

# URBAN SCENARIOS

It is the end of the century and we are in a place called Villabrava, a crooked city that sits atop steep slopes and nestles in deep ravines, twisting along the contours of the northern Andes and down toward pristine Caribbean beaches. The sun beats down on red clay rooftops, fierce and unrelenting. The rain, when its season comes, falls in biblical proportions. The coast is battered by tidal storms and gale-force winds. Flash floods destroy the makeshift homes that crawl precariously up the foothills. Now and then, the earth quakes. Older buildings, made of stone and timber, are toppled by this tectonic movement. Volatile and violent, this unpredictable microclimate shapes the character of the *villabravenses*. Behind closed doors, in the basin of the valley, the hubristic residents of the grand town houses fester in their decadence. Their dubious allegiances through marriage, business, and politics are like rot to the city's social composition. Up above, those exposed to the elements in the hillside barrios are aggressive and impulsive. Theirs are lives of vice and degeneracy, devoid of any moral grounding. Between these extremes walks one Julián Hidalgo, the hero of our story and a man who seeks redemption for his compatriots. Hidalgo descends from a line of fearsome tribal warriors that was decimated with the arrival of the Europeans, harboring disease and murderous intentions. His past is one of petty crime and misdemeanors. But his spirit, hailing from the heights of tropical mountain forests, seems destined for leadership and greatness.

Angry and rebellious, Hidalgo channels these ancestral forces into a regenerative political project for Villabrava, championing the cause of socialist reform and rallying support from the city's working sectors. Taking leave from his usual company of poets, intellectuals, doctors, journalists, and lawyers, who convene in private clubs, Hidalgo proselytizes in public spaces. Crowds gather in old taverns and city squares to hear his diatribes against high society, and they are shocked by his diagnoses. Villabrava, he

declares, is suffering from the lasting effects of a multitude of ills: miscegenation, colonialism, nepotism, immorality, debauchery, egotism, and exploitation. This toxic combination has caused the city to stagnate, plagued by hypocrisies and double standards among the ruling classes. In the name of the fatherland, Hidalgo sets out to shame the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and does so, he claims, on behalf of the disenfranchised urban masses. He will fight for revolution and give his life for freedom, setting an example for the city's poorest. For inciting unrest, he is imprisoned by the city's governorship and sentenced by a military tribunal. Eventually, Hidalgo is pardoned, but nonetheless, his fate is sealed when he murders his girlfriend's father, who is also his mother's lover—a former military general and Hidalgo's natural enemy within this social order. For all his good intentions, he cannot resist the pull of death and is met, in turn, with the same fatal ending as his antagonist. Hidalgo is not to be blamed entirely for his tragic downfall, nor for the failure of his campaign. Villabrava is a saturnine city that devours its inhabitants.

This story could be read as a fictional rendition of recent history, as though it were set at the turn of the millennium, in twenty-first-century Venezuela. The principal tenets of the Bolivarian Revolution, the groundbreaking movement that came to power in 1999, resonate in Hidalgo's egalitarian convictions. His efforts to incorporate the city's low-income barrios in nation-making projects were duplicated by Hugo Chávez, the divisive figurehead who brought the idiom of socialism to the center of Venezuelan state formation. Hidalgo himself resembles the polemical politician in character, rhetoric, upbringing, resolve, and temperament.<sup>1</sup> But this was the plot of a *costumbrista* novel, entitled *Todo un pueblo*, written by Venezuelan author Miguel Eduardo Pardo in 1899, a century before the emergence of the Bolivarian movement. It was the first substantial piece of fiction to take Caracas as its protagonist, creating a rich literary tableau of the Venezuelan capital, and the first novel that turned its gaze toward the city's informal settlements. Pardo's theatrical version of Caracas and its barrios, animated by local customs and folklore, would have resonated with a fin-de-siècle, Spanish-speaking audience. From his residence in Madrid, after long stays in Paris, Pardo viewed his birthplace, then home to some 80,000 inhabitants, through the heuristic lens of nineteenth-century Europe. Flaubert, Tolstoy, Balzac, and Zola were all cited in the pseudo-realist text that was afforded a picaresque tone by the interjections of the satirical narrator. He, in turn, imagined these masters' disdainful reactions should they ever have visited the former colonial outpost, "a most painful spectacle of our present moment."<sup>2</sup> Special scorn was reserved for its aristocracy, "insufferable, frivolous, useless beyond belief," and its proletariat, "scandalous, disorderly,

*mestizo*, awful . . . Reckless, feral, and perverse, all as a result of their humiliating treatment.”<sup>3</sup>

While the author paid homage to the literary figures of the day, he made less-explicit mention of the epistemologies that framed this dim portrait of Caracas. *Todo un pueblo* adopted recognizable novelistic formulae to convey emergent ideas about urban degeneration that had gained currency under the name of positivism, or *positivismo* in its Latin American inflection.<sup>4</sup> *Positivismo* drove toward progress in society and politics, where progress was aligned with racial purity, strong leadership, national sovereignty, enlightened ideals, and the accumulation of capital to metropolitan quantities and standards. It was a viewpoint that at once acknowledged teleological variabilities and yet also saw destiny trump freedom and free will in a triumph of fatalist reason. So the material realities of history, the environment, the city, its politics, and its demography intermingled to produce complex effects that were then attributed to the innate and immutable properties of each contributing factor. Inspired by the quantitative methods of the natural sciences that had, in the previous century, advanced groundbreaking findings, *positivismo* made abundant use of measurements, taxonomies, labels, diagrams, and catalogs in its studies of society. This was useful at a time when global powers and classes were realigning after the end of the Iberian Empire: it was deployed to make sense of impending worldly chaos. Like many *positivistas*, Pardo channeled his vitriol toward the decaying creole aristocracy, who he believed were primarily responsible for the lamentable state of affairs in Venezuela. His despairing of this class was matched only by his disdain for the demographic that Hidalgo called the *populacho*, or *la plebe*, located at the bottom of the city’s pecking order in the positivist hierarchies clearly delineated by *Todo un pueblo*. In Pardo’s eyes, *la plebe* consisted of the unemployed, the underemployed, the illiterate, and the criminal: they were the offspring of a clash of cultures; the shirtless lumpen. Distinguished from *la plebe* was the law-abiding *pueblo*: they were honorable and hardworking, akin to the feudal peasantry, and they represented the possibility of a better future. In proportioning blame for this sorry state of urban life, Pardo absolved the people—“the *pueblo*, the true *pueblo* of Villabrava”—as innocent victims of degradation.<sup>5</sup>

