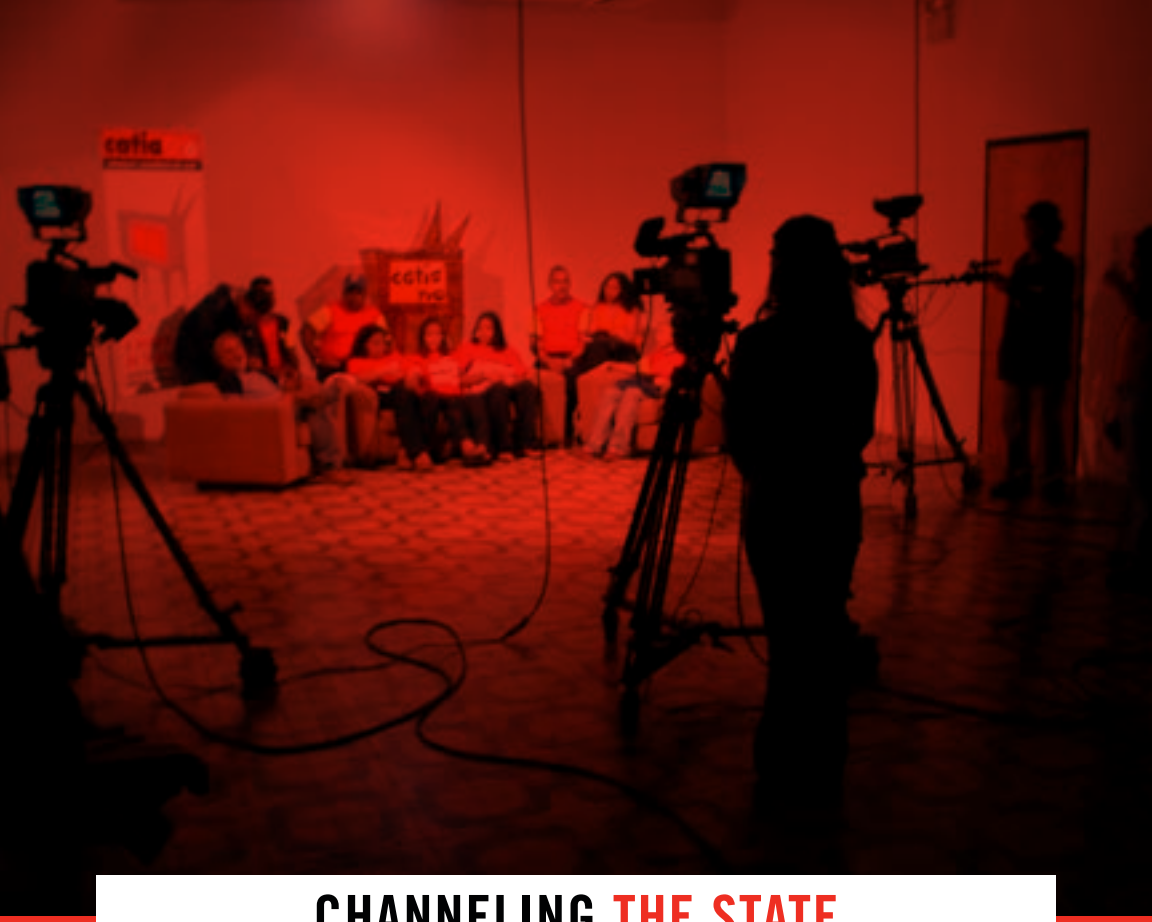

CHANNELING THE STATE

COMMUNITY MEDIA AND POPULAR POLITICS IN VENEZUELA

Naomi Schiller

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RADICAL AMÉRICAS

A series edited by Bruno Bosteels
and George Ciccariello-Maher

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Naomi Schiller

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Cover art: Catia TVe's television studio, 2004. Courtesy of the author.

To my mom,

NINA GLICK SCHILLER

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Preface

I started examining some of the issues explored in this book in 2000, when I spent eight months conducting research in a rural community outside of Cumaná, a small city in eastern Venezuela. I wanted to understand how campesino men and women engaged with commercial television's flashy depictions of elite urban experience and melodrama. Sitting for hours with women from the mountain valley, and occasionally local men, I watched endless hours of telenovelas, Latin American soap operas. Together with Anahi, one of the women with whom I had grown particularly close, I watched the concluding chapter of *Maria Rosa Búscame una Esposa* (Maria Rosa Find Me a Wife), a Peruvian telenovela about a secretary who—surprise!—falls in love with her wealthy boss. During the final episode, the boss recognizes his feelings for his secretary and the two live happily ever after. Anahi and I cried.

At this point, Hugo Chávez had been president for less than two years. Along with my interlocutors, I had paid limited attention to Chávez or the central government. The social welfare programs that would become the hallmark of Chávez's presidency did not yet exist. The campesinos with whom I was living had yet to feel any change in their everyday lives under Chávez, beyond being annoyed when he interrupted their telenovelas with long-winded speeches. For the most part they remained loyal to Democratic Action, the political party in Venezuela that had done most to solidify identification with rural Venezuelans through efforts at land reform and limited wealth redistribution.

I conducted this initial field research project at a time of increased anthropological attention to the role of media in people's everyday lives. I was

drawn to analyses that recognized that audiences were not dupes of bourgeois values and aesthetics, although they did not always have access to tools that would allow them to negotiate all of television's messages (Abu-Lughod 1995). At the same time, I came away from this period of research knowing that commercial television encouraged very poor women to aspire to middle-class lifestyles, relating and comparing the ups and downs of their daily lives to the characters on the telenovelas.

I was eager to learn more about the Venezuelan "media world," the process of production, circulation, and engagement of media, and the social relations that create both mass and small media (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). I began to learn about Venezuelan community television. I first heard about the community television station Catia TVe, the subject of this book, at a conference on neoliberalism organized by *Left Turn* magazine at New York University in 2002. Conference organizers invited Blanca Eekhout, a young middle-class Venezuelan woman, to speak about Catia TVe, the station she founded together with activists from a poor neighborhood. I returned to Venezuela in 2003 to learn more about Catia TVe, based in Caracas, and what Hugo Chávez and his allies' called the Bolivarian Revolution, named after the early nineteenth-century liberator of Latin America, Simón Bolívar. My experience watching telenovelas with very poor women in a marginal area of the country fueled questions about the urban poor's experience of media production in the nation's capital. I set out to do ethnographic research on how people teach, learn, and advocate for community media production as a means to construct a more just society.

