THE FERNANDO CORONIL READER

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE IS THE MATTER

Fernando Coronil *Edited by Julie Skurski, Gary Wilder, Laurent Dubois, Paul Eiss, Edward Murphy, Mariana Coronil, and David Pedersen*

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Cover art: Fernando Coronil, La Sabana, Venezuela. Photo by Mariana Coronil.

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Introduction: Transcultural Paths and Utopian Imaginings

MARIANA CORONIL, LAURENT DUBOIS, JULIE SKURSKI, AND GARY WILDER

■ Shortly before his untimely death in 2011, Fernando Coronil captured the core ethic of his practice as a thinker: "the struggle for life is the matter." The search to find and communicate "historical truth," he wrote, implied "struggling against the forces that limit life, the source and aim of history, an elusive marvel." The pursuit of that "marvel" shaped his many interventions, offering a powerful history of the present that always insisted on the possibility of new ways of seeing and thinking, and therefore of new worlds.[1]

The essays gathered in this collection were written between 1991 and 2011. An innovative and coherent body of work, they illuminate the intellectual conjuncture in which they were written while speaking directly to many of our most pressing analytic and political challenges. Through empirically rich and conceptually sophisticated analyses of history, culture, and practice, Coronil examined the forces that sought to delimit and foreclose alternative futures. Yet his work also identified openings for alternatives, reminding us of the unwritten and unknown that could always be ahead. He was fascinated by the search for a utopian project grounded in *this world*, by how struggles for alternative futures always take place under conditions that can then themselves give rise to as yet unimagined possibilities.

In this search and struggle he found allies in poetry and novels; Nicolás Guillén, Jorge Luis Borges, and Alejo Carpentier were among the touchstones to whom he returned constantly in his teaching and writing. Braided through his rigorous political and economic analyses are reflections on magic, marvels, myths, illusion, imagination, poetics, voyages, and labyrinths. It is not incidental that the epigraph to *The Magical State*, his masterly 1997 book on oil wealth, nationalist ideology, and state power in Venezuela,

Figure I.1. Fernando preferred to write in a hammock wherever he was—here, at his home in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Photo by Julie Skurski.

is drawn from the poet Derek Walcott: "For every poet it is always morning in the world, and History is a forgotten insomniac night. History and elemental awe are always our early beginning, because the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world in spite of History."[2]

This love for the world in spite of history's depredations deeply informed Coronil's life and work. He was a fierce critic, generous reader, and open-minded thinker. He delighted in unforeseen difficulties, unexpected surprises, and unsettling realities. Although situated firmly on the anti-imperial Left, his thinking was free from theoretical dogma and political orthodoxy. Coronil was as interested in *how* we know what we know, reflecting critically on taken-for-granted categories and frameworks, as he was in producing new knowledge. His analyses, which typically tacked between the concrete and conceptual, always started from complex historical situations. Rather than use worldly examples to demonstrate the truth of theoretical principles, he allowed worldly complexity to present real dilemmas, to raise pressing questions, which displaced inherited categories and frameworks. Coronil constantly called into question academic common sense, disciplinary divisions, and the false binaries that have limited scholarly debates: empirical versus theoretical, material versus cultural, local versus global, universal versus particular, practical politics versus political imagi-

Figure I.2. At his home in Caracas, Venezuela.

nation, poetry and art versus scholarship, scholarship versus advocacy. Drawing on a multitude of inspirations and sources, he sought constantly to find a space beyond these binaries from which to critically analyze and engage the world.

Coronil gave profound importance to the intrinsic relations between form and content, means and ends, an individual's concrete location and their intellectual insights. Those who knew him as a colleague and teacher came to see that there was an underlying connection between what he said and how he acted, between his politics and his ethics, between the kind of work he produced and the kind of person he was. Coronil was an engaged intellectual and internationally known public commentator on the political situation in Venezuela and Latin America. He was an enthusiastic interlocutor who cherished collective projects and delighted in productive disagreement. He was a committed teacher and mentor who invariably treated younger scholars as collaborators; disciplinary parochialism and professional productivism were anathema to him. Throughout, he brought boundless vitality, imagination, and humor to his undertakings and relations. This book is an invitation to think with Fernando Coronil about the central forces shaping our present and the prospect of a different and better world.

Figures I.3 and I.4. Portrait of Fernando by the Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín, painted as a gift to Fernando's family in thanks for their support during his exile. Self-portrait by Fernando when he was a teenager.

Futures Present

It is telling that the last essay Coronil wrote was entitled "The Future in Question," for it crystallizes many of the approaches and questions that preoccupied him throughout his life. In it he analyzes the complexities of Latin America while viewing the world from the perspective of the Global South; he reflects deeply on politics without being bound by conventional binaries; he pays equal attention to material conditions and utopian imaginings. The essay demonstrates how Coronil engaged simultaneously with Marxism, critical theory, and postcolonialism without subscribing to any of their orthodoxies. We see him forcefully challenge Western hegemony while endorsing struggles and envisioning futures that cross identitarian divisions. It stands as a testament to Coronil's enduring contemporaneity, a charter for why he needs to be read now.

"The Future in Question" analyzes the leftward shift among Latin American governments whose beginning Coronil dates from the electoral defeat of Augusto Pinochet in Chile in the 1989 referendum. He frames his

analysis with a central paradox: Latin American leftists were increasingly animated by a renewed commitment to fundamentally change society in the service of postcapitalist futures even as they were less certain than ever about what such a future might look like. Given the failure of both capitalist and existing socialist development models to realize "universal equality" and "general well-being," the Latin American Left, according to Coronil, no longer knew "*what* to desire." This "crisis of futurity," he explains, was marked by a temporal disjuncture between a long-term utopianism fueled by belief in an alternative future and a short-term pragmatism plagued by the sense of an inescapable and ever-extending present. The result, he shows, was a constant tension between radical political imaginaries and everyday accommodations with neoliberal economic arrangements.[3]

This is the kind of paradox that Coronil skillfully identified and engaged throughout his work. It is geographically situated and of global importance. It can be only grasped through empirical examination and theoretical reflection. It calls for close attention to present conditions and requires a longer historical perspective. It entails systemic processes and conjunctural shifts. It must be explained in relation to material, political, and ideological conditions. The paradox is both conceptually challenging and politically urgent. And it invites us to unthink a whole range of conventional (leftist) political assumptions.

For Coronil, this inability to envision the alternative future for which one was already struggling marked a crisis of political imagination that was rooted in a contradictory geopolitical situation. If the Latin American Left no longer knew what to desire, this was not simply a matter of bad thinking, political weakness, or hypocrisy. It expressed a real predicament that confronted states critical of transnational capitalism across the Global South. Coronil explains that their ongoing reliance on ground rent from primary products and their vulnerability to the international financial system has left them nominally politically independent but economically dependent. Under such conditions, any attempts to develop long-term transformative projects are obstructed by the short-term imperative to maximize income and seek comparative advantage in the existing global marketplace. This means that "in a perverse twist of fate, in pursuit of fortune, leftist states may be doing the work of capital." The very capacity to imagine a radically different future is undermined by this sense of being trapped within an endlessly extending present.[4]

The hope of bringing about fundamental change is often displaced by the debilitating sense that human society cannot be improved. This double

vision generates a split world that appears to oscillate between the malleable landscape of utopian imaginaries and the immutable ground of recalcitrant histories. From the fissure between these worlds there emanate contradictory dispositions and incentives that stretch the present forward and push the desired future toward an uncertain horizon: "On the one hand, the future enters the public stage as an open horizon of expectation, as potentiality, offering a hopeful sense of possibility that is characteristic of liminal phases in revolutions. On the other, the future imposes its presence as a receding historical horizon, a future in doubt, inducing a sense of despondency that is typical of periods of decline or historical depression."[5]

When Coronil proposes that the future is *in question*, then, he is not only observing that the Left does not know what kind of future to wish for. He is also indicating that under existing global arrangements, Latin America's very material survival is threatened and, moreover, that people's faith in futurity itself, their sense that a truly different future is possible, has eroded. Yet he does not himself reproduce the political despondency that he identifies, accounts for, and takes seriously. On the contrary, he observes that "although the future is not open, it offers openings."[6]

In this spirit, Coronil examines the dynamic field of Latin American politics to identify an emergent set of political logics and practices that might indeed ground a renewed leftist project for Latin America. He thus points to the pluralization of political actors and imaginaries; the eclipse of a single, class-based revolutionary subject; and the end of the assumption that radical social transformation must always be mediated by the state. He emphasizes the importance of difference as a political value and the integration of indigenous and diasporic epistemologies and cosmologies into radical political projects. He points to a new commitment to multiclass alliances, an expansive vision of plurinationality, and democracy as an indispensable means and end of socialist struggle. It is precisely because the existing models for progressive futures have failed so thoroughly, according to Coronil, that leftist movements in Latin America came to question the old party politics and inherited Marxist orthodoxies, conventional assumptions about Left versus Right, reform versus revolution, means versus ends, and realism versus utopianism.

