought to reclaim the term as denominating a positive subject for historical action ("We, the lumpen . . ."), others rejected the very suggestion that such a label might apply at all ("Lumpen? Me?")?[8] One explanation for this painful divergence toward the term *lumpen* is quite simple: the truth hurts, and its pain varies directly according to its undeniability. While "rabble," "mob," and "scum" are sufficiently vague to avoid their derogatory content, the term *lumpen*, in contrast, seems to have a very precise content, especially among traditional Marxists. After all, had not the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto* shielded the proletariat from the taint of association with the "mob" by defining it as the heart of the future society in contrast to the "dangerous class" of "social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society" that might occasionally join the side of the revolution, but which is far more likely to serve as a "bribed tool of reactionary intrigue"?[9] And has not this very same class come to increasingly constitute the Chavista base? Here of course there is more moralism than conceptual precision, but in a society where Marx is on the tip of all tongues, such words are painfully resonant.

Fanon's position on the lumpen was in some ways the inverse of his critique of the formal working class of the colonies, and if his dismissal of the latter was poorly received by many on the left, his analysis of the lumpen has become positively infamous (albeit largely through deliberate misinterpretation). While Fanon was careful not to eulogize this "species of subhumans" comprising "the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, the petty criminals" — he did not transform an economic problem into the unambiguous heroic protagonist of national liberation (this role he reserved for the peasantry) — he nevertheless did insist on recognizing both the undeniably structural origin and potentially progressive function of the lumpen within a revolutionary situation. Possessing an instability matched only by desperation, "this cohort of starving men" would serve as crucial fodder for either liberation or reaction, and if anticolonial forces played their cards right, the lumpen might even furnish the "urban spearhead" of the struggle, reclaiming their humanity in the process.[10] But is this the same "lumpen" of which Otero speaks and which Chavistas alternatively embrace or deny? Do the poor residents of the *barrios* of Venezuela, and Caracas in particular, reflect Fanon's analysis in their origins, their class composition, and above all in their potential for revolutionary political action?

Who Has the Most Chains?

As I have suggested above, the residents of Venezuela's sprawling shantytowns emerged in many ways from the very same forces Fanon identified in colonial Algeria, namely, dependent development and the resulting exodus from the rural areas and concentration in the capital in search of opportunity. This process of "urban macrocephaly," moreover, would only be exacerbated by Venezuela's reliance on oil, an economic resource which, if its benefits are to reach the population at all, requires a necessarily *political* disbursement and thereby further concentrates opportunity in the capital.[11] But if Fanon's category of the lumpen accurately reflects the origins of many *barrio*-dwellers, what about their class makeup? Here there is far more multiplicity than mere pimps and hustlers, but I also suspect that Fanon's openly provocative description did not accurately describe the makeup of those masses concentrated in the outskirts of Algiers, either. Rather, I take his provocative description of the lumpen as simultaneously constituting a location, a condition, and a practice: a vast gray area at the margins of the city, the margins of respectable society, the margins of the economy, and the margins of the law. Unsurprisingly, then, these semiurban, poor *barrio* residents once were dismissed as "marginals," as an unfortunate exteriority, a frightening, liminal presence, there but not there. Embedded within this phrase was more than a bit of elite contempt and liberal guilt, both of which seek to cleanse wealthy hands of all responsibility for the poverty surrounding their urban citadels. But how "marginal" are they in reality?

Anyone who rides the Caracas Metro at six o'clock in the morning, as I once was accustomed to doing, will observe yet another peculiar migratory phenomenon whereby the city is drawn together into something approaching a single and unified whole. But it is not wealthy elites that carry out this seemingly Herculean task of unifying the "two Venezuelas," one that we associate with the coordinating functions of the managerial class. Rather, it is the poor and largely informal working class that coordinates the city, moving west to east on tired feet to provide the reproductive labor, services, and circulation of goods that sustain the city's operations. The wealthy, needless to say, rarely make this pilgrimage in reverse; hysterical fear prevents them from climbing the steep hills into the *barrios* (this lack of firsthand knowledge does not prevent many from spouting their opinions of the *barrios*, however). If Marx and Gyorgy Lukács after him insisted that only the proletariat was capable of grasping the totality of the capitalist system, we might say in a similar way that it is only this quasi-lumpen *barrio* dweller who can grasp the totality of Venezuela's lumpen-capitalism. Thus, if this "lumpen" is frequently (although not entirely) absent from the sphere of production, this absence is more than compensated for by its contributions to the remaining spheres of circulation (buying and selling commodities) and reproduction (varieties of domestic labor and services), which are, after all, prerequisites to capital accumulation.[12] Given the general invisibility of domestic work (see also chapter 5), the most visible form of this contribution tends to be in the sphere of circulation as either street vendors (*buhoneros*) or their mobile counterparts, the *motorizados* (motorcycle couriers), who literally circulate constantly throughout the city and whose unpredictable mobility strikes fear into the heart of the wealthy.

As the integration of these groups within the economic system and "the manifold ways in which their activities contributed to capitalist accumulation" became undeniably clear, the term *marginals* gave way to the more accurate but not unequivocal phrase "informal labor."[13] According to some estimates, informal workers, or those "excluded from modern capitalist relations . . . which must survive through unregulated work and direct subsistence activities," ballooned after the dismantling of state-led import-substitution industrialization programs and now constitute "the numerically most important segment of the employed population in Latin America."[14] In the wake of Carlos Andrés Pérez's neoliberal reform package and the Caracazo it provoked, “Masses of peasants migrated to the cities, real wages dropped substantially, and the informal sector ballooned. In just three years 600,000 people migrated to the cities. The *campesino* labor force, rural peasants and farmers, shrank by 90 percent. The proportion of workers in the informal sector rose from 34.5 percent in 1980 to 53 percent in 1999. The industrial labor sector decreased.”[15] When combined with the ranks of the formally unemployed, this figure reaches well over half of the active population, with fewer than 20 percent of the population as a whole employed in the formal sector. These informal laborers are overwhelmingly women and include a sizeable segment of downwardly mobile former middle class.[16] In the period of economic stability following the 2002 coup and oil lockout, this trend was reversed slightly, and recent statistics suggest a rate of informal employment of 43.5 percent.[17]

In response to this growing predominance of the urban informal sector and its relative homogeneity of economic condition, some, like Portes and Hoffman, speak of a new category entirely: the “informal proletariat.” While certainly better than *marginals*, this attempt to maintain the dignity of *proletariat* while escaping the indignity of *lumpen* nevertheless abandons the potent indictment contained within the latter. On the one hand, this concept risks neglecting and even naturalizing the perversity of economic structures and processes that generate the lumpen in the first place: as Gunder Frank powerfully insists, it is not the poor who are lumpen, but the entirety of the system of “lumpendevelopment.” In this sense, “informal” seems to be a weak stand-in for “illegal,” and yet it is *illegality*—here stripped of its pejorative content—that best characterizes many aspects of informal labor and *barrio* life: from openly criminal activities associated with the black market and smuggling to the more mundane illegality of the *buhoneros*’ occupation of public space and illegal use of electricity. The key is to grasp the two-sidedness of this illegality, which results in equal part from the capitalist need to circulate goods and from the preference for an underpaid and unprotected workforce, and this generalized situation of illegality, this broad grey area at the margin of the law, is visible not only in the number of informal workers, but also in political phenomena such as corruption, in which an entire political system operates outside the law.[18]

On the other hand, we also risk losing sight of the fact that this two-sidedness constitutes informal workers as well, giving rise to what Fanon sees as the central characteristic of the lumpen: a political instability driven, at least in part, by a situation of economic precarity. When seen historically, this instability, rather than a negative or pejorative marker, should remind us that in recent decades the informal sector, the poorest of the poor in Venezuela and Latin America as a whole, have behaved in a far more revolutionary fashion than their more nominally "working class" counterparts. If the politically salient questions are, Who has the most chains? or, Who has the least to lose? then events from January 23, 1958, to the Caracazo to April 13, 2002, should give us a clear enough answer: informal and lumpen sectors have long been at the forefront of Venezuela's most radical and militant struggles. In the early years of Venezuelan "democracy," it was the unemployed workers who first tasted the repression of the Betancourt regime while Betancourt's union thugs jealously guarded the privileges of formal workers. But the arguably vanguard role of "lumpen" sectors was most visible during the Caracazo: in the words of Nora Castañeda, "it was so-called *malandros*, the street criminals, who defended the unarmed people—the street criminals, not the leftist parties, were the ones who confronted the army."[19] In more recent years, moreover, this same sector has come to provide not only the support base for Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution, but also its most intransigently radical leadership. From the popular militias growing organically from the struggle against *barrio* violence to Lina Ron's Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), which has consistently represented the demands of informal workers, this has been a sector that not only has supported Chávez but *pushed him* further, faster, and in more radical directions: the metaphorical whip of the revolution.

Finally, it is this sector—from *motorizados* to *buhoneros*—and its armed components that provide the only guarantee for Chávez's persistence in power because it was they who took to the streets in a show of force on April 13, 2002, to demand his return.[20] It was even the poor residents of the ostensibly nonpoliticized *barrio* of Petare in eastern Caracas that "stormed the state television station, bringing it back on the air to inform the country of the coup, rallying Chávez' supporters to successfully demand his return."[21] But for Fanon, this tendency toward extremism in the name of the revolution has as its counterpart the possibility for a swing toward the same extremism in the name of counter-revolution and reaction, and this danger is lost in the label "informal proletariat." Here, the experience of the *barrio* militias is instructive as well; Juan Contreras told me of many former comrades who went over to the other side, transitioning from armed resistance against the drug trade to active participation in it. But what much of the moralistic Marxist dismissal of the so-called lumpen refuses to recognize is that — as C. L. R. James argued — this "dual nature" extends even the traditional industrial working class, explaining its manifest propensity toward both revolution and reaction.

Barrio *Culture*

As this example suggests, political instability does not derive mechanically from objective class structures, from the distance that separates informal laborers from the means of production. As struggles shifted to the community level during the 1970s and 1980s — struggles for public services and against the drug trade — differences vis-à-vis the means of production tended to melt away. Regardless of where people worked and in what capacity, they needed to come home, needed to walk the streets safely, needed running water and spaces for sports and cultural activities, and these shared needs and the struggles they generated gave rise to a sort of *barrio* consciousness and *barrio* culture. While Marx would not have been sympathetic to such an idea, it nevertheless shares some elements with his description of the proletariat, whose class consciousness grows in part from its physical concentration (unlike the dispersed and therefore "idiotic" peasantry). It was this element that allowed C. L. R. James to describe the Haitian slaves, "working and living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar factories," as being "closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time."[22] Should we be surprised to find political consciousness and spontaneous organizational capacity sprouting up from the fertile concentration of millions into the Venezuelan *barrios*?

Here, rural community traditions both remain and are transformed in yet another challenge to Régis Debray's dismissive phenomenology of the abstraction and the corruption of the city. Here *hervidos* are cooked collectively over open flames, with communal drinking rituals and even a gossipy culture that many describe as a vestige of life in the *pueblo*; the colloquial refrain "*pueblo pequeño, infierno grande*," or "small town, big hell," that refers to the nosy neighbors and prying eyes of the countryside is frequently deployed in the *barrios* as well, where such intimate relations remain on a block-to-block basis. This *barrio* culture, coagulating in those moments of rest in the human flows that unite the city, cuts against the purported class pathologies of the lumpen, generating a community of *vecinos*, or neighbors, where economic structures and violence press toward atomization.[23] It was into precisely these countervailing pressures of violence and community that many militia groupings intervened in an effort to regenerate the cultural fabric of *barrio* communities. Furthermore, some have observed in the physical appearance of the *barrios* a powerful expression of human creativity and the self-activity of their poor residents, evocatively describing the constantly shifting geography of shantytowns in the following terms:

> It is creation.
> It is urgency.
> It is the unprecedented.
> It is surprise.
> It is the humility of the worker who is constantly constructing.
> It is making a world in which to live, in which to take refuge.
> It is putting brick upon brick, sheet to sheet, until arriving at who knows where. . . ."[24]

Class consciousness and culture thus emerge in a spatial and geographic aspect and are transformed in the process, sometimes intermingling with and sometimes plainly overruled by geographical concentration. But *barrio* culture also explains in part the peculiar way in which these actors have expressed themselves in action; class demands have been subsumed to territorial, neighborhood demands that manifest, above all, *politically*. This tendency, what former guerrilla Kléber Ramírez termed the "social homogenization of the *barrio*," is pushed by both internal and external barriers that make organizing informal workers according to strictly economic demands difficult.[25]

On the one hand, informal workers (as well as the unemployed and peasants, for example) have been excluded systematically from most labor unions, thereby blocking strictly economic outlets for their demands. The collapse of the Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV) and its replacement by the National Workers' Union (UNT) — a radical union confederation that at least claimed it would incorporate informal workers — initially seemed to bode well for the unity of economic struggles, but despite such initial good intentions, partisan bickering has trumped the important work of building a union movement "from below" that would include all oppressed workers. According to Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes, "the UNT, like the CTV before it, has largely avoided any attempt to organize workers in the informal sector, focusing overwhelmingly on the demands of the most privileged layer of Venezuelan workers," which "has led to a disjuncture between the organized trade union movement and the masses of poor Venezuelans who form the backbone of the Bolivarian revolution."[26] On the other hand, however, there are also internal barriers to organizing informal workers as a strictly economic force. Namely, when one operates in the realm of pure circulation — as do *buhoneros* — is there any exploiter other than the global market itself against which to organize and make claims? In the end, demands — for greater protections, for public services, for recognition as workers, and for social security — are directed toward (and occasionally against) the state, rendering them more political than economic.[27]

Economic organizations of informal workers have indeed emerged, notably the powerful United Federation of Non-Dependent and Similar Workers of Venezuela, which was founded in 1992 and claims some seventeen thousand affiliates.[28] But, given this dual difficulty, it should not be surprising when the modes of organization expressing the demands of the informal sector assume political and geographical forms rooted in *barrio* culture.[29] From the early popular assemblies that blossomed in the run-up to and immediate aftermath of the Caracazo, to the Patriotic Circles and later Bolivarian Circles, to today's communal councils, these have been the mechanisms of choice for many informal workers in Venezuela.

Buhoneros *and the Revolution*

In the years following the "lumpen controversy" sparked by Otero's *El Nacional* editorial, such struggles would increasingly come to center on a single figure: the *buhonero*. Although this oft-maligned street vendor has been identified according to economic function, both the attacks on *buhoneros* and their chosen mode of self-defense have leaned toward broader political claims regarding public space and the imperative need to confront the phenomenon of lumpendevelopment in a systematic manner. As this controversy has developed and deepened, the Chavista government has experienced the double-edged blade of the lumpen that, if not handled properly, threatens to cut into the hands of those who seek to wield it. In recent years, it has become clear that those very same Chavistas who would have rejected the label "lumpen" for themselves when it came from the opposition were surprisingly willing to apply this weapon of elite derision to others, and specifically to the *buhoneros*.

According to radical Chavista Reinaldo Iturriza López, the *buhoneros*, like their mobile counterparts, the *motorizados*, "are political subjects that have played a decisive and determinant role in the toughest moments of political confrontation and yet are seen disdainfully by those who participate, shall we say, in formal politics." While there is some truth to critiques of the *buhoneros*, Iturriza insists on engaging in an "exercise in historical memory": these same *buhoneros* who are attacked for their lack of political consciousness and individualism, according to Iturriza, were on the front lines of the struggle against the 2002 coup, also playing an economic role in breaking the oil lockout through their commercial activities. "I will go even further," he adds. "How many of the first victims of the Carmona dictatorship [during the 2002 coup] were *not buhoneros* from central Caracas, repressed in blood and fire by the Metropolitan Police? Without a doubt, some of the first street combat against the dictatorship, on April 12, was led by the people/*buhoneros*."[30] In 2005 and 2006, the phenomenon of informal capitalism was at its peak; the walking boulevards of Sabana Grande and Chacaito were choked with stalls whose occupants hawked clothing, DVDs, and other wares, the *buhonerías*, or knick-knacks, from which the name derives. For a time it seemed as if the Chávez government would tolerate this quasi-illegality that was the product of economic structures rather than individual predilection, the product of lumpendevelopment rather than the so-called lumpens themselves. After all, the revolutionary Constitution of 1999 clearly enshrines the right to work and declares the promotion of employment to be an obligation of the state (Article 87), although this right is mitigated—as was the case with land expropriations—by the qualifier *productive*. In recent years, however, as the *buhonero* controversy deepened, the interpretation of this phrase has become a point of sharp disagreement.

Beginning as early as 2004, local governments began to resist the spread of street vendors and, even more controversially, began to physically remove stalls from densely packed or politically contested areas. This was particularly controversial because the deployment of (historically despised) police against street vendors had previously been a tactic of wealthy elites seeking to ethnically cleanse the poor from their sphere of control, as with the 1998 ban on the informal economy in Chacao, the wealthy center of Caracas, which effectively sought to outlaw an entire class of people.[31] It was no surprise, therefore, that when Chavista officials took up the battle against the *buhoneros*, presenting it as a struggle for access to public space, the response was spontaneous but determined resistance that revealed the lines of force—economic as well as political—behind the controversy. Serious conflicts began to surface between the heavily Chavista street vendors and Freddy Bernal, then mayor of western Caracas; in December, arguably under pressure from business interests whose Christmas profits were undercut by cheaper wares on the street, Bernal deployed the hated Metropolitan Police in an effort to clear *buhoneros* from the street, prompting clashes that left dozens injured.[32] To the undiscerning eye, this must have looked like the Caracazo all over again. While Bernal was allegedly scolded by Chávez and some officers were disciplined, tensions continued to rise, with sporadic clashes and shootouts marring Bernal's *desalojos*, or evictions of informal workers.

At one such clash in Vargas State, Lina Ron's UPV stepped forward as the most vociferous defender of the informal sector, from which its militant ranks tended to be drawn, thereby bringing Ron into direct conflict with local Chavista leaders such as Bernal and Vargas Mayor Alexis Toledo (a Chavista closely tied to the official Tupamaro Party). Ron, who had been disparaged before her recent death as the "commander of delinquents" (*jefa de los malandros*) and the "hope of the prostitutes, can collectors, and beggars," was perhaps the single public figure most directly associated in the popular imaginary with the "lumpen" masses.[33] Ron knew the life of informal labor from harsh experience, and her politicization came through the Popular Struggle Committees (see chapter 2), legal mass fronts through which the once-revolutionary Bandera Roja sought to connect to the *barrios* (Ron insists that she was only a member "when Bandera was Bandera").[34] When the *buhoneros* in Vargas sought to block the streets in protest of efforts to remove them, the UPV stepped in to help, prompting conflict with local police and even the Tupamaros that resulted in gunfire, one death, and the arrest of nine UPV supporters. Amid the melee, an old woman dressed in Chavista red reputedly turned a traditional slogan of the poor majority into a threat aimed at the local mayor (and possibly even at Chávez himself): "*Nosotros te pusimos, nosotros te quitamos*," she shouted, "we put you [in power] and we can take you out."[35] Thus, revolutionary organizations and institutional structures intermingle and clash in the frequently disorienting whirlwind that is the Venezuelan war of position; the *desalojos* and the resistance that almost inevitably greets them continues to the present.[36]

During the *buhonero* controversy, in which Chavista leaders mimicked their elite counterparts by banishing the informal economy from the streets, I made a habit of asking my students at the Planning School what they thought of *buhoneros*. "They are criminals," some would say. "They are capitalists," others would add, echoing the traditional Marxist critique of the lumpen as aspiring petty bourgeoisie: "they would own twenty stalls and exploit workers if they could."[37] But in a city like Caracas I would inevitably have students who had been *buhoneros* and who would attempt to defend themselves by presenting it as merely a job like any other and, above all, as the only possible response to a situation of economic necessity. For example, Gonzalo Gómez places the onus for solving what is a social problem squarely on the government while recognizing the "distortions" embedded within the informal economy, by which he means its tendency toward a capitalist consciousness and criminal practices. Chavista leaders, both nationally and locally, have lacked "a policy to combat this, appealing to the democratic organization of the *buhoneros*," choosing instead to ignore the problem until the only remaining solution is physical eviction. "This is not the way to resolve problems," Gómez insists, arguing instead for "attacking the capitalist and corrupt elements that exist within this sector, fighting for leadership, and opening up alternatives in the social economy for these sectors."[38]

While it is true that the Bolivarian government is ultimately responsible for treating the effects of lumpendevelopment, I want to go one step further to argue that the vanguard position played thus far by the *buhoneros* and the lumpen more generally is no accident, but is instead precisely the result of this strategic position this massive class currently holds in Venezuelan society. Their overwhelming numbers, their high degree of mobility, their necessarily political demands, and their location in the bustling streets of the capital make this a class that, if pushed toward revolution, is capable of providing more than merely the "spearhead" foreseen by Fanon. In fact, just as the *barrios* express this dual consciousness and potential for creative self-activity in their physical being, Roland Denis insists on the potential for radical consciousness among the informal workers, those "millions of persons who," as a result of "forced immigration from the countryside . . . have been left only the street as their space," a forcible relocation of politics best expressed in the Caracazo. These "nomad workers, landless, nationless, and jobless" are the "most genuine" product of "capital's global chaos" and possibly its most genuine gravediggers as well.

But many Chavistas have failed to recognize either the structural origins of the lumpen or its explosive potential, opting instead for the "language of accusation . . . blaming the pariah for their own condition, the poor for their poverty" and "repeating the old nonsense of: Long live the working class! Down with the lumpen!" "Bolivarian socialism has, through its spokespeople, decided brilliantly in Caracas to exclude from its project half of the country's workers, including women and men who have at times been those who have risked their skin when it was time to defend this revolution . . . Bullets for the people, long live the revolution!"[39] Making pariahs of the *buhoneros* by excluding them from the revolutionary process will only lead to a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the negative potential of their consciousness will win out over the positive and economic mafias will gladly fill the space left by political exclusion (and here Denis and Iturriza echo Fanon).[40] For Denis, we must

> take advantage of this reality of nomadism, to rummage through its garbage and its asphalt and cement world, betting that we might discover within it a new and unknown revolutionary miracle . . . "Nomad Communities" . . . the capitalist world, just as it invades, expropriates, and exploits the creative qualities of human beings for its advantage and profit, also generates the conditions for a rebellious and anti-capitalist subjectivity which is the basis for its own demise. Might there be something of this in our streets, so full of reggaeton, robberies, garbage, violence, disregard, irresponsibility, individualism, and all types of mafias?

It was this very same wager on the revolutionary potential of the Venezuelan masses — driven as much by revolutionary hope as by an acute recognition of the failures of the guerrilla war — that had driven Denis and others to sink their roots into the *barrios* in the first place, contributing to the Caracazo and crucially *making possible all that has come since*. It is this perspective that the Bolivarian leadership neglects at its own peril.

Denis proposes a concrete model of "Communal Councils of the Street," which echoes what we heard from Liborio Guarulla, the indigenous governor of Amazonas (see chapter 6): representative institutions must respond to human geography, moving where people move and adapting spatially to the constituents in question. Indeed, this sort of fluid democracy — what Lina Ron referred to as "direct elections in the streets"[41] — was expressed in a powerfully concentrated form in the Caracazo and on April 13, 2002. But its institutionalization into directly democratic institutions radicalizes thinkers like Marta Harnecker, who envisions a proliferation of councils across all branches of production and circulation alongside "thematic" councils of women, students, the elderly, and the disabled, among others.[42] This aspiration has also been visible in the recent street action of the newly formed Settlers' Movement (*Movimiento de Pobladores*), which has stirred controversy by participating in takeovers of idle land in Caracas, prompting Chávez to meet with the organization and make some declarations in favor of squatting that shocked moderate Chavistas.[43] Just as the *buhoneros* demand an access to public space that reflects their economic centrality, so too do these new settlers bring the spatial demands of the *barrios* into the heart of the opposition-controlled zones of the capital. But in line with all the other movements we have discussed, Iturriza correctly warns radical Chavistas that this and other victories were won “in the streets,” not in the halls of power.[44]

Writing from Venezuela, the Canadian economist Michael Lebowitz identifies a new revolutionary “specter” haunting Latin America, but he is quick to clarify what this specter is *not*: “this specter is not a focus upon the industrial working class as the revolutionary subjects of socialism, a privileging whereby all other workers (including those in the growing informal sector) are seen as lesser workers, unproductive workers, indeed lumpenproletariat. Nor does it suggest that those industrial workers by virtue of the difference between their productivity with advanced means of production and their incomes (i.e., the extent of their exploitation) have a greater entitlement to the wealth of society than the poor and excluded.”[45] Nothing could be as dangerous for the Bolivarian government as clinging to old Marxist dogmas and neglecting the fact that its own success came *only* as the result of the desperate and decisive action of these so-called *lumpen de siempre*.

Conclusion. Dual Power against the Magical State

Dispersed people, dispersed hearts,
dispersed struggles, let us find the reasons . . .
Why not unite, if the rifle and the gospel
have already united in Camilo's hands?
I ask, I ask, why do we divide ourselves,
if this only makes our enemies happy?
Why do we insist on isolating our struggles,
the struggles that should lead us to final victory?
—Alí Primera

In many ways, this people's history has been a history of the dispersal of a people: the failure of the Venezuelan guerrilla war, a struggle that represented the people in its aspirations but never in its constituency, led to a dispersal of popular forces. This dispersal then gave rise to a period in which a multiplicity of movements and struggles developed autonomously across Venezuelan society, in factories, *barrios*, schools, homes, parties, and a multitude of revolutionary organizations and political formations. However, while this period of dispersal and autonomous development has been crucial to the consolidation of Afro, indigenous, and women's identities, few would consider this dispersal of the movement to be an unambiguously positive development, an end in itself. Thus, although I disagree with Primera's suggestion that any division of the struggle necessarily constitutes a weakness, and certainly with the idea that there might be such a thing as a "final victory," I nevertheless take his point that these dispersed struggles must ultimately seek some sort of reunification if any victory is to be won. After all, reunification of the struggle is also a part of this history, as those many dispersed and diverse movements were eventually bound together in an explosive chain of events: the Caracazo, the pair of failed coups in 1992, and Chávez's election in 1998. This reunification, moreover, was more than the mere negation of their dispersal, marking instead a clear dialectical progression: the movements of today are much more powerful and developed than they would have been had they not "dispersed" in the first place.

Nevertheless, I wonder how to square Alí Primera's lamentation of dispersal with, for example, Raúl Zibechi's recent insistence on "dispersing power." Reflecting on recent rebellions in the Bolivian community of El Alto, the radical Uruguayan theorist argues for the construction of a nonstate power that, in its horizontalism and absence of institutions, leadership, and singular logics, "disperse[s] the state without re-creating it."[1] Do Primera and Zibechi stand fundamentally opposed to one another on the question of how to create revolutionary change? Would Primera allow any dispersal of forces in the present? Would Zibechi see the struggle of the future as requiring any reunification of our power at all? For Enrique Dussel, the "dissolution of the state" (what Zibechi calls the dispersal of power) is—much like the classless society—a normative postulate that serves to orient our strategy for the present.[2] But he insists that a grave error is committed when we confuse or substitute that ideal, that ultimate horizon toward which we aim, for strategy itself, deeming the destruction of the state our immediate task in the present. The mortal danger posed by such an error can be seen in the position that some contemporary anarchists assume toward the process underway in Venezuela: blinded by the perceived need to destroy the state *now*, they fail to see the revolutionary forest for the trees. Prioritizing our ultimate aims in the present can lead to a blindness to how it is that revolutionary change occurs and how it has been occurring in Venezuela. Rather than the revolution underway in Venezuela, then, some see merely the continuity of the state, of corrupt institutions, of charismatic leaders. It is in contrast to this view—the blind insistence that all power must be immediately dispersed in the here and now—that Primera describes his people as

> Wood fragrant of jasmine and coffee,
> precious wood, precious wood,
> wood of hope, wood of song.
> Let us make this wood into a hand

to strike powerfully at those who forever
strike, strike, strike at us.

In other words, we must first strategically accumulate, consolidate, and develop *our own* power if we are ever going to be in a position to "disperse" the power *of our enemies* later. Lest this distinction provoke anxiety (as I am certain it will), I will be clear: this is not a question of putting off the "real" revolution until later or of accepting institutions "as is" for the present, but of insisting on the need to understand the accumulation of forces as a revolutionary alternative.

How do we build this other power, and what does it look like? As I have shown in the chapters comprising this study, the initial unification of revolutionary forces in the years leading up to Chávez's election certainly emerged around the image of Chávez, the concept of the *pueblo*, and the Constitution that later emerged at the intersection of the two. All three of these can be understood as what Ernesto Laclau calls "empty signifiers," sufficiently vacant vessels in which to deposit revolutionary aspirations and focal points around which power can be consolidated.[3] But there is more to it than that. The years since Chávez's election, during which this unification has turned to development and accumulation of forces, a deepening of popular power, have seen a process closer to what Dussel, following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, calls "dialogue and *translation*," in which the constituent elements of the Chavista bloc have learned from one another and translated their struggles into mutually legible terms, yielding an increased understanding of the intersecting function of race, gender, and class oppressions.[4] Female organizers have increasingly recognized that poor women of color bear the brunt of neoliberalism, Afro and indigenous Venezuelans have sought to hammer out a long-awaited if still preliminary alliance around questions of land, students have come to understand that an entire society exists beyond university walls, and aging guerrillas and their contemporary progeny let slip their vanguardist tendencies and begin to learn all of these lessons at once.

