WHO CAN STOP THE DRUMS?

URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN CHÁVEZ'S VENEZUELA

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FOR AISHA
In memory of Yolanda Salas

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Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the generosity, humor, and patience of my friends in the Caracas barrios, and I owe them a great debt. Yajaira Hernandez and Johnny Moreno were my guides, my hosts, my good friends, and my rock through the various ups and downs of field research. Without them to come home to every night and share my stories over a meal of *arepas*, my experience in Caracas would not have been nearly as rewarding. Their friends, family, and neighbors who also extended hospitality to me included, among many others, Damarys, Amarilys, Zulay, Alexis, Ricardito, Palmiro, and Tito. I was also very lucky to have the friendship and guidance of the novelist and community journalist José Roberto Duque, "el embarcador," who introduced me to a large number of the people who would become my close collaborators in his native 23 de Enero and in La Vega.

I owe many thanks to the folks and organizations in each of the parishes where I worked. In 23 de Enero, I would like to acknowledge Gustavo Borges and Susana Rodriguez, as well as the *camaradas* of the Coordinadora Simón Bolívar, especially Juan Contreras and Guadalupe Rodriguez. In La Vega, there are Freddy Mendoza, Carmen Pérez, and all the *vecinos* from the Carretera Negra; Williams Ochoa and others from the Grupo Autoctono de la Vega; and Edgar "El Gordo" Pérez and those from the Grupo Caribes de Itagua. In San Agustín, there is Jesus "Totoño" Blanco and his group Tacusan. Antonio "Pelon" Marrero, and Carlos Palacios. The community radio folks also extended a great deal of help to me in my research, especially Carlos Carles, Rafael Fernandez, Madera, Carlos Lugo, and Fernando Pinto.

Although being immersed in the field often felt far from the halls of academe, I had some fruitful and engaging interactions with scholars and colleagues in Caracas that enriched my understanding of Venezuela. I owe

a prime debt to the anthropologist Yolanda Salas, who, sadly, passed away at the end of 2007. Yolanda's decades of field research among the urban and rural poor were of great inspiration to me. We met regularly to discuss my research and to plan our collaborations, even toward the end when she was confined to her bed. But even in the most difficult moments, she would put on her lipstick and a brave smile, always positive and full of jokes.

The historian Alejandro Velasco was residing in el 23 while carrying out his doctoral research and we engaged in many dialogues that have proved central to my thinking on the issues. He read over several drafts of various chapters and provided insightful and critical feedback. Luis Duno provided important initial contacts in Caracas, and I am very grateful for his generosity, guidance, and solidarity. Jesus "Chucho" Garcia made available to me his archives at the Fundación Afro-America. I also learned a great deal from my interactions with Daisy Barreto and Miguel Angel Contreras.

The ideas in this book were not developed in isolation, and I have benefited from a series of interrelated discussions in conferences and seminars. My initial engagement with neoliberalism was sparked by the conference "Neoliberalism: Historical Perspectives and Critical Possibilities," which I organized together with Hairong Yan at Princeton University in October 2004. Related to this conference were a series of panels and then a workshop and edited volume that Carol Greenhouse organized at Princeton on politics, publics, and personhood at the limits of neoliberalism. The initial workshop also led to my participation in a panel at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) conference organized by Roger Rouse on the topic of neoliberal subjectivities, and that led to a Latin American Studies Association (LASA) panel and conference at the University of California, San Diego organized by Nancy Postero and Mark Goodale on postneoliberalism. I have also been part of a series of discussions at LASA and through a list-serv and finally a volume edited by David Smilde on publics and civil society in Venezuela. My own thoughts have evolved through my participation in these various interdisciplinary gatherings, and I owe much to the organizers and other participants for the questions they have raised and the insights they offered.

In addition to these forums, I have also presented chapters from this work at the conference "Latin America's Informal Cities in Comparative Perspective," at Northwestern University; the conference "Latin American

Opposition to Neo-Liberalism" at the New School; a seminar, "The Popular Sectors and the State in Chávez's Venezuela," at Yale University; the conference "Changes in the Andes" at Brown University; and the public forum "Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution at Home and Abroad" at Yale University. I have had the opportunity to discuss my work at the Race and Ethnicity Working Group in the Department of Sociology at UCLA; the Cotsen Seminar, Carl A. Fields Center, and the Program in Latin American Studies at Princeton University; as well as meetings of the American Sociological Association (ASA), American Political Science Association (APSA), and Western Political Science Association (WPSA). I have received invaluable feedback from all of these events, and I thank the organizers and participants.

This book has benefited greatly from the feedback and advice of various people. Nancy Postero reviewed the manuscript for Duke, and our ongoing dialogue over conference lunches, long distance phone calls, and email has been exciting and productive for my work. Nancy's imprint on my thinking and hence the book has been very strong. Likewise, Carol Greenhouse continues to be an important figure for my work and I appreciate her insights and guidance on various drafts. Steve Ellner also reviewed the manuscript for Duke, and was kind enough to answer my numerous questions over email. Greg Grandin and David Smilde were very helpful through the process of writing and publishing this book. They provided a sympathetic ear and sound advice when I ran into snags. The other people who read drafts of chapters and provided helpful suggestions were Priya Srinivasan, David Guss, and Naomi Schiller. I had the chance to workshop the book through a year-long informal writing group that included Amy Chazkel, Josie Saldaña, David Kazanjian, and Sarah Covington. The group taught me a lot about the process of writing and revising, and I am grateful to the participants for their detailed comments on my work. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for Duke University Press, and my editor Miriam Angress, who guided the book to completion with speed and thoroughness.