By situating this crisis of futurity within a broader imperial framework, Coronil refuses liberal pieties (often favored by Latin American elites) about progress through economic development. Yet he also resists the temptation, increasingly common in poststructural and postcolonial analyses, to simply unmask this progressivist ideology. Beyond merely identifying this

impasse, he seeks to understand how the leftward turn in Latin America, however contradictory, may have created new openings that compel us to reconsider our political categories. He does so by paying close attention to the relation between shifting contingencies and emergent possibilities in specific places. He identifies with these radical possibilities while refusing orthodox Marxist doctrines about economic determinism, class universalism, and historical stages. Like Stuart Hall's, Coronil's is a Marxism "without guarantees." He thus resists the poststructuralist and postcolonial tendency to posit an epistemological equivalence between liberalism and Marxism.[7]

Coronil's ability in "The Future in Question" to identify an impasse on the Left, to account for it structurally and conjuncturally while remaining unapologetically attuned to and aligned with emergent emancipatory possibilities, is precisely what distinguished Coronil as a critical thinker. He writes, "Although the final destination may not be clear, the sense of direction is: toward justice, equality, freedom, diversity, and social and ecological harmony. The Left has no map, but it has a compass."[8]

Unlike many of his critical contemporaries, and in contrast to much current academic discourse, Coronil both insisted that the future could not be known *and* boldly named that which a Left should desire: universal equality, democracy, diversity, justice, freedom, "general well-being in ever more domains, ever more comprehensively," and "the pursuit of an alternative social order guided by the indigenous concept of el *buen vivir*—living well." On the one hand, he reminds us that, "as a political project, the pursuit of well-being for all—and all now includes non-human entities—is now less than ever the monopoly of the 'West,' of its dominant conceptions and logics. In effect, these struggles in Latin America are part of a decolonizing process that challenges the ethnocentrism of Western modernity and opens up spaces for other imaginaries based on different histories, epistemologies, aesthetics, and ethics." On the other hand, he does not insist on a categorical distinction between Latin America and the "West." Indeed, he suggests that new utopian "imaginaries now unite South and North in a politics that fuses the pursuit of well-being and sheer global survival."[9]

Ultimately, Coronil desired a transformative political project that would overcome the false opposition between universality and particularity: "Carried along by winds of history that fan old flames and rouse new struggles, Latin America has become a diverse fabric of collective utopian dreams. The dialogue between past and future informing current struggles has, despite

constraints, challenged place-bound, parochial conceptions of universality and has generated global exchanges about reimagined worlds." Engaging with "different cosmologies," he suggests, makes it possible "to recognize particulars in universals and universals in particulars." This would then be the basis of a new "planetary universality." Coronil is not naïve about this prospect: "Of course, given the unequal structures of power within which this leftward turn has taken place, it is possible that its new imaginings may be co-opted or crushed. . . . Politics will remain a battle of desire waged on an uneven terrain." Yet he concludes by affirming that "as long as people find themselves without a safe and dignified home in the world, utopian dreams will continue to proliferate, energizing struggles to build a world made of many worlds, where people can dream their futures without fear of waking up."[10]

Hemispheric Itinerary: Enter the (Cold War) Labyrinth

Whatever the topic, Coronil's thinking was always profoundly refracted through his own political present and his extraordinary hemispheric itinerary. His singular perspective was rooted in his experiences, beginning as a young student activist engaged with the swirling world of politics in Venezuela and Latin America more broadly. To introduce his work is to tell his story, and vice versa. As he certainly would have reminded us, to tell any individual's story is to relay the material and cultural conditions in which they lived, learned, argued, and dreamed.

Coronil understood himself as having been formed by his extended family and its rich network of friends and colleagues. Over the years he reflected on their efforts to create what they saw as a modern nation, and these relationships informed his work. He was born in Caracas in November 1944, and his life was shaped by the social vision and achievements of his parents, both of whom were physicians who took an active role in building Venezuela's medical and social welfare systems during periods of dramatic social transformation. While neither was a member of the established economic elite, his parents became members of an emerging professional elite that was socially respected and internationally connected. From markedly different backgrounds, they became a pioneering example of a couple who shared their professions as well as their ethics of secularism, nonpartisanship, and socially responsible medicine.

In many respects, Coronil's critical and global orientations were shaped by his mother, Lya Ímber Barú, with whom he was very close. A Russian

Figure I.5. With his mother, Lya Ímber, in Caracas. Photo by Julie Skurski.

Jewish immigrant from Odessa, Ukraine, whose family fled pogroms in 1920 to seek refuge in Romania (then Moldova), she arrived in Venezuela with her family (her father, Nahum Ímber, an agronomist; her mother, Ana Barú; and younger sister, Sofía) in 1930, after a difficult ten years in Romania where anti-Semitic repression was on the rise. Part of a wave of European refugees, they sought to establish a new life in the Americas. Uncertain of what it might offer, they imagined tropical abundance, freedom from repression, and an egalitarian sense of possibility. Venezuela was then an agrarian country with limited educational and medical systems, ruled by one of the continent's most repressive dictators, Juan Vicente Gómez (1908–35). But when Lya's family arrived, political opposition had begun to coalesce. At a time of rising oil income and urbanization, new initiatives to establish health and educational institutions became possible.

Though Lya was sixteen and spoke no Spanish when they arrived, she quickly enrolled in the Central University's school of medicine, and in 1936 she became the first woman to graduate from medical school in Venezuela. It was there that she met her future husband, Fernando's father, Fernando Rubén Coronil. Lya did her residency in pediatrics under the mentorship of professors, trained in France, whose holistic concept of childhood oriented her clinical work and pedagogic activity. She treated children's

health as a social issue requiring social policies on national and international scales.[11] From 1965 on, her international activity intensified, along with her public role as a moral critic of Venezuela's oil income-fueled economic expansion.[12]

Lya and Fernando Rubén married in 1938. While their backgrounds differed, their respective families were remarkably accepting of a marriage that challenged the norms of each of their communities: Jewish and Catholic, recent immigrant European and established Venezuelan. Fernando Rubén's father, Domingo Antonio Coronil, was a mestizo of humble origins who had come to Caracas as a young man from the southern state of Guyana. He entered law school, became a law professor, and, though marginal to the social and economic elite, quickly rose within the political elite as the personal lawyer of the dictator General Juan Vicente Gómez, who was adept at incorporating talented professionals into his regime. Gómez made him his trusted representative (he referred to Coronil as "my eyes") following his seizure of power in 1908.[13]

Domingo Antonio married Adela Ravelo, the daughter of immigrants from the Canary Island, and had ten children: three boys (including Fernando's father, Fernando Rubén) and seven girls. When Domingo Antonio died in 1925, his family had limited means, for he had refrained from the standard practice of personal enrichment through government office. Fernando Rubén, then a teenager, managed the family's modest coffee hacienda after his father's death, while his mother and sisters sewed items to sell to sustain the family. Eventually, he attended the university, where he specialized in surgery.[14]

Following Gómez's death in 1935, rising oil income and democratizing initiatives allowed for the expansion of medical institutions.[15] Fernando Rubén was a proponent of public healthcare, and his life work centered on developing the Hospital Vargas as a teaching and research institution that promoted attention to the whole patient. In his medical practice, where he often performed surgery for free, he had a devoted following from all social classes. An elegant and charming man, he inspired generations of physicians while keeping himself outside the fray of party politics. Like other doctors of his generation, he was widely read; he could readily recite poems, discuss world history, or name Venezuela's rivers.

Being raised by socially concerned professionals who maintained their independence from political party affiliation deeply shaped Fernando, as well as his older sister, María Elena, who became a psychologist.[16] While close to his grandparents and cousins on both sides, Fernando was es-

pecially influenced by his mother's younger sister, his aunt Sofía, and her husband, the acclaimed Venezuelan author Guillermo Meneses. Closely entwined with his parents' lives, they brought to his family a cosmopolitan perspective as well as personal connections to European and Latin American artists and writers. They lived for years in Paris, which was then the center of the Latin American intellectual community.[17] The Coronil family's visits to Paris, where his aunt and uncle were deeply engaged with the intelligentsia, left Fernando with a lifelong passion for contemporary art. His deep interest in Venezuelan self-taught artists and his desire to learn from artists and writers about different ways to see the world grew out of his lasting relationship with his aunt and uncle.

Fernando attended high school from 1958 to 1962 during a tumultuous period for Venezuela and the hemisphere. In January 1958, a civic-military alliance overthrew the U.S.-backed Pérez Jiménez dictatorship. The newly elected President Rómulo Betancourt, leader of the social-democratic Acción Democrática party, made a pact before taking office with the Social Christian party that marginalized leftist parties from power and promoted an anticommunist agenda.[18] Unlike many students of his social class, Fernando attended a public high school with a diverse student body, Liceo Andrés Bello (as had his father). Here he formed lasting friendships with students of nonelite origins. Many participated with him in student politics, which at that time were closely connected to national politics, given that political parties sponsored electoral slates for student government. Like his parents, Coronil did not join a party, but he was elected president of the student federation on a slate composed primarily of Communist Youth members.

Fernando's position in student government placed him in a high-profile public position at a moment of remarkable political turmoil. Much of the populace in Caracas held deep antipathy toward the United States at the time. The overthrow of Guatemala's President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 with backing from the Central Intelligence Agency, along with U.S. support for dictatorial regimes in the region, including those of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Venezuela, had aligned the United States with antidemocratic forces. When U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon visited Venezuela in May 1958, he was shocked to encounter massive popular protest against his presence.

To the distress of the United States, Venezuela's interim government had sent arms to Castro's guerrilla forces then fighting Fulgencio Batista, in a gesture of antidictatorial solidarity that reflected historic ties among exile

Figure I.6. Campaign poster for election to the high school student federation. The slogan of Fernando's slate: "For the fulfilment of students' highest aspirations. Experience, Effectiveness, Dynamism."