When I arrived in Caracas in 2006 to do long-term fieldwork, and after spending three summers getting to know Catia TVe's founders, I decided to accept the invitation of the director of Catia TVe to live with him, his wife (who also worked at Catia TVe), and their two children in Manicomio, the neighborhood where Catia TVe was founded. I paid them rent. Living in Manicomio, I experienced the rhythms of daily life in a barrio: the occasional electrical blackouts, the long waits to pay 900 *bolivares* (about forty cents) to ride a minibus down the hill to where one could catch the metro, and the sounds of motorcycles buzzing up and down the narrow *callejon* (passageway) between the cement block houses. While I did not conduct research in or about life in Manicomio, this experience informed my understanding of people's lives at Catia TVe and the context from which their political project emerged.

I became part of the daily life at the station as well as I could. I accompanied staff and volunteers into the field, where they filmed meetings, marches,

press conferences, and dance performances. I observed and participated in Catia TVe's weekly studio shows, the editing and transmission of programming, and the station's classes for new volunteers. I also attended workshops, conferences, and meetings in poor neighborhoods and state institutions alongside Catia TVe producers. I was excluded from most internal meetings of Catia TVe's directors, as well as many meetings with state officials. I conducted over fifty interviews with Catia TVe's staff and volunteers, staff at an official state television station called ViVe TV, and government officials.

When I became more involved, co-producing programs with Catia TVe producers and filming on my own, the video camera served me, as it did Catia TVe producers, as an entry vehicle into official state institutions and barrio meetings. Given my appearance (dark hair with "white but not bright white" skin, as one Catia TVe producer described me), people often assumed that I was a Catia TVe staff member. I had to make a conscious effort to alert people to my status as an American researcher—that is, until I opened my mouth and let loose my gringa Spanish. Given the inundation of foreigners who arrived to document and study aspects of life in Caracas at the time, most people found my being there unremarkable. People embraced me as an additional avenue for publicity, alongside Catia TVe producers. This presented its own challenges, as I attempted to make clear the long-term time frame of my research and writing.

Like so many others who visited Venezuela in the first decade of the 2000s, I had set out hoping to find a successful social movement. I witnessed many scholars, observers, and tourists turned off by the complexity of the political process they found in Venezuela. For my part, I had to come to terms with the gaps between the political ideals of Catia TVe producers and some of their practices. I saw how everyday interactions at times reproduced hierarchies, particularly of gender and class. The anthropological methodology of long-term engagement with our research subjects was vital in allowing me time to process messy realities and understand the history and perspectives of my interlocutors.

The challenge of writing this book has been one that Catia TVe producers have also faced. Creating representations of the world is part and parcel of constructing the world. Just as the production of all knowledge is a practice of mediation, so I struggled with striking the right balance, unearthing the complexity of Catia TVe producers' experiences, choosing which moments to highlight to show the deep problems as well as the possibilities. I hope that this book honors as much as possible the challenges that Catia TVe producers embraced.

As this book focuses on research I conducted in the early 2000s, I use the past tense to describe Catia TVe's struggle to tip the balance of forces in the direction of poor people's leadership. What I observed during this time period does not represent the position or outlook of my interlocutors for all time. My use of the past tense is not meant to indicate that Venezuelans have stopped struggling for a better world. The people I describe in this book continue to change and to develop new strategies in the face of shifting and increasingly difficult circumstances.

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go to the men and women at Catia TVe who welcomed me into their lives and shared their insights and experiences. Without their patience and willingness to allow me to observe and participate in their work, this book would not have been possible. My hope is that this project honors the complex challenges these media producers faced. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from them, debate with them, and share passions for a better world.

This project began at New York University, where I had the opportunity to work closely with Faye Ginsburg, Thomas Abercrombie, Bruce Grant, Greg Grandin, and Rafael Sánchez. The media production skills and knowledge I gained from Cheryl Furjanic, Meg McLagan, and Peggy Vail, through NYU's Program in Culture and Media in the Department of Anthropology, proved enormously important in allowing me to participate in the work of television production in Caracas. I am indebted to Faye Ginsburg for inspiring my interest in understanding the social practice of media production and for her ongoing intellectual engagement. Bruce Grant's continued generosity as a mentor and interlocutor has been vital. I am thankful for support for this project from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, the McCracken Graduate Fellowship of New York University, a Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Temple University's Center for the Humanities Faculty Fellowship, a CUNY Graduate Center's Gittell Junior Faculty Award, and a fellowship from CUNY's Center for Place, Culture, and Politics. Support for this project was also provided by a PSC-CUNY Award,

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My sincere thanks goes to Lila Abu-Lughod, my undergraduate advisor, who first helped me craft a project to study media in Venezuela, and to Robert Albert, Julio Alvarez, Steven Bloomstein, and Susan Reyna for welcoming me to intern at the Turimiquire Foundation in Cumaná.

Great joy came from working with and learning from a wonderful group of friends and colleagues at the different institutions where I have made my life. At NYU, I benefited from the support and intellectual energy of Haytham Bahoora, Amahl Bishara, Maggie Clinton, Priya Lal, Deborah Matzner, John Patrick Leary, Shane Minkin, Tsolin Nalbantian, and Sherene Seikaly. In Caracas, I received vital feedback on the central ideas of this book from Chelina Sepúlveda and Andrés Antillano. Over the years, I have received helpful input from Anthony Alessandrini, Cristina Beltran, Dominic Boyer, George Ciccariello-Maher, Luis Duno Gottberg, Steve Ellner, Sujatha Fernandes, Judith Goode, Joseph Keith, Antonio Lauria, William Mazzarella, Natalia Roudakova, Robert Samet, Krupa Shandilya, Julie Skurski, Sam Stark, Constance Sutton, Miguel Tinker Salas, Alejandro Velasco, and K. Eva Weiss. Maggie Clinton, Crystal Parikh, and Jini Kim Watson were a continuous source of constructive criticism, intellectual guidance, and support. I am fortunate to have terrific colleagues at Brooklyn College, including Patricia Antoniello, Jillian Cavanaugh, and Katie Rose Hejtmanek. In addition, I am indebted to two anonymous readers for Duke University Press, who provided invaluable feedback and posed challenging questions that helped me improve the manuscript.