Pardo’s differentiation between *la plebe* and *el pueblo* was one that drew on Marx and Engels’s systemic delineation of class, as set out in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx and Engels were notoriously hostile toward the lumpenproletariat, a term we may take as a Germanic equivalent to *la plebe*, whom they considered a threat to revolutionary transcendence: “The ‘dangerous class’ [*lumpenproletariat*], the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society,” so they wrote, “may,

here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.”<sup>6</sup> The lumpen—the hordes, the rabble, the mobs, and the masses that gathered in industrial cities—was an untrustworthy, shapeshifting lot that was to be distinguished from the proletariat. A more noble class, the proletariat was the driving force of revolutionary history and would be critical in overturning the capitalist system. “By abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation,” continued Marx and Engels, the proletariat would therefore abolish “every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurance of, individual property.”<sup>7</sup> Put simply, the emancipation of the proletariat would overturn class domination and bring about an end to subordination and oppression by depriving the capitalist economy of its energy and raw materials. On these grounds, the proletariat could be conceived as a “universal class,” inasmuch as its interests converged with the interests of society at large; it could embody the struggle to free *all* classes from the chains of the capitalist system.<sup>8</sup> The multiple demands of many different groups—each exploited in its own way—would be united under the common banner of the proletarian revolution. This was not to say that the coherence of this universal class, which we might also term *el pueblo*, would come without any struggles or internal tensions. On the contrary, for some, *el pueblo* must be understood as “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,” which, as Marx and Engels acknowledged, could come to include the *lumpen* and other groups deemed hostile to revolution.<sup>9</sup> Such malleability meant that *el pueblo* was often idealized in the image of opposing classes or causes, standing instead for the values of capitalist reproduction. For Pardo, for example, *el pueblo* did not champion the rise of a communist order; rather, it enshrined the liberal principles of decency, honesty, purity, accountability, and obedience.<sup>10</sup>

Pardo’s distinction between *el pueblo* and *la plebe*, as this book will demonstrate, became foundational in the Venezuelan political imagination with the acceleration of urbanization in the early 1900s.<sup>11</sup> Pardo’s narrator implied that their differentiation stemmed primarily from the inherent characteristics that each group was understood to possess, although, like Marx, he also recognized that their categorization was dependent on their relationship to their observer.<sup>12</sup> This meant that *la plebe* could also be transformed into *el pueblo* and back again, not only as a result of internal reconfigurations but also as and when it befitted certain regimes and their representatives. Moreover, *la plebe* became a useful social designator in that

it allowed for the identification, and rejection, of the groups to be excluded from certain political projects. Probing this process, *Todo un pueblo* captured a moment when would-be politicians in Venezuela had begun to rethink their relationship with the inhabitants of growing cities, especially in its burgeoning capital. With the timid arrival of electoral democracy in other parts of the world, political agency and historical consciousness were under debate, and the power of grassroots organizing was acknowledged by industrial figureheads. The bourgeoisie recognized that modernity was fueled by the exertions of the manual workforce, driven by laborers in factories and miners in coalfields, and that their unionization could revolutionize state making and national politics. In proximity to these communities, there were opportunities for leadership among individuals who could stake no claim to aristocratic heritage but who promised dignity for the working sectors. Coal power catalyzed what we could call the first embodied democracies, whereby bodies were used as political instruments in mass mobilizations, empowered by the collective withdrawal of labor. Meanwhile, in Venezuela, a country lacking a sizable industrial workforce, the ambitions of such leaders hinged on the emotive backing of *el pueblo* that, so they claimed, would benefit from their governance. The appearance of oil as a transformational source of energy that created maximum capital with minimal labor would eventually galvanize this disembodied style of politics.<sup>13</sup>

In the national imaginary, then, popular identities were tied to the rise of charismatic leaders who sought to rouse passionate ideological sentiments among an increasingly urbanized base of supporters, which they conceived, romantically, as *el pueblo*. While their careers depended on their relationship with the urban masses, at the same time, politicians like Hidalgo also were afraid that these same masses could rupture with nascent notions of democratic consent, if their mobilizing potential was left unharnessed. The urban poor were believed to be of an intrinsically aggressive disposition, and sometimes, this could be a source of authority for national statesmen and would-be leaders. They found strength in urban mobilizations and protests when this coincided with their agenda, especially in mounting revolutions against the ruling order. But forging a relationship with supporters that depended on the exploitation of violence generated the risk of mutiny, counter-revolution, and insurrection. Any politician conspiring to seize power from his rivals could later receive treatment with his own medicine. When power was consolidated, political subjectivity became equated with obedience and compliance; any signs of rebellion, when this rebellion exceeded the social contract, transformed *el pueblo* into *la plebe*. Pardo recognized this instability and these identities' contingency on their mediation by figures of authority, describing how both classes cohabited in the city's "barrios apartados"

(peripheral neighborhoods), “rancherías” (shantytowns), “arroyos” (gutters), or “arrabales” (slums).<sup>14</sup> These were the expressions used by the narrator to mean what architects today call “informal settlements.”<sup>15</sup> They were precarious neighborhoods built upon privately or publicly owned land, largely without legal permissions, where connections to national infrastructures were terse, stretched, or broken. The barrios as Pardo described them, albeit largely undocumented in maps, archives, and literary works, had existed since the foundation of Caracas in 1567 by Diego de Losada. They were the result of the land-grabbing practices that had escalated in the Americas with the arrival of the conquistadors, which were ultimately the defining feature of colonial state formation.<sup>16</sup> Some teetered on the slopes of the Ávila, the great mountain that towered over the capital city, and others clustered on the outskirts, where land was readily available, cheap, and unproductive. Others still took smaller plots in the city center, squeezed between colonial townhouses and gated mansions, where the descendants of the *encomenderos* had the paperwork to show for their occupations. At the turn of the twentieth century, as the number of their inhabitants grew, the barrios began to make an appearance in public discourse: they became prominent features in political rhetoric, journalism, and literature. Oftentimes, however, their presence in these domains was overdetermined by their representatives, who designated the barrios as *el pueblo* or *la plebe*, and by the anxieties generated by the fluidity of these categories.