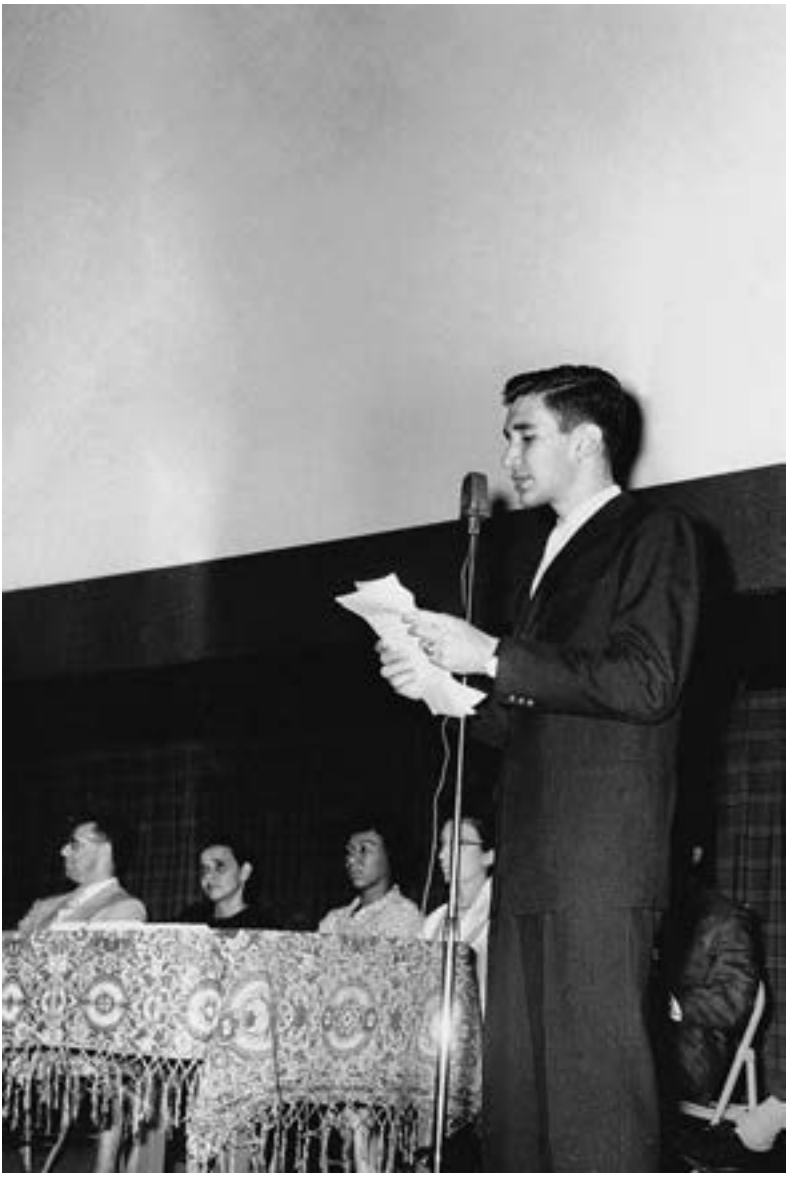

Figure I.7. Speech delivered as president of the student federation at the Liceo Andrés Bello.

groups in the greater Caribbean. After Batista's overthrow in January 1959, Castro visited Venezuela to thank the country for its support and to promote his message of hemispheric independence. The teenage Coronil was among the massive crowd, which included university and political leaders, who welcomed the Cuban revolutionary. Castro delivered speeches that wove together the histories of the countries, linked the ideas of their independence leaders Simón Bolívar and José Martí, and pointed toward a future of Latin American liberation during what was a defining moment in a newly divided political arena.[19] However, President-elect Betancourt (1959–64) was closely aligned with the United States. U.S. President John F. Kennedy would soon present him as a counter to Castro, casting his regime as a model for the combination of electoral democracy and capitalism the United States sought to promote in Latin America through the Alliance for Progress (1961). Under Betancourt, Venezuela led the campaign to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States and severed diplomatic relations with Cuba (1961).

These dramatic political events profoundly shaped Coronil's understanding of history, bringing into focus the connection between national and international representations of freedom. The debates surrounding U.S. interventions led him to a question that would preoccupy him in the future: who tells the story and from what perspective? During the Bay of Pigs invasion by U.S.-backed Cuban exiles (April 1961), the news media provided misleading accounts of the success of the attack. Coronil and his fellow students listened to shortwave radio broadcasts from Cuba on the defeat of the invading troops by military and civilian forces and created posters with news summaries mounted on boards in front of their school. In this heavily transited neighborhood, crowds gathered to read the reports and debate their implications for Venezuela. The posters did not only challenge official media; they criticized Betancourt's relationship with the United States and his claim to represent a Latin American path to sovereignty.

Coronil's political actions in this volatile period unsettled local authorities. The fact that a member of a respected family with which Betancourt had personal ties was publicly critical of the government was galling. As antigovernment protests increased, the authorities began to pay closer attention to his activities. At one point when the police came looking for him at his high school, fellow students directed him to hide in the girls' bathroom. Following that incident, he slept at friends' houses for a period. As street demonstrations intensified, Coronil's father was once called to

the morgue to identify a body thought to be his son's. Although it was not Fernando, his parents were shaken by the mounting dangers just when he planned to pursue university studies. Hoping to protect him from state repression in this highly charged atmosphere, his parents obtained a sabbatical to London. While there, Fernando connected with members of the Latin American intelligentsia who were attempting to reimagine the region's political future.

Despite this political engagement, when Coronil entered Stanford University in 1963 he began a premedical curriculum, as he intended to follow in his parents' path as a physician. However, when he encountered the array of courses offered by a liberal arts education, which differed from Latin America's system of early professional study, he changed paths and immersed himself in history, literature, and social theory. He majored in Social Thought and Institutions, an interdisciplinary honors program centered on theme-based seminars that presaged his future intellectual orientation.

Early in his studies at Stanford, where he was intellectually engaged but ill at ease in its monochromatic atmosphere, Coronil attended a talk on Cuba by members of a group that had challenged the U.S. travel ban. At the event, a fellow student and activist on U.S.-Latin American relations, Fred Goff (future founder of the magazine NACLA *Report on the Americas*), introduced him to Julie Skurski, a fellow student. Raised on the West Coast by leftist parents of working-class immigrant origins who had been active in the labor movement, she had long been interested in Latin America. At Stanford she pursued studies on the region, majoring in history, and became involved in the civil rights and antiwar movements.[20] Although Fernando and Julie were from markedly different social and national backgrounds, they shared many convictions, aesthetics, and hopes. While undergraduates they began a relationship that shaped both of them over the course of their forty-six years together. They explored work and life, with their thinking and writing intertwined, as they sought to find the humor in everyday life and the poetry in the political.

In the context of growing national upheaval and counterculture questionings in the United States, they looked to graduate studies in anthropology as a path to studying social transformation and political imaginaries. They entered the doctoral program in anthropology at Cornell University in late 1967 to study with Victor Turner, a British social anthropologist of Africa who pioneered the integration of social and symbolic processes. They also worked closely with Terence Turner (no relation), a young scholar of

lowland Brazilian indigenous peoples, myth and poetics, and social theory. As members of the Turners' innovative joint seminar on symbolic processes, in which Victor Turner developed his theories of liminality and communitas, and Terence Turner developed an innovative theory of Kayapó myth and a critique of Talcott Parsons's systems theory, the couple encountered exciting new work that addressed the production of meaning as part of social practice. When Victor and Terence Turner were recruited by the University of Chicago, they took with them Coronil, Skurski, and Anthony Seeger (who, like his uncle Pete Seeger, was an accomplished musician), where they began studies in the fall of 1968.

This was an explosive time in the United States and the world. There were uprisings met by violent repression in Mexico City, Paris, Prague, Northern Ireland, and Chicago; Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy were assassinated; the Vietnam Tet Offensive, antiwar movement, Black Power movement, and urban rebellions exploded; and the feminist movement challenged notions of the political. As protests against imperialism, racism, and patriarchy expanded, so did critiques of the dominant social theories and disciplinary premises that held sway at the University of Chicago. Fernando and Julie joined the emerging challenges to British structural functionalism, American symbolic anthropology, and modernization theory (of which the prominent University of Chicago professors Clifford Geertz and Lloyd Fallers, founding members of the Committee on New Nations, were leading proponents[21]), village studies, and Parsons's systems theory. These frameworks had buttressed the prevailing theoretical division between the cultural and the social, their ahistorical conceptualization, and the exclusion of power relations from both realms.[22]

Coronil was critical of the dominant depoliticized conception of culture as well as of the role that modernization theory played in legitimating U.S. power in Latin America. He began to craft an intellectual approach to social inquiry that could relate the material and the symbolic, social relations and cultural processes, and anthropology and history. These efforts were nourished by his continuing dialogue with Terence Turner's work. Long before the studies of Michel Foucault and Edward Said appeared in the U.S. academy, Coronil was thinking through the question of how to confront the relationship between imperial arrangements and knowledge production. For example, in a paper written for Victor Turner's seminar, he used Turner's ideas of communitas and liminality to analyze the Cuban Revolution's literacy campaign that upended social hierarchies, mobilized urban youth, and transformed subjectivities. He sought to craft an integrated approach in

which culture, politics, and history were grasped together and to introduce a dynamic concept of culture into the study of political conflict and social transformation. These intellectual developments estranged him from Victor Turner and placed him in an uneasy relationship with the University of Chicago's dominant strain of culturalism. Increasingly he looked to history for intellectual resources. There he found support from John Coatsworth, a Marxist-influenced economic historian of Latin America, and Bernard S. Cohn, a pioneering historical anthropologist of India whose critique of colonial sources anticipated the Subaltern Studies movement.