Institutional support was necessary for the fieldwork, writing, and research that led up to this book. My fieldwork was carried out while I was a Wilson-Cotsen fellow at Princeton's Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts. I received generous faculty research grants from the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and faculty summer

alone, and he reminds me always of the things in life that are really important. This book is dedicated to our daughter Aisha Sinead, who was born just as the book was being completed, with the wish that we are bringing her into a world with a little more hope, a little more laughter, and a little more justice than what has gone before.

Introduction

The Miraflores presidential palace in downtown Caracas has histori-
cally been the site of much political activity, from presidential vic-
tories to coups, impeachments, and protests. From 1998, Miraflores was
occupied by President Hugo Chávez and a governing coalition of Bolivarian
political parties, who carried out a radical program for redistribution and
regional integration based on the vision of the early-nineteenth-century
Republican leader Simón Bolívar. Next door to the Miraflores palace is
Mirapollo, a fried chicken joint. Palmiro Avilan, a community organizer
from the parish of Petare, carries out most of his political work here.

When I met Palmiro at Mirapollo, I had to elbow my way past noisy
gatherings of swarthy men tearing through plates of greasy fries and roast
chicken. The booth in the corner of Mirapollo is Palmiro's "office." Palmiro
is in his fifties, short and broad shouldered, with a goatee and dark skin. He
has three cell phones on the table which are constantly ringing and beeping
with incoming text messages. Community activists come in and out of the
booth. Over a cold *malta*, Palmiro tells me that he is a devotee of Maria
Lionza, a popular cult based on various spirits of indigenous and black
fighters from the past, such as Guaicaipuro, Negro Primero, and Maria
Lionza herself.

"These spirits have the elements of blackness," said Palmiro, "a spiri-
tuality that's been gestating and has its roots in the *rochelas* [communities
of escaped slaves] that formed for over two hundred and fifty years in the
plains. It was in the plains that they created the liberation army of re-
sistance to rescue five countries from Spanish imperialism. One of the first
leaders was José Tomás Boves, who led a group of ragtag Indians and
blacks against a Republican army that was in the hands of *mantuanos*
[creole elites]."

In nationalist histories, Boves is an antihero who betrayed the cause of

Independence by launching a rebellion against the Bolívar-led Republican army in 1814. But he has been mythified in popular culture as a renegade caudillo who gave importance to marginalized Indians and blacks.[1] Palmiro sees himself as a modern-day Boves; he is leading an army of those who are being excluded from society.

Palmiro's deployment of Boves helps to frame a contemporary form of exclusion, based in geographies of marginality that were fortified over decades of economic crisis and consequent neoliberal policies of privatization, deregulation, and market-based growth. As economic inequalities increased, there was a growing segregation of urban space. Communal areas of city life such as cultural centers were taken over by malls and private interests. Urban barrio residents came to be seen as a threat to the property and security of the middle classes and were subject to greater policing. The spaces available for public life and deliberation were further reduced through media consolidation, a process that centralized the media in the hands of a small number of conglomerates.

Since Chávez was elected in 1998, he has embraced an anti-neoliberal and pro-poor agenda, in an attempt to reduce economic and spatial inequalities, create access to public spaces, and give voice to the black and mestizo majority. Highlighting his own mestizo features and dark complexion, Chávez has encouraged new forms of cultural identity based on blackness and indigeneity. Urban social movements elaborate these identities in fiestas and murals as they find themselves excluded from the ranks of a self-proclaimed, middle-class civil society. The Chávez government has sponsored local cultural and media collectives, passing legislation to authorize low-power radios as an alternative to media conglomerates. In his speeches and a new constitution, Chávez has encouraged barrio movements to occupy public spaces of the city. Chávez's election also created avenues for previously disenfranchised groups to participate in governance and decision making. The structures and discourses of exclusion have been contested in multiple arenas since Chávez has come to power. So why does the figure of Boves resonate so strongly for some in a Bolivarian Venezuela? What are the lines of conflict emerging as barrio-based movements demand inclusion in the state?

As urban movements engage with the political arena, they come up against the instrumental rationalities—both liberal and neoliberal—of state administrators. The economic policy of the Chávez government has

been distinctly anti-neoliberal. Its restructuring of the oil industry has allowed the government to create protected areas of the economy such as social welfare which are not subject to market requirements. But the realities of Venezuela's continued participation in a global market economy are manifested in a neoliberal political rationality, present in areas such as culture and communications. By "political rationality," I refer to the calculus of cost and benefit that undergirds administrators' actions and decisions. Concerned with securing foreign investment, technocrats in state institutions apply market-based calculations in these fields. I argue that the disjunctures between state goals of fostering market competition and reducing poverty produce tensions that barrio-based movements experience in their interactions with the state and its intermediaries. Social movements counter the utilitarian logics of state and party officials with visions based in "lo cotidiano" (the everyday), cultural heritage, and historical memory. In this dimension, the figure of Boves—as a renegade figure who opposed Bolívar—also signals a response by barrio movements to the forms of exclusion they encounter in a new hybrid order.