But, as previous chapters have shown, such dialogue and translation are rarely undertaken voluntarily by those occupying positions of relative privilege. Thus, alongside dialogue and translation — and indeed as a fundamental component of these — we have witnessed a process of combat whereby some groups and movements, notably women and Afro-Venezuelans, have issued strong demands and even ultimatums that *force* such translation to occur. This intra-revolutionary conflict, this dialectic within a dialectic that occasionally proceeds by blows, has proven fundamental to the unification of the *pueblo*, far more so than the image of the "great leader" fetishistically exaggerated by the foreign and opposition press. If anything, this process has gradually filled the "empty signifier" that is Hugo Chávez with an increasingly definite content as the revolutionary movements discussed in previous chapters have pushed him radically to the left. This history of struggle is the best vaccine against the very real tendency toward homogenization that mutes controversial demands in an effort not to rock the Chavista boat; for Afro-Venezuelan organizers, taking the risk of rocking that boat has paid off in the past, and this lesson has not been lost. But if this internal process, whereby revolutionary forces draw closer to and are interwoven with one another like the rifle and the gospel of the revolutionary Colombian priest Camilo Torres, is a fundamental one, we must now turn to the broader question at hand. How does this consolidated and unified bloc, this newly radicalized "people," relate to its enemies and, more generally, to the state?

Shattering State Magic

This has been a history of struggle, failure, and yet more struggle. This struggle has been both for and against the state, undertaken largely by those with a healthy skepticism toward that state, skepticism earned by decades of struggle that could only be against, and tempered only slightly by, the recent suggestion that this against might also be a "for": *for* the strategic use of elements of the state, *for* the creation of an alternative, *for* the ultimate deconstruction of the state apparatus as a whole. Thus, without this being a history *of* the state per se and despite my insistence on crafting a history "from below" that is embodied in an alternative power, this history inevitably draws the question of the state into its consideration. As should by now be clear, few Venezuelan revolutionaries of the past fifty years have approached the state with the simplistic goal of "seizing" power: such "Winter Palace" schemas have long since expired, albeit not without leaving behind a rancid and pernicious residue. This is not, however, a history of evading power, evading the state, and attempting to "change the world" by doing anything possible *but* touching that negative talismanic force that is the state.

I have attempted to avoid these twin fetishes by consciously centering the histories and voices of those whose struggle has been generally located *outside* the traditional halls of power and its commanding heights, voices that have transitioned only recently from outright opposition to such power to a more complex dialectic *with* the constituted power of the state and its institutions. But this does not, has not, and cannot lead to a neglect of the question of the nature of the state in general and the Venezuelan state in particular, and once we turn to this issue, we find some justification for the skeptical, anarchist position: this is not just *any* state, but, as in the late Fernando Coronil's seminal phrase, it is a "magical state." In his self-professed attempt to diagnose the "deification of the state" in twentieth-century Venezuelan history, Coronil's task shared much with my own objective of diagnosing and resisting the fetishism of the state (and of Chávez the man) that accompanies much discussion of contemporary Venezuela.[5] But Coronil admitted that this task required that he "look at Venezuelan history from the top," and that if he himself became "trapped" in such a top-down perspective, "subordinated sectors" might be "excluded from view or remain shadowy figures in the background."[6]

For Coronil, the state's "magic" derives from its power to disburse what is contained in the subsoil over which it claims legitimate authority: oil. But if we are to avoid becoming trapped in the view from above, we must ask, What has been the response from below, from the "subordinated sectors," to this oil-lubricated state magic? After all, was it not the insistence that the oil belongs to the Venezuelan people that unleashed the Caracazo? As Coronil himself observed, the doubling of domestic gasoline prices in February 1989 "shattered the bond that united the body politic as the collective owner of the nation's natural body" and thereby "ruptured a moral bond of protection between state and people."[7] In other words, just as oil grounded the magic of the state and its mythical bond with the people, so too did it simultaneously threaten that bond. Unfortunately, as though a prisoner to the very "magic" he sought to debunk, Coronil could view the 1989 rebellion only as an unmitigated "tragedy" in the terms of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history": the nation divided, polarized between rich and poor, he could perceive only "wreckage upon wreckage . . . catastrophe."[8] Coronil remained mesmerized by the object of his analysis; seeing "from above," he could only mourn.

But what of those people who hurled themselves into the streets in late February 1989? In the repression that followed, there was, of course, tragedy, but there was also much more than that. As Coronil had himself recognized in an earlier coauthored piece, the Caracazo "shook assumptions concerning the relationship between civilization and barbarism, leader and *pueblo*, and state and citizen that have ordered populist discourse."[9] In other words, popular rebellion and constituent explosion have the potential to fundamentally transform and challenge the very foundations of the state itself, its "magic."[10] Fanon, too, was concerned with the conservatizing magic of the national state, but his answer to the "magicians" came resolutely from below, from the sort of mass action exemplified in the Caracazo: "Enlightened by violence, the people's consciousness rebels against any pacification. The demagogues, the opportunists and the magicians now have a difficult task. The praxis which pitched them into a desperate man-to-man struggle has given the masses a ravenous taste for the tangible. Any attempt at mystification in long term becomes virtually impossible."[11]As the Caracazo has shown more clearly than any other moment in recent Venezuelan history, popular rebellion is entirely capable of shaking off such illusions, but this potential is only visible from below. It is only by retelling history from below that we can come to terms with the undeniable reality of recent Venezuelan history: rather than standing as barriers to the transformation of Venezuelan society, the sorts of polarization that Coronil mourned in the aftermath of the Caracazo—between Chavistas and anti-Chavistas, revolutionaries and *escualidos*, or *pueblo* and *oligarquía*—have instead been the *motor* of such transformation through their inauguration and deepening of oppositions. But the question of how to leverage popular rebellion *against* the state while avoiding the hypnotic effects of its magic remains. What complexity is introduced once we understand the president of the state himself is a *result* of these movements, this rebellious history, especially the constituent explosion of the Caracazo? Can elements of the state rebel against that state, devour and disperse it, if given sufficient support from that "outside" and "from below" that constitutes the bulk of this history?

"An Entirely Different Kind of Power"

How to think about this newly reunited people that, after having dispersed in the failure of the guerrilla struggle, came together *not* primarily to support Chávez's 1992 coup attempt, but rather through the momentary flash of the Caracazo and the process of social polarization it accelerated? How to conceive this alternative power that propelled Chávez to power in 1998 but that refused even then to lay down its arms, both metaphorical and material, as evidenced by the events of April 2002? What concept both speaks to the existence of this power beyond the state and attests to its continued function as lever or fulcrum to radically transform that state?

I propose to speak of this reservoir of rebellious energy that exists outside, beyond, and against the state according to Lenin's concept of "dual power."[12] Writing to *Pravda* in early 1917 from the unprecedented and previously unforeseeable political crossroads of the brief interregnum separating the February and October revolutions, Lenin spoke of the emergence of "an entirely different kind of power": alongside the Provisional Government of Kerensky, an alternative government had emerged, a "dual power" (*dvoevlastie*) consisting of workers' councils (notably alongside armed peasants) positioned outside and against the existing state structure.[13] Here, dual power refers not only to the unstable *situation* of tense equilibrium between this alternative structure and the traditional state but also to the second, nonstate, dual power itself. It is the condensation of popular power from below into a radical pole that stands in antagonistic opposition to the state but functions not as a vehicle to seize that state (unlike Lenin's initial formulation), but instead as a fulcrum to radically transform and deconstruct it. This alternative power is irrevocably marked by its situation, its dual-*ness*, and this is what makes it "entirely different": it is not and cannot be merely another power, but is instead fundamentally a power-against-the-state.[14] Dual power is, therefore, not a state of affairs but a political *orientation* and the transformative institutions that uphold that orientation, and the question in contemporary Venezuela is whether this orientation will expand or recede.

The relevance of the concept of dual power to contemporary Venezuela is no coincidence. Lenin saw himself as fighting a war on two fronts against those "opportunists" who sought to simply take control of the state and the "anarchists" who sought to avoid it at all costs, and his response to each was clear: against the former he insisted that the "ready-made state machinery" must be "smashed" and replaced, and against the latter he added the proviso that the old state will be replaced for a time by a proletarian "semi-state" that must then "wither away."[15] The dual power embodies this intermediary form: still an instrument of class power (a state), but one oriented toward its own abolition. In today's Venezuela, the opponents are largely the same: the "opportunists" are those conservative sectors of Chavismo that would like nothing more than to become a new ruling class, whereas the "anarchists" are those who — mostly from a distance — reject any dealings with the state as tainted a priori.[16] In other words, I speak of "dual power" because it points us in the right direction, toward the simultaneous *preservation* and *radicalization* of the revolutionary process in Venezuela and the transformation of that coercive apparatus generally bearing the name "state." Moreover, whereas some Chávez supporters simply hope for radicalization *from above*, my history attests instead to the consolidation of a dual power as a fulcrum to force that radicalization *from below*.

If dual power is oriented inherently toward its own abolition, this orientation is determined both by the source of that power (the people, directly seizing from below) and the two concrete mechanisms that made this dual power "*the same type* as the Paris Commune." According to Lenin, the two pillars of the bourgeois state — the bureaucracy and the military — would be replaced by new structures organically linked to this popular power, namely, autonomous, armed councils directly comprising the people as a whole.[17] In what follows, I track these three components of the "entirely different kind of power" gestating in today's Venezuela. I describe in broad strokes the development of the political (council) and military (militia) aspects of dual power in Venezuela, showing first that these powers effectively *predated* the Bolivarian Revolution proper. I then show, crucially, that rather than being uniformly seized from below, these councils and militia structures are today constituted by a double-motion from below and from above, existing at the intersection of a tense relationship with the state as both an instance of popular power — the result of the history I have told up to this point — and an inherent danger to that very same power.

> . . . a power directly based on revolutionary seizure, on the direct initiative of the people from below, and not on a law enacted by a centralized state power.[18]

There is no denying the role of the "centralized state power" in the Bolivarian Revolution, and while this would seem to negate the applicability of Lenin's concept of dual power, I argue that things are not so simple. The starting point for grasping this new and alternative power from below is the history of the Venezuelan people itself. The failure of the guerrilla struggle and its subsequent period of dispersal and recomposition has generated two organizational forms that closely parallel Lenin's criteria for this new power: on a more (but not exclusively) *military* level, the alienation of the guerrillas from the masses generated the phenomenon of armed self-defense militias, whereas on a more (but not exclusively) *political* level, we have seen the spontaneous appearance of self-governing *barrio* assemblies. Both of these forms emerged organically from the ashes of past failures, thereby engendering what Lenin calls the "direct initiative of the people from below," and both were largely in place *before* Chávez's 1998 election. While most participants in both the *barrio* assemblies and the popular militias supported to some degree the 1992 coup attempts and Chávez's electoral bid, few would be so naïve as to believe that the victory was complete in

1998 or even that "the state" had been "seized." Moreover, their cynicism derived not from some assessment of Chávez himself but from the historic failures of guerrilla immediatism and the turn toward a more prolonged struggle, one located largely on the hegemonic terrain.

However, what is crucial is that this cynicism was not transformed into the opposite error; as Oswaldo, a veteran of the Venezuelan guerrilla struggle and himself no friend of state power, cautions, "we wouldn't want to compare Chávez to Kerensky." In other words, Chávez is not a provisional leader to be deposed by the true revolutionaries but instead is an object of hegemonic struggle to be won or lost, a microcosm of the state more generally. But, more importantly, any state — particularly the bloated and bureaucratic Venezuelan variant — is far too complex to simply be "seized." If Latin American history tells us anything, it is that even the instruments of force that uphold the state must also be subjected to hegemonic control if counterrevolutionary coups are to be avoided. Rather than seizing the state, a strategic position *within* the state apparatus has been occupied by an individual, Chávez, as an expression of this alternative power "from below." As the title of this book puts it, "we created him."

Since 1998 we have witnessed a complex process in which Chávez himself has been radicalized as a result of both pressure from below and the hostility with which he was received, almost immediately, by the remnants of the old system. As he has become increasingly radical, moreover, Chávez has intervened from above to facilitate the development of this revolutionary dual power from below. In other words, as revolutionaries have pressed on from below, the state has reached down from above, taking clear steps toward the institutionalization of popular power, harnessing its powerful motor to the machinery of the state. Unlike populisms past, however, and despite all the ambiguities and dangers that this process entails, this harnessing is not done for the sake of the state itself, but frequently toward its dissolution.

Venezuelan history, therefore, introduces a dialectical twist *internal* to Lenin's concept of direct seizure of power from below. This twist is found in the interplay that I have been tracking throughout this work: not only is power built and consolidated from below in an orientation toward "seizure," but that seizure itself becomes a process in which Chávez is thrown forth as the result and partial expression of energies surging up from below and in which he thereafter contributes to a top-bottom dialectic that transforms, decentralizes, and begins to "disperse" state power. Here, ironically, and in contrast to traditional theories in which sovereignty features as un-divided, the enemy — the utmost expression of state power that becomes the target of revolutionary transformation — is *not* the executive, *not* the president himself, but rather a vast middle sector, a broad swath of the midlevel bureaucracy (as well as local executives on the state and municipal levels) that, by dint of its tendencies toward inertia and the power-sharing privileges it enjoys, has proven the most resistant to change.

Whereas the presence of direct "from below" institutions — be they *barrio* councils or popular militias — was an undeniable fact by the mid-1990s, one that would testify to the developing presence of those elements that Lenin associates with a radically dual power, the dialectical torsion introduced into the first element, the concept of direct seizure, has had its own implications for *both* the political and military institutions of this new power. Recent years have seen the establishment of "official" communal councils and, more recently, of "official" militias as the state has reached downward toward the institutionalization of energy from below in both spheres. In both, elements of the traditional state apparatus have been transformed and radicalized in ways that approximate, without ever constituting, a properly alternative power while always simultaneously generating an ambiguous effect on revolutionary movements.

The Explosion of Communal Power

> Officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control; they not only become elected officials, but are also subject to recall at the people's first demand . . . they become workers of a special "arm of the service," whose remuneration does not exceed the ordinary pay of a competent worker.[19]

By 1992, *barrio* assemblies had emerged in close alliance with organizations like Popular Disobedience, and they were joined by other organs of popular power with a scope that was more national than local. First, after the failed coups of 1992, Patriotic Circles sprouted up as vehicles for expressing the widespread rejection of the existing system and as an eventual means of supporting Chávez's electoral campaign some years later. Around the drafting of the new Constitution in 1999, these morphed into Bolivarian Circles whose professed objective was to study the draft Constitution and work toward its approval in a national referendum. While neither of these institutions were limited solely to these tasks — popular power is often as protean as it is powerful — these were nevertheless popular council structures closely associated with the radical left wing of the Chavista movement, to be joined later by such instances as the Popular Revolutionary Assembly, which emerged around the 2002 coup and birthed *Aporrea.org*.

In light of such powerful pressure toward radically democratic self-governance from below, it was not much of a surprise when, in the aftermath of Chávez's landslide re-election in December 2006, the Bolivarian Revolution took a radical turn toward popular power. The enemies of the process had been soundly defeated in the 2002 coup and 2003 oil lockout, and the 2006 election was but confirmation of an established fact. Moreover, with six years of leadership ahead of him, Chávez enjoyed a brief respite from the demands of his "allies," allowing him to take serious steps against those corrupt bureaucrats within the Chavista ranks who would halt the revolutionary process. In short, the way had been cleared for the deepening and radicalization of the revolutionary process both within and outside of Chavismo. The program for this radicalization was described in terms of the "five motors" driving the revolution, the fifth and most substantial of which was dubbed "the explosion of communal power."[20] This refers to the official establishment of local communal councils throughout Venezuela, a process that began in earnest with the 2006 Law on Communal Councils, which encouraged the proliferation of small, self-governing units throughout the country.[21] Within one year, 18,320 communal councils had been established, and that number has since exceeded 40,000.[22]

According to the 2006 law, these councils seek to "allow the organized people to directly manage public policy and projects oriented toward responding to the needs and aspirations of communities in the construction of a society of equity and social justice" (Article 2). These councils, moreover, are required to operate according to criteria that include "mutual responsibility, cooperation, solidarity, transparency, accountability, honesty, efficacy, efficiency, social responsibility, social control, equity, and social and gender equality" (Article 3), and they are broadly empowered to "adopt those decisions essential to life in the community" (Article 6). In short, the communal councils embody one of Lenin's central criteria for dual power, seeking to subject the official bureaucracy to the will of the people through direct participation at the local level (and ultimately to replace that bureaucracy entirely), and their directly democratic function is the first plank in this attack on the bureaucracy. In addition, in line with Lenin's emphasis on revocable mandates and limited wages, committee members of communal councils are elected, through the direct participation of the community, to short, revocable terms of two years (Article 6), and all elected posts are explicitly "ad honorem," or unpaid (Article 12). The directly democratic nature of participation in the councils coupled with the lack of remuneration for their elected leadership militate against the corruption and bureaucratization of the councils themselves, thereby making them a more stable and self-sufficient reservoir of dual power. Moreover, the capacity of the councils to attack bureaucracy and corruption exceeds their own internal functioning, extending as well to their capacity to supervise *other* levels of government: every council elects a five-person committee for "social oversight [*contraloría*]," which, in the words of Lenin, places bureaucrats "under special control" on the "national, regional, or municipal" level (Article 11). This authority therefore represents a powerful weapon against the corrupt state and local bureaucracies that many hope the councils will eventually replace entirely.

The committee that authored the Law on Communal Councils was chaired by David Velásquez, who was then a member of the Communist Party and was later named Minister of Participation and Social Development. Velásquez sees in the councils the basis for the revolutionary transformation of the state, arguing that "what is sought is to transfer power and democracy to organized communities to such a degree that the State apparatus would eventually be reduced to levels that it becomes unnecessary."[23] Drawing directly and consciously on the distinction between "constituent" and "constituted" powers, a distinction that Chávez himself has cited on several occasions, Velásquez's justification for the councils parallels this people's history by envisioning a dialectic between constituent and constituted and a constant intervention by the "constituent" masses against sterile legality.[24] This extralegal intervention of the constituent masses, which we have seen as clearly in 1989 as in 2002 and in many moments between and beyond, has largely been responsible for the transformation of the Venezuelan state and the laws that ostensibly govern it. Here the Constitution stands out above all else as embodying this dialectic: like Chávez, the new Constitution was the result of popular power, and, like Chávez, it has since served as a foothold for further advances, as we have seen clearly in the case of the women's and Afro-indigenous movements.

In the case of the communal councils, the foothold in question comes through the vague Constitutional enshrinement of the right to popular participation, a foothold that allowed for the development of the councils. But this dialectic of popular power and the law—like the dialectic of revolution and the state more generally—did not cease with the 2006 Law on

Communal Councils. Rather, the law was recently amended (rewritten, really) on the basis of accumulating experience with the councils, reflecting this relationship between constituent and constituted even in the process whereby it was reformed. An initial draft revision of the law was approved by the National Assembly in May 2009, which then was sent to the councils themselves for discussion, debate, and consultation. It was only after this process, which purported to include some 61,850 council spokespeople, that the final reform was approved in November 2009. While some elements of the reform seem to be minor technicalities aimed at improving the councils' functioning and levels of participation, the most significant change refers to the very status of the councils themselves. The reformed law, unlike the 2006 original, is an *organic* law that refers by definition to a fundamental power, and as a result the councils now stand as a public power on par with any other.[25]

Beyond their strictly legislative aspect, the Communal Councils have come to embody in many ways the conflicts and contradictions within the Bolivarian process as a whole. Against those who dismiss the councils as mere appendages to a populist state, for example, Sara Motta engages in a participatory analysis showing that "popular subjectivity" is capable of transcending the merely legal enshrinement of the councils, and she quotes one early participant: "This process began as a decree. It is we who have made it real, have given it its meaning and content, through our struggles, our mistakes, and our successes."[26] This effort to fill the councils with revolutionary content, however, has not been without its challenges, coming from supporters as well as opponents of popular power. As Wilpert argues, a tendency to problem solve from the top means that "Chávez supporters in the communities, who have been empowered by communal councils and worker-managed workplaces, end up in bitter conflicts with state functionaries who try to implement the top-down directives from their ministers, who get their directives from Chávez."[27] This inherent challenge is more serious from those who see the councils as a threat to their own power; Fernando, an organizer with the Simón Bolívar Cultural Foundation in the 23 de Enero, expresses a common concern that "most mayors are playing too big a role in the creation of communal councils, trying to control them."

> The replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people themselves.[28]

While there was certainly resistance to the proposed communal councils from within the ranks of Chavismo (notably by Planning Minister Jorge Giordani, who according to a ministry official opposed the small scale of the councils), and while in practice this resistance was coupled with that of even Chavista mayors and state governors who have found the incipient councils a threat to their personal "power quota," efforts to transform the military have proven even more sharply controversial, and this controversy has swirled around one figure above all: Alberto Müller Rojas. When I met the chain-smoking, retired general (who has since died), he had recently been named the first vice-president of Chavez's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), but this was a far cry from a year earlier, when Müller's relationship with the PSUV sparked a nationwide polemic regarding the status of the military. As ostensibly "apolitical" members of society, Venezuelan soldiers and officers traditionally are not allowed to join political parties, but in 2007, Müller spurned existing law by joining the PSUV while on active military duty. Military neutrality, Müller argued, is a myth that only encourages "secret" militancy (such as his own in earlier decades) that stands alongside professionalism as twin pillars of reactionary military organization.[29] Advocating recognition of the inherently political role of the military alongside the development of a broad-based and popular militia structure to offset military hierarchy, Müller urged that the upcoming process of constitutional reform be used to clear the way for this new vision.[30]

Müller was promptly assailed by moderate Chavistas, who accused him of feeding into opposition paranoia that the military was becoming increasingly politicized. What happened next offers a rare window into the shadowy corridors of Venezuelan power: Chávez joined in the attack on Müller, insisting on the apolitical and professional nature of the Venezuelan military, and the impertinent general was duly ostracized from the president's inner circle for daring to suggest the sort of militia structure that Chávez and so many other Venezuelan officials had proposed in the past.[31] But when Chávez's proposed constitutional reform conformed almost point for point with Müller's arguments, it became clear that this attack on Müller was merely a tactic to calm the nerves of the military hierarchy. Later defeated in the December 2007 referendum, the proposed reform of Article 328 would have meant that the military was no longer an explicitly "apolitical" institution, but instead "patriotic, popular, and anti-imperialist." Moreover, a reformed Article 329 would have converted the existing reserve into a more institutionally powerful force referred to as the "Bolivarian Popular Militias."[32]

Müller was quick to suggest that military pressure was behind Chávez's prevarications on the matter, and it soon became clear just how right he was, as the intrigue did not end with Müller's ironic ostracism. On November 4, less than a month before the constitutional reform referendum, Chávez warned that someone might soon be "*saltando la talanquera*," or "jumping the divider," between Chavismo and the opposition. Such a statement meant something serious was afoot, but few understood just how serious. The next day, longtime Chávez ally General Raúl Baduel stunned the millions for whom he had come to represent the epitome of loyalty: it was Baduel who spearheaded Chávez's return to power in 2002, yet now he came out publicly against the president. According to Baduel, the 1999 Constitution was sufficient and required no further reform. Whereas the function of constitutions, according to Baduel's negative liberal view, is to "limit and control power," the proposed 2007 reform "would consummate, in practice, a coup d'état, shamefully violating the text of the constitution." However, when Baduel called upon the military to "profoundly analyze the proposed text," he revealed his deeper motivations: the reform, he feared, would undermine the professionalism and necessary "verticalism" of the traditional military hierarchy. Given such concerns, many would rightly wonder if it was in fact Baduel who was behind Müller's ostracism.

Müller didn't hesitate to hit back, accusing Baduel of fomenting support for a coup through his declarations. But the most intriguing and revealing part of this long saga would not be played out until Müller Rojas was invited to give his opinion on the Baduel affair on the VTV evening program *Contragolpe.* Müller proceeded to explain that he had never considered Baduel a committed revolutionary and that in the past he had criticized Baduel's policies as defense minister, which, according to Müller, hindered the government's military-civilian integration. The show then received an unexpected call from Chávez himself, publicly thanking the retired general for the incisive advice he had always offered. This was a public apology and an admission that Baduel had come between the president and Müller's proposed radicalization of the military. History had effectively absolved Müller, which explains the very different circumstances under which I met him.

While the proposed constitutional reform failed at the polls in December, the dialectic it had unleashed arguably had deeper implications than even its passage would have. In a pattern we have already seen played out with other radical voices within the Bolivarian Revolution, Müller, a longtime Chávez confidant, was expelled from the president's inner circle only to be brought back into the fold, and, more importantly, Baduel — and the hierarchical, professional view of the military he advocated — was out for good. The results were clear: on October 22, 2009, a reformed Organic Law of the Armed Forces, establishing Bolivarian militias, came into effect only a month before the reformed Law of Communal Councils, the latter of which tasks the councils with "security and integral defense" and links them directly with the militias.[33]

This relationship between the newly established militias and the communal councils was deepened in early 2010 with the new push for communal power from above in the form of government-sanctioned communes, which Chávez has called the "building blocks" of a new Venezuelan state.[34] By early 2010, 187 such communes were already in formation and a Federal Government Council had been established to reinforce the legal status of the communes and councils and to "decentralize powers away from traditional municipal and state authorities and transfer those powers to grassroots communal councils."[35] Moreover, these councils were no longer limited to the communal level; the organic law enshrining the Federal Government Council specifically makes mention of workers' councils, *campesino* councils, and essentially any other councils representing a concrete segment of society. Thus, as the councils have been integrated vertically into communes, they have also proliferated horizontally across society as a whole, as have militias. On the anniversary of Ezequiel Zamora's Federal War, Chávez unveiled a new statue of the revolutionary *campesino* leader in El Calvario Park, which he renamed for Zamora; at the same time he formally established peasant battalions as a component of the Bolivarian Militia, the function of which would be to protect *campesinos* from the wave of violence that had been unleashed by landed oligarchs.[36]

Less than a month later, Chávez officially renamed April 13 — the day on which the constituent masses returned him to power — the "Day of the Bolivarian Militia, the Armed People, and the April Revolution," further insisting that "The militia is the people and the people are the militia, the armed people and the armed forces are one."[37] This renewed push toward communal power in recent years, therefore, is one that directly fuses democratic governance with militia structures on the local level. It would be no coincidence, then, that Chávez announced these transformations with a quote from the former PRV guerrilla Kléber Ramírez: "The time has come for communities to assume the powers of state, which will lead administratively to the total transformation of the Venezuelan state and socially to the real exercise of sovereignty by society through communal powers."[38]

A Revolution Beyond the Law

If the state has been reaching from above toward the popular movements from below, however, this gesture is not without either its contradictions or dangers.[39] The contradictions are as old as sovereignty itself: the state does not like to share power, and much less does the military. Thus, while we can celebrate the institutionalization of communal power as being on par with other public powers, this certainly does not — for the moment, at least — put popular organs of power in a position of supremacy. The official militias, too, remain firmly *within* the structure of the state and subject to hierarchical control (albeit one that now comes more from Chávez than from the generals). As one revolutionary organizer told me: "Despite Chávez's pronouncements on the need for a citizens' militia, many of those within the structure still believe in the state's need to maintain a monopoly of violence."

Former guerrilla and self-identified Communard Carlos Betancourt puts this as clearly as anyone. Pointing to a copy of the Law of Communal Councils, he is emphatic: "The law claims 'to create,' but laws don't create, the will of the masses does! The law claims 'to regulate,' but you can't regulate popular movements without a straitjacket!" While he does not necessarily oppose the efforts of the government, he cannot help but see in these efforts a fundamental contradiction: that reaching down to build dual power is simply not the same thing as building it from the bottom up. The embryo of the new state, Betancourt concludes, is not a rigorous theory but a new organizational practice that while apparently similar to Chávez's objectives, with its councils and its militias, nevertheless far exceeds these. Despite such contradictions, many have opted to function within or in association with these new legal structures. Valentín Santana, for example, explains to me that the local population around La Piedrita attempted to hand their communal council over entirely to collective members, but he and others refused. Now, half of the council members are members of the revolutionary collective, and half are elected, thereby leading to an organic institutional fusion that hopefully will prevent these local structures from becoming alienated. But, echoing Carlos Betancourt, Santana insists that the true militias are in the street, not in the barracks, and that you cannot build a dual power from above.