The increasing attention afforded to the barrios at the turn of the twentieth century hinged on the recognition in political theory that the urban poor had acquired important historical subjectivity that was bound to its identity as an unpropertied collective. There was another reason for this focus on the barrios, revealed between the lines of *Todo un pueblo*: they were the drivers of the novel’s internal economy, whereby the lifestyles of its wealthier characters were dependent on the cheap services and the low-cost labor they provided. To these settlements had arrived the owners of agrarian smallholdings who had been displaced by a century of civil wars and, as a result, a decline in agricultural productivity. So, too, were the barrios home to the formerly enslaved and their descendants, indebted by the purchase of their freedom and prevented by law to acquire land or property.<sup>17</sup> They were the destination for members of indigenous communities who had been systematically deprived of their territories. Those who could not build their homes in the barrios could find rent that was affordable on minimal salaries, kept low by the buildings’ paralegal status. Many searched for work in the city’s growing service industries or made and sold goods as artisans and small-time merchants. With few resources and minimal state support, residents mounted basic services like drinking wells, thorough-

fares, stairways, drainage, and waste disposal systems. Their contributions to Caracas, in material and economic terms, were central to decades of intense city building that resulted in the transformation of Venezuela.<sup>18</sup>

And yet, it was not this centrality that was the focus of *Todo un pueblo* but rather the marginality of the “peripheral neighborhoods.” The material limitations of the services sustained in impoverished communities were ascribed by the narrator to deficiencies in character and moral hygiene. The barrios were dirty and polluted, and he described how there festered bacteria, stray dogs, and vagabonds who reeked of alcohol and collapsed in attacks of manic laughter. The only hope, Pardo suggested, with no small trace of irony, was that the rains that poured each season, causing major floods and landslides, would annihilate these dreadful settlements and all the misery that they represented.<sup>19</sup> The narrator’s attitude—that the solution to abject poverty was the erasure of its symptoms by a higher entity—would long pervade among urban designers and policy makers in the Venezuelan capital. But it was precisely there, in these informal communities, steeped in colonial and postcolonial hemispheric history, as Pardo would also recognize, that the future of Venezuelan politics and culture resided.<sup>20</sup>

## SPATIAL CONTOURS

In the century that followed, Pardo would establish the viewpoint for writers to come, as dozens and then hundreds more would turn toward the barrios, either in their immediate surroundings or from a distance. The barrios were brought successively and systematically from the backdrop of *Todo un pueblo* to the foreground of the national imagination, even as their historical origins were gradually forgotten, and the barrios were approached as novel, fundamentally modern phenomena. This book traces this shift in the location of the barrio by examining its representation in literary and visual cultures at definitive junctures during transformative political administrations. It begins a decade after the publication of Pardo’s novel and culminates in the 1990s, before the beginnings of Bolivarian Socialism—a movement that, as I explain in the preface, claimed the barrios as its historical protagonist—and accounts for the rise of the barrios as a key component of *el pueblo*. At a structural level, the book takes the barrio to be an informal neighborhood, often built without legal permissions on precarious land, which typically houses a low-income population.<sup>21</sup> But the barrio is also more than this: it is a dynamic spatial arrangement, a political identity, a historical entity, and a cultural construct, formed by abstract and material processes that are co-constitutive and mutually dependent. The barrio comes into being at concrete locations, in certain parishes and dis-

tricts, but also in public institutions like schools, universities, hospitals, and prisons. It is summoned by the interactions that arise between groups and individuals of different classes and takes form in the national imagination. Like Pardo and the other figures whose work I scrutinize, I turn to the fields of narrative and discourse to explore the complexities of these composite living spaces. The twentieth century saw the rise of populist politics, which I understand alongside Margaret Canovan “as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society” that was instrumentalized by state makers who sought to draw support from these low-income sectors.<sup>22</sup> With this, representations of the barrios appeared incrementally in political speeches, campaign materials, newspapers, magazines, short stories, novels, films, autobiographies, poetry, and music. These texts, sounds, and images constitute the backbone of this study and have been created by a cross section of groups and individuals that includes aspiring politicians, cultural ambassadors, commercial filmmakers, radical intellectuals, student protestors, young offenders, and grassroots activists. Their stories have been shaped by the many intellectual currents that have tried to make sense of twentieth-century Caracas—positivism, liberalism, structuralism, materialism, poststructuralism—and which also inform my methods and approaches.

The sources under scrutiny constitute what Geoffrey Kantaris calls “the mental spatialisation of the city,” or the production of space in the realm of the imagination.<sup>23</sup> This is where urban practices, problems, and physical markers are translated into discourse and where they become signifiers of broader structural arrangements and tensions. In making this claim, Kantaris draws on Henri Lefebvre’s notion of “representational space,” whereby space is “directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’ but also of some artists.”<sup>24</sup> This is the first and freest of Lefebvre’s famous tripartite model of spatial categories organized by distinct specialized, and socialized, perspectives. This distinguishes “representational spaces” from a second category, “representations of space,” which is to say “conceptualized space, the space of scientists [and] planners.”<sup>25</sup> This takes the form of policy, cartography, design, and investment: it is the product of politicians, engineers, and architects who work in tandem and attempt to manage urban development. The third category is that of “spatial practice,” “which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation.”<sup>26</sup> These practices are the concrete expressions of the capital that is marshaled in infrastructure, its value aggregated by manual labor. It is the space of capitalists and workers. While Lefebvre’s model is useful in approximating cities as pluralistic and multifunctional entities, such dif-



differentiations place artificial limitations on the fields of the imagined, the political, and the physical. Delineating articulations of space according to the purposes they are designed to meet, Lefebvre draws boundaries around the producers and the products of these spatial configurations in ways that curb the elasticity of these concepts. According to this account, “the lived, conceived, and perceived realms [are] interconnected, so that the ‘subject,’ the individual member of a given social group, may move *from one to another* without confusion.”<sup>27</sup> But the idea of moving *between* these domains suggests that they are separate and sequential, not overlaying dimensions that perform simultaneous functions, and made by people who play multiple roles in the production of spaces that have heterogeneous uses. In other words, this overlooks the notion that a resident or an artist might also be a mapmaker, and that the creation of this map, and its circulation in space, is revelatory and constitutive of the politics of spatial production. Reading against the grain of Lefebvre’s distinct spatial categories, I seek to navigate obscured terrains of urban dialectics in the contemporary Caracas of the cultural imagination.