An engagement with the lives and experiences of barrio residents reveals a reality of political life in the Chávez era mostly absent from the burgeoning literature on contemporary Venezuelan politics. State-centric and structuralist analysis has tended to dominate both among scholars sympathetic to Chávez and those who are critical. Some political scientists seek to understand the crisis of traditional politics and the electoral successes of Chávez as linked to the destabilizing effects of the 1980s debt crisis and neoliberal economic reforms across Latin America. According to Kenneth Roberts, the debt crisis weakened the traditional political parties and labor institutions at the base of nationalist development models, such as that associated with Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI). The crisis in mass representation left a void that was filled by populist leaders such as Chávez who fashioned new, unmediated relationships with the masses.[2] As Steve Ellner elaborates, unlike the brief reign of so-called neopopulist leaders in Latin America who embraced neoliberal policies, such as Brazil's Fernando Collor de Mello, Peru's Alberto Fujimori, and Argentina's Carlos Menem, Chávez has shown a deeper commitment to anti-neoliberal programs and has had a more enduring impact.[3] But at the same time, Ellner notes that all of these highly personalistic leaders emerged from a crisis of institutions under neoliberalism.

In contrast to this political economy approach, other political scientists have tended to focus in a circular way on the disfunctionality of traditional political parties as the cause of what they see as a breakdown of democracy.[4] They cite the inability of the traditional parties to cope with the economic crisis of the 1980s, and the changes brought about in the party system through decentralization and direct elections for governors and mayors, as crucial factors in the rise of nontraditional actors such as Chávez.[5] These political scientists claim that internal problems with the party system contributed to its weakening during a period of economic crisis. Some even consider that it is leftist groups,[6] populist strategies, and an increasingly powerful executive that have caused the disintegration of the two-party system, rather than the other way around. Others concentrate on the extraordinary personal charisma of Chávez, relying on psychosocial factors, such as people's "psychological need to believe in salvation" and "the personal appeal of a potential savior" or the suggestion by a former minister of trade and energy that "Chávez constantly caters to the emotional needs of a deeply demoralized nation."[7] These scholars explain Chávez's ongoing public support as due to his ability to politicize the masses, as well as his use of the substantial oil reserves of the country in order to fund social programs such as the missions.

These multiple approaches share a top-down perspective that reduces the present conjuncture to the consequences of a set of structural determinants or locates all agency in the figure of Chávez as the sole figure responsible for crafting policy, designing programs, and providing orientation to an otherwise incoherent mass. The descriptions of the urban poor as "susceptible," "ripe for mobilization," and "charisma-hungry"; the reduction of people to "voters" in most rational choice analyses; and the assumption of "unorganized mass constituencies" betray a concept of popular sectors as easily manipulated, depoliticized individuals.[8] Many rely on the erroneous assumption, expressed by Jennifer McCoy, that "the urban poor never successfully organized politically."[9] They do not account for the histories of urban social movements that have contested the existing order for over four decades, nor the ways in which these actors have continued to negotiate with and shape the political process.

On the other side, some left-wing and progressive supporters of the Chávez government have tended toward a celebration of the new spaces of

participatory democracy that are emerging in contemporary Venezuela.[10] They do provide a useful counterpoint to state-centric perspectives by focusing on the units of popular organization and deliberation that have flourished at the grassroots. But these accounts are not so attentive to the obstacles that are faced by barrio-based actors when they interact with state agencies. They also focus predominantly on groupings such as the Bolivarian circles, land committees, and communal councils that were formed under Chávez, excluding the long-term social movements that predate the Chávez government.

This book offers an alternative approach to the study of Venezuelan politics that explores the alliances, conflicts, and mutual empowerment of state and society. The relationship between society and the state is reciprocal: just as the strong figure of Chávez has given impetus and unity to popular organizing, so the creative movements fashioned in the barrios help determine the form and content of official politics. 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.

One of the other goals of this book is to comprehend the diverse histories and experiences of social movements under Chávez. Many commentators misrepresent those groups supporting Chávez as uniformly Chavista, when in reality Chavistas are only one tendency in a broad array of cultural, community, and political groups participating in the "*proceso*." 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.[11] Many community organizers in the barrios do not identify as Chavistas, and they have alternative sources of identity that come from their barrio or parish (Barrio Sucre, Barrio Marín, 23 de Enero, San Agustín, Petare) and that form the basis of alternative social and community networks (Coordinadora Simón Bolívar, Cayapo, Radio Negro Primero, Ciudadela de Catía). These popular movements claim distinct genealogies that predate Chávez, including the clandestine movements against the 1950s military regime, the posttransition era of guerrilla struggle in the 1960s, movements against urban displacement and hunger strikes led by Jesuit worker priests in the 1970s, and

cultural activism and urban committees of the 1980s and 1990s. These multiple histories are not adequately conveyed in reductive labels such as "Chavista rank-and-file," "Chávez supporters," or "Chavista movement."