In his analysis of the Niehous kidnapping, penned in 1979 from within San Carlos prison, Carlos Lanz rejected two opposing revolutionary strategies prevalent at the time. The "gradualist" conception, he insists, builds alternative institutions but lacks any strategic orientation, whereas the "putschist-insurrectionalist" view, which is in fact a "parody of the idea of the 'Winter Palace,'" neglects the need to build an alternative, a dual power: "No revolution — past or present — can be conceived outside the duality of powers."[40] While maintaining the need for an "assault on power and the installation of a class dictatorship," Lanz argued instead that this "entails, at the same time, *the gradual construction of a parallel power*," citing council and militia structures as noteworthy organs of this incipient power.[41] To the question of how to conceptualize the dynamics of this dual power in the present moment, Lanz's younger comrade Roland Denis argues that: "The old slogan of 'dual power' (bourgeois and working-class) valid for the summit of the revolutionary movement today becomes a permanent strategy in accord with the need for the organization of a socialized and non-state power."[42] What once expressed the revolutionary *moment* par excellence now becomes a continuous process, a negative dialectic with no *telos* outside of its incessant deepening, dual power no longer understood "from above," but "from below" and in a tense interplay with existing institutions.

Denis himself has embodied this tense interplay in a particularly personal way: a veteran of decades of antistate struggles in Popular Disobedience and active in both the Caracazo and resistance to the 2002 coup, Denis was briefly named vice-minister of planning after the coup was defeated. While in that post, moreover, he spearheaded a series of meetings with popular organizations and *barrio* councils.[43] Perhaps the best evidence of the peculiarity of dual power in the Venezuelan context lies in the fact that this proponent of "non-state power" heads up an organization deemed the "April 13th Movement," named for the day that the Venezuelan masses showed their true dual power credentials, invoking their constituent authority to return Chávez to his position *within* the constituted structure.[44] Despite his overall support for the revolutionary process, however, Denis — like Betancourt — is wary of the dangers that tend to trickle down from above. In particular, Denis has opposed the way in which the government has recently sought to legislate the communes from above, referring to the same source of revolutionary inspiration as Chávez: "It is not the law that gives the revolutionary Commune permission to enter into history, in our case it is the echo left to us by our own — by now, historic — revolutionary debate, when it has spoken, following the guidelines provided by Kléber Ramírez, of the formation of the 'communal state' or the 'self-governing republic.'" Against what he deems a "verticalist" and even "feudalist" legislation of the communes from above, Denis aspires to the development of communes "without the law."[45] Nevertheless, despite his specific concerns regarding the more recent 2010 Organic Commune Law and the general wariness toward transformation from above that these concerns indicate, Denis has provided, in his insistence on dual power as a permanent process, a powerful concept for understanding the dynamics of the Bolivarian Revolution.[46]

Por Ahora

We return to the ostensible paradox from which we began, according to which antistate militants like La Piedrita pledge loyalty to the president, and the late guerrilla Kléber Ramírez speaks of a powerful dynamic of constituent and constituted power under a framework of a "government of popular insurgency."[47] To these we could add the apparent paradox of the numerous former guerrillas who have assumed powerful positions within the state apparatus, negativity incarnate assuming the uncomfortable mantle of the positive.[48] While the few former guerrillas who oppose Chávez tend to do so from the right, as with Teodoro Petkoff, guerrilla *comandantes* and PRV founders Douglas Bravo and Francisco "El Flaco" Prada do so from an ostensibly radical position. While under normal circumstances, it might not be surprising to find a former guerrilla leader who distrusts or even opposes those leftist movements in power, it should be clear by this point that there is nothing normal about contemporary Venezuela, where the traditional state apparatus houses an explosive combination of guerrillas and opportunists, authentic decentralizers and a new, power-hungry elite dressed in red. In this Venezuela, the vast majority of those who formerly opposed the state, rifle in hand, now accompany the process with Chávez at its ostensible head. Those who have felt the hot breath and hotter lead of the DISIP and felt the damp cold of the torture chambers of San Carlos are certainly much more skeptical of the process and partial in their praise. But this does not change the fact that they see the Bolivarian Revolution as the only path currently available.

Back in Douglas Bravo's apartment, he scrutinizes me. "You are among the 80 percent who sympathize with the process," he declares, before attempting to convince me otherwise. He insists that the fundamental error was for the people to give their sovereignty over to Chávez. "What we are seeing now" — his mind clearly moving quicker than his words — "is a struggle between 'two right wings,' with the people standing on the sidelines. Chávez's position is increasingly weaker since the 2007 referendum defeat," he seethes. "Chávez is playing the role of CAP [Carlos Andrés Pérez] now, and like CAP they will get rid of him to maintain the system. *Say we said it*!" he shouts as if shaking me to see something that is right in front of my eyes. But in the end I fail to see what he is seeing: I fail to see the impossibility of the Bolivarian process, I fail to see how it can be understood as unambiguously evil rather than as an instance of struggle in itself, I fail to see what alternative exists to the process, and I fail to see how Douglas is impervious to this. All I see, in the end, is an isolated former guerrilla who cannot accept the reality of the battle ahead, a *comandante* without troops.

According to Juvenal, himself no friend of the constituted power of the state, Douglas Bravo is so critical of Chávez precisely because of his own role in bringing the latter to power. After all, it was the PRV above all that spearheaded the putschism of the civilian-military alliance known as the "third path." "He feels like the father" of the process, says Juvenal, and as a result he rejects it all the more vigorously, placing himself on the wrong side of history as a result. "Yes, we are critical," Juvenal insists, and this is evident from the fact that the majority of his current activities remain clandestine in preparation for an unpredictable future. "But we will give our lives for the process, *within* the process." Others, like Rafael Uzcátegui, would prefer not to speak of the subject, insisting sharply that "Douglas' failures are his own reflections," whereas another former PRV member, who today coordinates activities at the Cuartel San Carlos, where he had previously been imprisoned, is defiant: "I am still part of the PRV — we didn't leave Douglas, *he abandoned us*."

In his simultaneous analysis of the French and Haitian Revolutions, *The Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James insists that, in a revolution, "It is force that counts, and chiefly the organized force of the masses." This much and more we have seen throughout our own history of a very different revolution: for every significant transformation of constituted power during the past fifty years, the constituent masses have stood as either inspiration or threat and occasionally as both. According to James, the implications of this revolutionary maxim for the question of leadership and the state are profound, and here the historical lessons of both Haiti and France are more negative than positive: "Toussaint, like Robespierre, destroyed his own left-wing, and with it sealed his own doom."[49] In other words, both leaders neglected their support base and thereby cut — or, in the case of Robespierre, guillotined — their own throats. The same lesson holds today for Chávez and anyone else seeking to occupy the constituted power of state institutions through the organized will of the people, and as revolutionaries and leftists have recently been swept to power across Latin America, this lesson has gained a continental relevance.

In the meantime, popular movements and grassroots revolutionaries have been forced to walk the "tightrope" between the state and the opposition, fighting a war on two fronts against the forces of reaction and against attacks from above on their own autonomy.[50] It occasionally seems as if Chávez has indeed grasped this lesson; after all, were the revolutionary importance of the popular masses not crystal clear in 1989, by 2002 it was undeniable. But Chávez sometimes vacillates and equivocates, as when he blames Allende's overthrow on the "ultra-left" in a thinly veiled warning to those to his own left. But it is always difficult to distinguish the rhetoric of a political leader from the depth of his or her understanding of the situation; many among that same ultra-left ignore such criticisms, dismissing them as necessary subterfuge for someone occupying a position of national power. It is this complex position, one that transcends a merely academic "critical support," that we must grasp and assume and that I have sought to capture, at least in part, through a resuscitation of the concept of dual power, in which popular organizations represent a reservoir of revolutionary energy at the base that intervenes against the state structure in its traditional bureaucratic and military form.

However, such a view does not entail that Chávez as an individual is purely a representative of the repressive apparatus that is the bureaucratic-military state. His position is far more complex and nuanced than that. In the struggle to push the contemporary revolutionary process forward, Chávez has, for the most part, been an ally up to this point. While engaged in the complex doublespeak of the state, more often than not he has pushed a radical agenda that facilitates the transformation of that state, a fact most visible in the recent development of communal councils and popular militias. Here there are no guarantees, and despite the fact that the collective "we" of the Venezuelan revolutionary movements documented in this book indeed "created him," this does not mean the creation will not betray the creators. However, given the institutionalization of popular power and

Chávez's clear reliance on the movements for support against a host of other enemies, to do so would certainly require a fight. So, we must move beyond the naïve dichotomy of pro-Chávez or anti-Chávez to say, alongside the most revolutionary segments of Venezuelan society, that we support Chávez as long as he supports the revolution; or, to paraphrase this most complex of all figures in contemporary Venezuela, turning his own words into a threat and a promise: Chávez, we are with you, *pero sólo por ahora*—only for now.

Notes

Introduction: What People? Whose History?

The collected lyrics of Primera's songs are available in Alí Primera, *Que Mi Canto No Se Pierda* (Caracas: Euroamericana de Ediciones, 2006), from which all my epigraphs are drawn. I am grateful to Dante Canoura and the Primera family for permission to reprint these.

1. In his discussion of La Piedrita, Alejandro Velasco also notes their "strategic" location: "'We Are Still Rebels': The Challenge of Popular History in Bolivarian Venezuela," in *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy: Participation, Politics, and Culture under Chávez*, ed. D. Smilde and D. Hellinger (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). See also Sujatha Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 60–61.

2. For more about the Matthews myth, see Anthony DePalma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006).

3. Interview with Valentín Santana, May 24, 2008.

4. See YVKE Mundial. (2008). "One Person Dead after Explosion at Fedecama-

ras," tr. K. Janicke, *Venezuela Analysis*, February 24, http://venezuelanalysis.com/newsbrief/3195.

5. In what follows, I draw upon George Ciccariello-Maher. (2008). "Radical Chavismo Bares Its Teeth," *Venezuela Analysis*, April 15, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/3358?quicktabs_2=1; and George Ciccariello-Maher. (2008). "Embedded with the Tupamaros," *Counterpunch*, April 25, http://www.counter punch.org/maher04252008.html.

6. Sebastiana Barráez Pérez. (2009). "La Piedrita pasará por la armas a enemigos de la revolución," *Quinto Día*, February 6, 22–23.

7. María Lilibeth Da Corte. (2009). "Chávez califica de terrorista y fascista a Colectivo La Piedrita," *El Universal*, February 9.

8. For more about the concept of the Bolivarian "process"—a phenomenon far broader than Chávez himself—see especially Roland Denis, *Rebelión en Proceso: dilemas del movimiento popular luego de la rebelión del 13 de Abril* (Caracas: Ediciones Nuestra América Rebelde, 2004), 15–17. Sujatha Fernandes, following José Roberto Duque, defines "the *proceso* as a parallel and underground movement that defends the Chávez government, but which has its own trajectory independent of directives from the central government" (Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 5), but I worry that shifting too quickly from "Chavismo" to "*proceso*" evades the most crucial question of the relationship between the two.

9. Such a complex sentiment is new to neither Venezuela nor to Latin America more generally. In contemporary Venezuela, one frequently hears or reads reference to the words of the Mexican Revolutionary General Plutarco Elías Calles: "the Revolution has degenerated into a government." This idea, moreover, existed within revolutionary movements seeking to go beyond the mere seizure of state power long before Chávez, as when Alfredo Maneiro cited these same words in *Notas Negativas* (Caracas: Ediciones Venezuela 83, 1971), 31.

10. From the anarchist "left," see Rafael Uzcátegui, *Venezuela: Revolution as Spectacle* (Tucson: See Sharp, 2011); although there is a massive amount of anti-Chavista literature on the right, see A. C. Clark, *The Revolutionary Has No Clothes* (New York: Encounter, 2009). Of the many excellent and necessary works that nevertheless share a top-down approach, see Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2005) and Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* (London: Verso, 2007). From the growing critique of this tendency, see Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 3–5; Fernandes notes the predominance of "state-centric" analyses and a "top-down perspective" that "locates all agency in Chávez" while presenting the poor as incapable of autonomous action; see also David Smilde's introduction to *Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy*. In that same volume, see Velasco's critique of "top-down structural analyses that leave local trajectories of organizing and mobilization unexamined" ("'We Are Still Rebels,'" 159); and Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).

11. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, [1938] 1963), x.

12. Interview with Juan Contreras, April 21, 2008.

13. Iraida Morocoima, cited in Martinez, Fox, and Farrell, *Venezuela Speaks!*, 42.

14. See, for example, Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. I. Bertoletti, J. Cascaito, and A. Casson (New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), [2001] 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

15. Furthermore, the grammatical ambiguity of the people — is it plural or singular? — cannot therefore be resolved entirely into the distinction between the (singular) *pueblo* and the (multiple) *gente*. Rather, multiplicity cuts into the *pueblo* itself, and I hope the reader will excuse any clumsiness and ambiguity that emerges in what follows between what "the people *is*" and what "the people *are*."

16. Fidel Castro Ruz, *History Will Absolve Me*, trans. C. González Díaz (Havana: Editorial José Martí, [1953] 1998), 56. Many translations butcher the meaning of this sentence. After listing the various groups that compose this struggling mass in Cuba, Castro adds, "This is the people, the one who knows misfortune and is therefore capable of fighting with boundless courage!" (57–58). Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. G. Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [2006] 2008), 74–75.

17. Dussel, *Twenty Theses*, 72. As we will see, however, such dialogue and translation is rarely voluntary and often the result of an internal struggle within the people.

18. Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela," in *Politics in the Andes: Identity, Conflict, and Reform*, ed. J. M. Burt and P. Mauceri (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 96.

19. The national anthem contains sufficient material to justify both conservative and revolutionary interpretations. The second line specifically — "La ley respetando la virtud y honor" — presents an ambiguity that plagues translation: who is the subject? Occasionally, the people becomes the subject and is thereby subject to "respecting the law," but equally plausible is the law personified as subject, which thereby is bound to obey the people.

20. This current struggle is one that, as others have argued well, pits this representative democracy, with its institutionalized channeling of popular energy and its efforts to buffer the state from the popular will, against a new experiment in democracy that is at once more direct, more radical, more fundamentally driven "from below." Velasco speaks of a "contest over competing visions of democracy and revolution" that emerged long before the Caracazo in radical *barrios* like 23 de Enero ("'We Are Still Rebels,'" 180). See also Steve Ellner, "The Radical Potential of Chavismo in Venezuela: The First Year and a Half in Power," *Latin American Perspectives* 28, no. 5 (September 2001); Jennifer McCoy, "From Representative to Participatory Democracy?" in *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, ed. McCoy and Myers (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

21. Terry Lynn Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Michael Derham, "Undemocratic Democracy," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21, no. 2 (2002), 270–89; Luis J. Oropeza,

Tutelary Pluralism: A Critical Approach to Venezuelan Democracy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1980); Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Jennifer McCoy et al., *Venezuelan Democracy Under Stress* (Miami, FL: University of Miami, 1995).

22. Rómulo Betancourt, *Tres Años de Gobierno Democrático*, v. 2 (Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 1962), 245.

23. This distinction is not hard and fast; even within the workers' movement, Betancourt relied on sectarian processes of exclusion alongside cooptation. In making this distinction, I am complicating Maneiro's emphasis on the "frontal attack" and "dictatorial regression" carried out by Betancourt (*Negative Notes*, 63).

24. Cabieses Donoso does the calculation as of January 1963: of 1,421 days in office, 761 were under a state of emergency. Manuel Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!* (Santiago: Ediciones del Litoral, 1963), 168.

25. Velasco, "'We Are Still Rebels,'" 166.

26. Daniel H. Levine, "Goodbye to Venezuelan Exceptionalism," *Journal of Interamerican Studies & World Affairs* 36, no. 4 (winter 1994), 147.

27. The neglect of this "bottom" is no coincidence: Sujatha Fernandes has skillfully dissected the assumption by most social scientists that the poor masses are fundamentally incapable of autonomous action (*Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 4).

28. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 55.

29. Daniel H. Levine, *Conflict and Political Change in Venezuela* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 259.

30. Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. R. Fagles (London: Penguin, 1982), 96. As Maneiro noted, this "overload" of tension "was increased by a political framework that prevented its partial release" (*Negative Notes*, 20).

31. For an analysis of the "myth of harmony" and its replacement in social scientific circles by a critique of "polarization," see George Ciccariello-Maher, "Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine: Symbolic Violence from Fanon to Chávez," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 1 (2010).

32. Some had been diagnosing two Venezuelas for years. See, e.g., Maneiro, *Negative Notes*, 16, 85, and 83.

33. Mainstream social scientists often deem Chávez an "antiparty candidate," again centering the individual leader, whereas a broader "antiparty sentiment" had been growing in popular sectors for decades, as documented in, e.g., Maneiro, *Negative Notes*, 22–23.

34. In the Euro-Atlantic world, this pair of concepts has been popularized by Antonio Negri and others, but arguably in a way that sees them as absolutely opposed. For a theoretical attempt to resist such an absolute opposition, see Dussel, *Twenty Theses*. For an example of the use of constituent power and the multitude in a Venezuelan context that does not fall into such an opposition, see Denis, *Rebelión en Proceso*. For a comparative analysis, see George Ciccariello-Maher, "Constituent Moments, Constitutional Processes," *Latin American Perspectives* (May 2013).

35. Velasco, "'We Are Still Rebels,'" 180. Here I am thinking of, e.g., Gott, *Hugo Chávez*; Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power*; and Hugo Chávez and Marta Harnecker, *Understanding the Venezuelan Revolution*, trans. C. Boudin (New York: Monthly Review, 2005). Even the more comprehensive history provided by Luis Bonilla-Molina and Haiman El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolucíon Bolivariana: Pequeña Crónica, 1948–2004* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2004), remains far too Chávez-centric. These texts are essential, and I do not intend to question their credibility; I merely emphasize what is in many ways neglected by or excluded from them.

36. As Sujatha Fernandes rightly observes, "To see Chávez as an independent figure pontificating from above, or popular movements as originating in autonomous spaces from below, would be to deny the interdependencies between them that both constrain and make possible each other's field of action" (*Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 5).

37. John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto, 2002).

38. See, e.g., the Debate on Power, featuring responses to Holloway (http://marxsite.com/debate_on_power.html) and Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power*. See also Martinez et al., eds., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 2–4, about the false opposition of the "from below" and the "from above."

39. Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 18.

40. Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, 19. One proponent of horizontalism notes that "Horizontalidad implies democratic communication on a level plane and involves—or at least strives towards—non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating." Marina Sitrin, ed., *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 3.

41. See Dussel's analysis of the fetish in *Twenty Theses on Politics* , 30, and especially footnote 23.

42. See the critiques that some proponents of horizontalism, namely Marina Sitrin's *Horizontalism* and Naomi Klein's film *The Take* (2004), misrepresent the object of their analysis. See, e.g., the statement signed by dozens of workers' cooperatives in Argentina against Klein's film, insisting that she has misrepresented their relationship with the state: Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas. 2004. "'La Toma' no refleja la realidad de las fábricas recuperadas en Argentina," April 20, http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2004/11/239016.php. Although Sujatha Fernandes does maintain a sufficiently complex position, insisting that "I do not advocate an antistate position" (*Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 28), there is some reason to worry that the movements she discusses were chosen for their horizontality rather than for their strategic importance.

43. Kléber Ramírez Rojas, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero* (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2006), 203. Ramírez insists, however, that this disunity was not solely the result of the horizontal orientation of the movements, blaming as well the vanguard-

ists who had cut ties with the movements from above and the opportunists who sold them up the river (206).

44. Ramírez Rojas, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero*, 207.

45. Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 24–29.

46. George Ciccariello-Maher, "An Anarchism that Is Not Anarchism: Notes Toward a Critique of Anarchist Imperialism," in *How Not to Be Governed*, ed. J. Klausen and J. Martel (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010). The Zapatistas themselves recognize the dangers of model-building, and Holloway cites Subcomandante Marcos: "The only thing that we proposed to do was to change the world; everything else has been improvisation. Our square conception of the world and of revolution was badly dented in the confrontation with the indigenous realities of Chiapas." John Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, ed. J. Holloway and E. Peláez (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 161.

47. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 81.

Chapter 1: A Guerrilla History

1. Fabricio Ojeda, "Carta de Renuncia de Fabricio Ojeda," June 30, 1962, available from the Centro de Documentación de los Movimientos Armados: http://www.cedema.org.

2. Ojeda was not the only radical to argue that the myth of 23 de Enero had come to mask its opposite. Alfredo Maneiro came to use the term *23 de Enero* as a metaphor for the evacuation of the radical content of struggles (*Notas Negativas* [Caracas: Ediciones Venezuela 83, 1971], 63–65, 101).

3. Ojeda, "Carta de Renuncia."

4. Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII: 1930 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 754. The URD was never an equal partner in this arrangement, and AD hegemony gave way to a two-party power-sharing system with COPEI only in the 1970s.

5. Interview with Douglas Bravo, May 23–24, 2008.

6. Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 176.

7. Betancourt, in fact, ranked fourth in Caracas. Bethell, *Cambridge History of Latin America*, 754. According to Clara Nieto, Larrazábal had been the only Latin American head of state to openly support the Cuban rebels (*Masters of War* [Boston: Seven Stories Press, 2003], 41–42).

8. Maneiro emphasizes that the first critique of Betancourt—the December riots—came not from the leftist vanguard, but instead from a spontaneous and popular mass movement. But this "dramatic revelation" of the latter's potential was not grasped by the political parties, who lagged behind and failed to transform their relation to the masses (*Notas Negativas*, 71).

9. Fidel Castro, speech at the University of Havana, March 13, 1967, in Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 163–64. This moment also is recounted in

Régis Debray, "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America" (1965), in *Strategy for Revolution* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 161–62.

10. In so doing, Betancourt also became one of representative democracy's "most notable gravediggers." Manuel Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!* (Santiago: Ediciones del Litoral, 1963), 68–69. Cabieses Donoso provides a full list of Betancourt's victims between 1959 and 1963 (269–76).

11. Interview with Douglas Bravo in *Sucesos* (December 1966), as cited in Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 167. See also Maneiro, *Notas Negativas*, 57.

12. This last phrase is perhaps the most commonly heard with regard to this pioneer of Venezuelan "democracy." Betancourt also is widely reported to have boasted to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, that he "doesn't transport tied-up prisoners," a tongue-in-cheek way of suggesting that he would rather have them executed outright (the phrase dates to the brutal royalist leader José Tomás Boves). Interview with Francisco "El Negro" Herrera of the Páez Front, May 4, 2008.

13. Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 170–75.

14. Ibid., 170.

15. Ibid., 168. See also "Venezuela: Plagued by Castro," *Time*, September 19, 1960. According to Luigi Valsalice, it was this international element, and not government repression, that was decisive and rendered the conflict "irreversible." Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política: Curso de acción en Venezuela (1962–1969)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1975), 17–18. About this entire process, see as well Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 176–78.

16. Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 170.

17. Moisés Moleiro, *El MIR de Venezuela* (Havana: Guairas, 1967), 154–55. Agreeing with this view are Douglas Bravo (in both my interview and in *Sucesos*); Fabricio Ojeda (in Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 181); Cabieses Donoso, who notes that popular organizations were "cornered and attacked" before resorting to self-defense (*Venezuela, Okey!*, 165); and Alfredo Maneiro, who argues that violence did not serve the revolutionaries and "came from the other side" (*Notas Negativas*, 58). Without denying the repression, Rafael Uzcátegui adds "left infantilism" (interview on April 26–27, 2008), and Valsalice speaks of a "determinism" that prevented radicals from maintaining multiple tactics in the face of repression (*Guerrilla y Política*, 3–4).

18. Pedro Pablo Linárez documents the occupations in *Lucha Armada en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2006), 30–31. About the press closures, see Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 143–45.

19. Moleiro, *El MIR de Venezuela*, 155–56.

20. According to Bravo, the government had devised a plan called Operation Macuare to destroy the insurrectionary elements of the capital, but before the plan was to be put into action, several of these commanders met secretly with Bravo to pass a message to the PCV leadership. He told the central committee, "At 4 P.M., we will have control of the government, because they aren't going to attack the insurrec-

tion, but will instead take Betancourt and his government hostage." Gott astutely notes the PCV's insistent if irrational hope that it could exert pressure on the Betancourt government. For example, as late as June 1960, the Party expressed solidarity with Betancourt after an assassination attempt, only to have it thrown, unsurprisingly, back in their face. Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 174–75.

21. Interview with Jesús Jiménez, May 4, 2008.

22. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 39nn15–16.

23. Ibid., 24–27. About the military rebellions, see, e.g., Asdrúbal J. Duarte Parejo, *El Carupanazo* (Caracas: Ministerio de Comunicación e Información, 2005); Alí Brett Martínez, *El Porteñazo: Historia de una Rebelión* (Caracas: Andaro, 1973).

24. Teodoro Petkoff seconds Bravo's claim that these rebellions came too late. Norman Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary. Part I: Years of Insurrection," January 1972, http://www.normangall.com/venezuela_art4.htm.

25. Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 172–73. In another decree on the same day, Betancourt established military tribunals for "extremists." Both measures were likely unconstitutional and certainly ironic because Betancourt previously had attacked the dictatorship for employing precisely the same measures.

26. Interview with the Páez Front, May 4, 2008.

27. Interview with Alberto Müller Rojas, May 14, 2008.

28. In the later words of Teodoro Petkoff, "democracy in Venezuela was a new toy recently taken out of the box and it still remained unbroken in the eyes of the masses"; in Norman Gall, 1973, "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary. Part II: A New Party" (January), http://www.normangall.com/venezuela_art4_2.htm.

29. Interview with Elio, May 17, 2008.

30. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 20–23.

31. Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 176.

32. This threat became public with the discovery of the Turimiquire camp in early 1962, coinciding with mass arrests in the cities (Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 39n17). Linárez attributes the Turimiquire camp to a short-lived and little-mentioned Venezuelan Revolutionary Directorate, DIREVE (*Lucha Armada*, 25–26, 38–39).

33. Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 45–46.

34. Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 221–24.

35. Valsalice notes that at this time even the most important front dwindled to some seven members (*Guerrilla y Política*, 21).

36. Ibid., 101–5.

37. Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 15; also notes Afro-Indigenous support for the Chirino Front in Falcón; Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 106–109; interview with José Luis Escobar, May 4, 2008.

38. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 108. This area had seen the only Communist victories in the 1958 elections (106). Further to the south, in Portuguesa, a small front was established under Juan Vicente Cabezas—alias Comandante "Pablo"—

which later joined the nearby Páez Front (later headed up by Fabricio Ojeda) (109–10). It is worth noting the Ezequiel Zamora Front, in the Bachiller mountains near Caracas, which was largely run by the MIR, but which has been deemed "more a place of refuge than a military organism" (111). The same might be an accurate description of other eastern fronts, also largely under MIR control (with the exception of those later under Maneiro), although with the withdrawal of the PCV and the decline of the western fronts, some eastern fronts were reinvigorated (113–14).

39. Alfredo Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo* (Caracas: Ateneo, 1978), 89. Valsalice summarizes this as a shift toward Maoism without the objective conditions (*Guerrilla y Política*, 53).

40. Interview with Bravo in *Sucesos*. In the aftermath of the 2002 coup against Chávez, this tendency would be analyzed by Marta Harnecker, *Venezuela: Militares Junto al Pueblo* (Barcelona, Spain: El Viejo Topo, 2003). See also Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 28–29.

41. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 42–45.

42. Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 278; Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 199.

43. Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 306–7.

44. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff I." Later, Manuitt even went so far as to address a letter to his "eternal brothers" of the traditional Armed Forces, urging them to come over to the right side of the struggle (Cabieses, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 229–30).

45. Interviewed by Debray, "Report from the Venezuelan Guerrilla," 128–29.

46. Enrique Rondón Nieto. 2002. "Asalto al tren de El Encanto," *Últimas Noticias*, September 22, 20; see also Luis Bonilla-Molina and Haiman El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolucíon Bolivariana: Pequeña Crónica, 1948–2004* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2004), 44; and Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 36; Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 69–70.

47. In Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America*, 202.

48. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 28–30.

49. This is not to say that the PCV had a policy of favoring the rural struggle. According to participants like Douglas Bravo, PCV policy generally favored the military coup and opportunistically sought legalization at the expense of both the urban and rural combatants.

50. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff I."

51. John Gerassi. 1967. "Latin America—the Next Vietnam," *Viet Report*, January–February.

52. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff I." Douglas Bravo seconds this assessment in an interview with *Sucesos*, as does Valsalice (*Guerrilla y Política*, 37).

53. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff I." In a second interview, Petkoff suggests that "perhaps our greatest error of this period was to try to stop the elections instead of participating in them." Norman Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff II."

54. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 49.

55. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 109.

56. Valsalice argues that because Betancourt benefited politically from the presence of the guerrillas, he made no serious effort to eradicate them (*Guerrilla y Política*, 81n3).

57. Ibid., 110. Cabieses Donoso catalogued prevalent torture methods and revealed the existence of terrorist organizations linked to Betancourt (*Venezuela, Okey!*, 202–6).

58. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 116–17.

59. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff I."

60. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 50.

61. In reality, Valsalice notes that the unexpected (and undisciplined) ferociousness of Bravo's attack on the old guard led many moderates to oppose him (*Guerrilla y Política*, 67).

62. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 120.

63. Interview with Elio, May 17, 2008.

64. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 122.

65. For Valsalice, this splintering was the predictable effect of the "degeneration" of guerrilla autonomy to mean even the autonomy of detachments from their own nominal commanders, giving rise to a number of small petty fiefdoms (*Guerrilla y Política*, 54). Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 131. Interview with Punto Cero member Elio. About MOSAN, see Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 147–54, 170; about Punto Cero, see 152–53, 168–71.

66. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 128.

67. Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 112; Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 164.

68. Interview with Nora Castañeda, May 2, 2008.

69. Interview with Lídice Navas, May 23, 2008.

70. Lídice Navas. 2005. "En esta lucha no hay fronteras . . . ," *Servicio Informativo Ecumenico y Popular*, April 6, http://www.ecumenico.org/leer.php/320#. Navas continues: "There are no borders in this struggle . . . the struggles of other people is our struggle as well."

71. Here, Navas echoes the insights of Frantz Fanon, who showed more than anything else the radical transformation of social structures in revolutionary processes. *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. H. Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

72. By contrast, these guerrillas are critical of one of the only accounts of the guerrilla struggle written by a woman, namely Angela Zago's semifictional *Aquí No Ha Pasado Nada* (Caracas: Sintesis Dosmil, 1972), for the openly dismissive tone expressed in the title.

73. For example, Elizabeth Friedman's account of the women's movement notably is centered on traditional politics and the social movements operating at the periphery of such politics (without noting the origin of many of those movements), and she devotes less than one page to female participation in the guerrilla struggle: *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), 128–29. What is needed in the present is a full account devoted to women's participation in the

Venezuelan armed struggle, of the sort that is beyond the scope of this book. For an excellent example that is limited to an earlier period (but that includes some later involved in the guerrilla struggle, see Fania Petzoldt and Jacinta Bevilacqua, eds., *Nosotras tambien nos jugamos la vida* [*We too risked our lives*]*: testimonios de la mujer venezolana en la lucha clandestina, 1948–1958* (Caracas: Editorial Ateneo de Caracas, 1979). Such an account would begin with Livia Governeur, an organizer of shock brigades in the UCV who was killed by the Betancourt government in November 1961, and in whose name revenge actions would quickly be carried out (see Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 33–36).

74. Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). Debray's progression between 1965 and 1967, during the course of which "the *foco* becomes the beginning and end of revolutionary wisdom, completely self-contained, responsible to nothing and to no one," is well-described by Martin Glaberman. 1968. "Regis Debray: Revolution Without a Revolution," *Speak Out*, April.

75. Cited by Fabricio Ojeda in *Hacia el poder revolucionario* (1967), http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=2209.

76. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 129. This same language is used by Rafael Uzcátegui and Juvenal. Valsalice characterizes Debray's theses as "dogmatic" and agrees that by 1968 the "myth" he had cultivated was critiqued thoroughly by even the most radical proponents of the Venezuelan armed struggle (*Guerrilla y Política*, 12).

77. Peña, *Conversaciones con Douglas Bravo*, 128.

78. Ibid., 129.

79. Debray himself was critical of this; "Castroism: The Long March in Latin America," in *Strategy for Revolution* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 29–99.

80. Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 97.

81. Interview with Carlos Betancourt, May 23, 2008.

82. Linárez argues that Alfredo Maneiro of the PCV, who would later break radically with vanguardism before founding La Causa R, was in fact the *most* vanguardist of the eastern *comandantes* (*Lucha Armada*, 92). Betancourt briefly formed part of the Committee for Revolutionary Integration in 1969, alongside Bravo and others (Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 97n181).

83. Notably, Carlos Lanz, interview, May 26, 2008.

84. According to Valsalice, even attempts at mass-based struggles after 1964 maintained the division between street battles and the class struggle, leading them to continue to rely on students as their shock-troops (*Guerrilla y Política*, 57).

85. Maneiro argues that the guerrillas never truly understood the rural areas and that they fell into a Debray-inspired Eurocentric belief that Third World countries could only yield rural insurrections (*Notas Negativas*, 46).

86. Again, the MIR was the most egregious with regard to such "mimesis," copying even the styles of the Cubans (Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política*, 11–12, 21), but Maneiro sees this argument as a cathartic self-absolution (*Notas Negativas*, 72).

87. Maneiro, *Notas Negativas*, 75.

Chapter 2: Reconnecting with the Masses

1. Interview with Rafael Uzcátegui, May 27, 2008. In the words of Chris Marker's cinematic critique of vanguardism (which includes a self-critical interview with Douglas Bravo), they were a "spear point without a spear," and in reference to Lewis Carroll's vanishing Cheshire Cat, "a grin without a cat." *A Grin Without a Cat* [*Le fond de l'air est rouge*] (Paris: Arte France, 1977).

2. Alfredo Maneiro, *Notas Negativas* (Caracas: Ediciones Venezuela 83, 1971), 21–23.

3. United Nations, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision* (New York: United Nations, 2004), 174.

4. Régis Debray, *Strategy for Revolution* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973), 76–77.

5. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 81. While Fanon certainly distinguishes the urban from the rural, he recognizes that this distinction is rooted in the structure of the dependent economy and places the two zones into a dialectical relationship. Debray, *Strategy for Revolution*, 76–82.

6. Norman Gall. (1972). "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary. Part I: Years of Insurrection," January, http://www.normangall.com/venezuela_art4.htm.

7. Gott would later deem Plaza "one of the intellectual authors of the project of Hugo Chávez" (*Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution* [London: Verso, 2005], 79). See also Steve Ellner and Miguel Tinker Salas, *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an 'Exceptional Democracy'* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 36. Fuenmayor did not himself join the PRV, but many of his collaborators, such as Margot García Maldonado, did.

8. Interview with Douglas Bravo, May 23–24, 2008.

9. Interview with Rafael Uzcátegui, April 26–27, 2008.

10. The PRV initially was close to Cuba, but they broke over Debray's *foquismo*, moving closer to China. Although Uzcátegui attributes the openness of the PRV more to experiences with orthodoxy on the domestic level than to the Sino-Soviet split, both the PRV and Maneiro's later LCR had official relations with China.

11. Interview with Isidro Ramirez, Caracas, May 15, 2008.

12. These were Comisión Ideológica de Ruptura, *El Imperialismo Petrolero y la Revolución Venezolana, Tomo I: Capital y Propiedad Territorial* (Caracas: Salvador de la Plaza, 1975); *Tomo II: Las Ganancias Extraordinarias y la Soberanía Nacional* (Caracas: Editorial Ruptura, 1977); *Tomo III: La OPEP y las Nacionalizaciones: La Renta Absoluta* (Caracas: Salvador de la Plaza, 1979). While the PRV-Ruptura position on oil plays a large role in Bravo's own opposition to Chávez, many of those involved in the Ruptura analysis have worked closely with the Chávez government, including Alí Rodriguez Araque (former head of OPEC and PDVSA), Rafael Ramírez (current head of PDVSA and former energy minister), and Bernard Mommer (OPEC minister and vice minister). See Bernard Mommer, *The New Governance of Venezuelan Oil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Mommer, "Subversive Oil," in *Venezuelan*

Politics in the Chávez Era, ed. Ellner and Hellinger (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 131–46.

13. Bravo denies that the PRV ever dissolved, but the article "¿Cual Partido? ¿Cual Socialismo?" published by the PRV Central Committee in the late 1970s prefigures many of these developments in its references to the need for a "parallel popular power" and "a new type of party."

14. Pedro Jorge Solans. (2009). "Héctor Vivas, el arquitecto de la fuga del cuartel San Carlos," *El Diario de Carlos Paz*, October 30, http://www.eldiariodecarlospaz.com/octubre_09/30_10_09/oc0929k.html.

15. About the history of the recovery of San Carlos, see Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 152–53.

16. Norman Gall. (1973). "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary. Part II: A New Party," January, http://www.normangall.com/venezuela_art4_2.htm.

17. About Simón the Arab and the escape, see Alejandra Otero. (2006). "Siete Dias," *El Nacional*, August 20, D4. See also Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff II"; Guillermo García Ponce, *El Túnel de San Carlos* (Caracas: Ediciones La Muralla, 1968); and Petkoff, "Como nos fugamos de San Carlos," *Elite* (1967), 47–53.

18. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff II."

19. Ibid.

20. Steve Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora: El Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1992), 57.

21. Gall, "Teodoro Petkoff II."

22. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 67.

23. Ibid., 72.

24. Margarita López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio* (Caracas: Alfadil, 2005), 135.

25. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 69–70.

26. Ibid., 79.

27. Ibid., 81.

28. Ibid., 111.

29. Ibid., 94–95.

30. Interview with Luis Britto García, April 24, 2008.

31. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 97.

32. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 70; López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 138.

33. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 155.

34. Maneiro, *Notas Negativas*, 5–6, 10. Thus Margarita López Maya's statement that "Comandantes like Maneiro and Petkoff would struggle to find a new connection with popular movements" is a partial truth (*Del Viernes Negro*, 137–38). Luis Bonilla-Molina and Haiman El Troudi distinguish between "reformists" like MAS and PCV and "centrists" like LCR (*Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana: Pequeña Crónica, 1948–2004* [Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2004], 48).

35. Maneiro, *Notas Negativas*, 102–103. Maneiro and others did not reject the concept of the vanguard outright, but instead saw it as both necessary and dangerous. A proper vanguard, they argued, must be the result and not the cause, emerging from "genetic linkages with the mass movement" (39–40).

36. Ellner, *De la Derrota Guerrillera a la Política Innovadora*, 104.

37. López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 141–42. Goldfrank notes that, according to Pablo Medina, an early LCR member, an additional area of focus existed, consisting of contacts within the military (*Deepening Local Democracy in Latin America: Participation, Decentralization, and the Left* [University Park: Penn State University Press, 2011], 43). Ellner critiques Maneiro as "anti-ideological," whereas Guillermo Yépez Salas deems him anti-intellectual (*La Causa R: Origen y Poder* [Caracas: Tropykos, 1993]). See also Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 50–51n53. About the LCR's role in ironically stabilizing the corrupt system, see Julia Buxton, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela* (London: Ashgate, 2001).

38. López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 145–46.

39. Ibid., 146.

40. Ibid., 144.

41. About experiments in LCR governance, see Marta Harnecker, *Haciendo Camino al Andar: Experiencias de ocho gobiernos locales* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1994).

42. López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 149.

43. Interview with Rafael Uzcátegui, May 27, 2008.

44. Interview with Juvenal, Maracaibo, May 18, 2008.

45. Pedro Pablo Linárez, *Lucha Armada en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2006), 168.

46. One Punto Cero member I spoke with (Elio) was in San Carlos from 1971 to 1979 but unable to participate in the 1975 escape because he was being held on the prison's upper levels. He was only released after Punto Cero members began to join other parties as a path to legalization.

47. Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 53–54.

48. Pedro Reyes Millán. (2004). "1975: la fuga del Cuartel San Carlos," *Aporrea .org*, January 16, http://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/a19479.html.

49. San Carlos remained a political prison until 1988, when then-leader of Bandera Roja, Gabriel Puerta Aponte — who had fled the prison in 1975 only to find himself there once again in 1982 — was released. However, San Carlos would return briefly to this role in the aftermath of Chávez's failed 1992 coup; the future president found himself confined by these familiar walls until his 1994 pardon by Rafael Caldera.

50. Gaspar Castro Rojas, *Como Secuestramos a Niehous* (Caracas: Editorial Fuentes/Tres Continentes, 1979). See also Pedro Mathison Leon, *Las Verdades y Mentiras del Rescate de Niehous* (Caracas: Comala, 2001); Ezequiel Díaz Silva, *Los Secretos de Niehous* (Caracas: Seleven, 1979).

51. "Venezuela: Terror and Takeover," *Time Magazine*, April 19, 1976, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,914076–1,00.html.

52. Although no domestic press outlets published the manifesto, likely for fear of

political repercussions, this did not prevent government attacks on press freedom: RCTV was searched and its director questioned for purportedly interviewing a GCR member, and the newspapers *El Nacional* and *La Verdad* were searched and their print runs confiscated. Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, *El Caso Niehous y la Corrupción Administrativa* (Caracas: Editorial Fuentes/Tres Contintentes, 1979), 20.

53. According to some, it was Ivan Nolasco Padilla, who has been vice-minister of culture under the Chávez government, who submitted to torture and identified Rodríguez as a participant (Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 158n12). For Padilla's account of his role in the formation of the GCRs and the Niehous operation, see Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 181–83.

54. Lanz, *El Caso Niehous*, 20–22.

55. Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII: 1930 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 777.

56. Lanz, *El Caso Niehous*, 10.

57. Ibid., 11.

58. Ibid., 177.

59. Interview with Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, May 26, 2008.

60. Juvenal agrees, describing the PRV as an "orthodox" organization that merely sought links with critical Marxism.

61. See also Lanz, *El Caso Niehous*, 125.

62. Ibid., 10. This assessment is shared by Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 61.

63. Linárez, *Lucha Armada*, 168.

64. Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 65.

65. Lanz, *El Caso Niehous*, 21.

66. Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 65.

Chapter 3: Birth of the "Tupamaros"

1. This outpost, located just a few blocks away on the Calle Real de la Cañada, was seized by the Simón Bolívar Coordinator and today serves as its headquarters.

2. Luis Britto García. 2008. "El 23 de Enero Vive," January 25, http://luisbrittogarcia.blogspot.com/.

3. Interview with Juan Contreras, April 21, 2008.

4. Norman Gall. (1972). "Teodoro Petkoff: The Crisis of the Professional Revolutionary. Part I: Years of Insurrection," January, http://www.normangall.com/venezuela_art4.htm.

5. Juvenal seconds this assessment (as does Maneiro, *Notas Negativas* [Caracas: Ediciones Venezuela 83, 1971], 74), but whereas Petkoff attributes it to the distinction between insurrectionary versus non-insurrectionary periods, Juvenal instead sees the tension with local communities as one rooted in vanguardist *foquismo*.

6. A popular subversion of Carlos Andrés Pérez's official 1988 electoral slogan. See Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 237. Luis Bonilla-Molina and Haiman El Troudi cite its origin as a chant among students during Pérez's first term in office (*Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana: Pequeña Crónica, 1948–2004* [Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2004], 314n68).

7. Margarita López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio* (Caracas: Alfadil, 2005), 23.

8. Ibid., 31–38. Elements of what follows appeared in George Ciccariello-Maher. (2008). "The Yumare Massacre, 22 Years On: The Very Model of 'Murderous' Democracy," *Counterpunch*, May 10, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher05102008.html.

9. Interview with Roland Denis, April 15, 2008. This is not to suggest that repression had never been widespread in the past. As Maneiro noted in 1971: "if three people met they were broken up by blows, and if thirty, by gunfire . . . any group of neighbors demanding . . . minimum services was considered a potential guerrilla *foco* and treated as such" (*Notas Negativas*, 20).

10. Interview with Isidro Ramírez, May 15, 2008.

11. Domingo Alberto Rangel. (1987). "La Masacre de Cantaura, o Cuando la Democracia También Mata," *Últimas Noticias*, October 18, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a5053.html. See also Rafael Hurtado Bravo, *Cantaura: La Masacre Anunciada* (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2008); Alexis Rosas, *La Masacre de Cantaura* (Caracas: Texto, 2005).

12. The operation was spearheaded by former DISIP head Henry López Sisco, who was responsible for nearly the entire Venezuelan state policy of massacre and targeted killings, including Cantaura, Yumare, and El Amparo, and the murder of Jorge Rodríguez. In 1989, after a sham trial in which the victim's families were threatened and not allowed to testify, a military judge ruled that because the victims were themselves guilty of "rebellion," the DISIP was not at fault. A higher military court later overturned this decision, citing vegetation unsuitable for an ambush, the manner in which the victims were killed, the lack of police casualties, and the absence of any indication that the victims had fired weapons. In September 2006, twenty-nine participants in the Yumare massacre were charged, including both former president Jaime Lusinchi and López Sisco himself, who was ordered to be detained immediately but managed to slip out of the country; he currently is seeking political asylum in Costa Rica. See the investigation by *Aporrea.org* at http://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/n113632.html. For accounts of Yumare, see Raúl Esté, Adán Navas, and Alvaro Carrera, *La Masacre de Yumare* (Caracas: Carlos Aponte, 1986); Alexis Rosas, *Yumare: La Masacre Impune* (Caracas: Texto: 2006).

13. To mention only a few: Dilia Rojas, a *barrio* organizer and founder of the Carabobo Neighborhood Association who had participated in the 1975 escape from San Carlos; Pedro Jiménez, a transport union organizer; Ronald Morao, active in the Popular Culture Front and who edited a radical newspaper in Catia; José Silva, founder of the Francisco de Miranda Cultural Center in Valencia; Simon Romero, an accomplished singer-songwriter; and Rafael Quevedo, a student leader at the Pedagogic University of Caracas.

14. On the profound impact of the Amparo Massacre on public trust in the government, see Coronil and Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation."

15. Francesco Relea. (2005). "23 de Enero, bastión del chavismo," *El Pais*, December 3, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/internacional/23/Enero/bastion/chavismo/elpeputec/20051203elpepiint_15/Tes.

16. Some claim that this was an open policy under the first Carlos Andrés Pérez administration (Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* [Oakland: PM Press, 2010], 274).

17. Elements of what follows first appeared in George Ciccariello-Maher. (2008). "Embedded with the Tupamaros," *MRZine*, April 23, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/cm230408.html.

18. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 274–75.

19. This anecdote originally appeared in George Ciccariello-Maher. (2007). "Dual Power in the Venezuelan Revolution," *Monthly Review* 59, no. 4 (September), 51. A similar description appears in Martin Markovits and Vincent Bevins. 2008. "Venezuela's Tupamaros on the Side of the Law," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 16, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/11/16/MNMAI2JFVS.DTL.

20. This is not the whole story, and the DISIP did not merely snatch the name out of thin air. Contreras recalls how these very same searches often turned up texts by the Uruguayan guerrillas such as *Actas Tupamaras* (Madrid: Editorial Revolución, 1982), not to mention classic texts like Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Punta Gorda, FL: Crashing Rocks Books, 2008 [1971]).

21. Bonilla-Molina and El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana*, 66, 315n80.

22. Ibid., 67. This fusion emerged from behind the heavy walls of Cuartel San Carlos, of all places, before Lanz's 1984 release.

23. Ibid., 67–69.

24. Ibid., 69.

25. Eric Hobsbawm responded by noting that the self-defense zones actually had *not* been crushed and had, in fact, come to represent the most durable bases for Colombia's FARC rebels, adding that Debray's critique of armed self-defense was both "politically motivated" and poorly informed. Eric Hobsbawm. 1970. "Guerrillas in Latin America," *The Socialist Register*, 53–55. It is worth noting that the FARC long outlasted most of the movements associated with Debray's *foquista* approach.

26. Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 27.

27. Interview with Carlos Betancourt, May 23, 2008; Luigi Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política: Curso de acción en Venezuela (1962–1969)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1975), 112.

28. Los Comuneros. (2008). "Cuadernos Ideológicos, No. 3: Los Consejos Comunales," 14.

29. See, for example, Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 277–78.

30. This distinction hinges decisively on Chávez's attempted coup in 1992, one that is interpreted as a principled stand against the odds. Predictably, when jockey-

ing for position, many prominent Chavistas attempt to portray themselves as having taken similar risks in the past.

31. It is worth emphasizing that almost every interviewee with whom I spoke, as well as those appearing in Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, spontaneously refer to these distinctions.

32. Interview with Valentín Santana, May 24, 2008.

33. David Beriain. (2007). "En la cuna del chavismo," *ADN.es*, November 28.

34. See George Ciccariello-Maher. (2007). "Of Submarines and Loose Screws: A Chávez Ally Jumps the Divider," *Counterpunch*, November 17, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher11172007.html.

35. In one interview, a militant from 23 de Enero claims to respect but not share Chávez's harsh critiques of La Piedrita, arguing that La Piedrita's history of community work is beyond question. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 278.

First Interlude: The Caracazo: History Splits in Two

1. Thus, while the claim that, "until that moment in 1989, Venezuela was almost entirely devoid of social movements" is certainly false, it nevertheless contains a kernel of truth. Jonah Gindin. (2005). "Chavistas in the Halls of Power, Chavistas on the Street," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, March 5.

2. Thus, if 1998 and 1992 admittedly were crucial turning points, then, 27-F and 13-A might be better understood as "points of inflection," marking fundamental qualitative leaps that made further institutional development possible, yet by virtue of their very nature generally remain hidden from view.

3. Roland Denis, *Los Fabricantes de la Rebelión: Movimiento Popular, Chavismo y Sociedad en los años noventa* (Caracas: Editorial Primera Linea, 2001), 5.

4. What follows draws upon George Ciccariello-Maher, "The Fourth World War Started in Venezuela: The Legacy of the Caracazo," *Counterpunch*, March 3, 2007, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher03032007.html.

5. Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 376.

6. Ibid., 375.

7. Margarita López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio* (Caracas: Alfadil, 2005), 22–28.

8. Ibid., 36, figure 3.

9. Coronil's correct diagnosis of the ideological function of such state "magic" does not decrease the urgent validity of this claim.

10. Here and in what follows I draw heavily on the description in López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 65–70.

11. For Nora Castañeda, it is crucial to note that the Caracazo was sparked largely by Afro-Venezuelans from the cacao-cultivating regions of eastern Miranda State. *Creating a Caring Economy* (London: Global Women's Strike, 2006), 27.

12. Dexy García. (2008). "El 27F nos dejó una gran enseñanza a los militantes de iz-

quierda," *MINCI*, February 29, http://www.minci.gob.ve/entrevistas/3/174876/el_27f_nos.html.

13. Coronil, *The Magical State*, 376.

14. Joaquín Murieta, *Lina Ron habla: su verdadera historia* (Caracas: Editorial Fuentes, 2003), 29.

15. López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 70. Vargas explains that some grabbed expensive imported whiskey at first, only to drop these later in favor of household necessities.

16. Roland Denis, *Los Fabricantes de la Rebelión: Movimiento Popular, Chavismo y Sociedad en los años noventa* (Caracas: Editorial Primera Linea, 2001), 5.

17. Ibid., 7.

18. Ibid., 8. In his concrete complexity, Denis far surpasses the abstract implausibility of Hardt and Negri's "multitude" as an actor lacking institutional mediations or representational functions.

19. Ibid., 8.

20. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 6.

21. López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro*, 75; Coronil, *The Magical State*, 377–78.

22. Emma Grand. (2010). "El Caracazo: Cuatro millones de balas se dispararon contra un pueblo desarmado," *YVKE Mundial*, February 26, http://www.radiomundial.com.ve/yvke/noticia.php?43605; Yolanda Valery. (2009). "A 20 años del Caracazo," *BBC Mundo*, February 27, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_7914000/7914048.stm.

23. Coronil, *The Magical State*, 378. One witness from 23 de Enero recalls seeing bodies stuffed into bags there as well (Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* [Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010], 276).

24. See Ciccariello-Maher, "Jumpstarting the Decolonial Engine: Symbolic Violence from Fanon to Chávez," *Theory & Event* 13, no. 1 (2010).

25. More recently, Chávez has used the same language to describe not the Caracazo, but his own coup, reflecting either a profound misunderstanding or cynical misrepresentation. Yaileth Argüelles. (2011). "Chávez conmemora el 4F en el Cuartel Libertador," *La Verdad*, February 4, http://laverdad.com/detnotic.php?CodNotic=51770.

26. Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy*, 28.

27. Vijay Prashad notes the historical difference between general's coups and colonel's coups, and this distinction is revealing in the Venezuelan context. *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 148–49.

28. Hugo Chávez and Marta Harnecker, *Understanding the Bolivarian Revolution*, trans. C. Boudin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2005), 32.

29. Fernando Acosta Riveros. (2009). "Febrero bolivariano y venezolano," *Aporrea.org*, February 7, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a71974.html.

30. In the 1998 election, Radical Cause (LCR) threw its lot in with right-wing reformer and former Miss Universe Irene Sáez. After polling upward of 70 percent, Sáez demonstrated an utter lack of understanding of the moment by accepting the endorsement of COPEI, one of the discredited traditional parties. By election time, Sáez polled less than 3 percent (Michael McCaugan, *The Battle of Venezuela* [New York: Seven Stories, 2005], 37). LCR's subsequent electoral results outside of its stronghold in Bolívar State have been nothing short of miserable.

31. Interview with Juvenal, May 18, 2008.

32. These documents are collected in Kléber Ramírez Rojas, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero* (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2006). Kléber was a former PRV-Ruptura member who had separated from the organization in the early 1980s, later founding Patriotic Hope (Esperanza Patriótica).

33. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 238.

34. Valentín Santana is more forthright in his skepticism: "we don't believe in soldiers, they have always been treasonous, like when Páez betrayed Bolívar."

35. Carlos Lanz Rodríguez. (2004). "La Revolución es cultural o reproducirá la dominación," *Aporrea.org*, August 30, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a9897.html.

36. Denis, *Fabricantes*, 13.

37. Denis, *Fabricantes*, 11.

38. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 161.

39. Luis Britto García, "Reflexiones sobre el 4 de febrero de 1992," February 16, 2008, http://luisbrittogarcia.blogspot.com/2008/02/pueblo-y-ejrcito.html.

40. Angela Zago, *La Rebelión de los ángeles* (Caracas: Fuentes, 1992), 30.

41. By linking the Caracazo to the coup and documenting the long history of prior organizing, I thus contest the top-down and conspiratorial histories by the late Alberto Garrido, especially *Historia Secreta de la Revolución Bolivariana* (Mérida: Editorial Venezolana, 2000).

42. Luis Britto García. (2007). "Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution Tells Us: 'People Are the Beginning and the End of Everything,'" *Venezuela Analysis*, February 26, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2242?page=21&quicktabs_2=2.

43. Denis, *Fabricantes*, 8.

44. Interview with Luis Britto García, April 24, 2008.

Chapter 4: Sergio's Blood: Student Struggles

1. Angela Zago, *La Rebelión de los ángeles* (Caracas: Fuentes, 1992), 30.

2. Many believe that the real winner of the 1993 election was Andrés Velázquez of Radical Cause (see chapter 2) and that Caldera's victory was fraudulent.

3. Roland Denis, *Los Fabricantes de la Rebelión: Movimiento Popular, Chavismo y Sociedad en los años noventa* (Caracas: Editorial Primera Linea, 2001), 48.

4. Ibid.

5. The second quote is from *La Piedrita* 10 (September/October 1993). Denis' book is dedicated to the memory of both Sergio Rodríguez and Yulimar Reyes, for whom *Yulimar Vive* was named. Reyes was murdered under similar circumstances on the Avenida Bolívar during the first moments of the Caracazo.

6. Luis Bonilla-Molina and Haiman El Troudi, *Historia de la Revolución Bolivariana: Pequeña Crónica, 1948–2004* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2004), 127.

7. Luis Beltran Acosta, *Las Luchas Sociales en Venezuela (1600–1814): Antecedentes históricos del movimiento estudiantil* (Caracas: Fondo Editorial Carlos Aponte, 1984), 18–24.

8. Roberto Antonio López Sánchez, *Movimiento estudiantil de LUZ y proceso politico venezolano*, 1958–1989 (Maracaibo: LUZ, 2007), 43.

9. See also Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* (London: Verso, 2007), 11.

10. López Sánchez, *Movimiento estudiantil*, 44.

11. Ibid., 46.

12. Roberto López Sánchez. (2006). "Los Movimientos estudiantiles en Venezuela, 1958–1990," *Historia Actual Online* 10 (Spring), 76.

13. Manuel Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!* (Santiago: Ediciones del Litoral, 1963), 218.

14. The UCV was occupied in October 1960 and again in December 1966 (Luigi Valsalice, *Guerrilla y Política: Curso de acción en Venezuela [1962–1969]* [Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1975], 74).

15. Interview with Fernando Rivero, April 17, 2008.

16. López Sánchez, "Los Movimientos . . . ," 77.

17. Ibid., 76.

18. López Sánchez, *Movimiento estudiantil*, 49.

19. As a result, López characterizes the Renovation as an alliance between liberal-bourgeois and revolutionary perspectives on the university against the threat of technocratic-developmentalist reform (López Sánchez, *Movimiento estudiantil*, 53).

20. Ibid., 49–50. See Carlos Lanz, *El poder en la escuela* (Caracas: Primera Línea, 1990).

21. See López Sánchez, "Los Movimientos . . . ," 78.

22. Ibid., 78.

23. Ibid., 78–79.

24. Roberto López Sánchez and Carmen Alicia Hernández Rodríguez, "Movimientos estudiantiles y crisis del sistema politico en Veneuzuela: 1987–1988," *Espacio Abierto* 10, no. 4 (October–December 2001), 649–51.

25. Ibid., 651–62.

26. Ibid., 654.

27. Ibid., 661–62. See also López Sánchez, "Los Movimientos . . . ," 80.

28. It would be difficult to agree that the student rebellions "wrote the script that the popular action of the Caracazo would put into practice," but nevertheless there is some truth to this claim. López Sánchez, "Los Movimientos . . . ," 82.