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Introduction

Passing through multiple security checkpoints staffed by heavily armed guards, Nestor, Jesica, and I made our way inside Miraflores, Venezuela's presidential palace.[1] Nestor and Jesica proudly presented their press credentials: small homemade squares of laminated cardboard emblazoned with the name of their community television station, Catia TVe. Once inside, we crowded beside nine professional camera crews in the back of a rectangular room with stadium seating. Nestor squeezed his skinny frame through the tangle of camera operators to place Catia TVe's microphone alongside those of major commercial television networks, a community radio station, and a state-run network.

A heavyset cameraman who worked for a state-run station eyed Catia TVe's palm-size video camera. Smiling, Jesica adjusted the height of Catia TVe's lightweight tripod and quipped, "¿Más criollo, no?" (It's more native, no?). The cameraman laughed at her suggestion that Catia TVe's low-priced video equipment made in Japan was somehow more Venezuelan, more of "the people," than his professional gear.

Jesica and Nestor's low-cost camera gear was not the only detail that marked them as different from most of the other media producers in the room. Jesica, twenty-four years old, and Nestor, eighteen years old, were younger, had darker complexions, and were more casually dressed than most of the journalists, photographers, and camera people. Jesica was the only female camera operator. She and Nestor had grown up in the same poor neighborhood of west Caracas, where they both dropped out of high school. After enrolling in a free video production class together at Catia TVe, they spent several months as volunteer producers at the station, making short programs

about a local dance troop and the problems plaguing trash collection in their neighborhood. Jesica and Nestor had joined Catia TVe's staff, which was mostly from the poor neighborhoods of Caracas, just six months before. Their attendance at this February 2007 press conference challenged long-established boundaries of class, race, and gender.

Jesica and Nestor's presence in the midst of a packed room of national and international journalists was one sign of the tumultuous changes occurring in Venezuela. By the turn of the twenty-first century, President Hugo Chávez had made Venezuela a steady source of front-page international news. Venezuela was long viewed in the United States as a politically stable and friendly supplier of oil. Chávez's effort to challenge U.S. influence in Latin America and launch what he called the Bolivarian Revolution attracted extensive scrutiny from the international and Venezuelan press. Although the Chávez government embraced some of the formal mechanisms of liberal democracy—such as a strong emphasis on the constitution and regular elections—it challenged the basic liberal norm of the necessary autonomy of media and social movements from the state. In the wake of Chávez's 2005 declaration that Venezuela was building "twenty-first-century socialism," pundits, human rights organizations, and politicians in the United States and elsewhere almost uniformly argued that Chávez was an aspiring dictator who sought to use the state to trample freedom.

Much of this analysis overlooked the perspectives of young people like Jesica and Nestor, whose experiences of state power began to change when Chávez was elected president in 1998. Although Miraflores was located less than a mile from the barrio where Jesica and Nestor grew up, poor people had few opportunities to enter the presidential palace, let alone participate in the media coverage of their own neighborhoods or of official state affairs before Chávez's election. After being marginalized for decades by poverty and violence under the rule of liberal democratic governments, by the early 2000s community media activists found themselves involved in an unpredictable turnabout. By the time of my long-term fieldwork in 2007, almost thirty community television stations and hundreds of community radio stations had begun operating across the country.

Nearly two hours after we arrived, President Chávez entered the press conference room, flanked by several ministers. The sound of camera shutters reached a frenzied pitch. Half the reporters in the room extended him a warm applause. The other half remained unmoved. Nestor clapped loudly, while Jesica jumped up and down to get a better view. The floor shook as her

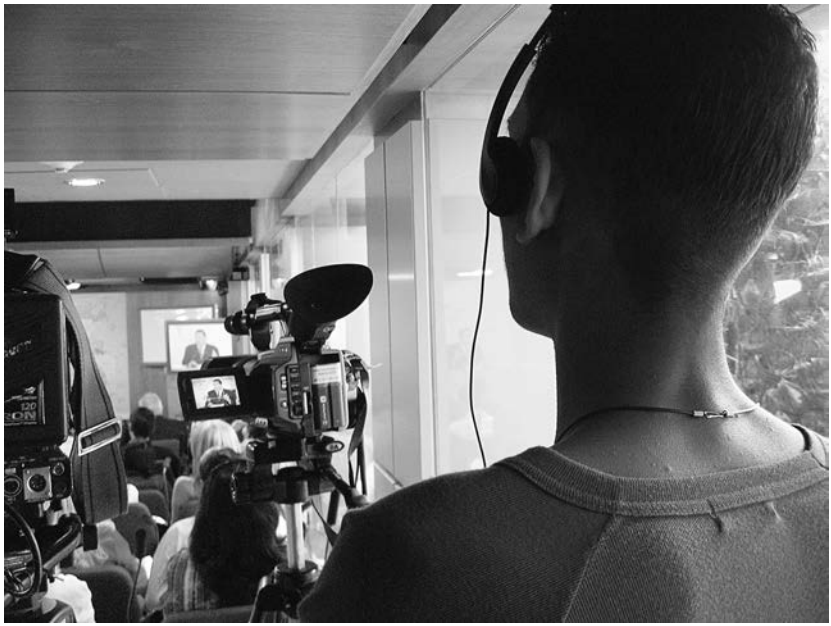

FIGURE I.1. Nestor films a Chávez press conference, February 1, 2007. Photo by the author.

feet hit the floor, eliciting angry glances from neighboring camera operators whose tripods and cameras registered every movement. Jesica and Nestor, like their Catia TVe colleagues, were ardent Chávez supporters, whom many in Venezuela and beyond have called *chavistas*. They identified with the president's humble roots; his mestizo, black, and indigenous features; and his call for social and economic justice.

Once considered the "voice of the voiceless" against the elite-controlled commercial media and the state, Catia TVe and many other community media producers became close collaborators with officials seeking to transform the state. By the time of my research in 2007, Catia TVe was not only politically aligned with the Chávez government and the Bolivarian Revolution, but was also financially dependent on state institutions to pay their staff and maintain their equipment and facilities.[2] This shift from dissident activists to government allies raised a lot of questions. Given their political and financial alignment with the Chávez-led Bolivarian movement, could Catia TVe generate what activists and scholars often refer to as "voices from below" when they were aligned with the state and supported financially "from above"? For many observers, the most pressing question is, Can state-supported media criticize the state?