The copious volumes of edited collections, books, and articles produced on Chávez's Venezuela have also failed to address the often painful contradictions and complexities of working-class life. As Daniel James has observed in the study of Peronism in Argentina, there has been a long-standing inability of academia to come to terms with working-class experience. The working class has either been mythologized or demonized, and working-class life has been simplified to fit the ideological parameters of the position being argued.[12] This book takes up James's challenge, and alongside histories of struggle and resistance in the barrios I include individual biographies that reveal the ambiguities of working-class life and the personal experiences of discrimination, redemption, and hope that underlie collective action.

INDIVIDUAL HISTORIES AND COLLECTIVE HISTORIES

My first night in Caracas, I stayed in a hotel in the middle-class suburb of Altamira. The next day I called Johnny, a contact from my sister Deepa, a journalist with WBAI radio (New York), who had spent some time in Venezuela the previous year. "Wait right there, I'm coming to get you," said Johnny. Next thing, a shiny green Nova pulled up outside the hotel, Johnny in the front and his wheelchair in the back. Johnny was a large, friendly, black Venezuelan man who had been left paraplegic after a car accident. I introduced myself using my nickname "Suyi," always easier than my full name. Johnny took me to the popular parish of El Valle, to the apartment that he shared with his *compañera* Yajaira, a middle-aged black woman from the parish of San Agustín. This was to become my home for the next month and over the years as I returned to Venezuela to do my field research.

Johnny and Yajaira lived in popular housing blocks (*bloques populares*), project-like buildings constructed by the government for barrio residents. I was to sleep on a small mattress on the floor in their spare room. The spare room was piled with boxes of papers, unironed clothes, dusty books, car parts, and other junk. Yajaira laughed nervously about how they hadn't cleaned out the room in years, but I said it was no problem. "I've lived in huts in the remotest villages of India, I've slept on park benches in Madrid,

and on the floors of crumbling mansions in Cuba," I boasted. "I'll be fine." That night after all the lights were out, and I lay down to sleep, I immediately felt a small tickle on my arm. I brushed it off, but soon, I felt another tickle, and then another. Reaching for the light, I gasped in horror as I saw teams of winged cockroaches all over my mattress and the floor. I ran out of the room shutting the door behind me and went to the living room, where I perched anxiously on the couch. The lights from the small Christmas tree blinked on and off, and I considered my options. I couldn't wake up Johnny and Yajaira, not after all I had said about being so cool and unperturbed by the conditions of the room. They would take it as an insult, they would see me as a wimp. Maybe I was not cut out for this research, if I couldn't even deal with the cockroaches on my first night in the barrio. I dozed intermittently, jerked awake every now and again by the flashing lights and my own distressing thoughts.

The next morning Yajaira came out to make coffee and when she saw me on the couch, she shrieked, "Suyi, what happened?" When I told her the story she looked at me in horror, and exclaimed, "If that had been me I would have screamed so loud that it would have woken up the whole house and brought all the neighbors running." I was so relieved, we burst into laughter. The story of my night with the cockroaches would become urban legend. From then on, every time we saw a cockroach, it was an *amigo de Suyi* (friend of Suyi). Yajaira decided that if I was to stay in their house, we would have to clean the room out to get rid of all the cockroaches. She pulled two old, identical t-shirts and pants from the pile of laundry and said that she and I would form a cleaning cooperative, especially since Chávez was now giving money for cooperatives.

As I came to know Yajaira, I realized that this mixture of pragmatism and humor was how she dealt with many situations in her life, from the death of her mother from lack of prompt medical attention, to the shooting of her brother by gang members. As I heard the life stories of Yajaira and countless others, I saw how these qualities marked their entry into community organizing. Relying on your wits, stretching personal resources, and making jokes are at the basis of a model of sociability that has helped sustain urban social movements.

My third day in Caracas we were cleaning out the room, and I received my introduction to Yajaira and Johnny's life history. The morning extended into the afternoon, then the evening and the night, as we looked at photos

and sifted through old papers, books, and souvenirs. We shared stories, moments of reflection, and laughs. There was memorabilia from Johnny's sporting career, including certificates, magazine clippings, and invitations abroad. I learned that after being left paraplegic from a car accident nearly thirty years ago, Johnny had embarked on a remarkable career as a long-distance marathon athlete. From one box, Johnny picked up an article from an American newspaper about his participation in the New York Marathon in 2001. The article said that Venezuelan athletes were being deprived of funds to attend overseas events under the Chávez government. Johnny said that he had tried to contact the press to tell them that this was not true, but nobody had wanted to hear his story. There were many papers on health care, diagrams of the body, and handwritten notes about disability.

In the evening, the neighbor Damarys dropped by and joined in the work. She picked up a book, dusted it off, and read the title. It was a Spanish translation of Alex Haley's *Roots.* Everyone in the room beamed in recognition. Damarys, a light-skinned black woman originally from the coastal region of Carupano, told a story about how she saw *Roots* on television with a young *negro* (black). According to Damarys, the young man burst into tears during this film about a black author's search for his roots in Africa and slavery. "He felt that the film really represented his experiences," she said. These questions of "roots" and belonging would recur throughout my time in Venezuela.