Close observation of barrio narratives demonstrates not only that these spaces are navigated in the realm of thought but also that the geography of this thinking tracks the movements of the city and its population. They are “representational spaces” that are also “representations of space” and that shape the power dynamics of “spatial practices.” These narratives also constitute cartographic inscriptions that, knowingly or otherwise, take Caracas itself as an empirical object of inquiry and intervene in its creation. Simultaneously, they cast the barrios as unknown terrains in the urban sphere and, hence, as territories available for occupation. This desire to map the informal city, which, not incidentally, also underlies the thrust of this study, reveals how, over the course of the twentieth century, what had once been a rural nation became one of the most urbanized countries in the Americas.<sup>28</sup> In 1926, some 15 percent of Venezuelans lived in urban spaces. By 1971, the number of urban residents had risen to over 75 percent. Many of Caracas’s newest residents—its migrants and its children—contributed to the construction of informal neighborhoods built outside of legal frameworks. Their homes became known as *ranchos*, which, in the national census of 1950, totaled some 19,000. Three years later, a more rigorous study undertaken by the Banco Obrero, in preparation for a major demolition project, counted around 54,000 of these rudimentary buildings.<sup>29</sup> They were districts that housed deeply rooted communities of multiple generations, who had established links to political parties and state institutions and who boasted long histories of grassroots activism and local organization. Despite this, depictions of these neighborhoods materialized infrequently in

state-produced cartographies or in legal archives, in academic studies, or in city registers.<sup>30</sup> For the most part, their appearance in these public records signified plans for their erasure. By the same token, their recognition in textual discourse led to their disappearance from the cityscape. Departing from Pardo, the intellectuals, artists, and authors who narrated these spaces often opposed the violent strategies used by the state to obliterate the barrios. Attracting special consternation were its policies of neglect, demolition, incarceration, military violence, physical abuse, and gentrification. Yet, in their own ways, many advocated the transformation of these spaces with political empowerment, welfare, and education that also—by different means—had their eradication as an ultimate objective. Paradoxically, then, these artistic depictions of the barrios created a cartography of urban settlements that were a focal point in the collective imaginary. At the same time, they also indexed a blind spot in the national subconscious, pinpointing these spaces for annihilation.<sup>31</sup>

This mapping of the barrios in film, images, and literature demonstrates how twentieth-century Caracas was a place of perennial transformation. From one fictional world to the next, the movements of characters around the districts of the capital blurred the logic of Pardo's "peripheral neighborhoods," undermining clear delineations between different districts. They stood in for demographic shifts and mass migrations that plotted the orbit of revolving spatial constellations. They showed Caracas to be a city of few stable referents or cardinal points; it did not lend itself to fixed depictions. Such elusion was fitting for the capital of a nation that Adriano González León would name, in his seminal 1968 Seix Barral novel, *País portátil*. The locations of the barrios changed over time and along rotational axes that were correlative to injections of capital. High-rise tower blocks, gated communities, and leafy suburbs were built, quite literally, on the ruins of smaller homes and *ranchos*, funded by mixed state enterprises and private developers. Often, their middle-class residents had fled from pockets of urban decay, creating what some would see as cavities and vacuums. These were filled, in turn, with the widespread construction of low-cost buildings erected with cheap and readily available materials. The expenditure required for the creation of each individual structure was comparatively low, but together, eventually numbering hundreds of thousands, these homes represented an enormous collective investment. As authors and artists charted this waltzing sprawl of the city, so, too, did they document the geographic history of state interventions in these neighborhoods—what I will call its territorializing impulses to appropriate the barrios. In documenting this territorialization, they mapped the physical construction of prisons, schools, universities, cultural institutes, and hospitals as different branches of the

state and recorded the interactions of these institutions with the residents of low-income areas. They observed the multiple forms of control inscribed upon their bodies, their actions, their routines, and their movements. They noted the arrival of political parties and electoral campaigns in the barrios at times of opportunity and lamented the arrival of security forces and the military during times of crisis. Their texts commented on the ways in which these organs of the state interpolated the barrios and the ways in which these barrios were imbricated in their foundational logic. Either directly or indirectly, they showed how the barrios resisted ideological appropriation by evading permanent capture in electoral politics and by creating non-state groupings that fought against the juggernaut of modern state development.

This is not to say, of course, that these acts of narrative mapping were disinterested or apolitical. The narratives that approximated the barrios can also be analyzed within the paradigm of Lefebvre's "spatial practices," or treated as the material *products* of the social antagonisms that propel this notion. After all, the books and films containing these stories about the city were also objects that found physical expression as etchings on tape and paper. They formed part of a disparate archive that moved around the city's different districts, transported by the circulation of capital. They were commodities that placed a price on depictions of urban poverty and that, in many instances, generated profits for their makers. So, too, did these cultural commodities seek to territorialize these neighborhoods, if not at the polls then on the market. As such, they were entangled in the politics of what Fredric Jameson calls the "culture industry," drawing on the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, which he defined unforgivingly as "a branch of the interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture."<sup>32</sup> Much can be learned by peering inside the mechanisms of this industry, following the trajectories of texts and images between the sites of their production and their consumption. We have seen already how, throughout the twentieth century, Caracas was transformed into one of the largest cities on the continent. With the concomitant expansion of the domestic economy, the city grew also in its number of consumers. Audiences sought entertainment, information, identification, and self-validation, and they did so, often, by turning toward the barrios. By tracking their interpretations of the barrios in cultural discourse (as preserved in reviews, scholarly studies, sales charts, and interviews) and the ways in which these interpretations then determine the trajectories of these materials (in market trends, intellectual movements, and the careers of cultural practitioners), this book documents the evolution of the Venezuelan cultural industry while sketching out the hopes, fears, and aspirations of readers and spectators.

We will see how, in the 1920s and 1930s, informal neighborhoods featured incrementally in chronicles and short stories, written by the first generation of professionalized Venezuelan wordsmiths, who were trained in cities across Latin America and Europe. With the arrival of the silver screen in the late 1940s, the barrios became the stars of an incipient national film industry that was modeled on the factory-line productions of neighboring countries such as Mexico and Argentina. In the 1960s, and especially in the 1970s, the Venezuelan box office was dominated by Hollywood gang movies and police thrillers that were set in the gritty underbellies of New York and Los Angeles. Protectionist laws prompted the creation of Venezuelan features in this ilk, transporting the cops-and-robbers chase to Caracas. Meanwhile, national book charts were topped by sensationalistic accounts of true crime and violence that defined life and death for their protagonists. These promised insight into the mindsets of adolescent criminals and would-be masterminds driven to lives of vice and violence. In the 1980s and 1990s, poetry collectives imagined an efficient and integrated city, spurred by the arrival of the Metro, which brought Caracas up to speed with Tokyo, New York, and Barcelona. Skeptical of this optimism, some drew attention instead to the disintegration of basic services in health and housing and to the deep class differences that polarized Venezuela. At the same time, commercial salsa music cast a spotlight on ordinary families in low-income districts, highlighting their trials and tribulations. What these narratives had in common, for all their important differences, was that they benefited from the commercial appeal of sex, poverty, violence, crime, and conflict. Doing so, they contributed to the promulgation of what could be called slum cultures, crystallizing identities that drew lines between the residents of formal and informal settlements.