This question seems straightforward enough. Yet when I first began my fieldwork with Catia TVe, I found myself tongue-tied when people asked me if community media producers could criticize the state. My research suggested not only that the people I was studying had different expectations about the state than many of my friends, family, and colleagues, but also that their understandings of the state were shifting. Nestor and Jesica's experience at the palace that morning was one of many instances I observed over fourteen months of fieldwork that encouraged Catia TVe producers to view the state as an unfolding and messy collection of ideas, practices, individuals, and institutions that had the potential to improve the lives of the poor and expand their access to political participation.

Over time I came to realize that embedded in the question about whether Catia TVe producers could criticize the state were several major assumptions that made it difficult to understand Catia TVe's media practice. To begin with, the question takes for granted that we already know what the state means. Most crucially, the question assumes that the central aim of media producers should be to monitor and criticize the state from an independent position, as liberal democratic definitions of press freedom assert. Widely accepted understandings of the state led only to the conclusion that Catia TVe was a client-mouthpiece for the Chávez government. From this starting point, Catia TVe's close alignment with Venezuela's central state institutions seemed like a problem for freedom and democracy.

What we have been missing is greater attention to what the state means in various sites of media production. Instead of beginning with ready-made understandings of the media and the state to evaluate Venezuela in the Chávez era, this book is about how barrio-based community media producers and their allies experienced, understood, and created the state through the process of making media. In order to answer the question about Catia TVe's relationship with the state, we must understand what the state meant to these media makers and how they were engaged in producing it. One of the many strengths of ethnography is that it allows scholars to approach the state as an open question rather than as a known object of inquiry.

Exploring Catia TVe producers' perspectives and analyzing their day-to-day work allowed me to view Nestor and Jesica's presence at the Chávez press conference as a practice of everyday statecraft. While the work of statecraft is often associated with trained elite professionals in formal governing positions, I build on the work of anthropologists and historians who have focused attention on the participation of the poor and historically disen-

franchised in the production of the state (Joseph and Nugent 1994).[3] From this perspective, statecraft (also referred to as state formation) is an ever-unfolding result of daily power-laden interactions between poor and elite social actors who jointly create the state through practices that are local, regional, and global. I argue that Catia TVe's work of media production was a form of statecraft. Catia TVe producers' efforts to make media in their own barrios, in the television studio, and inside central state institutions provided them a way to shape the emerging state project in the interest of the poor.

Official government press conferences in Venezuela, like the one I have been describing, are examples of the performance of state power. As a "made for media" ritual or play, press conferences are not simply created by the state but are constitutive of the state itself (Pedelty 1995). Even before Chávez walked into the room—before a single camera shutter clicked or a journalist asked a question—Nestor, Jesica, and their community media colleagues were already an essential part of a process of creating ideas and representations of the state. Together, the official actors—most prominently, President Chávez—and the press corps not only produced media content and coverage, but also granted the state meaning and power.[4] Jesica and Nestor, as barrio-based media producers, were a new piece of this performance. Their presence asserted that poor men and women of color had the right and the ability to participate in politics. For the government and for its supporters, their attendance was an important display of the government's redistribution of wealth and its commitment to the empowerment of the poor. Catia TVe's budget camera equipment and cheerful community logo helped proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution authenticate claims that the revolution was the product of grassroots participation. In the chapters that follow, I trace how Catia TVe producers worked to make these displays of popular power not simply window dressing, but meaningful opportunities for the poor to participate in revolutionary statecraft.

Taking seriously Catia TVe producers' perspectives on state institutions means having to allow for uncertainty about what the state means. In this book, I ask readers to join me in assuming a critical distance from what have become commonsense definitions of the state, especially in the United States. To be sure, given the history of authoritarianism and state violence, it is impossible to dismiss suspicions of state power. Many people around the world experience the state primarily as an antagonistic, coercive, or mystifying force. This book examines another possibility, one that challenges a uniform narrative of the state. Catia TVe producers and many of their allies rejected notions that the state was either a coherent thing to be seized or a

collection of institutions always already predisposed to enacting a particular kind of politics.[5]

In their struggle to participate in the construction of a democratic socialist state, the pressing question for Catia TVe producers was not how to assert autonomy from the state so that they could criticize it. Instead, these media makers continually asked whose state they were constructing, which social class this state represented, and how to expand social justice and equality as they developed relationships with members of the middle class who had long monopolized influence over official state institutions. Catia TVe producers attempted to make Venezuelan state institutions sites of class struggle over how to use and dismantle the existing unjust economic and political system. I show how and why Catia TVe producers saw the state as a process rather than as a coherent object to be captured once and for all. Throughout this book I uncover how Catia TVe's work in poor neighborhoods and inside central state institutions created unique openings for the urban poor and their allies to embrace statecraft as a collective endeavor with the potential for creating positive social change.

In contrast to theorists and observers who argue that states are inherently oppressive, I draw attention to the contingency, unpredictability, and negotiation between popular movements and official state actors. I argue that state institutions are continuously made and remade rather than inevitable and unchangeable forms for the exercise of elite power. In emphasizing how the state is an uneven, variable process, I suggest that the state is a condition of possibility for popular mobilization at certain junctures. At the same time, the uncertainty about the meaning, boundaries, and possibility of the state left Catia TVe producers vulnerable. As I write this in 2017, Venezuelans face grave political and economic turmoil. Although Catia TVe producers anticipated many of the risks that their embrace of a revolutionary state project posed, some of which have come to fruition, they nevertheless wagered that this vulnerability was necessary and important. This book explains why. It offers insights into the state, class conflict, populist politics, gendered power, liberal notions of press freedom, and the challenges that revolutionary movements face in Venezuela and beyond.

Don't Watch Television, Make It!

Poor and working-class activists planted the seeds for Catia TVe in the late 1980s, a time when sectors of the Venezuelan military were unleashing murderous violence against poor people who had risen up to reject the govern-

ment's decision to embrace neoliberal reforms. The founders of the station were drawn to community media as a form of social activism for two central reasons: first, they saw the enormous potential of video production to generate interest and inspire participation in their barrio; and second, they wanted to counter the power of the privately owned commercial media who, they believed, stood in the way of any meaningful political change.