At one point, I picked up a wad of papers, with chapter headings on co-operatives. Yajaira sheepishly grabbed the papers of what was her un-finished college thesis. She told me that she had never finished college because her mother became ill and she had to abandon her degree and work as a street vendor in order to support her family. As we continued into the night we came across banners, pamphlets, and flyers from Johnny's and Yajaira's years of community organizing. Johnny found some old bed frames and improvised a bed for me, while they told me about their work with street children in the parish of San Agustín. That night I collapsed into my new bed, with no cockroaches, and a glimpse into the lives of my new friends. I thought about the fragments, stories, and pieces through which we patch together our lives, make meaning of our present, and engage in action to fight for possible futures.

Over the years that I returned to stay with Johnny and Yajaira, I came to

know much more about them. At night, we would stay up talking till late, exchanging stories about our day, about our lives, laughing, and getting to know one another as friends. I became close to Yajaira's nieces and nephews, who would often stay over, and the many friends from the neighborhood who would drop by. I came to know the local drug dealers and other characters such as the street vendors. Originally I had seen the house as a place to stay while I carried out my research on urban social movements. But I began to realize that these exchanges were a crucial part of the story that I was telling about the ways that larger political processes intersect with individual histories and individual lives. Yajaira's story helped me to see the personal reasons why someone might be motivated to become a community activist, what Chávez represents in her life and those around her, and how her individual experiences led her to build collaborations with others. While the historical archives offer certain accounts of local barrio histories, Yajaira's personal archives offer a different kind of interpretation, and both will be explored together in the early chapters of this book.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE CITY

The barrios of Caracas, like the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, the periferia of São Paolo, the poblaciones of Santiago, and the villas of Buenos Aires, are places that have been formed by exclusion, rural-urban migration, and poverty. A visitor arriving to Caracas at night will see the sparkling lights of the shantytowns nestled in the valleys and hills of the city, but commercial tourist guides offer no directions to reach these areas and they are not present on visitors' maps. The Lonely Planet guidebook to Venezuela warns the traveler: "Don't venture into the shantytowns at any time of the day, let alone at night." This is not to deny that the money-making potential of the shantytowns is being marketed by resourceful entrepreneurs. In Brazil, following the commercial success of such films as *Cidade de Deus*, foreign tourists have been leaving the beaches and shopping malls of Rio to go on the increasingly popular "Favela Tours." But many of these tours are like safaris, where tourists remain in the safety of their buses or tour groups without having to engage with the realities of the residents' lives. Despite their connections to the outside world, the shantytowns remain in relative obscurity and isolation.

With the exception of Petare, a large, sprawling conglomeration of bar-
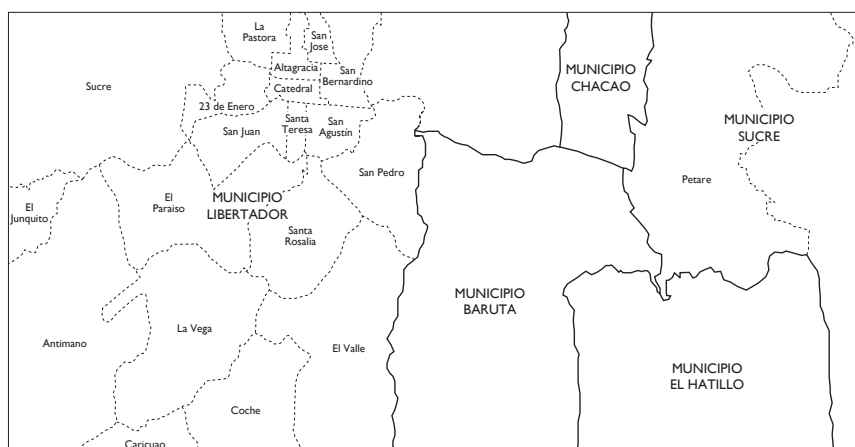
MAP 1 Municipalities and parishes of the metropolitan region of Caracas.

rios located in the far east of Caracas, most of the shantytown areas are in the western part of the city, known as the Municipio Libertador. Since my research was mainly carried out in the western parishes of San Agustín, 23 de Enero, and La Vega, I briefly describe them in this section. In the 2000 census, the population of Municipio Libertador was estimated at 1.9 million.[13] The rate of urbanization in Venezuela increased markedly during the twentieth century. In 2005, the percentage of the population living in urban areas was 93.6 percent, with around 13 percent of the population based in Caracas.[14] The country went from being predominantly rural in the early twentieth century to predominantly urban by the new millennium.