Coronil and Skurski developed dissertation proposals on the dynamics of the Cuban Revolution. During this period, Cuba had become a focal point for an international anti-imperialist intelligentsia, highlighted by the Tricontinental Conference held in 1966 in Havana, and the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. While Cuba was a hub for this activity, the U.S. trade embargo restricted communication with the island, and lack of scholarly studies limited the possibilities for conducting research there. The Cuban state welcomed solidarity groups and permitted closely controlled visits. But it was suspicious of academics and allowed research only by those who arrived with formal government invitations.

In an effort to obtain such an invitation to do research in Cuba, Fernando and Julie traveled to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City. This ultimately futile effort led to their involvement in a serious car crash (with Fernando's uncle at the wheel) that would alter both the course of their lives and their understanding of state power. In the convoluted aftermath of the crash (with Julie hospitalized), Fernando was jailed as the falsely accused driver of the car, then imprisoned in Mexico City under charges of international drug dealing. The subsequent fictions and negotiations required to obtain his release and their departure from the country provided a stunning lesson on the hidden relations between state officials and powerful local figures, and on the state's capacity to create appearances for national and international publics.

After Coronil was depicted in the Mexican press as a drug dealer, he and Skurski left for Venezuela. This sequence of bizarre events brought home the depth of their commitment to each other personally and the importance of legal recognition by state and medical authorities. In an improvised wedding marked by comedic turns of events, they married in September 1969 in a city clerk's office. With characteristic calm and understanding, Fernando's mother hastily organized a reception at his home for extended family and friends who had not yet met Fernando's spouse.

On their return to Chicago they received welcome news: through the mediation of a Venezuelan friend of Fernando's parents (the leftist intellectual Inocente Palacios), who had contacts with Cuban leaders dating from his period of exile, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a respected leader of the Cuban regime, had offered them an invitation to do research there.[23] Thus, the long-established Venezuelan practice of using personal connections had worked, while conventional efforts had not. They had already arranged to travel to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade,[24] and the invitation from the Cuban government would allow them to remain there to do anthropological fieldwork. The more than four hundred members of the Third Venceremos Brigade converged in St. Johns, Canada, from where they traveled on a Cuban cargo ship to Cuba. There they spent several weeks on the Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth, formerly the Isle of Pines) tending citrus trees (fruit was an export crop) and attending talks, including memorable presentations by Vietnamese female guerrillas. After the rest of the Brigade returned to the United States, Coronil and Skurski remained in Cuba, hosted in hotels by the government.

In the context of U.S. pressure on the Cuban regime and the international outcry over U.S. social scientists' counterinsurgency research projects, Coronil and Skurski told Cuban authorities that their proposed research topics were open to revision. Officials asked them to study the agricultural brigade Columna Juvenil del Centenario (Centennial Youth Column; CJC), at the suggestion of Rodríguez, who believed that young anthropologists could help understand the difficulties of "integrating" youth from rural and low-income backgrounds into the revolutionary project. When they explained that they expected to do participant observation, they were told that it would just be a matter of time before the required permits were issued.

Their stay in Cuba coincided with a period of deep shifts in economic and cultural life there, now referred to as "la Década Gris" (the Gray Decade, also known as "el Quinquenio Gris," or the Gray Five Years). This was a time of heightened Sovietization and state repression that had a lasting impact on policies of social control, racial relations, and intellectual activity. The consequences of this grim period only became public years later and have been little studied. Coronil and Skurski had arrived in Cuba shortly after the official failure of the Ten Million Tons Harvest in 1970, a two-year push to achieve the largest sugar harvest in history, one that Castro promised would allow Cuba to achieve economic autonomy.[25] This productivist project, which fused notions of revolutionary sacrifice and the

creation of a "new man," aimed to expand the neglected sugar industry, despite sugar's identification with colonialism. The campaign entailed the semi-militarization of society and deeply disrupted economic and state activities. However, given Castro's extraordinary ability to create a narrative of revolutionary triumph over a past of colonial submission, much of the population was mobilized for this effort, and many people enthusiastically placed faith in the promised future. Paradoxically, the project led to a greater economic and ideological reliance on the Soviet Union. Among its consequences, determinist Soviet Marxism was imposed on the educational system and its curriculum, while the philosophy department of the University of Havana (where Gramscian Marxism had been taught) and the journal *Pensamiento Crítico* were shut down. Many Cuban intellectuals lost their posts or had no outlet for their work during this decade.

These forms of silencing were linked to Castro's public break with leading international intellectuals—notably, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis and French theorists whose books were critical of the regime's antidemocratic aspects.[26] The arrest of the prizewinning Cuban poet Herberto Padilla and his public confession as a counter-revolutionary in April 1971 had the greatest impact on the national and international scene. Padilla's detention and Soviet-style self-criticism prompted public letters of concern to Castro from a wide range of international leftist intellectuals, primarily from Latin America and Europe (including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Italo Calvino, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa). Several of these critics broke relations with the regime.[27] In angry response, Castro denounced the "shameless pseudo-leftists" who sought glory living in Paris, London, or Rome. He declared that only "truly revolutionary" intellectuals would serve as judges or receive prizes in Cuba and announced that the country's doors were henceforth shut to the "bourgeois libelers" of the Revolution.[28]

Given the silence of the Cuban press, Coronil and Skurski learned about these events secondhand. Since they were unable to interpret the veiled references in official statements or to identify the officials who were orchestrating this repressive cultural policy, their status as foreign researchers in Cuba was uncertain.[29] The sudden shift from the triumphalist heroic discourse presented to the Venceremos Brigade to the embattled atmosphere of la Década Gris, marked by food shortages and growing skepticism, confronted them with an opaque reality. A transformative friendship with a young Afro-Cuban filmmaker, Sara Gómez, the only female director at the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, changed their

perspective. She introduced them to a circle of intellectuals and artists who identified with the revolution yet were critical of its growing centralization, dogmatism, and blindness to racial and patriarchal hierarchies. This was a profoundly influential friendship for both of them.

In her open-ended films, Gómez documented the everyday lives of working-class people in their discussions about the changes brought by the revolutionary process. During the same period that Antonio Gramsci's thought was being erased from the university, Frantz Fanon's thought was being marginalized, and feminism was being equated with women's advancement, Gómez made cinematic works that in contemporary terms would be called intersectional. Her documentary work on grassroots life was revolutionary in ways that challenged the government's statist orientation.[30] "I am not a Fidelista," she said, critiquing the top-down, male-centered, culturally and politically white project of the Cuban Revolution.

During this period, cultural repression extended beyond intellectual censorship. Measures taken against gay people, banned from teaching and in earlier years forcibly detained, received some international attention. Less publicly known were the policies that restricted Afro-Cuban religions. Practitioners were stigmatized as "antisocial" and their beliefs as primitive atavisms that were supposed to disappear under the revolution. When radio broadcasts as well as police actions cast these practitioners as criminals, they were obliged to conceal their affiliation. If their beliefs became known, they could be denied membership in the Communist Party, and their avenues of professional advancement could be blocked.[31] Like all such policies in Cuba, they were applied unevenly, and there were individual exceptions.

Coronil and Skurski took part in gatherings at Gómez's apartment while she was conducting research on Afro-Cuban life and cultural practices for her planned feature length film *De cierta manera* (One Way or Another).[32] As these topics were not addressed at that time in the social sciences, they had limited knowledge of Afro-Cuban history or religion when they accompanied friends to religious ceremonies (primarily Santería or Yoruba) in people's houses. They were cautioned not to talk to anyone about these gatherings, as they could cause problems for themselves and others. They learned that these African-derived and Cuban transculturated practices were fundamental to the lives of working people of all origins and races, many of whom, such as their interlocutor Oriol Bustamante—founding member of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional—viewed Cuban history from a subaltern perspective. These experiences provided an enormous chal-

lenge to the standard class- and state-centered studies of Cuba in which race, religion, and ethnicity were absent or present in the form of statistics. As lived alternative perspectives, they were formative for what became lasting concerns in Coronil's work: Eurocentric narratives of the past and the future and their forms of silencing; the epistemological basis of these narratives; and the processes of transculturation through which Latin American societies have been forged.

This was the context in which Coronil and Skurski attempted to conduct research on the CJC. But their efforts stalled, as they were allowed to make only an officially accompanied visit with leaders and members of the brigade in Camagüey.[33] After many months, they were called to meet with officials at the Central Committee who informed them they would not be able to do fieldwork because the government was revising its policy on foreign researchers. They were asked to leave the country. Nevertheless, this period in Cuba profoundly shaped Coronil's perspective on leftist politics, race and history, the state, personalism, and the politics of knowledge. It also marked the beginning of a larger saga that compelled Coronil and Skurski to shift their research topic, led to Coronil's deportation from the United States and the couple's return to Venezuela, and obstructed Coronil's career.