29. López Sánchez and Hernández Rodríguez, "Movimientos estudiantiles . . . ," 653.

30. Interview with Roland Denis, April 13, 2008.

31. Héctor Ruiz. (2007). "Los Consejos Estudiantiles: Herramienta para la transformación diaria," *Aporrea.org*, August 5, http://www.aporrea.org/educacion/a39299.html.

32. The quote is from Fernando Rivero. The 7 percent figure is from Kiraz Janicke. (2007). "Venezuela's Resurgent Revolutionary Student Movement," *Venezuela Analysis*, September 3, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2581.

33. Kiraz Janicke eloquently describes this dynamic in "Venezuela's Resurgent Revolutionary Student Movement."

34. On Primero Justicia, see Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking U.S. Intervention in Venezuela* (London: Pluto Press, 2006). Today's Bandera Roja emerged from a 1976 split in which Gabriel Puerta Aponte expelled Carlos Betancourt and the guerrillas of the eastern front, but the vast transition Bandera Roja has undergone is best illustrated in a single decade: from supporting both 1992 coups against Carlos Andrés Pérez, Bandera Roja would support the 2002 coup against Chávez as well, arguing that the president is a false communist and must be overthrown. According to some, it was the opportunism inherent in student electoral politics that prompted this shift.

35. In what follows, I draw upon George Ciccariello-Maher, "Behind Venezuela's 'Student Rebellion': Who's Pulling the Strings," *Counterpunch*, June 9–10, 2007 http://www.counterpunch.org/maher06092007.html.

36. This turn of phrase has a long history in Venezuela and had been deployed against the Betancourt government's censorship campaign of 1960. Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!*, 136.

37. According to right-wing apologists, the story of the script was false, but rather than denying the existence of the script, the anti-Chavista students instead claimed that the Chavistas had "stolen" their property.

38. Sandra Sierra, "8 Injured After Anti-Hugo Chávez March," The Associated Press, November 8, 2007. While no formal retractions appeared, the *Wall Street Journal* corrected its own version of the story later: John Lyons and José de Córdoba, "To Oppose Chávez, Youth in Caracas Rally Behind Stalin," *Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2007.

39. Before the attack on the School of Social Work, I was contacted by Casey Woods from the *Miami Herald*, who hoped to speak with some Chavista students about the protests. However, after the shooting at the UCV, I emailed Woods all the available information about the events, including several videos showing clearly what happened, yet the *Herald* refused to cover the Chavista side. These videos are available here: Luigino Bracci, "Varios heridos en la UCV por agresión opositora contra estudiantes," *YVKE Mundial*, November 7, 2007, http://radiomundial.com.ve/node/143737; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF1YOWDORPU. Woods' contribution can be seen in the article by Phil Gunson, "Anti-Chávez Marchers

Ambushed on Campus," *Miami Herald*, November 8, 2007, as well as her profiles of Stalin González and Chavista student leader Héctor Rodríguez: Casey Woods, "Student Critic of Chávez Comes from Marxist Ranks," and "Student Leader Works for Chávez," *Miami Herald*, November 24, 2007.

40. Luigino Bracci. (2007). "Al pueblo no le costaría tomar las universidades si siguen con la violencia," YVKE *Mundial*, November 8, http://radiomundial.com.ve/node/143746.

41. For an account of struggles within the UBV, see Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, chapter 16.

42. From 668,109 in 1997 to an estimated 1,796,507 students in 2007. Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Planificación y Desarrollo, "Boletín de Indicadores, No. 3: Logros Sociales," May 2008, 45–58. Thanks to Megan Morrissey at the Venezuela Information Office for making this document available to me.

43. See Tamara Pearson, "Venezuela's Dreams and Demons: Has the Bolivarian Revolution Changed Education?" *Venezuela Analysis*, March 18, 2011, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/6072.

44. This turn to the *liceistas* was nothing new; Denis notes an upsurge in organizing among secondary school students around 1991 (*Fabricantes*, 13).

45. Janicke, "Venezuela's Resurgent Revolutionary Student Movement." See also Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 237–41.

46. See Edgardo Lander, ed., *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 1993).

47. Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, "La División social del trabajo y su impacto en la educación," July 27, 2007, http://www.kaosenlared.net/noticia/division-social-trabajo-impacto-educacion.

48. Ibid.

49. Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, "Rinden tributo a luchador social Sergio Rodríguez," October 1, 2010, http://www.avn.info.ve/node/20716.

50. Carmen Clemente Travieso, *Las esquinas de Caracas* (Caracas: El Nacional, 2007), 74. The history is told by General Francisco Tosta García in his *Leyendas patrióticas: segunda parte de las leyendas de la conquista* (Caracas: University of Los Andes, 1898), 35–42.

Chapter 5: Manuelita's Boots: Women between Two Movements

1. Gabriel García Márquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, trans. E. Grossman (New York: Knopf, 1990), 54–55.

2. See Pamela S. Murray, "'Loca' or 'Libertadora'?: Manuela Sáenz in the Eyes of History and Historians, 1900–c. 1990," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33, no. 2 (May 2001), 291–310. Murray documents this erasure of Sáenz and even of her saving Bolívar, which occasionally has been described in such a gendered manner to give Bolívar credit for saving himself and describing Manuela as "hysterical" (293).

3. Pilar Moreno, *José María Córdova* (Bogota, 1977), 404, as cited in Murray,

"'Loca' or 'Libertadora'?," 295. García Márquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, 192–93. Murray also discusses Palma's description of Manuela as a "mannish woman" (296).

4. García Márquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, 193.

5. Ibid., 227.

6. Evelyn Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America," in Ann Pescatelo, ed., *Female and Male in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 91.

7. For a critique of the presumed universality of Marianismo, see Tracy Bachrach Ehlers, "Debunking Marianismo: Economic Vulnerability and Survival Strategies among Guatemalan Wives," *Ethnology* 30, no. 1 (January 1991), 1–16.

8. Fernando Coronil explains how the cult of María Lionza was repressed as it was incorporated into national folklore, shifting from that of a "pagan popular figure . . . sensual and muscular . . . to a chaste image that has an uncanny resemblance to the [more *marianista*] Virgin of Coromoto" (*The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 171). For a discussion of the centrality of the cult of María Lionza for interpreting contemporary Venezuelan gender relations, see Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols, "The Power of the Pelvic Bone: Breaching the Barriers of Social Class in Venezuela," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26, no. 3 (2005), 71–105.

9. For example, Elizabeth Friedman's *Unfinished Transitions: Women and the Gendered Development of Democracy in Venezuela, 1936–1996* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000) devotes less than a single page to female participation in the guerrilla struggle (128–29).

10. Interview with Nora Castañeda, May 2, 2008.

11. Interview with Alba Carosio, April 28, 2008.

12. Furthermore, through either a dismissal of Nora Castañeda's supporting role or a misunderstanding of her history, Carosio insists that "Nora was never in the guerrilla struggle."

13. Friedman, *Unfinished Transitions*, 140. The Popular Women's Circles were founded in 1974, and just four years later, they numbered thirty-six, of which seventeen were in Caracas alone (170).

14. Ibid., 170–71.

15. Ibid., 173.

16. Ibid., 174, my emphasis. However, Friedman also notes a later turn by the CFPs toward more "feminist" questions.

17. As Sarah Wagner puts it: "These government initiatives were the catalyst in consolidating the women's movement and in laying the foundation for those who would follow." Wagner. (2005). "Women and Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution," *Venezuela Analysis*, January 15, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/877.

18. Friedman, *Unfinished Transitions*, 186; see also Sujatha Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 58. Friedman notes that the class makeup of the women's

movement was most apparent in the reform of the Labor Law, in which many women who relied on paid domestic labor for their own professional careers were unwilling to extend labor protections to the very women they hired (194).

19. Nichols discusses two such cases, that of Inés María Marcano, a poor *barrio* resident and single mother who in 1987 was charged with child abandonment after her daughter was kidnapped, raped, and killed while she was out of the house, and of Linda Loaiza López, who in 2001 was kidnapped and held for three months, during which time she was tortured and raped by a wealthy man who eventually was freed (but later re-arrested) on the grounds that she had been a prostitute. Such concrete cases, in drawing women together, also challenged the middle-class nature of the movement ("The Power of the Pelvic Bone," 74–75).

20. Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1975).

21. Nora Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy* (London: Global Women's Strike, 2006), 71.

22. The book appeared in Spanish translation by 1975 (Madrid: Siglo XXI). Selma James recounts Castañeda's surprise in her introduction to the latter's *Creating A Caring Economy*, 11.

23. See, e.g., Laura Sullivan, "Wages for Anyone is Bad for Business," *Mute Magazine*, January 9, 2006, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wages-anyone-bad-business.

24. James and Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women*, 36n16.

25. Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy*, 68. This does not mean that tensions do not persist within and between those advocating wages for housework, however. Lizardi Prada, founder of the Venezuelan Homemakers' Union and head of its chapter in Merida State, does not seek to "destroy" housework as Selma James does, but instead seeks to "dignify women" without necessarily transforming the household. James Suggett. (2009). "Venezuela's Homemakers Union: An Interview with Founder and Coordinator Lizardi Prada," *Venezuela Analysis*, July 7, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4597.

26. Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy*, 66.

27. In early 2010, some participants even denounced the fact that corruption and bureaucracy had "devoured" the mission. Comité Propulsor. (2010). "La corrupción y el burocratismo se comen la Misión Madres del Barrio," *Aporrea.org*, March 18, http://www.aporrea.org/misiones/a97237.html.

28. See Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy*, 54–60.

29. Interview with Jessie Blanco, May 7, 2008.

30. Banmujer draws directly on the "pedagogy of the oppressed" in its participatory nature and uses "grassroots educators" to draw out the latent knowledge of popular women rather than "teaching" them (Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy*, 58). Furthermore, its decentralized structure in some ways prefigures the communal council phenomenon (64). True to her political origins, Selma James describes these elements in terms of "self-activity," a central concept of the Johnson-Forest Tendency (8).

31. Blanco collaborated in the past with the anarchist grouping *El Libertario* before breaking with it over its "right-wing positions," especially around the time of the 2002 coup against Chávez. She now works on a political level alongside Roland Denis and others in the M-13A Movement (and previously Proyecto Nuestramérica).

32. Edith Franco, "El Socialismo del Siglo XXI es el Comunismo," interview with María León, *Rebelión* (September 3, 2005), http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=19606.

33. Jessie Blanco, "Is Our Socialism Feminist?" *Socialist Outlook* 12 (summer 2007), http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/spip.php?article497. Originally published in *Revista Matea*, which Blanco founded.

34. While slightly less pessimistic about the balance sheet of progress in recent years, Sujatha Fernandes has shown how the ability of women to challenge the recreation of gender norms within the Bolivarian Revolution has depended upon their ability to organize on a grassroots level beyond the reach of the bureaucratic state. Sujatha Fernandes, "Barrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez's Venezuela," *Latin American Politics & Society* 49, no. 3 (2007), 97–127. See also Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums?*, esp. 58.

35. Hugo Chávez Frías, "Rindamos tributo a Manuela Sáenz," in Mónica Saiz, ed., *Bolivarianas: el protagonismo de las mujeres en la Revolución Venezolana* (Caracas: Ediciones Emancipación, 2004), 148–49.

36. García Márquez, *The General in His Labyrinth*, 226, 193.

37. Saiz, *Bolivarianas*, 56.

38. Pablo Neruda, *Ceremonial Songs/Cantos Ceremoniales* (Tempe, AZ: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1996), 18.

39. In Chávez's speech, he recites several of Neruda's poems for Manuelita, insisting that "I believe that Neruda was in love with Manuela" (Saiz, *Bolivarianas*, 149).

40. Not only with Bolívar, but also with other recently resuscitated symbols of Afro-Venezuelan womanhood such as Negra Hipólita and Negra Matea, two slaves who raised Bolívar, whose remains were interred in the Pantheon only two months before those of Manuelita.

41. Luis Britto García, "Manuela Sáenz se reune con Bolívar en Caracas," July 18, 2010, http://luisbrittogarcia.blogspot.com/2010/07/manuela-saenz-se-reune-con-bolivar-en.html.

Chapter 6: José Leonardo's Body and the Collapse of Mestizaje

1. Manuel Vicente Magallanes, *Luchas e insurrecciones en la Venezuela colonial* (Caracas: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, 1972), 11–15.

2. Martín Fernández de Navarrete, *Colección de los Viages y Descubrimientos que Hicieron por Mar los Españoles*, vol. 3 (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1829), 16–17.

3. Magallanes, *Luchas e insurrecciones*, 18–20.

4. Ibid., 7.

5. Ibid., 7.

6. Ibid, 32.

7. José de Oviedo y Baños dedicates almost the entire eighth chapter of his account to El Negro Miguel (*The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, trans. J. J. Varner [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987], 94–98). Whether this was truly the "first" serious resistance to black slavery in the Americas depends on our definition; José L. Franco documents some limited rebellions and massacres before Miguel in his *Afroamérica* (Havana: Junta Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, 1961), 115–21. In 1551, the latent rebelliousness of the zone led to the imprisonment of El Negro Cristóbal, a slave suspected of mounting a rebellion in the mines of Chirgua. Chirgua was soon abandoned for the richer veins at Buría, and as if equipped with golden blinders, the Spanish transferred many of Cristóbal's followers there in 1552. As an indication of the dialectic driving resistance and colonization, it is ironic the mines at Buría were discovered on a mission to pacify the Jirajaras. Jesús María Herrera Salas, *El Negro Miguel y la primera revolución venezolana* (Caracas: Vadell Hermanos Editores, 2003), 98–99. Buría boasted Venezuela's highest concentration of slaves of the period, although they numbered only around eighty. Pedro M. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los Negros de la Serranía de Coro* (Caracas: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, [1910] 1949), 15.

8. According to Arcaya's admittedly white supremacist account, Miguel's new state was "a grotesque caricature of Spanish institutions" that the slaves and Indians were incapable of even understanding (*Insurrección de los Negros*, 15).

9. Herrera Salas, *El Negro Miguel*, 116.

10. Federico Brito Figueroa, *Las insurrecciones de los esclavos negros en la sociedad colonial venezolana* (Caracas: Cantaclaro, 1961), 43; Ricardo E. Alegría. (1978). "El Rey Miguel: Héroe puertorriqueño en la lucha por la libertad de los esclavos," *Revista de Historia de América* 85 (January–June), 16.

11. Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). For one reference to King Miguel by contemporary organizers, see Martinez Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 222.

12. Martha Cobb. (1972). "Africa in Latin America," *Black World* 21, no. 10 (August), 8. Cobb mistakes the town of El Tocuyo for the name of an indigenous leader, erroneously suggesting that the colonists turned to the indigenous population for assistance in crushing Miguel's rebellion.

13. Oviedo, *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, 98. While such rebelliousness would wane eventually, its subterraneous basis remained in the Cult of María Lionza, whose center at Cerro Sorte was not far from Buría and in whose pantheon King Miguel figures as a lesser deity (he himself had been a practitioner of voodoo). Herrera Salas, *El Negro Miguel*, 112.

14. The intersection of Afro-indigenous resistance and the guerrilla war was limited, but not entirely symbolic, since guerrilla fronts occasionally grew out of previous Afro-indigenous struggles. Pedro Pablo Linárez, *Lucha Armada en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Bolivariana, 2006), 14–15.

15. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los Negros*, 27–28.

16. Ibid., 31, 36.

17. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1963 [1938]), 81. José Marcial Ramos Guédez places Chirino in a forgotten tradition of "Black Jacobins" in Venezuela: "150 años de la abolición de la esclavitud en Venezuela: de José Leonardo Chirino a José Gregorio Monagas," *Tierra Firme* 22, no. 85 (2004).

18. Arcaya, wearing his racism on his sleeve, insists that Chirino — like Miguel — could not even comprehend the meaning of the words for which they risked their lives (*Insurrección de los Negros*, 38).

19. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los Negros*, 54–55. See also José Gil Fortoul, *Historia Constitucional de Venezuela*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1907), 131.

20. One historical account places Miguel's revolt under the category of "more economic than political," whereas Chirino's rebellion is considered the first movement with "freedom" as its objective. Edgar Esteves González, *Batallas de Venezuela, 1810–1824* (Caracas: Los Libros de El Nacional, 2004), 8, 12. Regarding contemporary debates, see *José Leonardo Chirino y la insurrección de la Serranía de Coro de 1795. Insurrección de libertad o rebelión de independencia* (Mérida: Universidad de Los Andes, 1996).

21. Jesús "Chucho" García, "Demystifying Africa's Absence in Venezuelan History and Culture," in S. Walker, ed., *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 285.

22. Interview with José Poyo, May 20, 2008.

23. Guarulla was involved in Chávez's efforts to force one particularly virulent evangelical group with ties to the United States' government — the New Tribes Mission — to leave Venezuela and Amazonas in particular.

24. Poyo has since been at the center of controversy within the CONIVE itself. After being nominated by CONIVE as an indigenous candidate to the National Assembly for the September 2010 elections, some accused Poyo of rigging the vote, at which point he withdrew and his critics named their own candidate — José Luis González (previously a deputy to the Constituent Assembly of 1999) — who was elected successfully (http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n158681.html).

25. César Uzcátegui. (1995). "Aproximación al estudio de la política indigenista venezolana del siglo XIX," *Montalbán* 28, 201.

26. This is not to say that racism toward these two groups does not function differently. Whereas anti-black racism in Venezuela largely reflects the epidermally "overdetermined" schema described by Fanon, anti-indigenous racism often takes its cues from the sphere of language.

27. Interview with Jesús "Chucho" García, May 27, 2008. DIGEPOL was the predecessor of the DISIP.

28. Magallanes, *Luchas e insurrecciones*, 108–10.

29. To this day, Caricuao is known as a center of culture and resistance and is home to the revolutionary Radio Perola and various Tupamaro-style groups.

30. According to Valsalice, the fact that the Bachiller Front, despite its strategic

location, was "more a place of refuge" than a fighting front was in part due to a lingering racism and underestimation of Afro fighters (*Guerrilla y Política: Curso de acción en Venezuela [1962–1969]* [Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1975], 111).

31. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. M. Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1928] 1971), 22.

32. Jesús María Herrera Salas. (2005). "Ethnicity and Revolution: The Political Economy of Racism in Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives*, 32, issue 141, no. 2 (March), 74.

33. On these nascent groups, see María Martha Mijares Pacheco, "Reflexiones para enfrentar al racismo en Venezuela," in D. Mato, ed., *Políticas de identidades y diferencias sociales en tiempos de globalización* (Caracas: FACES-Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2003), 63–78. See also Colectivo Red Afrovenezolano, *Somos la Red de Organizaciones Afrovenezolanos* (Ministerio de Cultura, n.d.).

34. See George Ciccariello-Maher. (2007). "Toward a Racial Geography of Caracas: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Fear of Penetration," *Qui Parle* 16, no. 2 (spring), 39–72.

35. The so-called Bratton Plan was instituted in Catia, and a recent *Business Week* article notes that during Peña's institution of the plan graffiti appeared in Catia reading "Bratton Go Home." Susan Berfield, "Bill Bratton, Globocop," *Business Week*, April 1, 2010, http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2010–03–31/bill-bratton-globocop.

36. Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution," 111.

37. Heiber Barreto Sánchez, "Lo que se olvida a la oposición política: raza y clase en la V República," *América Latina en Movimiento* (December 16, 2002), 1, cited in Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution," 82.

38. Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution," 83.

39. Ernesto Cardenal, "Venezuela: una nueva revolución en América Latina" (August 1, 2004), cited in Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution," 84; Tariq Ali, "Why He Crushed the Oligarchs: the Importance of Hugo Chávez," *Counterpunch*, August 16, 2004, http://www.counterpunch.org/tariq08162004.html.

40. Cited in Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution," 107–8.

41. On the division of CONIVE, see Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 216. Chapters 12 and 13 document both the advances and setbacks for indigenous communities under the Bolivarian Revolution.

42. Tal Abaddy, "Venezuelan Leader Wins Praise For Efforts To Help His Nation's Minorities," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, April 9, 2007, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2327.

43. In the run-up to the 2012 presidential election, Guarulla joined an anti-Chávez split from the PPT, the Progressive Movement of Venezuela (MPV), that supported opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski.

44. Jorge Montiel, a Wayúu from western Venezuela, speaks similarly of the concept of Yanama (Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 217). For more contemporary discussion of the *ayllu*, see Raúl Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti-State Forces*, trans. R. Ryan (Oakland, CA: AK Press, [2006] 2010).

45. On *rochelas*, see Sujatha Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

46. Interview with Enrique Arrieta Chourio, May 17, 2008. Arrieta refers to the following statement by Mariátegui: "The contribution of the Negro, who came as a slave, almost as a merchandise, appears . . . worthless and negative. . . . His condition . . . did not permit him to help create culture" (*Seven Interpretative Essays*, 280).

47. Abaddy, "Venezuelan Leader Wins Praise."

Second Interlude: Every Eleventh Has Its Thirteenth

1. The following draws upon George Ciccariello-Maher, "Every 11th Has Its 13th: The Failed Coup Against Chávez, Five Years On," *Counterpunch*, April 13, 2007, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher04132007.html.

2. The opposition strategy and the maneuvering of police and military forces involved were revealed in the film by Kim Bartley and Donnacha Ó Briain, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (Ireland: Power Pictures, 2003). The accuracy of the film has been debated, but when the critics of the film include Phil Gunson, whose own lack of journalistic integrity I encountered more recently during the student struggles in Venezuela (see chapter 4), one should immediately be skeptical of the critics. See the debate in *Columbia Journalism Review* (May–June 2004) between Phil Gunson, "Director's Cut" (59–61) and Kim Bartley and Donnacha Ó Briain, "Who's Right? The Filmmakers Respond" (60–61).

3. *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, April 12, 2002, transcript available at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/jan-june02/venezuela_4-12.html. Even the *Guardian* made this mistake by claiming that "pro-Chavez snipers had killed at least 13 people" (Alex Bellos, "Ousted Chavez Detained by Army," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2002, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/apr/13/venezuela.alexbellos). Most evidence now points to the notorious Metropolitan Police as having furnished the snipers, but initially this did not help to clear up the events: were the multiple mayors of Caracas not confusing enough, the Metropolitan Mayor Alfredo Peña, who found himself in command of the Metropolitan Police on that day, had been elected with Chávez's support, only to turn rapidly and ferociously against the government in the months leading up to the coup. Many still contest this, including Brian Nelson in *The Silence and the Scorpion* (New York: Nation Books, 2009). However, even for Nelson, the question of the snipers remains a "riddle." Gregory Wilpert is rightly critical of Nelson's book and points to overlooked film footage of the Metropolitan Police captured in the popular documentary *Claves de una massacre*. Wilpert, "The Venezuelan Coup Revisited: Silencing the Evidence," *NACLA Report* 42, no. 4 (July–August 2009), https://nacla.org/node/5944.

4. Bartley and Ó Briain, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*. This message was filmed by a CNN correspondent, Otto Neustaldt, who publicly denounced those involved and leaked the video to the public.

5. When Luis Herrera Campins restricted television advertising for cigarettes and alcohol, he was pilloried and defamed without hesitation.

6. Luis Britto García, *Dictadura Mediática en Venezuela* (Caracas: MPPCI, 2008).

7. This also applies to the 2009 coup against Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, who lacked the organic relationship with well-developed social movements that the Chávez regime enjoyed. See George Ciccariello-Maher, "The Counter-Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted: The Honduran Coup and the Limits of Hope and Change," *Counterpunch*, July 3, 2009, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher07032009.html.

8. *Crónica de un golpe, part 2, El Rostro del Fascism* (film), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxQzKNPwEoQ.

9. Marta Harnecker, *Venezuela: Militares Junto al Pueblo* (Spain: El Viejo Topo, 2003), 212. Baduel, one of Chávez's most loyal military allies, would later join the opposition in the run-up to the failed 2007 constitutional reform referendum (see the conclusion).

10. Ibid., 113.

11. Ibid., 39, 41.

12. Ibid., 59.

13. Interview with Gonzalo Gómez, May 19, 2008.

14. See "La Asamblea Popular Revolucionaria: Origen de Aporrea.org," http://aporrea.org/nosotros.php.

15. Francisco Toro, "Venezuela's 2002 Coup: The Evidence Two Years On," http://www.proveo.org/11A.pdf.

16. The claim of a "power vacuum" was reinforced later by a high court in a ruling that blocked efforts to hold the soldiers involved responsible.

17. Son of Willian Izarra, one of Chávez's co-conspirators in 1992, Andrés Izarra quickly tendered his resignation and has since worked alongside the Chávez government, most recently as head of international news channel TeleSUR and Minister of Communication.

18. Hugo Blanco, "Chile: ¿La lección que Venezuela aprendió?" *Rebelión.org*, March 9, 2007, http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=47858. For Blanco's early reflections on the Chilean coup, see Hugo Blanco et al., *The Coup in Chile: Firsthand Report and Assessment* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973) and Les Evans, ed., *Disaster in Chile: Allende Strategy and Why It Failed* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974). For contemporary references to Allende, see Unidad Socialista de Izquierda, "Si se viene un golpe, que no agarre al pueblo desarmado, como en Chile," *Aporrea.org*, September 13, 2008, http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/a63718.html; Chávez himself has said the same: Prensa Presidencial, "Presidente Chávez: 'Defiendo la verdad en la que creo y la defiendo con pasión,'" November 10, 2007, http://www.aporrea.org/venezuelaexterior/n104506.html.

19. See, for example, "Chávez acusó a oposición de intentar promover guerra religiosa y los reta a retractarse," *Prensa Web YVKE*, February 10, 2009, http://www.aporrea.org/oposicion/n128656.html. The editor of the Venezuelan Communist Party periodical *Tribuna Popular* notably agrees with this analysis of the Chilean

coup. Oscar Peña, "El imperialismo, la oligarquía y la ultraizquierda contra Allende," *Aporrea.org*, February 29, 2008, http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/a52037.html.

20. Roland Denis, *Rebelión en Proceso: dilemas del movimiento popular luego de la rebelión del 13 de Abril* (Caracas: Ediciones Nuestra América Rebelde, 2004), 8.

21. Eduardo José Rangel, "Douglas Bravo: 'Consejos Comunales tienen que ser las primeras células de defensa de la Revolución,'" *Aporrea.org*, June 21, 2006, http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/n79634.html; Douglas Bravo et al., "Del PRV-Tercer Camino a la nación venezolana," *Aporrea.org*, March 2, 2003, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a2481.html.

Chapter 7: Venezuelan Workers: Aristocracy or Revolutionary Class?

1. In this effort, the CTV enjoyed the support of the AFL-CIO's notorious American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

2. Steve Ellner, "Middle-Class Revolt: Venezuelan Elites Go On Strike," *In These Times* 27, no. 4 (December 2002), http://www.inthesetimes.com/issue/27/04/news2.shtml.

3. While this slogan often is denigrated as reflecting an acceptance of the failures of the government, it was coined amidst an economic crisis precipitated by the opposition.

4. PDVSA's software, moreover, was managed by the company SAIC-INTESA, which some have linked to the CIA. See Manuel Arias C., "Relaciones Peligrosas PDVSA, SAIC, INTESA y la CIA," *Soberanía*, April 13, 2003, http://www.soberania.org/Opinion/opinion_007.htm.

5. Gonzalo Gómez, Américo Tábata, and Nelson Gámez, eds., *Orlando Chirino Responde* (Caracas: Instituto Municipal de Publicaciones, 2005), 11.

6. Ibid., 36–37.

7. Ibid., 42.

8. Ibid., 41. Even Roland Denis, who emphasizes the importance of 13-A, argues that it was only with the *paro* that the mass response took on a "revolutionary quality" beyond merely an "insurgent event." For Denis, the dual power struggle at that moment extended *within* the government—of which he was a part—to reveal two camps: one that sought to use the state's financial resources to weather the stoppage and another that sought to legitimize the popular appropriation of goods. *Rebelión en Proceso: dilemas del movimiento popular luego de la rebelión del 13 de Abril* (Caracas: Ediciones Nuestra América Rebelde, 2004), 9–10.

9. Mario Menéndez Rodríguez, "Venezuela empuña las armas," *Sucesos*, December 17, 1966, as cited in Richard Gott, *Guerrilla Movements in Latin America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 166–67. See also Steve Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela, 1958–1991: Behavior and Concerns in a Democratic Setting* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1993), 7.

10. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 11.

11. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 64.

12. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Fanon and the Revolutionary Class" (1979), in *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York: New Press, 2000), 26.

13. José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. M. Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1928] 1971), 11–12.

14. Ruth Berins Collier and Samuel Handlin, eds., *Reorganizing Popular Politics: Participation and the New Interest Regime in Latin America* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 55–56.

15. Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman, "Latin American Class Structures: Their Composition and Change during the Neoliberal Era," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (2003), 55.