San Agustín is one of the older parishes, located close to the city center. The 2000 census lists its population as some 39,175, although this is an estimate. The actual numbers are probably somewhat higher due to the difficulty of accurately counting highly dense urban populations with a large number of squatters.[15] San Agustín del Sur is divided off from the more prosperous area of San Agustín del Norte by the river Guaire. Walking along the main avenue of San Agustín del Sur, one encounters a series of small bodegas selling groceries, cleaning products, and baked goods; religious shops with statues of saints and other mementos in the windows; and auto repair shops. Men sit outside on makeshift boxes, beer bottles in hand, laughing and making jokes. The pavement is jammed with a steady stream of pedestrians and street vendors selling popular snacks. Moving
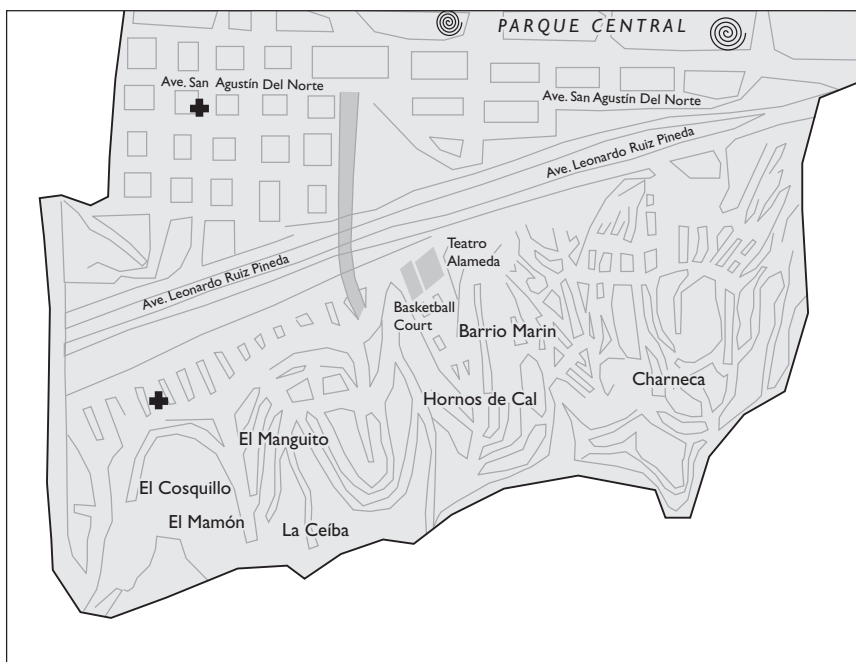
MAP 2 San Agustín parish. ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY KAREN ALYDE PREN; REDRAWN BY BILL NELSON.

east along the avenue, there is a large basketball court on the left. On the right is a dilapidated theater known as the Teatro Alameda, which ceased functioning in 1965 and was recuperated by the residents in 2004 as a community cultural center. A lane behind the theater, littered with trash and syringes and reeking of urine, leads to a small square known as the Afinque de Marín, at the heart of Barrio Marín. Several houses face onto the square and there is a basketball ring to the right. On one wall of the Afinque, life-size murals of the original members of the 1970s-era local musical ensemble Grupo Madera give a sense of the cultural history of the sector.

Barrio Marín is unique among Caraqueño barrios for its old-style colonial houses with inner courtyards decorated with ornate grills and pastel colors; its wide stone streets; and street lights that begin to glow in the early evening. Some residents have the means to preserve these colonial houses, but most have watched their homes deteriorate in the humid climate as they are unable to pay for repairs. Between the tall facades of the houses, one sees the *ranchos* in the hills behind. The more precarious

ranchos are made with wood or recycled materials and have zinc roofs and earth floors, while the consolidated ones may be multistory with brick walls, tiled roofs, and electricity. Leaving Barrio Marín and climbing several long, concrete staircases, one reaches the *cerro*, or upper barrios of the sector, such as Charneca, El Mamón, and La Ceiba. Interspersed among the precarious ranchos are rich vegetation, papaya trees, and overgrown grass; public water amenities for residents of the sector; a makeshift basketball court; and bodegas, where residents sell maltas, pasta, toothpaste, and soap from small windows of their dwellings. Salsa musicians gather in dark rooms to practice. Occasionally the clash of a snare or the rumble of a conga can be heard coming from a rancho. Reggaeton blares from small radios. The climb up to the cerro reveals views of large city skyscrapers, the Hotel Caracas Hilton, the downtown Parque Central district, and San Agustín del Norte.

Further west of the city, the parish of 23 de Enero is characterized by its militant murals and high-rise project buildings, built under the military ruler Marcos Pérez Jimenez. The 2000 census records 82,642 residents of 23 de Enero, of whom a little over half reside in the public housing buildings.[16] At one entrance to the parish, at Avenida Sucre, there is a large mural of Che Guevara next to a masked guerrilla, with the message "Welcome to 23 de Enero." Another entrance to the parish is from the metro stop Agua Salud, which lets out at a busy avenue with street vendors selling newspapers and fresh fruits, hawking trinkets, and offering telephone services. Buses and cars choke the busy street and collect waiting lines of passengers, headed for Monte Piedad. The street facing Agua Salud leads toward La Cañada. After five minutes on foot, one arrives at blocks 18 and 19, home to the militant, cadre-based organization Coordinadora Simón Bolívar (CSB). Their headquarters are in a reclaimed police station, painted in bright white, with images of Simón Bolívar and Che Guevara. Entering one of the residential buildings in La Cañada, the level of deterioration is immediately apparent. The paint is peeling, there are large patches of water damage on the walls, and the stairwell smells of urine. There is rubbish on the landings and here and there a rat scurries away. Climbing further up the street, one approaches the main intersection of Barrio Sucre, with its mazelike streets and small brick houses.