Once obliged to leave Cuba, Coronil needed to renew his Venezuelan passport but could do so only through the Swiss Embassy. When his mother, Lya, learned this after she fortuitously phoned the couple from Switzerland, where she was staying at the home of the former president (and Fernando's former nemesis) Rómulo Betancourt, she asked Betancourt to send a new passport to the embassy. Strangely, on the same day as his mother's call, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which had been trying to locate the couple when they did not return to the United States with the Venceremos Brigade, learned that he was in Cuba. It then placed his name, as a subversive agent, on a list of persons to be denied entry to the United States, a fact he learned only years later through FBI files the couple obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

The couple left for Paris, from where they planned to renew Coronil's student visa and return to the United States to formulate a new research project. After spending months in the austere conditions of embattled Havana, they were shocked to find themselves amid refined consumer displays and mildly inquisitive French intellectuals. When Coronil sought to renew his student visa at the U.S. embassy, he nonchalantly walked past anti–Vietnam War demonstrators throwing balloons filled with red paint—

not a cause for concern after his experiences of protest in Caracas—and distracted U.S. officials quickly stamped his visa. When they later flew to New York, he was able to pass through immigration control without questions. His name was apparently not listed in the infamous Blue Book used in the pre-digital age to keep track of travelers who were to be stopped at the border. Enormously relieved, they continued to California to visit Skurski's family in Oakland.

Coronil then took a brief trip to Caracas to see his family before the couple returned to the University of Chicago. While in Caracas he met with friends from the Movimiento al Socialismo, an independent socialist party founded by leftists who had broken with the Cuban government. As it turned out, his every move was reported to U.S. authorities. On his return trip to California he was detained in transit by immigration control at the airport in Miami and refused entry to the United States. Without being told why, he was placed in an off-site Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detention center, an old motel run by Cuban exiles, where he lacked the rights of a person legally on U.S. soil.[34]

A juridical world of Kafkaesque fictions and imaginings drew the couple ever deeper into an opaque realm of unknown accusations and futile demands. During his three days of detention the INS officers focused on examining his passport rather than questioning him. As Coronil later learned, they were convinced that he had altered his passport to remove the stamps of countries where he had traveled, including Cuba. They were building a case that he was an international communist agent. Confident that the confusion would be cleared up, Coronil phoned the Venezuelan consul in Miami, a family friend, to inform him of his situation. Despite his request to keep this quiet, the consul promptly called Coronil's father, who was then physician to President Rafael Caldera's wife. The president requested immediate action from the Venezuelan ambassador in Washington, instructing him to "treat Coronil as if he were my son." However, these and subsequent diplomatic pressures had limited effect. Coronil was allowed to travel to California to join Skurski, but his legal status was unchanged. The INS considered him technically "offshore" at the Port of San Francisco.

Coronil sought to obtain a hearing from the INS so he could contest whatever mysterious charges they had against him. During this period of legal limbo, the couple lived in a co-op in Berkeley and participated in the escalating demonstrations against the secret bombings in Laos and Cambodia. Coronil's requests for a hearing went unanswered after submitting

a dossier on his life as an upstanding citizen, on the advice of his American Civil Liberties Union lawyer. The agency claimed that revealing the charges against him would endanger the security of the U.S. government. In frustration, his lawyer commented, "They're treating your case as if you'd flown a U-2 spy plane over the Pentagon."[35] Soon Coronil received a letter from the INS instructing him to report to the San Francisco airport within forty-eight hours with no more than forty-four pounds of luggage. He was to be deported. However, only days before, his mother had had a chance social encounter with a New York corporate lawyer, Jay Shaffron, who worked with oil companies in Venezuela. Alarmed when he learned that Lya's son had "problems" with the INS, he contacted his friend, Secretary of State George Schultz, and obtained a stay of deportation order. Coronil received the two letters at the same time.

The deportation order cited an article that dated from the Immigration Act of 1918, a product of the first Red Scare when categories of people vaguely defined as anarchists and subversives were excluded from entry into the United States.[36] Shaffron offered to take over Coronil's case. He advised him to remain in the United States until it was resolved, because the law made no exceptions for those married to U.S. citizens, and deportation under it would result in permanent exclusion. Yet despite his extensive efforts over the following months, the INS did not relent. Coronil and Skurski spent much of this period in Chicago, where they sought support from the University of Chicago and approval for new dissertation projects. Although the university took no steps to aid him, his adviser Terence Turner wrote in his support. Eventually Shaffron was able to negotiate one concession: if Coronil left the United States, he would be allowed to return only once—to defend his doctoral dissertation. In 1972, worn out by this state security nightmare, the couple moved to Venezuela, where they lived for the next seven years.

This experience of being caught up in the twisted works of a powerful but dysfunctional bureaucratic, legal, and intelligence apparatus deeply informed Coronil's thinking. In subsequent research, he approached the state as a complex and contradictory web of institutions and actors.

His expulsion from the United States made his future as an academic difficult to imagine. The U.S. Embassy signaled that he was being monitored in Venezuela. Nevertheless, Coronil and Skurksi began a new life as engaged anthropologists.[37] With the aid of a Venezuelan government grant and a cohort of supportive social scientists and historians, they began to research the impact of industrial development projects and ideology

Figure I.8. Fieldwork on the auto industry: business conference, Caracas, 1975.

initiated during Venezuela's oil boom period under the presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974–79).

During this period, a new vision of Venezuela's future as an industrial, economically independent, and globally influential power burst onto the national scene. The mirage of wildly accelerating and amplifying development was not simply a state construct. Global, private sector, and popular actors participated in promoting the vision. Coronil and Skurski focused on the automobile industry—specifically, the auto parts sector—because it occupied a key ideological space in the imagined creation of a national bourgeoisie capable of stimulating modern heavy industry and its related businesses. The projected goal was to manufacture a Venezuelan car, including the engine, rather than to simply assemble on Venezuelan soil vehicles made by multinationals. They explored connections among state planners, small manufacturers, and major national investors through intersecting boards of directors, as well as kinship ties. At a time before anthropologists regularly produced ethnographies of the state, Coronil and Skurski's

work brought out the concealed presence of diversified economic groups based in prominent families that had long-standing connections to the state and to multinational capital.[38] Following the Middle East oil crisis of 1973 and efforts of international financial institutions to redirect the flood of petrodollars to metropolitan economies, Venezuela experienced an oil boom. In this context, Coronil undertook long-term research into how petrodollars and their materialization transformed Venezuela's political, economic, and cultural relations. Deeply attached to his country of origin, he intended to pursue an academic career in Venezuela. He was undeterred by the fact that some established intellectuals there regarded his work as overly empirical and insufficiently theoretical at a time when Nicos Poulantzas's structural Marxist approach dominated discussions.

During their years living in Caracas, Coronil and Skurski became more richly involved with life in their new home. The birth of their daughter Mariana Adela, along with bringing them great joy, deepened their family ties as well as their understanding of Venezuelan society. They also developed friendships with a number of self-taught artists (misleadingly labeled *ingenuos*, or "naïve"). At the same time that they researched automobile parts firms across the country, they established connections with creative artists and thinkers, some of whom lived in desolate towns spawned by the oil industry. These artists reflected on subjects that included ecological devastation, the solitude of oil towns, the veneration of Simón Bolívar, and the beauty of the land and the cosmos. Their explorations into villages and rural areas, as well as the barrios of Caracas, informed Coronil's effort to understand the hidden dimensions of the petro-state and to listen to the views of those seen as marginal to its projects. Coronil and Skurski organized an exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, directed by Fernando's aunt Sofía Ímber, titled "Artistas al Margen" (Artists on the Margins). It was the first exhibition of its kind at that institution, and their essays for the catalogue challenged prevailing theories in the art world that viewed these kinds of producers as "intuitive" and unselfconscious rather than as proper artists.

In the midst of their varied engagements, which also included university teaching and work at the Central University of Venezuela's Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo (Center for Development Studies; CENDES), Coronil was stunned to receive a letter from the U.S. Embassy, at the end of Jimmy Carter's presidency, stating that the unspecified charges against him had been dropped. He was free to return to the United States. He and Skurski decided to return to the University of Chicago to complete their doctoral dissertations and rejoin academic discussions in the United States.

Figure I.9. With the Venezuelan artist Rafael Vargas, who, decades earlier, migrated to work in the oil industry in Cabimas, Zulia. Photo by Julie Skurski.

Figure I.10. Visit with rural artists in Falcón State, Venezuela. Photo by Julie Skurski.

Figure I.11. Fernando and Julie with the painter Emerio Dario Lunar at his home in Cabimas, with an oil pump in the background.

Figure I.12. With Elsa Morales, artist and friend, in Caracas, 1993. Photo by Julie Skurski.

Figure I.13. Debating politics with painter Rafael Castillo Arnal in downtown Caracas, 2000. Photo by Julie Skurski.

Figure I.14. Painting by Castillo Arnal on bills of Venezuelan currency that depict a masked protester, Simón Bolívar with a machete, and an indigenous woman. The work is dedicated to Fernando, acknowledging his efforts to promote the artist's work internationally.

After moving back to Chicago, Coronil tragically lost his mother, Lya, while soon after the couple joyously welcomed their second daughter, Andrea Lya, to the family. During this period, John and Jean Comaroff joined the anthropology faculty, helping to change its primary emphasis on American symbolic anthropology. Their friendship, along with the continuing intellectual support of the historical anthropologist Bernard S. Cohn and the historian John Coatsworth, shaped Coronil's work in important ways. Terence Turner's support remained constant. Coronil's dissertation, "The Black Eldorado: Money, Fetishism, Capitalism and Democracy in Venezuela" (1987), at the time an anomaly in the University of Chicago's Anthropology Department, pioneered coming shifts in the discipline more broadly toward global and state issues.