## MAPPING HISTORY

The roles performed by cultural discourse in buffering such dualistic urban distinctions are probed by Ángel Rama in his seminal text, *The Lettered City*, which takes a geographic approach toward the history of colonial expansion in the Americas.<sup>33</sup> Rama argues that, since the foundation of the Hispanic metropolis, its *letrados*—or the men of letters, who formed part of the political elite—worked in the interests of the state in projecting its values and ensuring compliance among its subjects, while maintaining erect the boundaries between the *República de españoles* and the *República de indios*. In this endeavor, written discourse served to extend the nexus of power that emanated from colonial seats of authority and functioned as a scaffold to support sovereign social orders. In the early twentieth century, with the

birth of the welfare state and after a century of independence, the *letrados* sought to incorporate urban marginality, or para-legality, into the national imagination, while also protecting the privileges associated with their social status. For all their inclusive rhetoric, the *letrados* exhibited an anxiety toward this demographic of the city that was socially, and economically, mobile and thus blurred the distinctions between identities, classes, and neighborhoods that had been carefully fashioned by the Spanish. Building on this concept, Jean Franco argues that, in the second half of the twentieth century, the diversification of the cultural industry that accompanied the Cuban Revolution “breach[ed] the walls of the lettered city” to break with the trends identified by Rama.<sup>34</sup> “In a more narrow sense,” she writes, “the changes destabilized the literary intelligentsia, altering cultural institutions such as the book industry and forcing a reassessment of the intellectual’s relationship to the new order.”<sup>35</sup> Tentatively, Franco suggests, these historical shifts facilitated the circulation of new kinds of discourse that served as sticking points in the hierarchies sustained by the *letrados*, which were determined by markers of race, religion, language, class, ethnicity, and gender. By the end of the century, those who had been excluded from the lettered city were granted access to the sphere of culture, while still often marginalized by the state: their practices eroded dichotomous constructs and sought to engender horizontalist collectives, as they were buoyed by an expanding global market. Frequently, however, the withdrawal of the state that permitted this circulation of these ideas was accompanied by the aggressive encroachments of a violent, unchecked neoliberal order. This was a system that projected illusions of freedom and equality, especially in the city, but reasserted an unforgivingly asymmetrical regime of geopolitics.

This book charts the rise and fall of different modes of governance in Venezuela, interrogating Rama’s and Franco’s accounts of the transition from colonial to state to market powers. It uncovers the links between the evolution of the oil economy and the growth of the barrios as these have become entwined in divergent routes of national development. Mapping the layout of the lettered city in its different articulations, it analyzes how they converge to shape the figure of the *letrado*. Rather than frame the state and the market as separate entities that function interchangeably, as suggested by Rama and Franco, I contend that they work in tandem, although sometimes at odds, in the pursuit of shared territorializing objectives.<sup>36</sup> During the twentieth century, the Venezuelan state developed in parallel with the global demand for carbon, creating an extractivist political economy that afforded legitimacy to a demagogic style of leadership which, based on imperial premises, sought to expand the geographic reach of the state and thus increase its offerings to the market.<sup>37</sup> These leaders, and their representa-

tives, benefited from enterprises of mineral extraction, spending profits on the tools of state formation, and operated within the paradigms of a neo-feudal system that had been established by the Spanish conquest.<sup>38</sup> In times of prosperity, they invested in welfare. They sponsored violence at moments of contraction. This, in turn, would give substance to the developmentalist ideology of the postcolonial state and improve its capacity for the accumulation of capital.<sup>39</sup> Many of the narratives under scrutiny here coalesce around the challenges posed to this extractive order, taking the forms of conspiracies, coups d'état, collective mobilizations, community activism, protests, riots, and demonstrations, enacted either in or on behalf of the barrios that were the targets of many such state occupations. These insurrections were political statements and collective declarations of discontent and were cast as revolutionary junctures in the historic imagination. They were moments that would engender change in social and economic structures by undermining authoritarian leaders and democratizing national governance. But these deviations that led away from tired regimes and exhausted systems eventually returned to the same hierarchical formulations, corresponding not to linear teleologies but instead to cyclical patterns and repetitions in territorializing practices. In other words, history was determined by space, not by time, and by clashes between competing factions to acquire, sustain, and defend valuable territories that included, but were not limited to, the barrios—spaces that housed increasing numbers of the electorate.<sup>40</sup> While the precise settings of these texts changed over the course of the twentieth century, they plotted familiar tales about age-old conflicts. More importantly, they told stories and revealed deep-seated assumptions about the places where such territorial struggles were reenacted.

This spatialized view of time has implications for the structure of this book. Broadly, the periods under scrutiny are determined by the moments when state territorialization in the barrios was vigorously pursued and when it was energetically resisted. Part 1 begins with the Juan Vicente Gómez military regime (1908–1935) and the emergence of an organized political opposition that came to prominence in the 1920s, known as the *generación del 28* (Generation of '28), a faction of which later evolved into the social democratic party Acción Democrática (AD) and went on to dominate twentieth-century Venezuelan politics. Experimenting with political models that drew on lessons from the Mexican Revolution, AD claimed to forge a break with *gomecismo* and the *letrados* who had worked in Gómez's interests. In doing so, it sought, but largely failed, to secure electoral support from the low-income urban sectors by promoting democracy, welfare, and education; instead, it would turn its attentions to the countryside. Part 2 considers the short-lived period of democracy led by AD that culminated

the *trienio* in 1948 and the shift to, and from, the military dictatorship ultimately led by a middle-ranking officer, Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–1958). Like the *trienio*, the Pérez Jiménez administration viewed the barrios as an obstacle to its vision of modernity, although its solution took the form of bulldozers, not ballots, in securing control of these neighborhoods. Informal settlements were demolished to be replaced by high-rise, cosmopolitan housing projects that, in turn, would transform their residents into modern, obedient citizens, converted from *la plebe* to *el pueblo*. The end of this regime gave way to four decades of bipartisan democracy that was known as *puntofijismo*, dominated by AD and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI), another political legacy of the *generación del 28*. Part 3 accounts for the state violence that accompanied the transition to *puntofijismo*, extending into the early 1970s, under the administration of *copeista* Rafael Caldera (1969–1974). The first decade of democracy saw the rise of armed urban insurgency and, subsequently, the aggressive policing of those parts of the city that posed a challenge to the *puntofijista* order. Part 4 centers on the economic crisis of 1983, beneath the watch of Jaime Lusinchi (1984–1989), and the Caracazo riots that erupted six years afterward, during the second presidency of AD stalwart Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989–1993). This decade saw the state's retreat from the barrios in the provision of basic services and its reassertion with the deployment of military interventions that recalled the strategies deployed by Caldera and other predecessors. The book closes at the end of the millennium with the beginnings of the Bolivarian Revolution headed by Hugo Chávez (1999–2013), which promised to bring the urban margins to the center of state formation while resurrecting the welfare programs designed by AD a century earlier.