16. Portes and Hoffman, "Latin American Class Structures," 52–53. Portes and Hoffman arrive at this calculation by adjusting to reflect only those enjoying formal labor protections. It should be noted, however, that the final figure of 27.2 percent is only among the working population (thereby excluding the unemployed and others) and only counts those aged fifteen and older (thereby excluding a largely informalized youth contingent). Considered in terms of the total population of all ages, the formal working class is but a tiny fraction.

17. Bernard Lestienne, *El Sindicalismo venezolano* (Caracas: Centro Gumilla, 1981), 15.

18. Steve Ellner, "Tendencias recientes en el movimiento laboral venezolano: autonomía vs control político," *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales* 9, no. 3 (September–December 2003), 157.

19. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*. Ellner sets himself the task of writing a history of Venezuelan unionism from above, that is, from the perspective of the CTV, while recognizing the need for a "bottom-up history of the labor movement" (xii). Although such a task cannot be accomplished in a single chapter, I hope to make a modest contribution to the subject.

20. Lestienne, *El Sindicalismo venezolano*, 15.

21. See Kelvin Singh, "Oil Politics in Venezuela during the López Contreras Administration (1936–1941)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 21, no. 1 (February 1989), 89–104.

22. Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 126.

23. Domingo Alberto Rangel, *¡Qué molleja de huelga! La huelga petrolera de 1936–1937* (Maracaibo: LUZ, 2007).

24. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 2. As early as April 1958, the Unified Syndical Committee signed a stability pact with Fedecámaras, declaring general strikes only against efforts to oust the democratic regime from the right (contrast this with the more recent CTV-Fedecámaras alliance to overthrow the democratically elected Chávez) (5–6).

25. Ibid., 13–15.

26. Ibid., 18–19.

27. Ibid., 20–22.

28. The People's Electoral Movement only abandoned the CTV in 1970, after COPEI and AD had effectively consolidated a bipartisan labor *puntofijismo*. See Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 47.

29. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 42; Lestienne, *El Sindicalismo venezolano*, 22–23. According to Lestienne, "the action of leftist political militants seems to have intervened to resuscitate worker combativeness."

30. Lestienne, *El Sindicalismo venezolano*, 22. The year 1968 saw 13 strikes with 45,795 man-hours lost, whereas by 1971, this number had reached 4,164,750 man-hours.

31. Furthermore, according to the ratio of illegal to legal man-hours, a *higher* ratio of illegal to legal strike-hours were seen during the presidency of AD's Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974–79). We could add that some of the most significant strike activity of the Caldera presidency, like that at Sidor, was opposed by AD. See Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 48–50.

32. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 51, 49.

33. Margarita López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio* (Caracas: Alfadil, 2005), 139–40.

34. Ibid., 146.

35. Ibid., 155–56.

36. Steve Ellner, "Trade Union Autonomy and the Emergence of a New Labor Movement," in S. Ellner and M. Tinker Salas, eds., *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez and the Decline of an 'Exceptional Democracy'* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 84–85.

37. Ibid., 86–87.

38. Ibid., 88–89.

39. Jonah Gindin, "Made in Venezuela: The Struggle to Reinvent Venezuelan Labor," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 2 (June 2005).

40. See Paul Pollack, "Building Labor's Revolutionary Voice in Venezuela: The UNT's Second National Congress," *Upside Down World*, June 5, 2006, http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/311/35/.

41. Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, "Venezuela: UNT Divisions Cause Congress Suspension," *Green Left Weekly* 670 (June 7, 2006), http://www.greenleft.org.au/2006/670/6529.

42. See Federico Fuentes, "Venezuela: Socialist Tide (Marea Socialista) Activists on the Referendum Defeat and the PSUV," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, March 2, 2008, http://links.org.au/index.php?q=node/294.

43. Gonzalo Gómez, "Venezuela 2008: Balance del proceso revolucionario," *Marea Socialista* 15, December 8, 2008, http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a68403.html.

44. Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes, "Venezuela's Labor Movement at the Crossroads," *Venezuela Analysis*, April 29, 2008, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/3398.

45. Quoted in Janicke and Fuentes, "Venezuela's Labor Movement."

46. Perhaps realizing the danger posed by a Bolivarian Socialist Workers' Force (FSBT) federation or perhaps optimistic about the ministerial shuffle, UNT leaders were quick to respond. In a July press conference, leaders of all major currents except the FSBT announced plans to relaunch the confederation. Federico Fuentes, "Venezuela: Encouraging Steps Forward for Union Movement," *Green Left Weekly* 759, July 19, 2008, http://www.greenleft.org.au/2008/759/39198. However, the efforts of FSBT to construct a new labor confederation "from above" recently have been renewed, with Chávez's ostensible support. The response from many in the UNT has been to ignore these official efforts, but Stalin Pérez Borges insists that while he disagrees with the "methodology" of the FSBT, such efforts cannot simply be ignored. "El Universal desinformó ayer sobre el sindicalismo bolivariano," *Prensa Marea Socialista* (September 6, 2011).

47. On other nationalization efforts, see Federico Fuentes, "The Struggle for Industry to Serve the Venezuelan People," *Green Left Weekly* 765, August 29, 2008, http://www.greenleft.org.au/2008/765/39466. Some justified this as necessary in the context of regional elections, but Marea Socialista member Stalin Pérez Borges insists that such an alliance is strategically dangerous, potentially giving rise to a Chile scenario in which a strengthened national bourgeoisie successfully brings down an elected government. Stalin Pérez Borges, "State Alliance with Employers Puts Brakes on March Toward Socialism," *Venezuela Analysis*, August 8, 2008, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/3703.

48. Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, "Ministro Sanz: Reclamos de tercerizados de Sidor no son viables," January 1, 2009, http://aporrea.org/actualidad/n126396.html. Contract workers at Sidor, the vast majority of the workforce during its years as a private corporation, earned 60 percent of the wage of regular employees. After renationalization, some contract workers were incorporated as permanent, but those who were not continue to demand a hefty payout of US$9,300. Tamara Pearson, "Sidor Contract Workers in Negotiations for Bonus, Following Brief Strike," *Venezuela Analysis*, November 5, 2008, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/3929.

49. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 16.

50. Ibid., 99–100.

51. Gómez et al., *Orlando Chirino*, 43.

52. Ibid., 38.

53. Ibid., 45–47.

54. Steve Ellner has sought to undermine the thesis of Venezuelan labor aristocracy, especially as applied to petroleum workers, by demonstrating that the thesis is not generalizable throughout history and that oil workers were politically radical prior to the 1960s and increasingly vulnerable to economic instability in the 1980s (*Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 144–46). However, as correct as such an objection may be, it does not represent a sufficient response to the danger of labor aristocracy, especially with respect to the broader Venezuelan class constellation. While *all* workers saw increased instability as economic crisis set in and neoliberalism took hold, this merely served to underline the privilege that formal employment prom-

ised and the imperative of maintaining that employment at all costs, thereby encouraging passivity and further alienating the formal from the growing informal sector.

55. Quoted in Kiraz Janicke, "Without Workers' Management There Can Be No Socialism," *Venezuela Analysis*, October 30, 2007, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2784.

56. See, e.g., Sharrin Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town* (Albany: SUNY, 1996).

57. Quoted in Gindin, "Made in Venezuela."

58. Kiraz Janicke, "Venezuela's Co-Managed Inveval: Surviving in a Sea of Capitalism," *Venezuela Analysis*, July 27, 2007, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/2520.

59. Camila Piñeiro Harnecker, "Workplace Democracy and Collective Consciousness: An Empirical Study of Venezuelan Cooperatives," *Monthly Review* 59, no. 6 (November 2007), 27–40. About the mixed fates of several cooperatives, some of which also recreated capitalist structures, see the film by Clifton Ross (producer and director), *Venezuela: Revolution from the Inside Out* (Oakland: PM Press, 2008).

60. Quoted in Gindin, "Made in Venezuela."

61. Stewart Munckton, "The Struggle for Workers' Power in Venezuela," *Green Left Weekly* 719, August 1, 2007, http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/38068. At the time of this interview, only one small sector of Cadafe maintained a degree of co-management. Fuentes suggests that Chávez had sided largely against worker participation, but after the Sidor intervention he speaks instead of an antiworker right wing within Chavismo toward which the president's position is far more complex.

62. Janicke and Fuentes, "Venezuela's Labor Movement."

63. Marta Harnecker, "Aluminum Workers in Venezuela Choose Their Managers and Increase Production," *Venezuela Analysis*, March 28, 2005, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1025.

64. Janicke, "Without Workers' Management."

65. Fred Fuentes, quoted in Munckton, "The Struggle for Workers' Power in Venezuela."

66. Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, "Balance y perspective de la cogestión en CVG-Alcasa" (Puerto Ordaz: CVG Aluminios del Caroní, May 8, 2007), http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a34468.html.

67. Patrick O'Donoghue, "New CVG-Alcasa Aluminum President Elio Sayago Addresses Workers," *VHeadline*, May 20, 2010.

68. Janicke, "Venezuela's Co-Managed Inveval."

69. Janicke, "Without Workers' Management."

70. Janicke, "Venezuela's Co-Managed Inveval"; Janicke, "Without Workers' Management."

71. Munckton, "The Struggle for Workers' Power in Venezuela."

72. Janicke, "Venezuela's Co-Managed Inveval."

73. The ferocity of the Gayones is described by José de Oviedo y Baños in *The Conquest and Settlement of Venezuela*, trans. J. J. Varner (Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1987), 45. See Movimiento Gayones, *Una Visión del proceso venezolano: revolución, marxismo y bolivarianismo* (2005).

74. Interview with José Luis Pinto, May 3, 2008.

75. Interview with Gonzalo Gómez; "Orlando Chirino on Chavez, Trade Unions and Socialism in Venezuela," *International Socialism*, May 9, 2007, http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=328. More recently, Chirino even ran against Chávez in the 2012 presidential election, coming in dead last with a paltry number of votes.

76. See Fuentes, quoted in Munckton, "The Struggle for Workers' Power in Venezuela."

77. Here too there are examples of workers breaking down the barriers between formal and informal labor. Martinez et al. document the struggle of Mitsubishi workers to absorb subcontractors and unite with their local communal councils (*Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* [Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010], 117–18, 123), and the "camaraderie" between slaughterhouse employees and irregular contractors led to the creation of a co-op, which then provided subsidized meat to the community (131, 135–36).

Chapter 8: Oligarchs Tremble! Peasant Struggles at the Margins of the State

1. Zamora's campaigns in Barinas are documented masterfully by José Esteban Ruiz-Guevara, a founder of the Communist Party in Barinas and a victim of *puntofijista* repression who sought to reclaim Zamora from historical oblivion. Ruiz-Guevara's history, *Zamora en Barinas*, was recently re-released and distributed free on the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Santa Inés (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2009), this quote from 132.

2. Ruiz-Guevara, *Zamora en Barinas*, 161.

3. Ibid., 166.

4. Jacinto Pérez Arcay, *La Guerra Federal: Consecuencias* (Caracas: Editorial Génesis, 1974). Pérez Arcay argues that the Federal War and the "unequaled triumph of the oppressed class" it represented contributed to the "untimeliness" of the guerrilla struggle by preemptively robbing it of the "psychological fuel of social separation and class hatred" (203). However, he did leave the door open for armed struggle in the future, should the political system become "rigid" (as it had already become at the time).

5. Richard Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2005), 27, 112.

6. Martinez Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 51.

7. See Ruiz-Guevara, *Zamora en Barinas*, 308–9.

8. Gott, *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, 111.

9. Officially founded in 2004, the FNCEZ was a fusion of several organizations that emerged "in the heat of the Bolivarian process": primarily the Simón Bolívar Revolutionary Campesino Front (FCRSB), founded in 2000 and based in Apure,

and the Ezequiel Zamora Revolutionary Campesino Front (FCREZ), founded in 2001 and based in Barinas, with the later addition of smaller groupings in Barinas and Táchira in 2003. FNCEZ, *Libro del FNCEZ*, 3–4; Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 51.

10. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 49.

11. Gregory Wilpert, "Land for People Not for Profit in Venezuela," in P. Rosset, R. Patel, and M. Courville, eds., *Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform* (New York: Food First, 2006), 251.

12. Ibid., 250.

13. Ibid., 250. The International Labour Organization documented this "drift from the land" (which reached some 85,000–100,000 annually in the 1970s) and concomitant proletarianization and increasing average farm size in *The Federación Campesina de Venezuela* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 1982).

14. Wilpert, "Land for People," 250–51.

15. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 129.

16. Ibid., 128–29.

17. Wilpert, "Land for People," 252.

18. Luis Vitale, "Estado y estructura de clases en la Venezuela contemporánea" (Caracas: UCV, 1984), 23. José Luis Escobar, an aging guerrilla from Lara, told me the story of Sandalio Linares, one of Gabaldón's lieutenants, for whom a small plaza stands in Goajirita. When Gabaldón explained to this illiterate, indigenous peasant the dangers to come, Linares reputedly reversed the situation by asking Gabaldón why he was so afraid. "That's the kind of *campesino* we have today," Escobar insists to me, "we can count on them because they really fight. They have balls to spare, and we're still scared."

19. Ibid., 23.

20. Ibid.; International Labour Organization, *The Federación Campesina de Venezuela*, 4.

21. Vitale, "Estado y estructura de clases," 23. Thus the 1960 land reform was not "aborted," as Martinez et al. describe it (*Venezuela Speaks!*, 48), but rather a conscious effort to undermine radical demands. See also Manuel Cabieses Donoso, *Venezuela, Okey!* (Santiago: Ediciones del Litoral, 1963), 111–17.

22. Whereas elsewhere peasant organizations are prevented legally from joining union confederations due to the threat of a unified movement of workers and peasants, Ellner attributes the affiliation of the FCV with the CTV to the "relative passivity of the Venezuelan peasantry" (*Organized Labor in Venezuela, 1958–1991: Behavior and Concerns in a Democratic Setting* [Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1993], 25). While the Venezuelan peasantry might have been passive in relation to that of other countries, the affiliation of the FCV with the CTV must be understood not merely as a reflection of *passivity*, but also as an attempt to undermine *militancy*.

23. Ellner, *Organized Labor in Venezuela*, 25.

24. Ibid., 26–28.

25. Ibid., 26.

26. Frente Nacional Campesino Ezequiel Zamora (with ANMCLA and Primera Línea), *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase contra los Campesinos* [DVD, 2005]). This observation is supported by the International Labour Organization, *The Federación Campesina de Venezuela*, 2.

27. Wilpert, "Land for People," 251. Wilpert also notes that nearly one-third of these beneficiaries dropped out and that 90 percent never gained title to their lands.

28. Vitale recalls that struggle committees sprang up in Carabobo, Yaracuy, Lara, Portuguesa, and other states; unaffiliated *campesino* fronts entered into struggle in Santa Lucía and San Juan in 1977, demanding the ability to occupy and expropriate lands; and in 1980 a caravan of seven thousand tractors headed for Caracas was prevented from reaching its destination ("Estado y estructura de clases," 24).

29. Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government* (London: Verso, 2007), 268–69nn19–20.

30. These objectives draw upon what has become a central tenet of Chavista economics: the idea of what is called "endogenous development," a balanced scheme for socioeconomic development that is driven from within (according to national *needs*) rather than from without (by the *demand* for goods on the international market).

31. Wilpert, "Land for People," 254. The law further stipulates that idle land that is not expropriated be subject to taxation. Peasants working redistributed land for three years are eligible to apply for a legal title to the land, but this title is nontransferrable (an effort by the government to avoid the "capitalist" resale and accumulation of redistributed lands), which according to some leads to a black market of land titles in which the peasants are paid far less than would be the case otherwise (255).

32. Ibid., 256. The other article that was struck down had to do with the compensation process, insisting that the government must compensate landowners for previous improvements made to expropriated lands *even if these were illegally held in the first place*. The Ley de Tierras was later amended to reinstate a modified version of this article.

33. Ibid., 257.

34. Ibid., 257–58.

35. See Karen Hill, "A Visit to Lord Vestey's Ranch in Venezuela," *Venezuela Analysis*, October 3, 2005, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1397.

36. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*. By mid-2010, this figure had reached 227, according to PROVEA, *Informe Anual, 2010* (Caracas: PROVEA, 2010), 228.

37. PROVEA, *Informe Anual, 2003* (Caracas: PROVEA, 2003), 251.

38. *Venpres*, "Muerte de dirigentes agrarios es obra del sicariato, afirma Braulio Álvarez," August 6, 2003, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n8815.html.

39. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*.

40. Maurice Lemoine, "Venezuela: The Promise of Land for the People," *Le Monde diplomatique English* (October 7, 2003), http://mondediplo.com/2003/10/07venezuela.

41. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*.

42. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 58.

43. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*.

44. Wilpert, "Land for People," 259. One FNCEZ member argues that because the state stepped in to spearhead recovery of idle lands, conflicts do not fall as directly on the farmers. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 58.

45. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*.

46. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 51.

47. Ibid., 54.

48. These actions are all cited in the declassified report by the U.S. Department of State, "Venezuela: 1992 Annual Terrorism Report," www.state.gov/documents/organization/143362.pdf.

49. Fuerzas Bolivarianas de Liberación, "Las FBL no están en proceso de desactivación," July 18, 2009, http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=3411.

50. *El Universal*, "FBL se transforma y divide," May 7, 2009, http://politica.eluniversal.com/2009/07/05/pol_apo_fbl-se-transforma-y_1458811.shtml. One *comandante*, Gerónimo Paz (alias "Gabino"), recently dissolved the Western Bloc of the FBL (in Barinas and Apure) to work within the Bolivarian Revolution (Gerónimo Paz, "Las FBL anuncian que se encuentran en un proceso de desactivación como organización armada," June 24, 2009, http://www.cedema.org/ver.php?id=3359). Soon thereafter, the Central Bloc of the FBL (which some locate in Cojedes and Portuguesa) publicly insisted that they would maintain both the name and the methods of the FBL ("Las FBL no están en proceso de desactivación").

51. See "La Corriente Revolucionaria Bolívar y Zamora y la construcción del poder armado del pueblo: La milicia nacional," March 30, 2011, http://www.crbz.org/content/site/module/pages/op/displaypage/page_id/13/format/html/.

52. Interview with Briggitte Marin, May 27, 2008. However, she also recognizes that the FBL is willing to overlook Chávez's criticisms of them as a necessity of government, which we also have seen in the cases of Lina Ron and La Piedrita. "Chávez's *regaños*, his scoldings don't affect them," she argues.

53. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 49. The FCV still exists and remains friendly toward the government, but its policies and tactics are more moderate than those of the FNCEZ.

54. This general sentiment is seconded by other FNCEZ members. While insisting that "everything changed under Chávez. There's no turning back," and that "the Land Law changed things 100 percent," they nevertheless add that "this revolution is apathetic, and you need to give it a kick so it reacts." Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 54–59.

55. FNCEZ, *Ley de Tierras y Violencia de Clase*.

56. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 52.

57. CRBZ, "El pueblo organizado está movilizado: Marcha de la CRBZ para radicalizar la revolución," December 13, 2010, http://www.antiimperialista.org/es/node/6696.

58. Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 52.

59. Ruiz-Guevara, *Zamora en Barinas*, 261.

Chapter 9: A New Proletariat? Informal Labor and the Revolutionary Streets

1. Andre Gunder Frank, *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment*, trans. M. Davis Berdecio (New York: Monthly Review, [1970] 1972).

2. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 81.

3. Some testify to the poorest even being forced *out* of the *barrios* by such newly established hierarchies (Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* [Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010], 39).

4. Whereas I have shown that Chávez relies *militarily* on the *barrio* residents and their militant organizations, his *electoral* reliance on the same sectors has increased steadily as well. See Gregory Wilpert, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chávez Government* (London: Verso, 2007), 268–69nn19–20.

5. Miguel Enrique Otero Silva, *El Nacional* (October 14, 2002).

6. Steve Ellner, "Middle-Class Revolt: Venezuelan Elites Go On Strike," *In These Times* 27, no. 4 (December 2002), http://www.inthesetimes.com/issue/27/04/news2.shtml. Otero even denied responsibility for the purportedly collective editorial: LB, "El Nacional publica 'rectificación'; Miguel Henrique Otero evade su responsabilidad y atribuye el escrito a otros editors," *Aporrea.org*, October 18, 2002, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n902.html.

7. Jesús María Herrera Salas, "Ethnicity and Revolution: The Political Economy of Racism in Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives* 32, issue 141, no. 2 (March 2005), 113. *Chusma* can also be translated as "scum."

8. Violeta Bujanda, "Nosotros, el lumpen," *Aporrea.org*, December 27, 2002, http://www.aporrea.org/imprime/a1642.html; Mercedes, "¿Lumpen, Yo?," *Expresión Cívica 80*.

9. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), 231.

10. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 81–82.

11. Ibid., 128.

12. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx associates the lumpen with "simple circulation," in contrast to the moralistic dismissals of the *Manifesto*. *Grundrisse* (London: Penguin, 1973), 272–73.

13. Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman, "Latin American Class Structures: Their Composition and Change during the Neoliberal Era," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 1 (2003), 50. See also Sujatha Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 16; Janice Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); José Nun, *Marginalidad y exclusión social* (Mexico: FCE, 2001).

14. Portes and Hoffman, "Latin American Class Structures," 53.

15. Marta Harnecker, "After the Referendum: Venezuela Faces New Challenges," *Monthly Review* 56, no. 6 (November 2004), http://www.monthlyreview.org/1104harnecker.htm.

16. Margarita López Maya, *Del Viernes Negro al Referendo Revocatorio* (Caracas: Alfadil, 2005), 34; Ruth Berins Collier and Samuel Handlin, eds., *Reorganizing Popular Politics: Participation and the New Interest Regime in Latin America* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 56. About women, see Amy Bellone Hite and Jocelyn S. Viterna, "Gendering Class in Latin America: How Women Effect and Experience Change in the Class Structure," *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 2 (June 2005); Sarah Wagner, "The Bolivarian Response to the Feminization of Poverty in Venezuela," *Venezuela Analysis*, February 5, 2005, http://venezuel analysis.com/analysis/918. On the former middle classes, see J. P. Leary, "Untying the Knot of Venezuela's Informal Economy," NACLA *News*, December 6, 2006, https://nacla.org/node/1427.

17. Venezuelanalysis.com, "Venezuelan Unemployment at New Low, GDP Continues Strong," *Venezuela Analysis*, February 28, 2007, http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/2246.

18. The phenomenon of corruption was analyzed and indicted by the kidnappers of William Niehous, as we discussed in chapter 2. For a more recent theoretical analysis of corruption, see Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. G. Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [2006] 2008).

19. Nora Castañeda, *Creating a Caring Economy* (London: Global Women's Strike, 2006), 28.

20. See Reinaldo Iturriza López, "Los buhoneros y el partido/movimiento," *Aporrea.org*, December 29, 2010, http://aporrea.org/actualidad/a114782.html.

21. Jonah Gindin, "The Possible Faces of Venezuelan Democracy," *Venezuela Analysis*, October 11, 2004, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/729.

22. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, [1938] 1963), 85.

23. Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 259–61. See also the concept of the *convive* in Alejandro Moreno, *El aro y la trama: Episteme, modernidad y pueblo* (Caracas: Centro de Investigaciones Populares, 1995).

24. Teolinda Bolívar, "Rehabilitación y reconocimiento de los barrios urbanos. Su necesidad y riesgos," T. Bolívar and J. Baldó, eds., *La cuestión de los barrios* (Caracas: Monte Avila, 1995), 78.

25. Kléber Ramírez Rojas, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero* (Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2006), 200. As a result of this process and what he perceives to be the shortcomings of the spontaneous horizontalism of existing assemblies, Ramírez proposes that the *barrios* themselves — through a general and not merely local assembly — can provide the organizational form necessary for overcoming the contradiction between spontaneity and vanguardism (201).

26. Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes, "Venezuela's Labor Movement at the

Crossroads," *Venezuela Analysis*, April 29, 2008, http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/3398.

27. This crucial question also applies in a slightly different form to the armies of state workers in Venezuela.

28. Marcial Guillermo Pérez Herrera, "La experiencia organizativa de la FUTRAND, Venezuela," *Haciendo Camino*, October 13, 2007, http://marcialperezherrera.blogspot.com/2007/10/la-experiencia-organizativa-de-la_13.html.

29. Portes and Hoffman identify the growth of community political organizing as a general tendency throughout Latin America that corresponds with the decline of the formal working class and the rise of the informal proletariat ("Latin American Class Structures," 76).

30. Iturriza, "Los buhoneros y el partido/movimiento."

31. On the importance of this ban—symbolic and historical—in the establishment of Chacao as a fortress municipality, see my article "Toward a Racial Geography of Caracas: Neoliberal Urbanism and the Fear of Penetration," *Qui Parle* 16, no. 2 (spring/summer 2007).

32. Jonah Gindin, "Venezuelan Street Vendors in Violent Clash with Metropolitan Police," *Venezuela Analysis*, December 11, 2004, http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/833. Although I follow Gindin's reference to the Metropolitan Police, Bernal's authority is generally limited to Policaracas, the police force for Libertador Municipality.

33. Joaquín Murieta, *Lina Ron habla: su verdadera historia* (Caracas: Editorial Fuentes, 2003), 15.

34. Ibid., 28, 20.

35. Ron claims to have been shot at by Toledo's police (his police chief is Tupamaro Party leader José Pinto). R. Escalona, "Violentas refriegas en Maiquetía por desalojo de buhoneros," *El Universal*, September 21, 2005, http://www.eluniversal.com/2005/09/21/ccs_art_21401D.shtml.

36. See, e.g., the notice of a shootout in May 2005: Migdalis Cañizález V., "Desalojo de buhoneros en la Fuerzas Armadas terminó en tiroteo," *El Universal*, May 27, 2010, http://www.eluniversal.com/2010/05/27/ccs_ava_desalojo-de-buhonero_27A3912331.shtml.

37. For a similar argument, see Oscar Flores, "Concepto de lumpenproletariado para principiantes," *Aporrea.org*, March 18, 2007, http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a32084.html.

38. Federico Fuentes, "Venezuela: Socialist Tide (Marea Socialista) Activists on the Referendum Defeat and the PSUV," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal* (2008), http://links.org.au/node/294/.

39. Roland Denis, "La comunidad nómada de la calle," *Aporrea.org*, February 28, 2007, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a31258.html.

40. Denis, "La comunidad nómada de la calle"; Iturriza, "Los buhoneros y el partido/movimiento."

41. Murieta, *Lina Ron habla*, 43.

42. Marta Harnecker, "Popular Power in Latin America: Inventing in Order to

Not Make Errors," trans. C. Wynter and F. Fuentes, *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, July 12, 2009, http://links.org.au/node/1136. In another interview, Gonzalo Gómez also identifies the new and broader commune structures as possible solutions to the challenges of informal labor. Jeffery Webber and Susan Spronk, "Voices from Venezuela on Worker Control and Bureaucracy in the Bolivarian Revolution," *Against the Current* 148 (September–October 2010), http://www.solidarity-us.org/current/node/3023.

43. Rory Carroll, "Chávez Tackles Housing Crisis by Urging Poor to Squat Wealthy Parts of Caracas," *The Guardian*, January 26, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/26/venezuela-chavez-housing-crisis-squats-caracas. This movement builds upon the experiences of the Urban Land Committees and their Pioneer Camps, which, like their rural counterparts, struggled for land titles in urban areas. For discussion of one such camp and its conflicts with local Chavista leaders, see Martinez et al., *Venezuela Speaks!*, 30–38.

44. Reinaldo Iturriza López, "La política es en la calle," *Ciudad CCS*, January 13, 2011, http://ciudadccs.info/?p=136010.

45. Michael A. Lebowitz, "The Specter of Socialism for the 21st Century Haunts Latin America," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, July 10, 2008, http://links.org.au/node/503.

Conclusion: Dual Power against the Magical State

1. Raúl Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movements as Anti-State Forces*, trans. R. Ryan (Oakland, CA: AK Press, [2006] 2010), 56. It is possible that I am overstating this distinction in a way that is unfair to Zibechi, and others have suggested to me that, for Zibechi, *dispersion* is in fact a *way of building* power that might be compatible with my argument. But it remains unclear what exactly is being dispersed: state power or the power of the community itself, the fragmentation of which Zibechi correctly celebrates as a barrier to state control. In the end, and as a result of this ambiguity, I think Zibechi's insistence on building a necessarily "nonstate" power differs fundamentally from my conception of a "dual power" that constantly attacks, pressures, and transforms the centralized state.

2. Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. G. Ciccariello-Maher (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [2006] 2008), 131–32. Dussel speaks of dissolving "the state" rather than Zibechi's "power" because he insists that power resides fundamentally in the community of the oppressed and is therefore not something that could ever be "dispersed."

3. See especially Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2006). According to Roland Denis, it was the Constitution, and not Chávez, that was able to unite these heterogeneous movements: "Nobody had been able to centralize this movement around a program, not even Chavez. His leadership is unquestioned, but his ideas were not sufficient to unite the movement. The constitution filled this emptiness" (Gregory Wilpert, "Land for People Not for Profit in Venezuela," in

Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform, ed. P. Rosset, R. Patel, and M. Courville [New York: Food First, 2006], 253).

4. Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, 72.

5. Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

6. Ibid., 13–15.

7. Ibid., 376.

8. Ibid., 385. The tragic view of the Caracazo is common among Venezuelan elites seeking to assuage their own consciences.

9. Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela," in *Politics in the Andes: Identity, Conflict, and Reform*, ed. J.-M. Burt and P. Mauceri (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 86. The authors also connect this effect to the 1988 El Amparo massacre (see chapter 3).

10. If we are tempted to pardon Coronil's "from above" perspective in *The Magical State*, such generosity cannot be afforded to his more recent attempts to demonstrate the continuity of state magic in contemporary Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution, in which he diagnosed the Chávez regime as "yet another manifestation" of state magic and even "perhaps the most magical of all." Fernando Coronil, "Magical History: What's Left of Chávez?," *LANIC Etext Collection* (2008), 3, 5, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/vrp/coronil.pdf.

11. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. R. Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004), 52.

12. In what follows, I draw upon elements that appeared in George Ciccariello-Maher, "Dual Power in the Venezuelan Revolution," *Monthly Review* 59, no. 4 (September 2007). To be clear from the outset, this is not another model-building exercise: my conception of dual power is not a model to be imposed on an unwieldy reality, but rather a provisional lens that I have found useful for clarifying the relationship between movements and the state, a lens to be transformed in the course of its very usage and discarded when necessary.

13. V. I. Lenin, "The Dual Power," *Pravda*, no. 28 (April 9, 1917), in *Lenin: Collected Works*, vol. 24 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 38.

14. This is why, for example, Lenin himself does not speak of a "dual power situation" as would later thinkers like Trotsky, why his title invokes instead "The" dual power, and why he argues that this power was previously inconceivable (whereas a situation of dual sovereignty certainly would not have been). It is this potent aspect of the concept of dual power that has led to its appropriation by anarchists and other antistate thinkers and activists. See Christopher Day, "Dual Power in the Selva Lacandon," in *A New World in Our Hearts*, ed. R. San Filippo (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 17–31.

15. V. I. Lenin citing Marx in *The State and Revolution*, in *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. H. Christman (New York: Dover, 1987), 297.

16. Although the category of "opportunists" is admittedly amorphous, many

would associate it with what has come to be called the "endogenous right" within Chavismo, which many associate with former Vice President Diosdado Cabello. See George Ciccariello-Maher, "Counterattack of the Bureaucrats," *Counterpunch*, March 6, 2008. According to Kiraz Janicke and Federico Fuentes ("Venezuela: Danger Signs for the Revolution," *Green Left Weekly*, February 26, 2008), this current "support[s] implementing some reforms without breaking with capitalism." Michael Lebowitz characterizes this current as "emerging new capitalists (the 'boli-bourgeoisie'), the high officials . . . who are opposed to power from below in workplaces and communities . . . the party functionaries and nomenklatura" ("The Specter of Socialism for the 21st Century Haunts Latin America," *Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, July 10, 2008), http://links.org.au/node/503). Patrick Larsen provides a useful account of this "endogenous right," members of which "pay lip-service to the revolution, in order to live off it," in recent PSUV primaries ("Venezuela: Sharpening Contradictions between Left and Right of the PSUV," *In Defence of Marxism*, May 11, 2010). For an example of anarchist critics, see Rafael Uzcátegui, *Venezuela: Revolution as Spectacle* (Tucson: Sharp, 2011).

17. Lenin, "The Dual Power," 38; see also *State and Revolution*, 297–99.

18. Lenin, "The Dual Power," 38–39.

19. Ibid., 38–39.

20. The first two were concrete mechanisms: an enabling law for the president and a constitutional reform. The second two were broad interventions into education and decentralized endogenous development.

21. República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Asamblea Nacional, "Ley de los Consejos Comunales," April 7, 2006.

22. "Consejos comunales han sido una experiencia exitosa," *Últimas Noticias,* April 7, 2007; Tamara Pearson, "Venezuela's Reformed Communal Council Law: When Laws Aren't Just for Lawyers and Power Is Public," *Venezuela Analysis*, December 4, 2009, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4980; Patrick J. O'Donoghue, "Communes Minister: Communal Power More Visible and Relevant in 2010," *VHeadline*, February 11, 2011.

23. *El Nacional*, January 12, 2007.

24. See Hugo Chávez and Marta Harnecker, *Understanding the Venezuelan Revolution*, trans. C. Boudin (New York: Monthly Review, 2005), 41. Chávez recalls reading Negri while in prison after the failed 1992 coup. Once placed in its context, however, the Venezuelan understanding of constituent power is arguably closer to Enrique Dussel's formulation of *potentia* against *potestas*, which resists exaggerating the opposition between these two terms. See his *Twenty Theses on Politics*, especially 18–20.

25. Pearson, "Venezuela's Reformed Communal Council Law."

26. Sara Motta, "Populism's Achilles' Heel: Popular Democracy beyond the Liberal State and the Market Economy in Venezuela," *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (January 2011), 39.

27. Gregory Wilpert, "An Assessment of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution at

Twelve Years," *Venezuela Analysis*, February 2, 2011, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/5971.

28. Lenin, "The Dual Power," 38–39.

29. Alberto Müller Rojas, "El partidismo de los militares," *Últimas Noticias*, June 6, 2007.

30. Alberto Müller Rojas, "No hay apoliticismo military," *Últimas Noticias*, April 24, 2007, and "Entrevista con Alberto Müller Rojas: La FAN está politizada y partidizada," *Últimas Noticias*, July 1, 2007.

31. Müller responded by openly critiquing the "profound contradiction" of Chávez's position, which "speaks of the professionalization of the active forces while simultaneously referring to . . . the war of resistance, and these are two absolutely incompatible concepts" ("La FAN está politizada y partidizada").

32. What follows draws upon George Ciccariello-Maher, "Of Submarines and Loose Screws: A Chávez Ally Jumps the Divider," *Counterpunch*, November 17, 2007, http://www.counterpunch.org/maher11172007.html. Shortly after the reform proposal appeared, Chávez announced that, after consultations with the military high command, the new militia force would be known as the "Bolivarian *National* Militias" rather than "popular" ones. What is more interesting than this seemingly minor semantic change is the (presumably powerful) political pressure that must have been brought to bear to cause it.

33. Kiraz Janicke, "Venezuela Creates Peasant Militias, Enacts Federal Government Council," *Venezuela Analysis*, February 22, 2010, http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5150; Pearson, "Venezuela's Reformed Communal Council Law."

34. Fred Fuentes, "Venezuela's Revolution Faces Crucial Battles," *Green Left Weekly*, February 20, 2010, http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/43252.

35. Fred Fuentes, "Venezuela: New Moves to Build People's Power," *Green Left Weekly*, March 20, 2010, http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/43484/; Janicke, "Venezuela Creates Peasant Militias." These moves coincided with a notable crackdown on high-level corruption.

36. Janicke, "Venezuela Creates Peasant Militias."

37. Kiraz Janicke, "Venezuela Celebrates 'Day of the Bolivarian Militias, the Armed People and the April Revolution,'" *Venezuela Analysis*, April 14, 2010, http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/5276.

38. Chávez cites this passage in his column "Onwards Towards a Communal State!" trans. K. Janicke, *Venezuela Analysis*, February 22, 2010, http://venezuel analysis.com/analysis/5160. The passage from Ramírez was penned after the first failed coup, in August 1992 (see Kléber Ramírez Rojas, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero* [Caracas: El Perro y la Rana, 2006], 146).

39. These dangers are well recognized by Sujatha Fernandes, *Who Can Stop the Drums? Urban Social Movements in Chávez's Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 27–28.

40. Carlos Lanz Rodríguez, *El Caso Niehous y la Corrupción Administrativa* (Caracas: Editorial Fuentes/Tres Contintentes, 1979), 128–29.

41. Ibid., 130.

42. Roland Denis, "Revolución vs. Gobierno (III): De la Izquierda Social a la Izquierda Política," *Proyecto Nuestramérica-Movimiento 13 de Abril*, August 11, 2006, http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a24361.html.

43. Mónica Bergos, "Es necesario ir más allá de la vigente Constitución bolivariana," *Periódico Diagonal* 42 (November 23–December 4, 2007). Denis claims that his eventual removal from the ministry resulted from a powerful reaction by conservative sectors of the Venezuelan state and Chavista movement. See also Denis, *Rebelión en Proceso: dilemas del movimiento popular luego de la rebelión del 13 de Abril* (Caracas: Ediciones Nuestra América Rebelde, 2004), 9.

44. For Denis, this is less about Chávez than about the Constitution. As he told Greg Wilpert: "What united them was the project to develop a common foundation — that is to say the constitution. Nobody had been able to centralize this movement around a program, not even Chavez. His leadership is unquestioned, but his ideas were not sufficient to unite the movement. The constitution filled this emptiness." Wilpert, "Land for People," 253.

45. Roland Denis, "Por unas comunas 'sin ley,'" *Aporrea.org*, October 19, 2010, http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a110539.html. See also, more recently, Turki Al Maaz, "Los Consejos Comunales, secuestro o liberación del Poder Popular," *Aporrea.org*, February 16, 2011, http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a117815.html.

46. Michael Lebowitz formulates this duality of power in terms of a transitional period characterized by "walking on two legs . . . the old state is replaced by the new, the state from below . . . That implies having a traditional army that can protect people, but we should also arm the people and develop the militias from below." José Sant Roz, "Michael Lebowitz: 'It's necessary to arm the people and develop militias from below,'" trans. K. Janicke, *Venezuela Analysis*, November 5, 2009, http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/4916. There is much to this argument, but this metaphor does not stand up (quite literally) because these are two legs that are battling one another constantly. Sujatha Fernandes is closer in her insistence on reciprocal alliances and interactions between movements and state, but such formulations can sound static because both sides are in constant motion as a result of the process (*Who Can Stop the Drums?*, 28–29).

47. Ramírez, *Historia documental del 4 de febrero*, 207.

48. These include such examples as Alí Rodríguez Araque, alias "Comandante Fausto," who was active in the guerrilla struggle under the PCV and PRV, before passing through what was simply known as "The Revolutionary Tendency" into LCR in 1988 and later the PPT. Other noteworthy PRVistas associated with the government include Rafael Uzcátegui, Dimas Petit (who lost eleven family members in the armed struggle and participated in the 1975 escape from San Carlos alongside Uzcátegui), and Chávez's brother Adán; as we have seen, several leaders of the feminist (María León, PCV; Nora Castañeda, MIR; and Lídice Navas, MIR/BR/LS) and Afro (Chucho García, PRV) struggles; and recent vice-president and

arguable heir to Chávez, Elías Jaua, was reputedly a member of BR. The list goes on and on.

49. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, [1938] 1963), 286.

50. Carlos Martinez, Michael Fox, and JoJo Farrell, eds., *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 7.

Index

2 de Diciembre, 69

23 de Enero (date), 23–24, 70–72, 190, 262n2. *See also* Pérez Jiménez, Marcos

23 de Enero (neighborhood), 2–4, 28, 38, 67, 94, 96, 107–8, 129, 246, 259n20, 274n35, Figs. 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 17; 2002 anti-Chávez coup and, 167, 176; Caracazo and, 71, 275n23; guerrilla presence in, 71–72, 79; history, 69–71; Tupamaros and, 76–85

Acción Democrática (AD), 11, 24–25, 36, 38, 48, 54, 105, 111, 114, 117, 131–32, 152, 163, 183, 205, 207, 262n4, 290n28, 290n31; ARS group splits from, 187; control of CTV, 185–93; FCV and, 205–6; MEP splits from, 187; MIR splits from, 27; violent thuggery by, 183, 187

AFL-CIO, 187; and American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), 288

Afro-Venezuelan Day, 165

Afro-Venezuelan Network, 153, 155–64

Afro-Venezuelans, 17, 20, 32, 49–50, 68–74, 135, 146–65, 212, 234, 236–37, 245, 264n37, 282n40; in the Caracazo, 92, 274n11; communal traditions of, 164; in the guerrilla struggle, 153–54, 283n14, 284–85n30, 304n48

agrarian reform, 46, 205–9, 217, 294n21. *See also* Ley de Tierras

Alcasa, 62, 81, 124, 196

Alexis Vive Collective, 83, 215

Algeria, 184, 222

Ali, Tariq, 159

Allende, Salvador, 84, 173, 177–78, 254, 287n18
Aló Presidente, 4, 213
Althusser, Louis, 111
Alvarado, Cornelio, 48–49
Álvarez, Braulio, 156, 209
Álvarez, Rubén, 71
Álvarez de Lovera, María del Mar, 136
American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, 26
Américo Silva Front, 74
Amparo massacre, 75, 97, 272n12, 273n14, 301n9
anarchism, 6, 20, 48, 79, 140, 235, 238, 240, 258n10, 282n31, 301n14, 302n16
Andrés Bello Catholic University, 121
anti-Chavistas, 3, 35, 70, 86, 89, 120, 162, 181, 208, 210, 218, 239, 255, 258n10; Bandera Roja joins, 117–18, 278n34; LCR joins, 98; media arm of, 167, 220; some of PPT joins, 285n43; student movement of, 117–20, 122, 143, 278n37. *See also* coup d'etat: April 2002 (reversed) against Chávez government
Antigone, 13
Aporrea.org, 174–75, 244
April 13th Movement (M-13A), 251, 282n31
Arcaya, Ignacio Luís, 27
Aristotle, 115
Armed Forces, 29, 36, 43, 86, 96–99, 114, 122, 168, 171–73, 175, 177, 215, 247–50; guerrilla strategy toward, 34, 265n44; hierarchy and professionalism, 247–49; Organic Law of the Armed Forces, 249; radical tradition within, 33–35, 49, 98; particularity of Venezuelan, 33, 171. *See also* Armed Forces of National Liberation; Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement; Trejismo
Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), 34–37, 45, 49, 51, 62, 71, 99
Army of the Sovereign People, 201
Arrieta Chourio, Enrique, 164, 286n46
ARS group, 187, 206
ARS Publicity, 120
assemblies, popular: appearance in barrios after Caracazo, 100, 113, 173–74, 178, 228, 241–43, 251; guerrilla experiments with, 42, 228, 243–44; horizontalism and, 18–20, 298n25; student struggle and, 111
autonomy: Afro and indigenous, 150, 152, 154, 156, 160–62; dual power and, 241; guerrilla, 266n65; local, 1–6, 86, 212; of popular masses, 46, 168, 258n10, 260n27; PDVSA's de facto, 122, 181; of peasantry, 212–14; of social movements, 15–18, 20, 234–37, 254, 261n36; of the state, 6; university, 109–12, 121, 123–24; women's, 128–30, 140–43; working-class, 62, 100, 186–99
ayllu, 164, 285n44

Baduel, Raúl, 86, 171–72, 248–49, 287n9
Bandera Roja (BR), 39, 58–60, 65, 71, 74–75, 113, 230, 270n49; opposition to Chávez, 117–18, 278n34
Baniva (Maipurean-Arawak) people, 151
Banmujer (Women's Development Bank), 38–39, 136, 139–40, 143, 281n30
Barlovento, 153–56, 164
Barranquilla Cooperative, 211
Barreto, Juan, 122
barrio assemblies. *See* assemblies, popular
barrios (shantytowns), 14, 75–76, 83, 96, 108, 154, 219–28, 297n3; effect of concentration on consciousness, 226–27; culture, 226–28; development of, 219; guerrillas turn attention to, 63–65; resistance to 2002 coup, 169; resistance to Rómulo Betancourt in, 11, 35, 70–72; strategic importance of, 46–47, 298n25; students turn attention to, 114. *See also* Caracazo rebellion; lumpenproletariat; mass fronts; militias, popular; urbanization; violence: social
Barrios, Douglas, 119–20
Bassiruque (newspaper, LS), 65
Benjamin, Walter, 238
Bernal, Freddy, 229–30, 299n32
Betancourt, Carlos ("Jerónimo"), 42–43,

58–59, 83–85, 214–15, 250–51, 267, 278n34, Fig. 15
Betancourt, José Luis, 210
Betancourt, Rómulo, 26–29, 33–36, 45, 48, 71, 86, 132, 260n23, 262nn7–8, 266–67, 278n36; guerrilla struggle against, 23–36, 263–64n20, 266n56; peasants and, 205–7, 217; the people, critique of, 10–12; repressive measures of, 11, 24, 26–28, 38, 225, 263nn10–12, 264n25, 266n57, 267n73; strategy of domestication, 11; student movement and, 109–10; workers and, 183, 185–87. *See also* democracy: representative; social democracy
Black Friday, 73, 92, 158
Black Panthers, 77
Blanco, Hugo, 177
Blanco, Jessie, 139–43, 282n31
Block 5 Collective, 68, 78
Bolívar, Simón, 22–23, 45, 48–49, 51, 126–28, 143–45, 176, 214. *See also* Bolivarianism
Bolívar (Liberator) Front, 32, 42
Bolivarian Circles, 100, 116, 228, 243
Bolivarianism, 18, 48–51, 62, 66, 74, 80
Bolivarian Liberation Forces (FBL), 213–16, 296nn50–52
Bolivarian Militias, 214, 248–49
Bolivariano, *El* (newspaper, PRV), 49
Bolivarian primary schools, 122
Bolivarian "process," 6, 84, 167, 258n8
Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement (MBR-200), 57, 98
Bolivarian Socialist Workers' Force (FSBT), 291n46
Bolivarian University, 42, 121–22
Bolivarian Workers' Force (FBT), 189–91
Bolivia, 33, 82, 235
Bratton, William, 159, 285n35
Bravo, Douglas, 52, 62, 70, 99, 148, 183, 268n1, Fig. 1; critiques of Chávez, 178–79, 252–53; PCV guerrilla, 25–37, 42, 263–64n20, 265n49; PRV guerrilla, 37, 48–51
Bravo, Napoleón, 168
Bravo Sur, 123
Britto García, Luis, 54, 69, 101–2, 145, 168
buhoneros (street vendors), 223–25, 228–32
bureaucracy, 5, 14, 65, 85, 142, 161, 163, 241–45, 281n27, 282n34; in peasants' movement, 206; in workers' movement, 185–98

Cabello, Diosdado, 302n16
Cabezas, Juan Vicente ("Pablo"), 264–65n38
Cabral, Amilcar, 154
Cadafe, 195–96, 292n61
Cajas Rurales, 204–5
Caldera, Rafael, 55–56, 101, 105–6, 112–15, 118, 121–22, 187–88, 270n49, 276n2, 290n31
Calles, Plutarco Elías, 258n9
Campesino Federation of Venezuela (FCV), 205–7, 209, 215, 294n22, 296n53
Cantaura massacre, 74–75, 97, 113, 272n12
Capriles Radonski, Henrique, 285n43
Caracazo rebellion (Caracas), 18, 25, 56, 59, 75–76, 88–103, 105–7, 113–14, 148, 158, 166, 172–73, 179, 182, 218, 228, 235, 251, 276n41, 277n5; as constituent moment, 13–15, 21, 89, 103, 166, 176, 238–39, 275n25; lumpenproletariat and, 224–25, 230–32; racism and, 158; repression of, 22, 71, 96–97, 219; student movements pave the way for, 81–82, 114, 277n28; as tragedy, 238, 301n8
Caribes, 63, 151–52
Caricuao Cultural Front, 154
Carmona Estanga, Pedro, 3, 170, 229
Carosio, Alba, 129–36, 280n12
Carúpanazo rebellion (Carúpano), 29, 32, 34
Casas de la Mujer, 131
Castañeda, Nora, 38–40, 98, 129–43, 162, 170, 225, 274n11, 280n12, 281n22, 281n25, 281n30, 304n48
Castro, Fidel, 2, 8, 10, 26–27, 37, 61, 178, 259
Castro Rojas, Gaspar. *See* Revolutionary Commando Groups
Catholic Church, 109, 128, 131, 135–36
Catia, 4, 55–56, 69–70, 95–96, 219, 272n13, 285n35, Figs. 10, 11, 12
Catia 83 (Venezuela 83), 55–56
Causa R, La (LCR), 51, 82, 98, 152, 161, 163,

Causa R, La (LCR) (*cont.*)
268n10, 269n34, 270n37, 270n41, 276n30, 304n48; joins anti-Chavista opposition, 57, 98; New Unionism, 188–91; origins of, 55–57; Patria Para Todos (PPT) splits from, 98
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 4, 30, 178
centralism, 83–84, 163, 204, 241
Central University of Venezuela (UCV), 28, 43, 55, 92, 106, 108, 114, 119–21, 124, 267n73, 278n39; military occupation of, 27, 110, 112, 277n14. *See also* university system
Chacao municipality (Caracas), 229, 299n31
Chacón, Jesse, 174
Chávez, Adán, 49, 304n48
Chávez Frías, Hugo, 48, 51, 176, 212, 301n10; Afro-indigenous movements and, 160–61; importance of Caracazo for, 98; critiques of "ultra-left," 4–5, 178, 254, 296n52; election in 1998, 6, 14–16, 20–21, 89, 100, 103, 161, 179, 236, 241–42; as empty signifier, 236; origins, 201; peasant movements and, 216; reelection in 2006, 117, 176, 191, 202, 244; revolutionary social movements and, 5–7, 14–21, 84–87; women's movement and, 141–43; on Zamora, 201–2
China, 43, 268n10
Chirino, José Leonardo, 148–50, 165, 284nn17–18, 284n20
Chirino, Orlando, 182, 190–91, 193, 198–99, 293n75
Chirino Front, 32–33, 37, 40, 148, 264n37
Chirinos, Edmundo, 114
Chispa, *La*, 173
cimarrones, 153–54, 164
circulation. *See* informal sector
Círculos Femeninos Populares (CFPS), 131, 140, 280n16
Cisneros, Gustavo, 174
Colombia, 33, 74, 82, 126–27, 147, 151, 158
coloniality of knowledge, 124
colonization, 48, 109, 128, 146–48, 150–52, 155, 165; and class structure, 183–85, 203–4; internal, 151, 163
Columbus, Christopher, 165
comanagement, 192–99, 292n61
Committees for Popular Struggles (BR), 65, 230
Committees for Revolutionary Student Struggles (BR), 65
Committees for Workers' Struggles (BR), 65
Communal Councils, 83, 174, 177, 179, 197, 228, 232, 243–47, 281n30, 293n77; Bolivarian militias and, 215, 249; Law on Communal Councils, 244–46, 249–50; popular assemblies as predecessor to, 100; popular militias and, 250, 254; traditional communal structures and, 163–64
Communard Movement, 83–84, 214
communes, 199, 249, 252, 300n42; Organic Commune Law, 252
communication, 89, 93
Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), 25–32, 34–35, 41, 43–44, 45, 48–49, 55, 64, 99, 188, 192, 206, 245, 263–64n20, 264–65n38, 265n49, 267n82, 269n34, 293n1, 304n48; excluded by Punto Fijo Pact, 25; expelled from CTV, 187; FCV and, 206; MAS splits from, 52–53; participation in overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, 24; turn to guerrilla struggle, 29–31; withdrawal from guerrilla struggle, 37, 57; women's movement and, 128, 133, 135, 140
Communist Party USA, 48
Communist Youth (JCV), 31, 48–49, 62
community struggles, 76–79, 226–28. *See also* barrios
Constitution (Bolivarian) of 1999, 142, 160, 172, 178–79, 182, 243, 245; Article 62, 157; Article 88, 136–39 (*see also* wages for housework); Afro and Indigenous proposals, 135, 156–57; dissolved during 2002 coup, 170; education in, 115, 124; as empty signifier, 236, 300n3, 304n44; on land and *latifundismo*, 207–8; reform proposal of 2007 (failed), 86, 120, 163–65, 199, 247–48, 253; right to work, 229; women's movements and, 134–39
contraloría (oversight), 198, 245

Contreras, Juan, 70–72, 76–82, 225, 273n20
cooperatives, 163, 193–99, 211, 213, 261n42, 292n59
COPEI (Christian Democratic Party), 24–25, 27, 54–55, 105, 111, 114, 117, 161, 163, 188, 190, 207, 262n4, 276n30
Coronil, Fernando, 91, 238–39, 274n9, 280n8, 301n10
corruption, 50, 224, 226, 235, 298n18; Carlos Lanz analyzes, 61, 63; communal councils as a weapon against, 245; CTV and, 167, 186, 189–90, 192; in informal sector, 231; persistence within Chavismo, 84, 161, 197, 244–45, 281n27, 303n35; police and, 83; under previous system, 3, 5, 13, 17–18, 24, 54–55, 60, 114, 193, 209, 214; UNT and, 198. *See also* democracy: representative; Punto Fijo Pact
councils, 81, 111–12, 123, 196, 199, 232, 240–41, 243–44, 249–51. *See also* assemblies, popular; Communal Councils; communes
coup d'etat: February 1992 (failed), by Chávez and others, 6, 14–15, 18, 20–21, 35, 49, 54–57, 89–90, 99–103, 105, 108, 114, 171, 174, 176, 178–79, 213, 239, 241, 270n49, 278n34, 302n24; November 1992 (failed), 14, 56, 99–101, 105, 108, 241, 278n34; April 2002 (reversed) against Chávez government, 3, 21, 86–87, 89–90, 102, 158–60, 166–79, 182, 225, 232, 249
CTV. *See* Venezuelan Workers' Confederation
Cuban Revolution, 2, 12, 19, 26–27, 31–33, 41, 43, 267
cultural struggle, 78, 82, 99, 154–56, 226–27, 284n29. *See also* Cabral, Amilcar; Gramsci, Antonio
cumbe, 164
Czechoslovakia, Soviet invasion of, 52

Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, 136–37
Dávila, Luis Alfonso, 162
Day of Indigenous Resistance, 165
Debray, Régis, 19, 40–41, 46–47, 62, 82–83, 226, 267nn74–79, 267n85, 268n10, 273n25
decentralization, 83–84, 163, 196, 204, 235
de la Plaza, Salvador, 48
de las Casas, Bartolomé, 148
democracy: direct and participatory, 10, 42, 56, 113, 121–24, 157, 196, 259, 281n30; formal, 9, 23–24, 179–80; representative, 9–11, 13, 25, 29, 31, 36, 55, 66, 88, 259n20, 263n10
Democratic Republican Unity (URD), 24–27, 262n4
Denis, Roland, 82, 115, 178, 251–52, 275n18, 277n5, 279n44, 282n31, 288n8, 300n3, 304nn43–44; on the Caracazo, 90, 94–96, 99–100, 102; on informal sector, 231–32; on Sergio Rodríguez, 106–8, 124–25; on socialization of repression, 73–76
DISIP (Intelligence Services, previously DIGEPOL), 61, 68, 71, 74, 77–79, 106, 153, 252, 272n12, 273n20
Draft Law for Higher Education (PLES), 115
drug trade, 3–4, 73, 77–78, 83, 85, 225–26
Duque, José Roberto, 258n8
Dussel, Enrique, 8, 16, 20, 235–36, 260n34, 261n41, 298n18, 300n2, 302n24

ecology and environment, 50–51, 155, 164
economic crisis, 13, 54, 72–73, 91–92, 99, 158, 291n54. *See also* Black Friday; neoliberal reform
El Charcote Ranch, 208–9, 211
El Encanto attack, 34–36
Ellner, Steve, 53–54, 180–81, 186, 289n19, 291–92n54, 294n22
El Salvador, 39–40, 178
Enabling Laws: of 2001, 86, 208; of 2007, 302
endogeneous development, 295n30
Escalona, Julio, 58
Escobar, José Luis, 294n18
escualidos. *See* anti-Chavistas
Esquina del Chorro, 106, 118, 124–25
Eurocentrism, 50, 124, 137, 163, 267n85
exceptionalism thesis, 12, 23, 25, 89, 97
Ezequiel Zamora National Agrarian Coordinator (CANEZ), 209

Ezequiel Zamora National Campesino Front (FNCEZ), 202–17; product of fusion of Simón Bolívar Revolutionary Campesino Front (FCRSB) and Ezequiel Zamora Revolutionary Campesino Front (FCREZ), 294