Anthrohistory and Anthroheresy

Following his extended graduate studies, interrupted by state interventions, Coronil forged a new path as a historical anthropologist of the state. During a postdoc at the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies at Notre Dame University (directed by the Argentine sociologist Guillermo O'Donnell), amid scholars focused on regime types and transitions, Coronil developed the concept of the "magical state."[39] He was then delighted to receive a Society of Fellows postdoc in 1988 at the University of Michigan. He quickly became integrated into the stimulating intellectual life of the university, and with the backing of faculty from both departments, he was offered a tenure-track position in the Anthropology Department and the History Department, where he spent much of his career.

While he and his family were in Venezuela for a year of research, they witnessed the rapid deterioration of the party system, rising protests, and the violently repressed social uprising against International Monetary Fund measures that occurred on February 27–March 2, 1989. Coronil and Skurski carried out research on the protests and the ensuing military massacre that became known as the Caracazo, which they lived through with their daughters. They wrote an article on this unprecedented event, included in this volume, "Dismembering and Remembering the Nation," that located the discussion of political violence within an analysis of economic and political policies and the discourse of civilization and progress.[40]

The University of Michigan was an important center of interdisciplinary efforts to rethink the human sciences in the wake of the epistemological decentering prompted by the linguistic turn, postcolonial studies, critical race

studies, feminist theory, and Foucauldian attention to power-knowledge relations. Coronil and Skurski were active participants in the interdisciplinary faculty seminar Comparative Studies of Social Transformation (1987–2001), a generative working group that invited path-breaking thinkers, including Stuart Hall.[41] At the university, Coronil devoted his greatest efforts and imagination to the development of the unique doctoral program in anthropology and history.[42] The program, which he directed and reorganized following the departure of founding members,[43] became a noted center for debates in critical anthropology, poststructuralist theory, Marxian cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and studies of empire.[44] His pedagogical approach profoundly shaped the intellectual development of several generations of students in the program, many of whom became lasting friends. He worked collectively with them, engaging them as he would colleagues, discussing with them as colleagues, and concluding conferences with parties at their home where everyone was encouraged to dance.[45]

Coronil's book *The Magical State* was profoundly shaped by his participation in the debates of this generative period. This book traces how twentieth-century state formation in Venezuela was mediated through the state's claim to stewardship over natural wealth. It demonstrates the historical process by which oil income from ground rent became central to the state's fetishistic, or "magical," capacity to represent the people (*el pueblo*) and direct national progress. Through its hidden capture and rematerialization of international rents, the state appeared as endowed with independent powers, the magician at center stage.

At a time when postmodernist currents in the social sciences had severed representations from material processes and granted them free-floating agency, Coronil built on the work of Marx, Gramsci, Hall, Raymond Williams, Walter Benjamin, and others to study the materiality of representations. While the notion of agency in the social sciences was becoming identified with human intentionality, he asked whether a powerful commodity such as oil could be seen as exercising agency within larger structural processes. In a period in which poststructuralist interest in the fragment left aside questions of broader connections, and in which globalization became equated with free-flowing movement, he asked how boundaries and hierarchies were being remade on the global level, including within and among subaltern states.

A pioneering work of anthrohistory, *The Magical State* integrates political economy and political ideology, state policy and representational prac-

tices, material life and cultural processes, and national and global relations into a single historical inquiry. It is a work of ethnographic history and historical sociology and an anthropology of the state in the Global South. Through the examination of historical conjunctures in a succession of regimes, it includes topics that range from political coups, oil policy, and infrastructure displays to presidential campaigns, industrial programs, political scandals, and presidential performances. By taking up issues then seen by many as outmoded (such as nature as well as development economics), the work combines a discursively informed approach with the analysis of state performances and representations and the study of systemic political and economic processes.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theorization of space (along with Doreen Massey, David Harvey, and Edward Soja), Coronil analyzes how the dynamics of state power in Latin America can be adequately understood only by attending to the historical relationships among nature, value, and space at different scales. Arguing that Marx neglected to analyze Nature in his own tripartite theory of value—focusing on the capital-labor relation—his work begins from the premise that the possibilities of countries in the Global South are often tied to their role as providers of primary products. An examination of modernity in and from the Global South, it questions the universalizing developmentalism of both modernization theory and reductionist Marxism. At the same time, it challenges narrow and descriptive tendencies within both cultural anthropology and conventional history that obstruct the structural understanding of large-scale and long-term processes. Like his last essay, "The Future in Question," *The Magical State* points beyond a set of false oppositions that continue to govern much social inquiry.

Views from the South

Coronil developed his synthetic theoretical approach to the Global South while participating in transnational networks that brought together diverse intellectual communities. The discussions he was engaged in provide an essential framework for understanding the generative essays he wrote beginning in the 1990s, as well as two additional projects that he undertook. He was a member of the Darkness in El Dorado Task Force of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), an ethics inquiry into the controversy over the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon's work in the

Amazon and Patrick Tierney's denunciatory book of 2000 (two articles on the debate are in this volume). He also began work on a new book project, *Crude Matters*, that sought to analyze the failed coup against President Hugo Chávez in 2002 (two articles on the coup and two draft book chapters are included in this collection).

Coronil participated in the Latin American modernity/coloniality group (*modernidad/colonialidad*) from its founding meeting in 1998. This itinerate think tank first met in Caracas at an event organized by the Venezuelan social theorist Edgardo Lander. Its leading voices initially included the Peruvian theorist Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Mignolo.[46] The group grew into a network of thinkers from diverse approaches, including liberation theology, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and political economy, who sought to integrate Latin American critical theories with developments in European and U.S. critical thought. Coronil played an important role in developing the group's critique of Eurocentrism, its role in forming the modern world, and its theorization of coloniality in the Americas. In essays on occidentalism and Latin American postcolonialism that drew on Quijano's concept of "the coloniality of power," Coronil argued that the Iberian imperial projects, with their racial hierarchies and labor regimes, were constitutive of modernity and capitalism, not their antecedents. He contended that the making of the modern world could be understood only in relation to European imperial expansion from the fifteenth century on and to the continuing cultural logic of coloniality.[47] Understood as the "dark side of modernity," in Mignolo's term, coloniality's logic has worked through institutions ranging from the church to the social sciences, negating alternative epistemologies and violently reordering social worlds.

Coronil helped link the group's challenge to develop decolonial thinking to the controversy in the AAA and at the University of Michigan concerning Chagnon's work in Venezuela and Brazil.[48] He was asked to join the AAA Ethics Committee's El Dorado Task Force, in light of his work on the Venezuelan state, to examine contentious accusations Tierney made in his flawed book. Coronil offered an independent voice in a conflict polarized around a misleading "science versus anti-science" clash in which evolutionary and biomedical schools of thought lined up against sectors of cultural anthropology. As he pointed out, the debate largely overlooked the long-standing critiques of Chagnon's projects set forth by anthropologists in Brazil and Venezuela and marginalized the views of affected Yanomami people. In this controversy, Coronil felt that disciplinary and legal

concerns had taken precedence over issues of the politics of knowledge and the ethics of research.[49] In an instantiation of the coloniality of power, Yanomami villagers had been viewed by some evolutionary scientists as if they were representatives of the human past, geographically isolated from social and genetic change. Treated as an Amazonian natural resource, they had unknowingly provided raw materials, including their DNA and genealogical information, for scientific research in U.S. centers that was unrelated to their health needs and that violated their concepts of the body, illness, and death.

Coronil was alarmed that the University of Michigan administration and the Anthropology Department had immediately defended the work of Chagnon and Dr. James Neel, the prominent University of Michigan human geneticist under whom he initially worked, by presenting one-sided arguments and ignoring scholarly discussion. In response, and with support from the Provost, he organized a symposium on the controversy through the anthrohistory program.[50] Initially, he was at odds with figures in the Anthropology Department and the University of Michigan administration. But following the symposium, the Provost's Office quietly retracted the university's original statement supporting Neel and Chagnon and issued a statement of support for scholarly debate.[51]

During this period, Coronil was suddenly drawn into an event that would be momentous for Venezuela's history and for his own work. On April 11–13, 2002, there was a brief, failed coup against Hugo Chávez, followed by his unprecedented return to power due to divisions in the opposition and a massive popular outpouring of support.[52] Given the dramatic unfolding of events and his own work on coups and presidentialism, Coronil dropped a project he was developing on Cuba and undertook research on the events surrounding the coup. It had occurred in the context of mass mobilization by opposition groups, many of which had close ties to the administration of President George W. Bush, and of statements by officials in the Bush government that were overtly hostile to Chávez. Yet what had happened during the coup, and why, was far from clear.

Coronil spent the next few years grappling with this increasingly complex project as troubling changes taking place in Venezuela confronted him with ever deeper questions. He first planned to structure his analysis as a microchronology of the 2002 coup and its aftermath. He envisioned a book of broad public interest that would identify the behind-the-scenes promoters of the coup, who were likely to include certain U.S. officials and Venezuelan

business figures. Yet as he followed leads and conducted interviews with figures from all sides of the event, including imprisoned military officers and the powerful Venezuelan media entrepreneur Gustavo Cisneros (rumored to be a coup backer), the contradictory accounts and layers of obfuscation compelled him to redefine the project.