As many scholars have demonstrated, the territorial struggles that have defined the material and social topographies of Caracas during these periods are bound up with the insertion of the South American nation into the global economy as a major supplier of crude oil in the aftermath of World War I. In this, Fernando Coronil's magisterial work *The Magical State* is especially instructive. For Coronil, the Venezuelan nation-state is a gatekeeper to the mineral resources that, in late modernity, have fueled transnational capitalist production. While this affords dominance to political leaders and entities in the domestic realm, it ensures subservience to global market interests: "Paradoxically, in pursuit of their comparative advantage, these nature-exporting nations are frequently recast in their old colonial role as sources of primary products, a role now rewritten in terms of the neoliberal rationality of globalizing capitalism."<sup>41</sup> In making this point, Coronil aligns with thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and Arturo

Escobar, who have sought to integrate their analyses of the workings of the postcolonial nation-state within the territorializing mechanisms of a capitalist world-system.<sup>42</sup> Scrutinizing the political configurations of the Andean nations that produce oil, coal, gas, iron ore, gold, silver, and copper, this school of thought understands the state as a mode of governance molded by the requisites of extractive industries. As Martín Arboleda puts it, the state is “the political form of market liberty.”<sup>43</sup> To wit, “the process of capitalist accumulation on a world scale can often assume the distorted political forms of an imperialist or subimperialist intervention.”<sup>44</sup> This, in turn, is premised on the capture of ground rents and reinforces feudal structures with the conflation of land, power, and capital within a territorial order of imperial expansion. During the foundational years of the Venezuelan oil economy, when the first legal and political frameworks were put in place to manage the industry, the state fashioned itself as the landlord of the nation’s subsoil and, as Coronil would have it, cast a spell on ordinary Venezuelan citizens by transforming petrodollars into collective illusions of modernity and progress.<sup>45</sup> Correspondingly, the citizenry was cast as the country’s neofeudal peasants; they were the passive beneficiaries of the nation-state’s benevolence and, in return for political loyalty, were permitted to reside on its landed holdings. In populist discourse, *el pueblo* was represented as the historical agent that instigated and sustained national development; in reality, it was the audience of a spectacle, tricked into believing it was the sorcerer.

This is one version of the story to be told about the history of oil and its role in delimiting political action. But there exists another—about popular agency, mobilization, and collective empowerment—that acknowledges the power of the masses. Contra Coronil, certain historians and anthropologists have emphasized the plurality of grassroots movements and the political significance of the protests that have challenged state attempts to assert its influence and extend clientelism to the barrios.<sup>46</sup> Alejandro Velasco argues that the demands and actions of the urban poor have consistently exceeded hegemonic delineations of *el pueblo*, altering the course of recent Venezuelan history and radicalizing the landscape of national politics.<sup>47</sup> In a similar vein, George Ciccariello-Maher claims that the urbanizing drive of the oil economy has compressed revolutionary activity not on the factory floor or in the mine shaft but, instead, in informal neighborhoods. Together, these authors emphasize the fact that, historically, Caracas has not provided regulated work to the group that in manually productive capitalist societies might be called the proletariat.<sup>48</sup> Instead, with the growth of the oil industry, the city became a hub for managers and bureaucrats who were required to oversee the administration of the sector. Those with qualifications and



contacts were met with abundant opportunities in white-collar employment based in the Venezuelan capital. Those with lower levels of schooling and less expendable social currency, however, did not enter the factories and the coalfields in massive numbers, as they had in nineteenth-century Europe. Rather, the majority was integrated into the casual, informal economy, becoming street vendors, service workers, and domestic servants. They had limited access to representation by interest groups and trade unions, which typically were designed to protect the mutual interests of businesses and government, and were alienated by the workings of a centrist bipartisan system.<sup>49</sup> This meant that the vectors of class conflict were to be found not in broad-based activism but rather with the organic emergence of geographically rooted collectives. These groups embraced community activism and championed neighborhood issues, transforming the *barrio* into a political identity and assuming protest and mobilization as strategic bargaining instruments. In this sense, Ciccariello-Maher writes, “class demands have been subsumed to territorial, neighborhood demands that manifest, above all, *politically*,” making of the *barrios* a historical protagonist.<sup>50</sup> These groups supported the rise of Chávez as a transcendental political actor, whom they treat, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe would have it, as an “empty signifier.”<sup>51</sup> This would lay the ground for what Ciccariello-Maher calls “territorialized socialism,” whereby *barrio* residents have claimed communal rights to power, goods, and property.<sup>52</sup>

## A NOTE ON METHODS, SOURCES, AND STRUCTURE

Through the lens of cultural studies, this interdisciplinary book mediates between these dialectical perspectives on the forms of power, agency, and leadership that are established between state and citizenry in the capital city of a postcolonial, oil-producing nation. It acknowledges the possibility that an individual, group, or entity may be simultaneously marginalized and dominant and explores this as a productive paradox. Doing so, it attempts to cut through the *parti-pris* posturing that has come to define much research on Venezuela. Though such work is valuable in discerning the tensions that have come to the foreground with the Bolivarian Revolution, it often fails to address the historical roots of these antagonisms, to consider how polarization might affect cultural discourse and analysis of it, or to think outside the delimitations of ideological positioning. In my close readings of the texts that follow, I challenge those who maintain that cultural narratives merely *reflect* the world around us, as though books, films, and artworks were mirrors held by their makers to their present moment. Instead, I highlight the manifold social functions of these artifacts,

both in their making and in their consumption. As I demonstrate, cultural production can act as a channel for class anxieties, as a sphere for negotiating political collectives and for formulating political resistance, as a testing ground for populist ideas and policies, as a means of rewriting history, and as a source of dignity, power, and profit. By collating a sample of the many stories that have been told about the barrios, I show how authors and artists map changes and continuities in urban expansion, commenting on issues such as mass migration, the criminalization of poverty, the growth of the oil industry, and the outcomes of state-making projects. Their ideas and opinions have had a tangible impact on the material realm: their work has shaped trends in politics and society, even when this has not necessarily been their intention. In pursuing this idea, I draw on Jameson's understanding of narrative discourse as the repository of what he calls "the political unconscious." Narrative discourse reveals "a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality," which are articulated—often in disharmony—at the levels of style, form, and content.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the data processed in the fields of sociology, economics, and politics, narrative discourse harbors the *experience* of dialectical relations, which, for Jameson, is "more immediately visible and available for study and reflection than in more apparently empirical sciences."<sup>54</sup> Along with Jameson, I contend that stories are a source of rich academic inquiry that can help us better understand the machinations of history and our roles within it.