The experience of community media producers who grew up in poor neighborhoods in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s differed markedly from the celebrations of Venezuela's democracy that I read about in many scholarly accounts. Beginning in the late 1950s, Venezuelans had regularly gone to the polls to elect leaders from two major political parties, the social-democratic party, Democratic Action (AD), and the social-Christian party, the Independent Political Electoral Organizing Committee (COPEI). To many observers, Venezuela seemed stable and relatively prosperous, especially in contrast to the conditions of state violence, civil war, and dictatorships that plagued other Latin American nations, including Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. These celebrations, however, overlooked the fact that substantive political participation, social equality, and access to resources remained elusive for the vast majority of Venezuelans. Indeed, despite prominent claims that Venezuela had a "racial democracy" that avoided the virulent, race-based discrimination of the United States, the unequal distribution of resources and political power largely fell along racial lines (Wright 1990).[6] While women of all racial backgrounds have encountered deep structural inequalities, women of color in Venezuela have faced enormous levels of discrimination and have been impoverished at higher rates than light-skinned women (Friedman 2000; Rakowski and Espina 2011).

Despite their skepticism about the ability of the kind of democracy they grew up in—one that was liberal and capitalist—to create a free and fair society, Venezuelans I worked with had not given up on the state as an apparatus that ideally works to secure socioeconomic security as well as political rights. This view stems in part from the ideas proposed by the elite political leaders who founded Venezuela's liberal democracy in the late 1950s. The system they created was democratic, insofar as its founders established universal suffrage and a representative political system, and liberal, in the sense that leaders made commitments to the central values of political liberalism, including individual rights, private property, and a constitutional rule of law. To legitimize their rule, the architects of Venezuelan democracy argued that all Venezuelans were entitled to a share of the profits from selling Venezuela's oil (Coronil 1997).[7] They framed natural resources as communal property

to be managed by the state in the interest of the people. This discourse has had an enduring impact. From my first research in rural Venezuela in 2000 through the fieldwork on which this book is based, I regularly heard Venezuelans express the idea that the population should have an equal share of the nation's oil wealth. My informants at Catia TVe assumed that it was common sense that Venezuelans have rights not only to vote or to express their opinions—what we generally think of as political rights—but also socioeconomic rights including access to shelter, food, health care, and education.

In practice, the ruling parties engineered a formal liberal democracy that allowed elites to maintain control of Venezuela's oil wealth and largely limited political participation to elections. During oil booms, leaders used oil-derived wealth to create spectacular development projects that made the state seem magical and out of reach (Coronil 1997). After the price of oil plummeted in the mid-1980s, Venezuela's government adopted neoliberal economic principles to reduce state support for public welfare, which proved disastrous, especially for the poor. If, by the early 1990s, the state appeared to much of the Venezuelan population as impenetrable, corrupt, violent, or even otherworldly, it did not strike popular activists as beyond recovery.

With the election of Chávez in the late 1990s, social activists demanded that the Venezuelan government invest resources from the sale of petroleum not only in social programs involving health and education, but also in community media initiatives. Rather than seeking to create autonomy apart from state institutions, Catia TVe producers demanded that they be able to participate in the remaking of these institutions so that they could fulfill their commitments to popular well-being. Catia TVe's central motto, "Don't watch television, make it!" provides an important starting point to understand how the station's producers saw media and the state during what would turn out to be a high tide of the Bolivarian Revolution.

When I returned to Caracas to do long-term fieldwork in 2006 after spending three previous summers getting to know Catia TVe's founders, the station's motto had already become a rallying cry for media producers across the country. Boldly proclaimed on a massive billboard that was perched atop the station's headquarters in Caracas, the motto demands production in place of reception. As I learned over the course of my research, the maxim referred to more than just television. It insisted that people from low-income barrios could shape the world around them. Catia TVe producers aimed to encourage people in low-income barrios to recognize their capacity not only to make television, but also to remake the broader social web of institutions

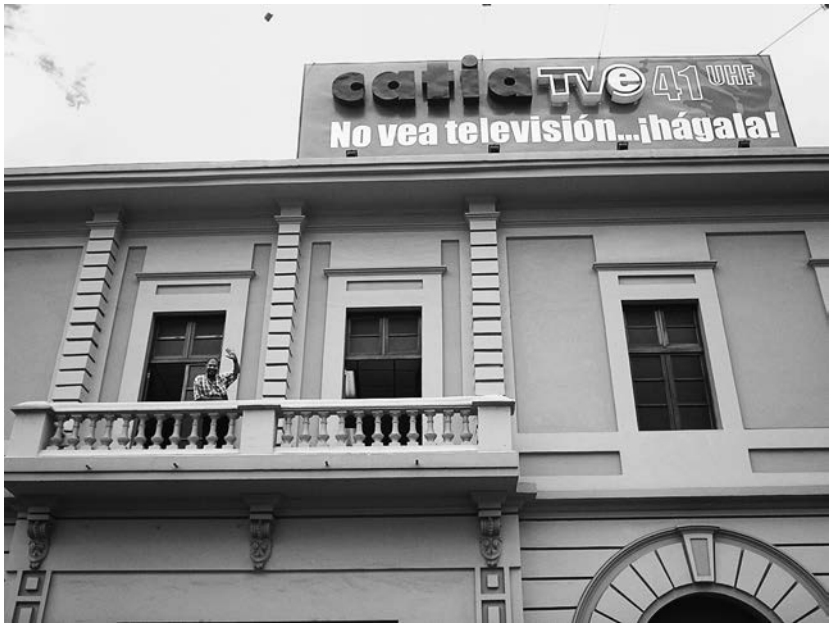

FIGURE I.2. Catia TVe headquarters with billboard that reads "Don't Watch Television, Make It!" January 25, 2006. Photo by the author.

and social relations they called the state. For my interlocutors at Catia TVe, the state was not a fixed and uniform thing, but rather a potentially revolutionary set of institutions and a process in gestation.

Despite the clarity of Catia TVe's slogan, it took me many months of fieldwork to understand that my interlocutors were quite serious about their motto. Like many grassroots video producers throughout Latin America, rather than seeing media as a product and imagining the effect that their programming might have on audiences, Catia TVe's thirty staff and nearly a hundred regular volunteers approached media as a process (Rodríguez 1994; Valdeavellano 1989). They worked to shape the immediate political terrain around them as they organized film shoots, conducted interviews, and documented their neighbors' problems. They did not aim to generate passive media audiences; they advocated for direct, engaged participation. Catia TVe's founders identified media production, not reception, as a practice that encouraged the discussion and debate necessary to create a truly participatory and democratic state. They attempted to bring this new state into being through their day-to-day participation in activities in poor neighborhoods and official state institutions where they asserted the right of the poor to participate and lead.