Given the shifts in oil policy, state structure, and Chávez's discourse that followed the coup, Coronil saw the event as a turning point for the regime.[53] During his year as a Cisneros Fellow at Harvard University's Rockefeller Center in 2004–2005, he broadened his research for this project. While there he organized an issue of the magazine *ReVista* (2008) for which a politically diverse set of petroleum industry experts responded to questions on oil policy. Some argued that Chávez had single-handedly realigned legal relations with multinational oil companies by again allowing joint ventures. They viewed this action as effectively reducing national sovereignty and denationalizing the oil industry (see "Oilpacity" in this volume). While extending oil-funded social programs and radicalizing his rhetoric, Chávez, who then renamed the Bolivarian Revolution "Socialism of the Twenty-First Century," had tied the country's future to the goal of dramatically *increasing* oil exports. The petro-state's scope had intensified without alternative proposals from any sector.[54] In his discussion of this process, Coronil uses the concept of "oilpacity" to capture the viscous quality of state-society relations whereby oil is visible primarily as a source of state income, while the organization of state-capital relations shaping the oil sector's links to the nation and to the global arena are obscured.

Crude Matters seeks to address the coup as a conjuncture of multiscale relations, forces, and actors in which contending projects, ideologies, and interests struggled for control. Refusing to limit the book to the conspiratorial maneuverings and personality clashes that consumed writings on the Chávez presidency, Coronil focuses on debates about Nature and issues of secrecy, truth, and knowledge. In this work he seeks both to reconstruct what happened over the course of a few days in April 2002 (still the subject of heated disagreements) and to analyze broader structural forces at work. At the same time, he asks how one can construct a history that is woven around narratives of secrets and rendered through masking.

Coronil developed these dimensions of the book project following his move from the University of Michigan to a position as Presidential Professor in the Anthropology Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2008. There, he and Skurski, who also obtained an appointment in anthropology, found a stimulating network

Figure I.15. Looking at the sea from his house in the coastal village La Sabana. Photo by Mariana Coronil.

of scholars, including former students and colleagues from the University of Michigan.[55] With the engaged orientation of the Graduate Center and the possibilities offered by working in New York (which Fernando called the only city in the United States where he did not feel like a foreigner), he expanded the range of his work and flourished, even as he was anguished by Venezuela's signs of coming crisis.

Resisting the pressures of political polarization, Coronil reflected on the possibilities and limitations in a neoliberal world for a certain kind of revolutionary tradition in the Global South. He struggled to find a way to rigorously engage the tensions and contradictions of the Chávez project while pursuing his critique of U.S. imperialism and neoliberal capitalism. What options are available for a self-proclaimed anticapitalist state project? How could a vision of hope for the future inform practice under these conditions?[56]

By including these draft chapters of Coronil's unfinished work, we invite readers into an ongoing engagement with his critical and open-ended analysis of Latin American and global futures. His insights are especially valuable at a moment when many currents of postcolonial theory have become preoccupied with cultural incommensurability, Marxists still tend to

regard the world through a metropolitan lens, and metropolitan critical theory has renounced the task of naming the future it desires.

Coronil was a gifted practitioner within the Latin American tradition of essay writing. His innovative pieces—on issues such as political futurity, Occidentalism, transculturation, anthrohistory, oilpacity, postcoloniality, subalternity, and imperial formations—ranged from the development of concepts that he addressed in *The Magical State* to programmatic discussions that engaged concepts at higher levels of abstraction. This collection gathers together some of his most important interventions into three sections organized according to thematic focus.

The first, "Labyrinths of Critique," presents key reflections and interventions on the practice of what Coronil called "anthrohistory." The second contains a series of critical essays on "Thinking from Latin America," which showcases his work on Venezuela, including two chapters from *Crude Matters*. Finally, the third, "Beyond Occidentalism, Beyond Empire," foregrounds his interventions into thinking about empire and its epistemological legacies. As editors, we had to make difficult decisions to exclude some wonderful essays. However, we feel that the pieces gathered here compose a powerful body of work that is greater than the sum of its parts. We regard this volume as a worthy companion to *The Magical State*, and we urge readers to consider these two works in relation to each other.

We might read Coronil as reflecting on the ongoing dilemmas he faced when he wrote in "The Future in Question":

> Under leftist rulers, political contests over different visions of society have stimulated public debate but have also tended to polarize political discourse, turning often useful simplifications into flat caricatures that block rather than stimulate understanding. In the context of heated political confrontations, this flattening of reason and heightening of emotions have affected political representations both in Latin America and abroad. . . . The demonization of the Left cannot be countered by its deification; the reduction of politics to a battle between Good and Evil must be challenged by accounts that develop the public's capacity to make sense of the world and of the history that produces it. If the mainstream media numbs people, we need accounts that help un-numb them.

His distinctive mode of critical engagement can be understood in terms of this effort to unnumb the public, neither deifying leftist leaders nor reduc-

ing politics to ahistorical confrontations between Good and Evil, "to avoid flat dichotomies, or at least turn them into meaningful distinctions" that might help us better understand the specific "conditions of possibility of historical change facing each [Latin American] nation."[57]

Conditions have worsened and possibilities have diminished for the Left in Latin America and beyond since Coronil's passing. At a moment in which the old axes of political differentiation no longer obtain, whether in the North or the South, his insistence on the need for conjunctural analysis from a systemic perspective has never been more urgent. Given the resurgence of neoliberal dogma after the financial crisis of 2008; the worldwide move toward authoritarian statism; and the upsurge of mass movements, both reactionary and progressive, against the existing order, Coronil's work appears more contemporary than ever. Those aspects of his work that might have seemed untimely in the 1980s and 1990s today provide a valuable framework for examining present predicaments. Some of the most urgent political and exciting intellectual work in contemporary scholarship is unfolding around confrontations concerning natural resources, capitalist imperatives, state sovereignty, and public welfare. There is a pressing need to realign Marxian and postcolonial modes of critique in ways that refuse orthodoxies, avoid flattened dichotomies, and resist Manichean oppositions. Assaulted by all manner of crude matters, the public is numbed. The future is in question. The way forward will certainly be precarious.

Coronil's writings remind us that any path toward an alternative future will have to be provisional and dialogical, democratic and plurinational, nourished by political imagination and utopian longing, mindful that means and ends must align. If intellectual work is to play a role in such an undertaking, and Coronil believed it could, it would have to be based on his insight that critical thinking is a process without limit, "an open-ended space oriented toward making sense of the world. . . . [I]t is openness to possibilities, it interprets being, what was and is, as forms of becoming. Through its recognition that what can be inhabits what is, it pursues knowledge for a world that can become home to multiple worlds. . . . Assembled as a labyrinth whose exits become entrances into an expanding labyrinth, its arrivals are points of departure and its answers pose new questions."[58]

His insistence on an open future is clear in his call for the "pursuit of knowledge for free people, who . . . will continue to struggle for aims we now can barely imagine." His critical practice was unapologetically utopian and grounded in the world. It was oriented toward a new "planetary

universality" based in social equality, human differences, and respect for nonhuman life, in the service of a world of many worlds, nourished by the prospect of "living well." Fernando Coronil's writings and example may help us make our way on this tightrope stretched between the imperative to envision and the impossibility of foreseeing a radically alternative future.[59]

Notes

1 Coronil, "Pieces for Anthrohistory," this volume, 55. Subsequent citations to this essay also give page numbers for this volume.
2 Coronil, *The Magical State*, xi.
3 Coronil, "The Future in Question," this volume, 128–162. Subsequent citations to this essay also give page numbers for this volume.
4 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 153.
5 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 132.
6 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 154.
7 Hall, "The Problem of Ideology."
8 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 154.
9 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 158.
10 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 158.
11 In the 1950s and '60s she held directive positions at the Children's Hospital and the Sociedad de Médicos and was a director of the Consejo Venezolano de Niños. For a discussion of the institutions Lya Ímber helped found or direct and her international activities, see Torres, *Lya Ímber de Coronil*, 51–62, 77–88. For her publications and official positions, see http://www.fundacionbengoa.org/personalidades/lya_imber_coronil.asp.
12 Among many posts, she was a vice president of UNICEF (1972–74), and in 1981 she was the first woman to be elected to Venezuela's National Academy of Medicine.
13 Coronil served as Minister of Finance, Senator, head of Congress, ambassador to Colombia, and diplomatic representative for oil company negotiations. His position as a thirty-third degree Freemason further cemented his standing as a respected figure and facilitated his international connections.
14 Of their sisters, the eldest was a French instructor and founder of a trade school for low-income girls; another became a doctor; and the youngest, "la Nena," founded the Ballet of Caracas. Of the two brothers, one became a lawyer and the other, a surgeon.
15 As founder of its Department of Experimental Surgery, he undertook innovative transplant research, was elected to the Venezuelan Academy of Medicine, and helped found an experimental medical school: see González Luque, "La escuela de medicina 'José María Vargas,'" 1.

16 During the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952–58), his parents were expelled from public positions. He recalled that when he was a child his parents hid a labor leader active in the clandestine struggle in their house, a fact he was told never to mention.

17 They founded an experimental arts magazine, and their home was a gathering place for people in the arts during Coronil's youth. His aunt Sofía helped bring art works by European and Venezuelan artists to the Central University of Venezuela and became a leading television commentator, turning toward politics with her second husband, Carlos Rangel. She founded the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Sofía Ímber, which opened in 1974, and directed it until 2001, when President Hugo Chávez abruptly fired her and removed her name from the institution: see Arroyo Gil, *La señora Ímber*.