My approach to cultural production in twentieth-century Venezuela has been inspired by scholars of Latin American culture including John Beverley, Néstor Canclini, Roberto González Echevarría, Beatriz González-Stephan, Jean Franco, Ángel Rama, Ana López, Carlos Monsiváis, and George Yúdice. Produced, for the most part, from the vantage point of North American institutions, their work has surveyed and interrogated the region's dominant cultural trends, centering predominantly on Mexico and Central America, the Southern Cone, and Cuba. Historically, for reasons too numerous and complex to detail here, less international attention has been directed toward Venezuela. An important exception is González-Stephan's *Fundaciones: Canon, historia, y cultura nacional*, a history of nineteenth-century liberal literature with a focus on the poetry and prose penned by the forefathers of Venezuelan independence. In her observations of the tendencies that characterized the study of literature in this period, she highlights three principal objectives. First, by conducting empirical inquiries into the texts that had been written at any given time, intellectuals set about creating and periodizing set literary corpora. Second, they analyzed these corpora to detect common trends in authorship, production,

themes, tropes, and distribution, thus identifying salient moments, groups, and movements, often using a philosophical framework to sustain their interpretations. Third, they subjected these methods to historical scrutiny, questioning the means deployed to reach such conclusions and asking how these approaches, too, were conditioned by empirical factors. The outcome was a national literary historiography.<sup>55</sup> By adopting and adapting these methods in her own work, González-Stephan helped establish this as one of the field's most prominent lines of inquiry. She has been joined by the likes of Arturo Almandoz, Luisela Alvaray, Elizabeth Barrios, Lisa Blackmore, Luis Duno-Gottberg, Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols, and, more recently, many others, whose book-length investigations depart from these studies in twentieth-century Venezuelan culture to look at the cultural production of the Chávez era.<sup>56</sup> With recourse to their findings, and in placing these in a broader spatiotemporal context, I seek to offer a history of Venezuelan cultural production that will further facilitate its incorporation into the remit of Latin American cultural studies, allowing for the identification and interrogation of intra-regional and transhistorical phenomena. The methods, approaches, and conclusions developed here might be applied in comparable settings to the cultures of urban development in other postcolonial and extractive contexts.

For its part, *Representing the Barrios* takes a consciously dialectical approach that is most immediately discernible in its structure. Each of the book's four sections contains a pair of chapters that juxtaposes works which, to my knowledge, have not yet been considered in tandem, to compare and contrast discursive approaches to the barrios that use the same mode of production. In some cases, the second text can be read as a rewriting or a reinterpretation of the first and comments metatextually on its production. Typically, one of the chapters in each part tends toward theoretical scholarly debates, while the other is more preoccupied with historical empiricism. Individually, each chapter reflects on the opportunities and constraints offered by particular forms and genres of cultural discourse in enacting resistance to hegemonic powers and hierarchical structures. The politics of these texts are determined, to a degree, by the sympathies and backgrounds of their makers, although their ideas are exceeded by the material conditions that mold their discourse. Some authors approximate the barrios from an epistemological distance, assuming the capacity of an observer, commentator, ally, or spectator. Others self-identify as residents and representatives of the barrios and have direct lived knowledge of the spaces that are incorporated into their artistic practices. The majority tell their stories for distribution among national and international audiences, seeking to secure cross-sector appeal and broad support for their convictions, or

otherwise to maximize profits and consolidate their status. In outlining the biographies of these narrators, I consider how their positions in society influence their work while highlighting some of the commonalities that transcend differences in their social markers. Focusing on one primary source per chapter has allowed me to treat these texts as windows into the lives of *caraqueños* at discrete moments and in discrete places. I have examined the scenes that they depict from multidisciplinary viewpoints.<sup>57</sup> The texts have been chosen, in part, because they speak to the widespread preoccupations of the times in which they were written; in part, because they resist single lines of interpretation; and, in part, because they convey hegemonic impressions of the barrios, evidenced in their popularity or in their impact on contemporary thinking.

Part 1, “Writing Anxieties,” scrutinizes the class-inflected apprehensions of two canonical Venezuelan authors who were aligned with opposing sides of the Gómez dictatorship in the 1920s. Neither Rómulo Gallegos nor Teresa de la Parra are authors whose work is readily associated with the barrios, and yet both were concerned with urban informality, using the gothic mode to communicate their anxieties. Chapter 1 examines the early writing of Gallegos, published in local newspapers, magazines, and circulars, with a focus on his novella “La Rebelión” (1922), in which the popular urban subject made a faltering appearance. First seen as a ghostly apparition at the outskirts of the city, he then reappeared, fleshed out, on the streets of Caracas’s colonial center. From afar, Gallegos lionized *el pueblo* in its heroic attributes, its work ethic, its political oppression, and its capacity to undermine the legitimacy of a regime led by a man whom he would eventually come to disparage. In closer proximity to popular sectors, however, he exhibited a deep discomfort at the notion that, in taking hold of the city and contesting political authority, *el pueblo* might instead become *el populacho*. Chapter 2 offers a reading of *Ifigenia* (1924), the first of two novels by De la Parra, a member of the declining plantocracy that had once held political clout and economic leverage in the Venezuelan capital. As a young and ambitious twenty-something, De la Parra assumed the role of an unofficial cultural attaché for the Gómez administration, during which time she wrote the first draft of *Ifigenia*, which, in plot, setting, and characterization, bore striking resemblance to “La Rebelión.” Using the voice of her narrator, María Eugenia, De la Parra rehearsed the disconcerting realization that her labor and status had been commodified by the uncouth, illegitimate presidential figurehead upon whom the ailing landed gentry had become dependent. This meant that, like the inhabitants of the barrios who serviced María Eugenia’s townhouse and maintained her lavish lifestyle, she, too, was a source of exploitation. An alignment with this class only generated

further distress for the disempowered protagonist-cum-author; faced with disinheritance and a marriage of convenience, she drew on conventions in horror writing to express her fears about the future.