Media production provided Catia TVe producers an entry into statecraft in ways that I did not anticipate when I began my fieldwork. It is commonplace to understand that media outlets are important brokers of power in society. But this is often understood as a result of the influence of media coverage on audiences. An unexpected finding of my research was that the practice of media production—generating interviews, filming community meetings, asserting their right to attend official press conferences—was much more vital to their political activism than the influence of their finished media product on viewers. This approach had its contradictions. Audience numbers are the evidence that we use to judge the reach of media; my own effort to measure audiences and official polling revealed that community media audiences remained proportionately very small.

Regardless of their audience numbers, seizing the tools of media production and demanding institutional legal recognition allowed Catia TVe's founders to gain a foothold in an arena—"the press"—that many people across social sectors see as highly influential. This access—and the accompanying "media ideologies" (Gershon 2008) concerning the importance of television's impact on audiences—granted them a degree of political authority. In their effort to work with their allies who had greater class power and access to official state institutions, Catia TVe producers leveraged widespread beliefs about the power of television programming to sway the political opinion of audiences and influence political outcomes. In practice, Catia TVe's leaders demonstrated that their central goal was getting people to make television, not to watch it. And by the end of my fieldwork, I understood their motto, "Don't watch television, make it!" as another way of saying, "Don't sit by and watch the state, make it!"

The Historical Conjuncture

Much of what I document and analyze in the chapters that follow took place between 2006 and 2007, a time of ad hoc invention and change in Venezuela. This was a high point for the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez was first elected in 1998 with the claim that his government would remake the relationship between state and society by granting the population direct control over governance and decision-making. To advance this vision, the government joined forces with active social movements to create a complex web of new programs in health care, education, housing, and media, some of which granted leadership to grassroots groups while others replicated previous patterns of paternalism. At the same time, Chávez concentrated power

in the executive branch and centralized leadership in his own hands. In the wake of Chávez's 2005 declaration that Venezuela was on the road to building twenty-first-century socialism, the government formed a mass socialist party; nationalized key industries, expropriating them with compensation; and promoted local self-governing organizations called communal councils. The president and his supporters asserted that their aim was to create a kind of socialism that was neither derived from Soviet or Cuban socialism, nor limited to the formal channels of representative liberal democracy.

Chávez was reelected in December 2006 by a wide margin, granting him a firm mandate, even in the face of a wealthy and globally influential political opposition. Chávez's reelection followed three years of economic expansion. Oil prices were high and state funding for social programs was plentiful. Socioeconomic indicators for the period between 2003, when the government gained control over the state oil industry, and Chávez's reelection in 2006 reveal improved life conditions for the population (López Maya and Lander 2011b). Chávez emerged as a key leader in Latin America. He voiced the perspective of a growing number of progressive governments that challenged U.S. political and economic hegemony in the region.

Catia TVe producers were hopeful that through the Bolivarian Revolution they could advance social justice and equality in Venezuela and beyond. Intermingled with my informants' optimism, however, was a sense of uncertainty. The Bolivarian Revolution unfolded through sharp and pervasive contradictions. Over lunch one afternoon in 2007, Hector, an assistant director at Catia TVe, referenced aspects of these inconsistencies, noting, "This revolution is too easy." We had spent almost ten minutes searching for seats in the crowded food court of a mall in a working-class neighborhood of west Caracas. Tables were packed with families and young people enjoying pizza, fried chicken, and falafel sandwiches at prices that were more than double the cost of lunch from the informal vendors that lined the streets just outside the mall. The Bolivarian Revolution's redistribution of resources allowed many poor and lower middle-class people newfound access to commodities. The incongruous mix of capitalist and socialist ideals that shaped daily life in west Caracas was particularly notable in the mall, a space that serves as a kind of laboratory for aspirational class identities (Dávila 2015).

Hector worried about the fact that redistribution relied on high oil prices. The material gains we saw in poor communities around Catia TVe were not the result of a hard-fought struggle to upend the capitalist world system and reorder production and distribution through collective worker control. Instead, the poor and middle-class advocates of the Bolivarian Revolution attempted

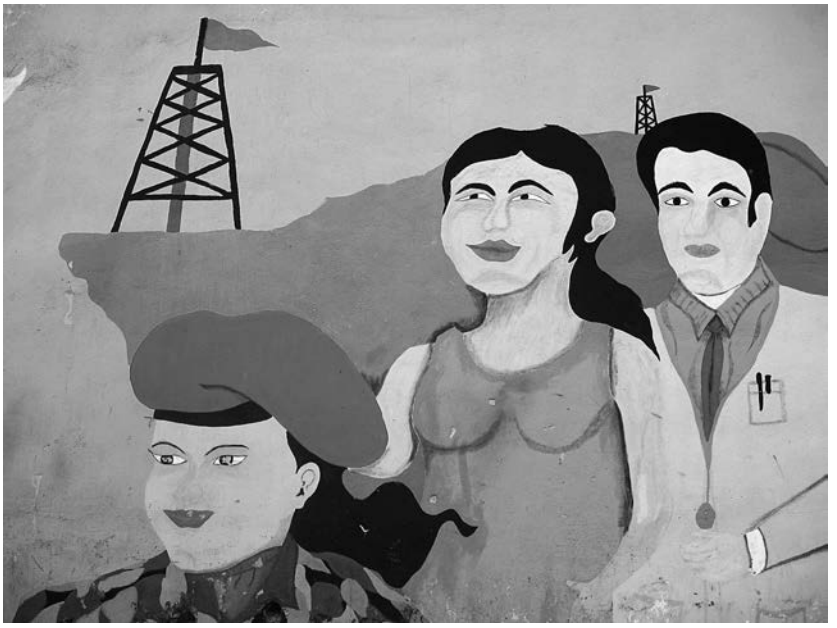

FIGURE 1.3. Caracas street mural, November 24, 2006. Photo by the author.

to build a new state on the foundation of an existing mono-crop export economy, which continued to keep Venezuela reliant on and deeply interconnected to what Hector saw as an unjust and destructive international capitalist system. In addition to being concerned about Venezuela's dependence on oil, most of my interlocutors at Catia TVe were also anxious about the hostility of the previous ruling elites, the opportunism they encountered within the ranks of chavistas, and the overreliance of the Bolivarian movement on Chávez's leadership. Nevertheless, they believed that revolutionary change was possible.

At the time of my research, my interlocutors at Catia TVe had already participated in advancing profound challenges to the status quo. They were part of a mass popular rebellion that helped reverse a 2002 coup attempt against Chávez, which Venezuela's commercial media owners and business leaders orchestrated and the U.S. government endorsed. This was no small achievement, given the violent history of U.S.-backed coups in the region (Grandin 2006). Moreover, Catia TVe producers were active in building and benefiting from programs in health, education, community media, and food distribution. They were optimistic about their efforts to expand political participation in state formation and develop meaningful popular control through the Bolivarian Revolution.