Fanon, Frantz, 46, 96, 102, 266n71, 268n5, 284n26; on the lumpenproletariat, 221–22, 224–25, 231–32; on urbanization, 204, 219; on violence, 85, 239; on the working class, 183–84. *See also* lumpenproletariat; violence: revolutionary
Fedecámaras, 3, 170, 180, 190–91, 210, 289n24
FEDENAGA, 210
Federal Government Council, 249
Federal Wars, 33, 249, 293n4
Federation of University Centers (FCUS), 111–13
Fermín, Claudio, 156
Fernandes, Sujatha, 258nn8–10, 260n27, 261n36, 261n42, 282n34, 304n46
fetishism, 16–19, 21, 48, 61, 90, 94, 237–38, 261n41
Fetralec, 194–95
Fidel (interviewee), 123
Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), 152, 158, 175
First Guerrilla Conference, 33
Flores, Cilia, 118
FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), 39
food sovereignty, 177, 203, 208
foquismo, 17, 19, 32–44, 46, 58–59, 62–63, 65, 71–72, 77, 79, 81–83, 99–100, 113, 267n74, 268n10, 271n5
Freire, Paolo, 112, 131, 281n30
French Revolution, 8, 149
Front of Workers in Occupied and Comanaged Factories (FRETECO), 196
Fronts for the Right to Bread, 41, 205
Fuenmayor, Juan Bautista, 48, 268n36
Fuentes, Fred, 195, 227, 292n61, 302n16
Fuerte Tiuna, 169–72, 174
Gabaldón, Argimiro, 32, 42, 60
Gabaldón, José Rafael, 32, 204
García, Jesús "Chucho," 150, 153–62, 304n48
García, Marcos, 191
García Carneiro, Jorge Luis, 171–72
García Márquez, Gabriel, 126–27, 144
García Ponce, Guillermo, 37, 52
Gayones Movement, 198–99
Generation of '28, 109
Gente 80, 51
Giordani, Jorge, 247
Global Women's Strike, 137
Globovisión, 4, 120, 144, 174
"Gloria al Bravo Pueblo" (national anthem), 9, 13, 23, 93, 259n19
Goicochea, Yon, 117–19
Gómez, Gonzalo, 173, 191, 231, 300n42
Gómez, Juan Vicente, 32, 109, 151, 186, 201, 203–5
González, Stalin, 118, 279n39
Gonzalito (interviewee), 43
Governeur, Livia, 267n73
Gramsci, Antonio, 49, 79: hegemony, 99–100, 112; intellectuals, 109; "war of position" versus "war of maneuver," 63, 112, 121–23, 192
Gran Colombia, 145
Granier, Marcel, 4, 174
Guarulla, Liborio, 150–52, 156, 161–64, 232, 284n23; joins anti-Chavista opposition, 285n43
Guerrero, Pedro, 209
guerrilla struggle, 11–12, 15, 17–18, 20, 23–44, 62, 82, 265, 293n4, 304–5n48: Cuban support for, 38, 153; contemporary rural, 212–15; failure and lessons, 43–44, 232, 234, 242; origins, 26–29; urban, 35–36, 41, 46–47, 57–63, 71–72, 76–77, 83, 172. See also *foquismo*, vanguardism
Guevara, Che, 3, 46, 49, 80, 84, 98
Gunder Frank, Andre, 219, 224
Guzmán, Julio Cesar, 39
Guzmán Blanco, Antonio, 200–201
Guzmán Navas, Julio Cesar, 39

Haitian Revolution, 7, 12, 148–49, 226, 253–54
Harnecker, Marta, 171, 232, 265n40, 270n41, 287n9
Hegel, G. W. F., 44
Hernández, Roberto, 192
Herrera, Juan, 183, 187
Herrera Campins, Luis, 132, 188, 287n5
Hobsbawm, Eric, 273n25
Holloway, John, 16, 19–20, 261n38, 262n46
Hombre Nuevo, *El* (newspaper), 108
horizontalism, 16–20, 53, 81, 235, 261nn40–43, 298n25
House of Calm Waters (Venezuela 83), 56
Humboldt, Alexander von, 151
Hurricane Katrina, 219

import-substitution industrialization, 185, 223
Incas, 124, 164
indigenous peoples, 32, 48–49, 63, 74, 81, 135, 146–52, 160–65, 184, 201, 212, 232, 234, 236, 245, 285n41; in the guerrilla struggle, 264n37, 283n14, 294n18; racism against, 284n26. *See also* colonization; National Indian Council of Venezuela
informal sector, 7, 20, 53–54, 184, 199, 218–33, 289n16, 292n54, 293n77, 299n29, 300n42: in the Caracazo, 92–93; and illegality, 224. *See also* lumpenproletariat
International Monetary Fund, 73, 91
International Workers of the World (IWW), 186
Invepal, 194–95
Inveval, 196–98
Istúriz, Aristóbulo, 56, 156, 158–60
Iturriza López, Reinaldo, 228–29, 232
Izaguirre, Alejandro, 96
Izarra, Andrés, 174, 287n17
Izarra, Willian, 287n17

Jackeline (interviewee), 198
Jacoa Cooperative, 213
James, C. L. R., 7, 21, 102, 136, 149, 226, 253–54
James, Selma, 136–38, 281n22, 281n25, 281n30
Janicke, Kiraz, 227, 278n33
Jaua, Elías, 156, 216, 305n48
Jiménez, Carlos, 30
Jiménez, Demetrio, 30
Jiménez, Jesús, 30
Jirajaras, 63, 147–48, 283n7
Johnson-Forest Tendency, 136, 281n30
Juvenal (interviewee), 57–60, 63–65, 79, 99, 154, 175–76, 253, 267n76, 271n60 (ch. 2), 271n5 (ch. 3)

Kariña people, 150–51
Kerensky, Alexander, 240, 242
Klein, Naomi, 261

La Azulita, 32
Laclau, Ernesto, 236
Lander, Edgardo, 124
Landless Workers' Movement (Brazil), 208
Lanz Rodríguez, Carlos, 51, 58, 99–100, 154; Alcasa, 62, 81, 124, 196; on Caracazo, 95; corruption, analysis of, 61, 63; critique of bourgeois legality, 63–66; critique of putschism, 99–100; on dual power, 251; on education, 112–13, 124–25; GCRs and Niehous operation, 59–61; history and influences, 62–63; Popular Disobedience (DP), 81–82; Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MRT), 80–81, 273n22
Lara, Willian, 211
Larrazábal, Wolfgang, 26, 183, 186–87, 262n7
latifundismo (large landholdings), 202–3, 206–7, 209, 215
Laya, Argelia, 133
Lebowitz, Michael, 194, 233, 302n16, 304n46
Ledezma, Antonio, 155–56
Lenin, V. I., 48, 50, 81, 83, 178, 192, 239–45, 301n14
León, María, 128, 135–36, 140–42, 304n48
Leoni, Raúl, 36, 45, 51, 153
Levine, Daniel, 12
Ley de Tierras, 208–13, 216, 295n32, 296n54
liberation theology, 49–50, 63, 74, 135

Libertario, El, 282n31. *See also* anarchism
Ligas Campesinas, 205
Liga Socialista (LS), 51, 61, 64, 113, 133, 135, 304n48
Linares, Sandalio, 294n18
Lionza, María, 50, 128, 280n8, 283n13
Lombroso, Cesare, 158–59
López, Warner, 4
López Sisco, Henry, 272n12
L'Ouverture, Toussaint, 7, 146, 254. *See also* Haitian Revolution
Lovera, Alberto, 75, 136
Luengo, Miguel, 153
Lukács, Gyorgy, 223
lumpen-capitalism, 223
lumpendevelopment, 219, 224, 228–31
lumpenproletariat, 7, 20, 177, 184, 204, 220–33, 297n12: as revolutionary subject, 224–25, 228–29, 231. *See also* informal sector
Lusinchi, Jaime, 91, 213, 272n12
Luxemburg, Rosa, 49

M-28 Movement, 110, 113, 116, 119–20, 123
Machado, Eduardo, 52
Machado, Gustavo, 52
Machuca, Ramón, 189–90
Machurucuto landing, 153
Magallanes, Manuel Vicente, 147
Maneiro, Alfredo, 51, 53, 191, 258n9, 260n23, 260nn30–33, 262n2, 262n8, 263n17, 267nn85–86, 269n34, 270n37, 272n9; founds LCR, 55–56, 188–189, 268n10; guerrilla commander, 32, 49, 265n38, 267n82; on the vanguard, 270n35. *See also* Causa R, La (LCR)
Manuitt, Elías, 34, 37, 265n44
Maoism, 62, 265n39
Mao Tse-Tung, 49, 62
Maracaibo Women's League, 130
Marea Socialista, 191, 291n47
marginals. *See* informal sector; lumpenproletariat
Marianismo, 128, 144, 280nn7–8
Mariátegui, José Carlos, 50, 62–63, 81, 155, 162–64, 184, 286n46
Marin, Briggite, 215–16, 296n52
Marker, Chris, 268
Márquez, Ángel J., 48
Márquez, Pompeyo, 52–53
Márquez Finol, Jesús Alberto, 58
Martín, Américo, 27, 38, 57
Martínez, Tulio, 34
Marx, Karl, 94, 108, 110, 163, 181, 221–26, 297n12
Marxism, 44, 48, 61–63, 111, 124, 137, 193, 230, 233; autonomist, 62; heterodox, 49, 62, 74, 81, 271n60; lumpenproletariat according to, 220–26; revolutionary subject according to, 183–84; spiritualization of, 50
Máspero, Marcela, 191
masses, popular. *See* people, the
mass fronts, 63–66, 75–76, 98–99, 230
mass military line, 80–82, 99–100
Matancero, El (newspaper, Venezuela 83), 55–56, 152, 189
Matthews, Herbert, 2, 257n2
media, 2, 96, 115; foreign, 121, 168; opposition, 118–20, 144, 159, 167–68; popular, 173–75; role in 2002 coup, 120, 167–75, 177
Medina, Pablo, 188–89, 270n37
Méndez, Genaro, 210, 212
Meridazo (Mérida), 114
mestizaje, 148, 150, 152–53, 157–60, 162. *See also* racism
Mesuca stairway massacre, 97
Metropolitan Police, 67–68, 77–80, 84, 96, 158, 170, 176, 229, 286n3, 299n32
Metropolitan University, 119
Miguel, King (Miguel del Barrio, El Negro Miguel), and Queen Guiomar, 147–48, 282nn7–8, 283n13, 284nn18–20
militias: official, 85, 214–15, 243, 247–51; peasant, 212–15; peasant battalions in official, 249; popular, 42, 70, 76–80, 82–87, 167, 175–78, 220, 225–26
Miquilena, Luis, 86
MIR. *See* Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR)
Miraflores Palace, 2, 69, 167–69, 173

Miranda, Francisco de, 125, 201
mission system, 207; Mission Barrio Adentro, 78; Mission Mothers of the Barrio, 138, 281n27; Mission Ribas, 122; Mission Robinson, 122; Mission Sucre, 122; Mission Zamora, 208
Moleiro, Moisés, 27–28
Molletones, Ramón, 209
Mommer, Bernard, 268–69n12
Moncada, Samuel, 169–70
Mondragon Corporation, 194
motorizados (motorcycle couriers), 93, 106, 173, 223, 225, 228
Motta, Sara, 246
Mount Sorte, 50, 283n13
Movement for National Salvation (MOSAN), 38
Movement toward Socialism (MAS), 52–58, 65, 82, 98, 133, 161, 188, 269n34. *See also* Petkoff, Teodoro
Müller Rojas, Alberto, 31, 247–49, 303n31, Fig. 16
Muñoz, Antonia, 156
Muñoz, Freddy, 52

Nacional, *El* (newspaper), 214, 220–21, 228, 271n52, 297n6
Ñangaras, 67–68, 77–79
national bourgeoisie, 28, 184, 192, 291n47
National Guard, 35, 168, 211
National Indian Council of Venezuela (CONIVE), 150, 152, 156, 160–61
National Liberation Army (ELN), 214
National Police Law, 83
National Workers' Union (UNT), 186, 190–92, 195, 197–98, 215, 227, 291n46
Navas, Angel, 194–95
Navas, Lídice, 39–40, 42, 130, 133, 139, 178, 266, 304n48
Negra Hipólita, 282
Negra Matea, 282
Negri, Antonio, 49, 62, 260n34, 275n18, 302n24
Negro Cristóbal, 283
Negro Miguel. *See* Miguel, King
neoliberal reform, 13, 56, 73, 91–92, 102, 148, 185, 192–93; and urbanization, 203, 223–24
Neruda, Pablo, 145, 282n39
Neustaldt, Otto, 286n4
New Autonomous Movements, 51
New Plague, 97, 220
Niehous, William, kidnapping of (Operation Argimiro Gabaldón), 59–66, 80, 113, 251, 270–71nn52–53, 298n18. *See also* Lanz Rodríguez, Carlos; Revolutionary Commando Groups (GCR)
Nolasco Padilla, Ivan, 271n53
North Korea, 62

occupations: factory, 188, 194–99; peasant, 11, 26–27, 41, 183, 205–11, 213–16, 295n28; student, 11, 28, 92, 113, 116, 263n18; urban, 69, 71, 232
oil, 26, 50, 54, 57; agriculture and land distribution, 203, 219; and class structure, 184–85; and educational system, 109; Ruptura studies, 268–69; and the state, 238; and urbanization, 93, 219, 222. *See also* oil lockout; Patróleos de Venezuela
oil lockout, 86, 180–82, 184, 190–91, 208, 210, 218, 224, 229, 244, 288n8
Ojeda, Alonso de, 146–47
Ojeda, Fabricio, 22–24, 37–38, 42, 48, 75, 153, 201, 262n2, 265n38
Ojeda Ríos, Filiberto, 69
oligarchy, 8, 33, 85, 109, 177, 200–201, 203, 216–17, 239, 249
Operation Condor, 68
opposition. *See* anti-Chavistas
Organization of American States, 27, 119, 159
Organization of Revolutionaries (OR), 58, 60, 64, 71
Ortega, Carlos, 167, 190
Osorio, Joaquín, 195
Oswaldo (interviewee), 242
Otero Silva, Miguel Enrique, 220–22, 228, 297n6
Owens-Illinois, 60

"pacification," 25, 36, 38, 45, 57, 62, 111, 113, 153, 187
Páez, José Antonio, 276n34
Páez Front, 29–31, 36, 40, 43–44, 265n38
Palestine, 154
paramilitaries, right-wing, 202, 213–14
Paris Commune, 164, 241
party-form, critique of, 50–51, 55–56, 81, 114, 269n13: "antiparty" sentiment, 55, 113–14, 260n33
Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV-FALN), 37, 41, 48–51, 55–59, 62–65, 70–71, 74, 81, 98–99, 113, 153–54, 162, 187, 250, 252–53, 268nn7–12, 269n13, 271n60, 276n32, 304n48. *See also* Bolivarianism; guerrilla struggle
Patria Para Todos (PPT), 49, 51, 57, 98, 141, 152, 163, 285n43, 304n48
Patriotic Circles, 100, 116, 228, 243
Patriotic Hope, 50, 276n32
Paz, Gerónimo ("Gabino"), 296n50
peasantry (*campesinos*), 7, 11, 26–27, 32–33, 41–42, 45–47, 49, 93, 153, 177, 183–84, 200–217, 219, 222, 226–27, 240, 247, 249, 294n18, 294n22, 295n31
Peña, Alfredo, 158–59, 285n35, 286n3
people, the (*el pueblo*), 1, 6–14, 20, 43, 144, 193, 204, 231, 234–39, 253–54; and the 2002 coup against Chávez, 166, 171–72, 175–79; and the Caracazo, 86–90, 101–2; concept, 8; and dual power, 241–49; guerrilla struggle and, 17–18, 44, 46, 234; history of, 9; Rómulo Betancourt's critique of, 10–12
People's Electoral Movement, 187, 290n28
Pérez, Carlos Andrés, 60–61, 105, 132, 154, 185–88, 253, 271–72n6, 273n16, 278n34, 290n31; neoliberal reform package, 13, 91–92, 223; repression of the Caracazo, 96–97
Pérez, Lisandro ("Mao"), 85
Pérez Arcay, Jacinto, 201, 293n4
Pérez Borges, Stalin, 191, 291nn46–47
Pérez Delgado, Pedro ("Maisanta"), 201–2, 204
Pérez Jiménez, Marcos, 9, 22–24, 27, 33, 69–71, 190, 205. *See also* 23 de Enero (date)
Pérez Pérez, Pedro, 201–2
Petare, 7, 96, 174, 219, 225
Petit, Dimas, 50, 304n48
Petkoff, Luben, 32–33, 38
Petkoff, Teodoro: guerrilla, 25, 31, 32, 35–37, 47, 57–58, 71–72, 264n24, 264n28, 265n53, 271n5; and MAS, 52–55, 133, 188, 269n34; opposition to Chávez, 57, 252. *See also* Movement toward Socialism (MAS)
Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), 167, 181–82, 197, 268n12, 288n4
Piar, Manuel, 152
Piedrita Collective, La, 1–6, 17, 78, 83–87, 108, 154, 175–77, 250, 252, 257n1, 274n35, 296n52, Fig. 9. *See also* militias: popular; Tupamaros
Piñeiro Harnecker, Camila, 195
Pinero, Francisco, 196–97
Pinochet, Augusto, 171
Pinto, José, 4, 80–81, 299n35. *See also* Revolutionary Tupamaro Movement
Pinto, José Luis, 198–99
Plan Bolívar 2000, 122
Plan Ezequiel Zamora, 208
polarization, 87, 98, 238–39, 260n31
Ponte Rodríguez, Manuel, 34; guerrilla front, 49
Popular Disobedience (DP), 81–82, 92–93, 95, 99, 106, 113–14, 124, 243, 251
Porteñazo rebellion (Puerto Cabello), 29, 30, 32, 34
Posada Carrilles, Luis, 71
poverty, 13, 91, 102, 122, 223, 231; women and, 135, 139
Powell, Colin, 159
power: antipower or "non-state" power, 251, 300; constituent power, 15–21, 88–90, 94–95, 103, 166–67, 172, 178–79, 245, 260n34, 302n24; constituted power, 245; dual power, 19, 182, 193, 239–50, 288n8, 300n1, 301nn12–14
Poyo, José, 150–52, 161–62, 165, 284n24
Prada, Francisco "El Flaco," 37, 50, 58–59, 252

Prada, Lizardi, 281n25

PRAG (Venezuela 83), 55–56

Prashad, Vijay, 275

precarity. *See* informal sector

press freedom, 28–29, 119, 270–71n52

Prieto, Agustin, 170

Primera, Alí, 11, 13, 14, 23, 69–70, 86, 110, 204, 219, 234–36, 257

Primero Justicia (PJ), 117–18, 278n34

Progressive Movement of Venezuela (MPV), 285n43

PROVEA, 212

Proyecto Nuestramérica (PNA), 82, 282n31

pueblo. *See* people, the

Puente Llaguno, 167–69

Puerta Aponte, Gabriel, 58, 270n49, 278n34. *See also* Bandera Roja (BR)

Puerto Flechado, 146–48

Punto Cero, 38, 58, 71, 270n46

puntofijismo. *See* Punto Fijo Pact

Punto Fijo Pact, 10, 25, 27, 90, 111, 114, 131, 290n28. *See also* Acción Democrática (AD); COPEI; Democratic Republican Unity (URD)

putschism, 35, 43, 62, 99, 251, 253

Quehacer (BR), 65

Quijada, Ramón, 206

racism, 152–53, 157–62, 284n18, 284n26, 285n30; endoracism, 157

Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), 4, 117–20, 143, 174, 271n52

Ramírez, Isidro, 49–50, 64–65

Ramírez, Rafael, 50, 268n12

Ramírez Rojas, Kléber, 18–19, 49, 99, 124, 227, 250, 252, 261–62n43, 276n32, 298n25, 303n38

Ramos, Alí, 202–3, 206, 209, 216

Ramos Jiménez, Raúl, 27

Rangel, Domingo Alberto, 27, 37, 57, 74, 186

Rangel, José Vicente, 54, 97

Rangel Gómez, Francisco, 191

Recio, Jorge, 169

Red Brigades, 62–63

Relatives of Victims Committee, 97

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), 213, 273n25

Revolutionary Bolívar and Zamora Current, 215–17

Revolutionary Commando Groups (GCR), 59–63, 80, 271n52–53

Revolutionary Fogata Movement, 123

Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), 27–29, 31, 37–40, 42–43, 45, 52, 57–58, 74, 133, 153, 186–87, 201, 265n38, 267n86, 304n48

Revolutionary October 8th Movement, 60

Revolutionary Popular Assembly (APR), 173–74

Revolutionary Tendency, 51, 304n48

Revolutionary Tupamaro Movement, 4, 80–81, 230, 299n35

Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MRT), 80–81

Revolution Will Not Be Televised, The (film), 286n2

Reyes, Yulimar, 93–94, 277n5

Rice, Condoleezza, 119

Ríos, Antonio, 213

Rivero, Fernando, 110–13, 115–16, 124

Rivero, José Ramón, 191–92

Robespierre, Maximilien de, 254

rochela, 164

Rodríguez, Héctor, 120, 278n39

Rodríguez, Isaías, 174–75

Rodríguez, Jorge, 58, 61, 65, 75, 271n53, 272n12

Rodríguez, Simón, 49

Rodríguez Araque, Alí ("Fausto"), 51, 268n12, 304n48

Rodríguez Yance, Carlos, 67

Rodríguez Yance, Ricardo, 67–68

Rodríguez Yance, Sergio, 67–68, 106–8, 114, 118, 124–25, 277n5, Fig. 4

Ron, Lina, 87, 94, 143–44, 214, 225, 230, 232, 296n52, 299n35. *See also* Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV)

Rondón, Franklin, 190–91

Rosales, Manuel, 211

Rosales, Rafael, 190

Rousseff, Dilma, 60
Rugeles, Manuel, 148
Ruiz-Guevara, José Esteban, 217, 293n1
Ruptura (newspaper), 65
Ruptura (PRV), 50, 64–65, 153–54, 187, 268n12, 276n32
Russian Revolution, 19, 99, 239–41; Winter Palace metaphor, 16, 99, 237, 251

Sacudón. *See* Caracazo rebellion
Sáenz, Manuela, 126–28, 141, 143–45
Sáez, Irene, 276
Sáez Mérida, Simón, 27
San Carlos prison, 36–37, 51, 61–62, 251–53, 269n15, 270n49, 273n22, Figs. 8, 13; 1967 escape, 52, 269n17; 1975 escape, 51, 57–59, 270n46, 272n13, 304n48
Sanitarios Maracay, 196
Santa Inés, battle of, 200–202, 216–17
Santana, Diego, 4
Santana, Valentín, 1–5, 84–87, 175–76, 250–51, 276n34, Fig. 9
Santería, 50
Seattle protests of 1999, 91
self-activity, 9, 102, 227, 231, 281n30
self-defense. *See* militias
Serra, Robert, 121
Settlers' Movement, 232
sex workers, 143
shabono, 164
Siderúrgica de Orinoco (Sidor), 55, 188–92, 196, 216, 290n31, 291n48, 292n61
SIFA (Intelligence Services), 38
Silva, Américo, 58
Silva, Ramón, 172
Silva, Trino, 196
Simón Bolivar Coordinator, 70, 78, 80, 83, 271n1
Simón Bolívar Cultural Foundation, 246
Simón Bolívar University, 112
Simón "the Arab," 52, 269n17
Sino-Soviet split, 49
Sitrin, Marina, 261nn40–42
slavery, 48, 146–50, 153, 165, 283n7
social democracy: AD and, 26, 105, 192; MAS and, 54
Social-Historic Current (CHS), 73–75, 80, 99, 131
socialism, twenty-first-century, 163–64
Socialist Workers' Party, 182
Sonora Ponceña, 69
Soto Rojas, Fernando, 58, 133
Sousa Santos, Boaventura de, 136
spirituality, 48–51
spontaneity, 89–90, 93–95, 102, 172–73, 181, 262n8, 298n25
Stalinism, 28, 62, 162–63
state, the: dissolution of, 235, 242, 245, 249; "magical," 237–39; seizing, 176, 182, 240, 242; "semi-state," 240; social movements and, 5–21, 134, 161, 167. *See also* autonomy
streets, as political location, 43, 65, 81, 87, 90, 93, 135–36, 171, 182, 232–33
strikes, 28–29, 64, 188–90, 289n24, 290nn30–31; general, 36, 186; *morrocoy* (slowdown), 188; wildcat, 188–89
students, 11, 20, 26–29, 43, 55, 64, 74, 81, 106–25, 183: in Caracazo, 92–93; Chavista, 118–24; in guerrilla struggle, 43, 86, 110; opposition, 117–20. *See also* Popular Disobedience (DP); university system
Sucre Front, 38, 42, 83
Suez Crisis, 26
SUTISS, 189

Tactical Combat Units (UTCs), 35–36. *See also* guerrilla struggle: urban
Tarazón, Andreína, 119
Techo de la Ballena, 48
Tercer Camino, 51. *See also* Bravo, Douglas
Toledo, Alexis, 230, 299n35
Torres, Camilo, 237
Torres, Eloy, 25
torture, 5, 14, 24, 30, 36, 38, 40, 51, 61, 65, 68, 74, 79, 154, 252, 266n57, 271n53, 281n19
Trejismo, 33–35, 97
Trejo, Hugo, 33
Tupak Amaru, 63

Tupamaros, 67–68, 72, 78–80, 82–87, 172, 175–78, Figs. 10, 11, 12
Turimiquire Peak, 32, 264n32
TVes, 117

unemployed, 11, 26, 86, 183, 222, 224–25, 227. *See also* informal sector
Unified, Revolutionary, Classist, Autonomous Current (C-CURA), 191
Union of Black Women, 155
United Federaton of Non-Dependent and Similar Workers of Venezuela, 228
United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), 31, 152, 191, 199, 247
United States of America, 12, 24, 27, 36, 77, 117, 121, 135, 159, 168, 284n23
United Syndical Committee, 186, 289n24
United Workers' Confederation of Venezuela, 187
University Law, 123
University of the Andes, 113
University of Zulia, 130
university system: Academic Renovation, 110–12, 115, 277; autonomy, 109–10, 112, 121, 124; development, 109; direct democracy in, 111, 113, 116, 121, 123; gentrification of, 108, 110, 112, 115, 117–18, 121; humanities, 116; privatization within, 115; strike of 1987, 113–14; technocratic reform of, 111–12, 116, 277; "Toma" of 2001, 113, 116
Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), 118
urbanization, 46, 70, 199, 203–4, 207, 218–19, 222
URD. *See* Democratic Republican Unity (URD)
Uzcátegui, Rafael "El Negro," 49–51, 59, 98, 253, 263n17, 267n76, 268n10, 304n48

Valera Mora, Chino, 48
vanguardism, 17, 20, 33, 35, 38, 41–44, 45, 53, 55–66, 71–72, 77, 81, 101–2, 108, 142, 175–76, 236, 261–62n43, 267n82, 268n1, 270n35, 271n5, 298n25. See also *foquismo*
Vargas, Alfredo, Sr., 94
Vargas mudslides, 219
Velasco, Alejandro, 15, 257n1, 258n10, 259n20
Velásquez, Andrés, 56, 189
Velásquez, David, 245
Venceremos Guerrilla Front, 3
Venceremos Organization, 63, 79
Venepal, 194
Venevisión, 174
Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), 248
Venezuela 83, 55–56
Venezuelan Homemakers' Union, 281n25
Venezuelan Planning School, 117–18, 122, 230
Venezuelan Popular Unity (UPV), 143–44, 225, 230. *See also* Ron, Lina
Venezuelan Revolutionary Directorate (DIREVE), 264n32
Venezuelan Workers' Confederation (CTV), 167, 180–90, 192–93, 198, 205–6, 213, 227, 288n1, 289n19, 289n24, 290n28, 294n22
verticalism, 17–18, 77, 81, 248, 252, 261n40. *See also* horizontalism
Vietnam, 62
violence: against campesinos, 206–14, 249; domestic, 4, 134; revolutionary, 56, 80–86, 95, 102, 113–14, 182, 206, 239; social, 4, 70, 78, 219–20, 225–26, 232; state, 3–5, 17, 36, 57, 68, 72–76, 79–80, 91, 96–97, 106–7, 183, 191, 220
Vivas, Héctor, 51

Wallerstein, Immanuel, 184
Washington Consensus. *See* neoliberal reform
Williams (interviewee), 181
Wilpert, Gregory, 208, 246, 286n3, 295nn27–32
women, 17, 20, 38–40, 42, 81, 126–45, 212, 236: Afro-Venezuelan, 135; class divisions among, 129–32, 138, 281; and the family, 138; and feminism, 129–31; and guerrilla struggle, 38–40, 129–30, 138, 266–67; and informal labor, 224; reform of Civil Code in 1982, 132; wages for housework, 136–

women (*cont.*)
  39. *See also* Banmujer; Constitution (Bolivarian) of 1999: Article 88; Women's CONG; Women's Ministry
Women's CONG (Coordinator of Non-Governmental Organizations), 132–35, 137
Women's Development Bank. *See* Banmujer
Women's Ministry, 128, 134, 136, 140
Workers in Revolution Collective, 191
working class, 7, 20, 45–46, 53–54, 56, 62, 72, 81, 137, 180–99, 224, 299n29; as labor aristocracy, 194, 291–92n54; as revolutionary subject, 93, 184–85, 225, 231, 233
Yanomami people, 151, 164
Yulimar Vive, 107, Fig. 4
Yumare massacre, 74–75, 97, 272n12

Zacarias, Comandante, 214
Zago, Angela, 266n72
Zamora, Ezequiel, 49, 200–204, 207, 209, 214–17, 249, 293n1
Zamora (El Bachiller) Front, 38, 153, 265n38
Zapatistas, 2, 19–20, 24, 91, 262n46, 301n14
Zelaya, Manuel, 287
Zibechi, Raúl, 235, 300nn1–2
Zinn, Howard, 8
Zuloaga, Guillermo, 174