Part 2, “Melodrama at the Margins,” evaluates the relationship between the barrios and studio cinema productions toward the end of the so-called golden-age period of Latin American filmmaking, lasting between the 1930s and 1950s, by filmmakers who were directly implicated in the birth of the audiovisual industry in Venezuela. Chapter 3 unpicks depictions of urban poverty in *La balandra Isabel llegó esta tarde* (1950), a film by prolific Argentine director Carlos Hugo Christensen based on a short story by Venezuelan author Guillermo Meneses, which transported spectators in upmarket *caraqueño* cinemas to a dangerous and lascivious port-side barrio in La Guaira. *La balandra Isabel* represented attempts to ignite a profitable film market in Venezuela by adopting a subject matter that would provoke intrigue and excitement among middle-class spectators. Produced by intellectuals affiliated with AD (led at the time by Gallegos), it promoted a bucolic brand of nationalism that repressed the agency of the urban sectors and condemned the intoxicating, maddening, and demonic influences of the barrios. Chapter 4 interrogates *Cain adolescente* (1959), a low-budget effort written and directed by urban migrant and auteur-to-be Román Chalbaud that was released almost a decade after *La balandra Isabel*. Chalbaud’s first feature-length film sought to deconstruct cinematic depictions of low-income communities; it may be read as a loose reworking of *La balandra Isabel*, featuring similar storylines and archetypes. To an extent, *Cain adolescente* can be interpreted as gesture of solidarity with the marginalized sectors of urban society, who, upon their arrival in the city, were inserted into the aggressively modernizing regime upheld by Pérez Jiménez. Ultimately, however, the film advocated a national retreat to a pastoral past, casting the barrios as unruly territories whose inhabitants were driven to delusion and self-destruction.

Part 3, “Criminal Testimonies,” explores the penalization of poverty as inflected in two testimonial texts—narrated by a student of law and a young offender, respectively, and published by left-leaning publisher Domingo Fuentes—as the guerrilla struggle subsided and crime rates rose in the early 1970s. Chapter 5 takes as its focus *Retén de Catia* (1972), written under the pseudonym Juan Sebastián Aldana, which detailed his detention and imprisonment on false charges during violent Universidad Central de Venezuela demonstrations that spread to the city center from the university campus. While in prison, Aldana shared a jail cell with armed insurgents and radical thinkers, at whose instruction he experienced a political awakening. Correspondingly, his text argued that, as the urban poor

had been targeted by police terror and security operations during successive *puntofijista* administrations, the Venezuelan prison had grown to become a metaphorical extension of the barrios. Eventually, Aldana's release was secured by a high-profile journalist and a member of Congress; they encouraged Aldana to publish his testimony as an exposé that called for the fall of *puntofijismo*. Chapter 6 offers an analysis of Ramón Brizuela's *Soy un delincuente* (1974), a book marketed as the autobiography of a self-professed delinquent that transported the reader between crime scenes and correctional facilities, and which played to widespread fears of urban violence. Produced by the same publishing house, it was considered a companion piece to *Retén de Catia*: the first featured guerrilla fighters, and the second, common criminals. In a series of picaresque episodes, Brizuela claimed to articulate the political demands of the delinquent community and, by extension, the residents of the barrios, who had been condemned to lives of crime and punishment. Brizuela denounced their marginalization by the ruling classes that, at the same time, constituted the testimony's readership. Tracing the ways in which the text mimics the dominant conventions and structures that it claimed to reject, this chapter engages with the *testimonio* debate to scrutinize the politicization of testimonial literature.

Part 4, "Polarized Poetics," analyzes the poetry, music, and prose that mediated the increased polarization of Venezuelan society which accompanied the crises of the 1980s, even as this was obscured in national rhetoric. Focusing on distinct poetic movements, chapter 7 considers the extent to which the written word could engender unity or segregation. The first part of this chapter examines the work of student collective Tráfico, which sought to use poetry as a means of connecting with the barrios. Replicating the logic and aesthetics of progressive, free-market narratives that celebrated collective urban identities, however, Tráfico's rhetoric served to obfuscate, and reinforce, entrenched territorial differences. The second part of this chapter analyses the poetry of María Auxiliadora Álvarez, a daughter of diplomats who trained with some members of Tráfico. Her collection *Cuerpo* (1985) recapitulates her experience of giving birth in a malfunctioning, underfunded public hospital in what she conceived as an act of embodied solidarity with impoverished women. In this endeavor, she had recourse to innovative literary techniques in an attempt to mediate their pain and generate empathy for their suffering. Chapter 8 probes *Salsa y control* (1996), a novel by José Roberto Duque set during the 1989 Caracazo uprisings and based on the author's firsthand account of the protests that exploded in response to neoliberal structural adjustments. This plurivocal collection of short, interconnected stories presented in the format of a salsa record imagined the barrio as a lawless place whose residents were perverse,

unthinking, and aggressive. In this, the author satirized depictions of the barrios in national politics and communications, reflecting on the tropes that were instrumentalized to justify violent military intervention in the barrios after the Caracazo.

Although at a first glance this book follows a chronological order, this does not mean that it takes a strictly sequential view of time or that it endorses a linear vision of progress. While it identifies the major historical shifts that have taken place over the past one hundred years, it also tracks figures who reappear, events that reoccur, settings that repeat, and ideas that resurface. Sometimes, the return of these things long gone takes the shape of faint, ghostly apparitions. They are dim echoes, uncanny recollections, soft murmurs, and faded outlines. At other times, their form is so great, so imposing, and so abrasive that they overshadow any precedence. Their impact casts memories and recollections of similarities and precursors into darkness. When this happens, space creates lapses in time by evading territorialization, and time loops back into the reterritorialization of spaces that are deterritorialized. Put more simply, terrains that have been captured and lost are again the targets of territorial conquest. It is with this in mind that the epilogue returns to Pardo's fin-de-siècle predictions of demise, which saw the destruction of the barrios during floods and landslides. There, I turn to the precarious geological foundations of the informal settlements that, often, are built on cheap, vertiginous land using rudimentary designs and flimsy materials. The tectonic movements of such topographies can be difficult to predict or mitigate. In their volatility, these urban domains seem to invite, and eschew, territorialization. The final section of this book analyzes stories that speak of these struggles as they arise in the aftermath of the Tragedia de Vargas. This was the catastrophic landslide that coincided with Chávez's first constitutional referendum in 1999 and that caused thousands of deaths in the informal settlements which sat in the crevices of the Ávila. Due to its scale and impacts, this particular disaster has gained special prominence in the national imaginary. But it was preceded by similar mudflows on the same stretch of coastline and has since been followed by subsequent crises. The epilogue compares politicized responses to these events as they have flowed through narrative discourse for over half a century. On a greater or lesser scale, such destruction offers the opportunity to reimagine the present and to recreate society anew, pressing time forward into the future. Just as often, it uncovers a latent desire for conservation and resurrection; it compels time to run its course, but backward. In an unstable landscape, the confluence of these currents creates a temporal maelstrom. It is with this that I close *Representing the Barrios* and return to its beginnings.