To understand their sense of possibility, it is vital to comprehend how the particular historical conjuncture of the first decade of the 2000s created openings for political change. The multiple interconnected forces that informed daily life in Caracas and globe-spanning politics during this period included a shifting political landscape created by the collapse of Venezuela's two-party political system in the 1990s; the growing popular rejection in Latin America of neoliberal policies imposed by the United States; the charismatic contradictory leadership of Hugo Chávez; widespread denunciation of U.S. intervention in the aftermath of the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq; and, of course, the rise in the price of oil, which was itself a complex outcome of the interplay of the Chávez government's policies and global politics. These conditions produced uncertainty and opportunity; Catia TVe producers and their allies were hopeful they could exploit this situation to build state institutions by and for the poor majority.

Ten years later, the easiness that concerned Hector is a distant memory. Much of my informants' optimism has turned to despair. With Chávez's death in 2013, the precipitous drop in the price of oil, a reconsolidated political opposition, and the calamitous leadership of Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, Hector and his allies face a remarkably different conjuncture. As I finish this book, my informants from Catia TVe fear the violence and political paralysis that shapes everyday life in Caracas. The poorest have been hit the hardest by the current economic collapse. Catia TVe is struggling to stay in operation in the face of budget cuts and the new challenges of everyday survival. The crisis Venezuela now faces is a consequence of at least three factors: first, the difficulty of altering the structure of dependency created by a mono-crop export economy; second, the pressure imposed by national and international interests who seek to curb anticapitalist politics that would upend the class structure; and third, the challenge of countering corruption in the midst of a chaotic and ad hoc process of transformation.

Given the formidable challenges Catia TVe producers and their allies faced in asserting popular leadership of state institutions, they were less attuned to analyzing and trying to intervene in the problems of Venezuela's dependence on the global oil market and its interconnections with global geopolitics. In the midst of high oil prices, some of the inconsistencies and tensions of the effort to build socialism on the foundation of a capitalist extraction-based economy could be temporarily sidestepped. Their horizon and practice of statecraft were focused on the local, national, and short term.

In focusing on the specific day-to-day work of statecraft in 2006 and 2007, I emphasize the opportunities that Catia TVe producers missed, especially

in addressing inequalities internal to the Bolivarian movement. I make clear that the direction the revolution has taken and the problems that have emerged were not inevitable, as some observers contend. I emphasize how the lack of internal critique of power relations among supporters of the Bolivarian movement created a weak basis on which to navigate the contradictions of the movement and the hostility of the local and global forces aligned against popular leadership. Careful assessment of the gains and missteps of the many projects, like Catia TVe, that emerged with the Bolivarian process will enable us not only to understand the Bolivarian movement but also to grasp the limits and challenges of the conceptual categories we use to understand revolutionary politics.

By now, many scholars and observers have worked to untangle the knots of co-optation and empowerment that held together the Bolivarian Revolution and the process of state formation in Venezuela under Chávez.[8] I take up and extend a valuable thread in this scholarship that highlights how the state is produced on an everyday basis outside as well as inside formal state institutions. With many of the institutions of the Bolivarian Revolution under extreme duress, if not already dismantled, it becomes even more pressing to understand how and why social activists engaged with the state as a condition of possibility during the period that I analyze.

Anthropological Approaches to States

What became clear to Catia TVe activists and to me, as a scholar who is sympathetic with their efforts to construct a more just world, is that "one's theory of 'the state' does greatly matter in formulating strategies for political action" (Gupta 1995, 394). We must address the perennial questions of what the state is and why our theories matter. While states play important roles in people's everyday lives, states are not easy to define or delineate. One might imagine a state in institutional terms—organizations of appointed, elected, or hired people who run the police, the military, and the official bureaucracies that order our lives through both violent and banal coercion. But on close inspection, it becomes difficult to draw boundaries between state and non-state. In a now classic article, Philip Abrams (1988) calls the state a "triumph of concealment"; the very idea of the state hides the way power works in the world by making it seem as if there were a unified, self-operating force of legitimate power separate from the workings of the economy and society. Forgetting that people make the state—like a god or an idol—the state appears to have a life force all its own (Taussig 1993). The common spatial

metaphor of the state as "above" and "outside" society inhibits an analysis of how power hierarchies are reproduced and challenged in daily interactions that are at once local and global (Coronil 1997; Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Informed by thinkers such as Gramsci and Poulantzas, anthropologists, historians, and political theorists have challenged, on the one hand, orthodox Marxist notions that states are straightforward instruments of the dominant capitalist class and, on the other hand, liberal approaches to the state as an entity ideally autonomous from civil society and the economy (Fernandes 2006; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Mitchell 1999). The processual approach to the state that I take up throughout this book sees the state, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot contends, as "a set of practices and processes and their effects" (2001, 131), which are thoroughly embedded in our everyday actions, concrete experiences, and relationships. My research resonates with that of scholars who have argued that the state is not a fixed form or a "thing" at all, but rather a social web that extends not only through individual societies but also across the globe (Abrams 1988; Coronil 1997; Mitchell 1991). Thus, the state not only includes formal institutions like prisons and schools, but also, as Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta note, "is within other institutional forms through which social relations are lived—family, civil society, and the economy" (2006, 9). A processual notion of the state takes into account how the unfolding social relationships that shape daily life are part of a network of unequal and global power relations.

Debates about the state are a steady fixture of everyday life for most Venezuelans. These discussions have generated extensive anthropological attention. Whether approached as "magical" (Coronil 1997; Taussig 1997), "festive" (Guss 2001), "hybrid" (Fernandes 2010b), or as a "process of everyday formation" (Schiller 2013; Valencia 2015), the state plays an outsized role in scholarly understandings and imaginations of Venezuela. My vantage point from Catia TVe allowed me to see that poor activists were using statecraft—the everyday process of creating ideas and representations about what the state is and can be—to try to create a more just world. This finding was distinct from most of what I had read about states and social movements.