18 The "Pacto de Punto Fijo" was a de facto agreement that excluded leftist parties from participating in cabinet level posts. Over time, this "pacted democracy" became increasingly patronage-based and exclusionary.

19 For Castro's itinerary and reception, see http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/viajes/venezuela-1959.

20 She worked with the Congress of Racial Equality on voter registration in 1965 in the town of Marianna, Florida, a stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan.

21 Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 316.

22 In this context, Victor Turner moved toward performance studies and universalizing humanism, changing his appointment to the Committee on Social Thought, while Terence Turner undertook the study of Marx's theory of value and its relevance for non-class-based societies.

23 Rodríguez, an economist and lawyer, and prior leader of the Cuban Communist Party, was an important intellectual figure in the Cuban government and one of the few leaders who had been prominent during the prerevolutionary period.

24 Founded in 1969 by members of Students for a Democratic Society in support of the Cuban Revolution, the group recruited volunteers of diverse racial and class origins to do agricultural work and learn about Cuban and international revolutionary struggles. The brigade was heavily surveilled by the FBI and infiltrated by COINTELPRO, a secret counterintelligence program designed to disrupt New Left, civil rights, and black militant organizations: see Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here*, 36–38.

25 The harvest reached 8.5 million tons. While it was the largest in history, it was deemed a failure. The lack of adequate refinery capacity, skilled personnel, cane cutters, and transportation made it impossible for the goal to be fulfilled.

26 Lewis, known for his oral histories of poor people in Mexico and Puerto Rico and for his controversial concept of the "culture of poverty," was invited by Castro to undertake a study of former residents of slums in Havana based on the expectation he would find that the socialist revolution had transformed

their culture. Lewis's "Project Cuba," which trained Cuban students in research techniques, was abruptly terminated in June 1970 when Lewis and his wife and co-author, Ruth Lewis, were expelled from the country and their remaining materials were confiscated. Ruth Lewis posthumously published three volumes based on their joint research. The Polish-French journalist K. S. Karol published *The Guerrillas in Power*, and René Dumont, noted French agronomist and proponent of citizen participation, published *Is Cuba Socialist?* in 1970, prompting Castro's denunciation of these authors and signaling the growing estrangement of the French intelligentsia.

27 Fornet, *El 71*, documents the critical international and national events that took place in 1971. It marks a breakthrough in scholarship published in Cuba.

28 For an account of Padilla's behavior and Castro's reaction, see http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=11664. For Castro's speech, see http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f300471e.html. For a collection of documents and publications concerning the case, see Casal, *El Caso Padilla*.

29 As invitees of the Cuban government, they were housed in hotels, first at the Habana Libre (formerly the Havana Hilton), then mainly a residence for political exiles, and for most of their stay at the Hotel Vedado.

30 Gómez's short films, most of which were never shown, were neither stories of the heroic proletariat and peasantry, nor of the conflicted bourgeoisie. They presented working and primarily black "marginal" people debating projects, performing music, and recounting their history. She also placed herself and her black middle-class family under the gaze of her unwavering critical eye. On her exploration of working women involved in the sugar harvest, *Mi Aporte* (My Contribution), see Alvarez Ramírez, "*El Aporte* de Sara Gómez."

31 This was a problem for those who took part in many religions and associations, including the Freemasons. However, followers of Afro-Cuban practices were more severely limited than others.

32 The film explores the strained relationship of a couple whose class, race, gender, religious, and political identifications conflicted at the height of the revolution's demands. Released in 1977, it was unfinished at the time of Gómez's untimely death in 1974, at thirty-one, from asthma. Two noted filmmakers completed it; the film has belatedly received attention, as has Gómez's body of work, for its innovative combination of documentary and fictional components and its radical insistence on presenting full characters struggling with conflicts rather than giving viewers a "happy end" resolution of them. For a nuanced discussion of the film as a feminist work, see Rich, One Way or Another." (Rich makes mistaken assertions about Afro-Cuban religions that reflect the limited material available in 1978, when the article was written.)

33 They later learned that participant observation was not an accepted practice and that Rodríguez's support for their work undoubtedly had met with strong opposition.

34 The INS, formerly an autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Justice, was organized after 2003 into several agencies within the Department of Homeland Security.

35 This quotation and other uncited quotations later in the introduction come from Skurski's recollection of the period.

36 For the political context, including anarchist attacks, labor unrest, race riots, and anti-Bolshevism, in which the Immigration Law was passed and amended to include anti-radical categories, see http://law.jrank.org/pages/9705/Red-Scare.html. For the political exclusion clauses in an early version of the law, see https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/65th-congress/session-2/c65s2ch186.pdf.

37 At a cocktail party in Caracas, the U.S. ambassador commented to Josefina, "Mademoiselle," Fernando's aunt, "I hear your nephew is coming back to Venezuela. Tell him to be a good boy."

38 This research led to the publication of their co-written article "Reproducing Dependency: Auto Industry Policy and Petrodollar Circulation in Venezuela" (1982), which was an early effort to understand the complexity of the Venezuelan state. The essay examined the disjunction between the state's self-representation in official programs and the practices through which elite Venezuelan families with old wealth influenced policy and multinationals established a network of connections with state figures and entrepreneurs.

39 Coronil's "The Magical State: History and Illusion in the Appearance of Venezuelan Democracy" (working paper, October 1988) critiqued Bonapartism as applied to Latin America through a discussion of several coups in Venezuela, understood as a neocolonial rentier state.

40 Given their interest in understanding violence in its social, discursive, and colonial dimensions, with the support of Raymond Grew, of the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, they organized a conference, "States of Violence," which led to an edited volume by the same name: see Coronil and Skurski, *States of Violence*.

41 Among the founders of the seminar were Geoff Eley, Terence McDonald, Ronald Suny, and Sherry Ortner. For a list of papers, see https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhlead/umich-bhl-2011120?view=text. Coronil first presented "Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Postimperial Geohistorical Categories" as a Comparative Study of Social Transformations working paper in 1992.

42 The doctoral program is connected to the Anthropology and History departments but has its own requirements, admissions, affiliated faculty, core seminar, student fellowships, and meeting space.

43 They included Ann Laura Stoler, Brinkley Messick, Nick Dirks, and E. Valentine Daniels.

44 For an innovative discussion of the debates and questions nourished by the doctoral program in anthropology and history, see Murphy et al., *Anthrohistory*.

45 Most of the co-editors of the volume are graduates of the anthrohistory program. Skurski was its associate director under David W. Cohen, the dedicated director of the program who succeeded Coronil.

46 The group met at frequent conferences in Latin America and the United States over the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century and produced many publications. Among its central participants were Catherine Walsh, Javier Sanjinés, and Arturo Escobar. For a chronology of conferences and list of publications, see http://www.ceapedi.com.ar/encuentro2012/encuentro_3.htm.

47 This argument converged with those of the anthropologists Sidney Mintz and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, among others.

48 For an archive of documents and sources concerning the "Darkness in El Dorado" controversy, see the website AnthroNiche, organized by Douglas W. Hume, at http://anthroniche.com/darkness-in-el-dorado-controversy. For an informative exchange among central figures, see Borofsky, *Yanomami*.

49 In an effort to counter this tendency, members of the task force, including Coronil and Turner, took part in an unprecedented meeting of Yanomami village leaders in the Venezuelan Amazon to discuss the past research projects and their current health needs.

50 For statements by participants in the conference, see https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0009.104/--production-of-knowledge-indigenous-peoples?rgn=main;view=fulltext.

51 For a discussion of the controversy at the University of Michigan, including a history of the expeditions to obtain Yanomami biological materials and kinship information, see Skurski, "Past Warfare."

52 On April 12, with Chávez out of power and contradictory accounts of the unfolding events, Coronil was invited to PBS *NewsHour* to comment on the upheaval, along with a mainstream analyst of Latin America. At a moment in which U.S. officials and media figures were claiming that Chávez had resigned amid popular rejection of his rule, Coronil cited the electoral foundations of Chávez's support and argued in defense of constitutional mechanisms of change.

53 Before the coup, employees of the state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) had gone on strike, and after the coup the opposition almost toppled him through a crippling oil company lockout and a business strike in 2002. These events helped cement the fierce polarization that marked the country for years.

54 The political theorist Edgardo Lander, initially a supporter of Chávez's project, published critiques of the regime's heightened oil dependency and its turn toward ecologically destructive mining under Chávez's successor Nicolás Maduro. For a discussion of the constitutional crisis and its link to the intensification of extractivism, see Lander and Arconada Rodríguez, "Venezuela."

55 At the CUNY Graduate Center, they included Katherine Verdery, with whom he worked closely. Gary Wilder, with whom he shared a deep concern for interdisciplinary and Global South issues, joined the Graduate Center soon after.

56 As Lander observes with anguish in an interview, the international Left has shown an unwillingness to engage in critical discussion of Chavismo, given its focus on imperial attacks, thus weakening its voice when the crisis of the Maduro government became glaring: see Lander, "Ante la crisis de Venezuela la izquierda carece de crítica."

57 Coronil, "The Future in Question," 137.

58 Coronil, "Pieces for Anthrohistory," 53–54.

59 Coronil, "Pieces for Anthrohistory," 56.

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