As a bus climbs to the sector Monte Piedad, the fifteen-story high-rise project buildings, set against hills and bulbous clouds, come into view. The
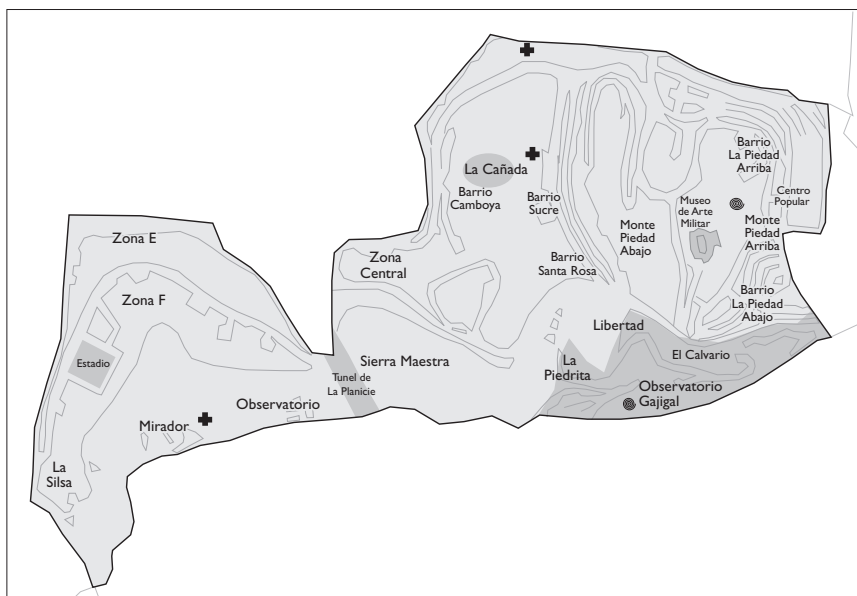
MAP 3 23 de Enero parish. ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY KAREN ALYDE PREN;
REDRAWN BY BILL NELSON.

facades of individual apartments appear as checkered squares of blues, whites, yellows, and pinks. Laundry hangs from the windows, fluttering in the breeze. The road winds through the hills in the approach to Monte Piedad Arriba, at the top of the hill. Here the Coordinadora Cultural Simón Bolívar (CCSB), a breakaway group from the CSB, have their headquarters in an old abandoned building. Facing the building is a long wall with a series of fierce images of indigenous chiefs. There are also murals of young men from the barrio who were killed in combat with the national guard in previous decades. The murals of fallen comrades, and bullet holes shot by security forces in the facades of the buildings during the 1989 Caracazo street riots, give the sense of being in a war zone.

To the south of these smaller, inner-city parishes lie the expansive and more recently urbanized popular parishes of El Valle, La Vega, Caricuao, and Antimano. La Vega is a large, mountainous parish, with about 130,886 residents living in an area of 13.3 square kilometers recorded in the census data.[17] A bus traveling from El Valle along the highway Cota 905 passes through a terrain of green hills with overgrown grass and trees and plants with rich foliage. It terminates at the Centro Comercial, a shopping center

MAP 4 La Vega parish. ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY KAREN ALYDE PREN; REDRAWN BY BILL NELSON.

at the entrance to La Vega. But the expensive boutique stores and fancy pastry shops in the shopping center are mostly for the wealthy residents of the neighboring El Paraíso. Stepping outside the air-conditioned environs of the mall, one encounters the bustle and noise of the barrio. Cars and buses sound their horns as they jostle to leave or enter the parish. Vendors line the street with large glass cases of sticky buns and iced donuts, surrounded by a halo of bees.

Taking the road to the left, one approaches Barrio Carmen and the headquarters of the Afro-centric cultural group Grupo Autoctono de la Vega. There is a large mural of Tupac Shakur, with a faint outline of Che Guevara's beret sketched in the background. On a large piece of metal someone has painted a portrait of Malcolm X. Further along this road is a small church and plaza, where fiestas of the saints are celebrated. Taking the road straight ahead and up from the shopping center, one passes sev-

eral smaller barrios on the right, and then Las Terrazas de la Vega, a large newly constructed housing complex for middle-class families. Facing this complex is a barrio known as the "Carretera Negra." The barrio consists of a line of houses located along the main stretch of highway road, as indicated by its name, "Black Highway," and along three smaller lanes, Oriente, 24 de Julio, and Justicia. The buildings include an auto repair shop, a soup kitchen, and a small medical dispensary. Continuing along the same road, one finally arrives at the sector Las Casitas, the highest point. The air is noticeably more rarefied; on all sides there are views of rolling hills and vegetation. Some of the residents engage in small-scale agriculture. Every so often, the crow of a rooster punctuates the silence. A Catholic school with swing sets and brightly painted murals is set amid the lush greenery.

There is no sociological data on the barrios as a whole, but a World Bank study provides information about the parish of La Vega. It reveals that the average family size is 5.4 persons. The population of the parish is relatively young, with 32 percent under fifteen years of age. The average household income is the equivalent of US$409 per month. The study found that 45 percent of residents are employed in the informal sector, without job security or access to benefits. There are also pockets of extreme poverty, with the bottom 20 percent of residents earning only US$125 per month. The researchers found a similar socioeconomic profile in the area of Petare North, where they carried out another study.[18] Marital arrangements in the barrios are fairly informal and fluid. The rate of single-mother households in La Vega is high, at 38 percent.[19] Extended family structures are also common, with children being raised by grandparents or aunts. Although there is no data available on San Agustín and 23 de Enero, I also saw a high degree of informality, concentrated poverty, and single-mother households in these parishes.

For all their rich variety and diversity, the barrios of Caracas share similar histories of urban-rural migration, poverty, and marginality that differentiate and segregate them from the more affluent parts of the city. There is a strong contrast between the European-like cafes, wide streets, and secluded gardens of the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods; and the barrios with their bustling markets, improvised architecture, and the sounds of reggaeton and salsa coming from *minitecas*, or portable djays. As one observer noted, "The people of Prados del Este do not resemble those of El Guarataro, those of El Cafetal do not speak like those of Catia, the

music that floats through the streets of Petare is not the same as that which passes through the upper part of La Castellana."[20] Moving between these different areas of the city is like passing through distinct worlds, each with its own aesthetic, norms of interaction, and street culture.

Since 1983, the two halves of the city have been connected through a subway system known locally as the *Metro*. Sleek, clean, and efficient, the Metro rapidly transports nannies, busboys, waiters, public servants, maids, gardeners, and students from their homes in the east of Caracas to the center and west of the city, and then back home at the end of the day. Those who live in the popular housing blocks, like Johnny and Yajaira, are more likely to be closer to the subway stops and have somewhat better access to services such as water and gas. By contrast, for those who live in the upper reaches of the barrio, in the ranchos, there is often a long wait for buses and less access to basic services. Despite developments that make it easier to traverse the city, the sharp inequalities between the east and west of the city remain salient, as do differences within the barrios themselves. The term "barrio" is technically used to refer to those poor, self-constructed neighborhoods that began as dispersed ranchos.[21] However, it has come to be used colloquially to describe poorer areas in general.

An important body of scholarship emerged in the 1960s to document and understand the problematic of urban segregation presented by shantytowns across Latin America. Some scholars sought to challenge what they saw as the "myth of marginality," debunking the idea that the shantytowns were peripheral and marginal to urban life.[22] Shantytown dwellers, they argued, were integrated into the life of the city and national politics through clientelist networks guaranteeing service provision in exchange for political votes and the struggles of neighborhood associations to improve their standard of living.[23] Contrary to notions of shantytowns as marginal zones or "cultures of poverty,"[24] these scholars argued that the urban poor were capable of social mobility, entrepreneurship, and political participation.

Revisiting these classical theories of marginality four decades later, a new generation of scholars reflected that the conditions of marginality that the scholars of the 1960s sought to challenge were being realized in contemporary societies.[25] Structural adjustment and neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s produced classical features of marginality such as unemployment, a growing informal sector, and barter economy, as well as social exclusion and violence.[26] In addition to producing the conditions of mar-

ginality, with the advance of neoliberal restructuring, the idea of marginality has reemerged in the social imaginary of Latin American urban societies.[27] Intensified rural immigration to the cities, growing poverty and segregation, and rising insecurity have led to the criminalization of poorer sectors, which are seen to disrupt the order and health of the city.[28] In Caracas, the poorer areas are generally referred to as the *barrios marginales* (marginal barrios) or *zonas marginales* (marginal zones). Understanding this new geography of power and marginality in the city is crucial to understanding how it may also be the site for a new kind of politics.

Cities have played a major strategic role in contemporary processes of social change in Latin America, especially given the urban concentration of the population. According to Saskia Sassen, from the start of the 1980s the city emerged as an important terrain for new conflicts and claims by both global capital and disadvantaged sectors of the population concentrated in urban areas.[29] As emerging elite classes became increasingly powerful and transnational under processes of neoliberal restructuring, the urban informal working class has become the fastest-growing class on the planet.[30] Disconnected from the formal economy, lacking structures of unionization or access to social welfare, and stigmatized by the middle classes, the "new cities of poverty" are important sites for political organizing. The burgeoning population of an informal working class located in shantytowns and shacks on the margins of major cities has implications for the sociology of protest that have been largely unexplored.

In the wake of James Scott's characterizations of "micro politics" as everyday forms of resistance, scholars of Latin America have provided rich accounts of consciousness and culture among urban shanty dwellers in a neoliberal era. Authors focus on humorous storytelling, popular Christianity, spirit possession cults, evangelical Protestantism, and everyday debates as means by which the urban poor negotiate, challenge, and reproduce the conditions of marginality.[31] Others look at how emerging urban informal classes adapt new strategies to confront the retreat of the state and the lack of public services. In contexts of material hardship, Javier Auyero shows that clientelist practices may reemerge as a means of survival and problem solving.[32] As the state retreats from tasks of security and policing, urban residents step in to administer justice through vigilante lynchings.[33] But alongside these everyday forms of resistance and survival are also growing spaces for popular participation, where the urban poor