Statecraft as a Weapon of the Weak

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, many anthropologists turned their attention away from organized revolutionary movements to focus instead on "unlikely" and "everyday forms of resistance" (Abu-Lughod 1990; Scott 1990). James Scott encouraged anthropologists to consider both

the importance of unorganized acts of resistance and the great danger of large-scale state projects to "improve the human condition" (1998). Ethnographers traced how subjugated populations resisted relations of subordination by employing "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985), including not only foot-dragging and dissimulation but also the "subtle, unorganized, diffuse and spontaneous" forms of oppositional culture, such as laughter and humor (Goldstein 2003, 98). As Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) notes, these studies uncovered the complexity of processes of domination, directed attention to everyday struggle, and deepened our understandings of power both as an exercise of hegemony and as brute violence. However, a weakness of the focus on unlikely and commonplace forms of resistance is that it downplayed the importance of overt organized forms of opposition and misrepresented resistance and local knowledge as separate from or outside of state power (Gutmann 1993; Li 2005).

At the same time that many anthropologists were devoting attention to small-scale everyday acts of resistance, social scientists studying Latin America increasingly directed their analyses to the "new social movements" that arose in the 1980s and 1990s. These scholars argued that conventional theories envisioned political practice in narrow terms that included only electoral, party, and other formal political institutions, overlooking the role of social movements in constructing and configuring democracy (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). In the struggle against the bloody dictatorships in Latin America's southern cone and in their aftermath, social movements engaged in political activism in unconventional spheres outside the formal state apparatus. These activists were suspicious of or rejected outright the possibility that the state was a site of collective reference in the pursuit of justice (Dagnino 1998, 45).

My research on Catia TVe and the Bolivarian Revolution differs markedly from studies of social activists who determined that the state was a lost cause. In contrast, I analyze why in the first decade of the twenty-first century many activists in Venezuela approached statecraft as a weapon of the weak. These efforts were always, in every moment, shaped by power inequalities of class, gender, race, and the kinds of access to decision-making these hierarchies afforded, as I demonstrate. Rather than waiting to engage the state once more equitable relations were established, they used the process of statecraft as a way to try to bring into being a more equitable world. Catia TVe producers wrestled with their relationships with official state institutions and agents, which, as I will show, were simultaneously constraining and enabling. However, establishing autonomy from the state along the lines that

liberal approaches to press freedom mandated was neither desirable nor possible for Catia TVe producers, given their political commitments to the Bolivarian Revolution and their view that the state resources on which they depended rightly belonged to them. They sought to create the necessary space for criticism in order to deepen the revolutionary process according to their agenda of popular empowerment.

Catia TVe producers' everyday forms of resistance included their efforts to develop radical interdependencies with, rather than absolute autonomy from, state institutions.[9] My informants at Catia TVe openly collaborated with officials, institutions, and a broad and diverse network of social movement actors who claimed affinity with a process of progressive social change. Catia TVe producers interchanged knowledge, material resources, and symbolic and material power with people working within state institutions. They aimed for these interdependent relations to be radical in the sense that they were in the interest of sweeping changes in the structures of liberal capitalist society. Catia TVe producers' efforts to create mutual reliance with official institutions involved maintaining long-standing ties and creating new relationships with allies who often exercised greater class power. In many moments, rather than radical interdependency, Catia TVe producers and their interlocutors created a kind of mutual instrumentality. In other moments, they created tenuous and fleeting forms of radical interdependence with official actors who worked within tumultuous state institutions, some of which were much more aligned than others with Catia TVe's goals of radical transformation and popular leadership. To engage in revolutionary statecraft in and through Venezuela's already existing liberal capitalist state institutions required Catia TVe producers to embrace the reality of an uneven playing field. They chose not to wait until they enjoyed conditions of equality with their allies to act. This process was conflict-ridden, frustrating, and sometimes tedious.

Making the Media and the State Ordinary

Let us return to the palace.

Considerable tension buzzed just below the staid collegiality of the press conference I began describing in the opening of this introduction. Just a few months before, Chávez had announced that his government would not renew the broadcast license for a commercial television station harshly critical of the Bolivarian Revolution. This announcement sparked the widespread conclusion that Chávez threatened press freedom. Tackling criticism

FIGURE 1.4. Chávez speaks at press conference, February 1, 2007. Photo by the author.

of his government head on, Chávez opened his address to the national and international press that morning by pledging that he loved what he called "the battle of ideas." Taking a sip of espresso from a tiny porcelain cup, Chávez instructed his audience, "One should say what one wants, as long as they are responsible about what they say. The public should freely watch, listen, analyze, and come to their own conclusions. This is part of the Bolivarian Revolution. So that everyone knows, people here say what they want."

Chávez's declaration of commitment to freedom of expression, a right central to the framework of liberal democracy, ran counter to most pronouncements. But the president's qualification that press freedom entailed a "responsibility" on the part of speakers to manage their own expression pointed to exactly the kind of ambiguity that critics argued would allow the government to unilaterally censor any material it deemed reckless.[10]

Chávez moved on to other topics. Many other topics. About two hours into the president's four-hour monologue, Nestor and Jesica's excitement at being inside the palace for the first time, alongside the international and national professional press crews, slowly dissipated. Chávez regularly spoke for hours on end. As usual, he interspersed his formal discussion of policy with off-the-cuff commentary peppered with songs, jokes, and accessible

lessons in political ideology. But even the most passionate supporters of the president grew bored as the tedium of being tightly packed against other film crews set in. Being in the same room as Chávez began to feel remarkably ordinary.

Nestor, Jesica, and I distracted ourselves by gazing through the windows of the control room behind us, where heavyset men in suits and ties operated dials and keyboards. Based on their experience in Catia TVe's studio, Jesica and Nestor explained to me—in short whispers—that these men were rotating between three different camera feeds to stitch together a seamless recording of the press conference, which they broadcast live over the airwaves of the principal state television channel. After a while, though, even this elaborate display of media production grew boring. Jesica and Nestor busied themselves exchanging text messages with friends. Like Chávez's presence, the behind-the-scenes action of this important site of official media production and state power had become altogether too familiar.

Nestor and Jesica's boredom during the press conference was significant. Their access to this space of official power exposed the everyday human character of what so often seemed otherworldly: the state, the media, and the charismatic force that was Hugo Chávez. In a historical context where Venezuela's vast oil wealth has been used by governing elites to make themselves and their institutions seem supernatural to many ordinary people, Catia TVe producers' access to the means of media production gave them new insight into the behind-the-scenes creation of state spectacle. Nestor and Jesica learned that the press conference was a carefully staged activity coordinated by ordinary people who made decisions about who should be permitted to ask questions, what camera angle to choose, and which dial to turn. The numerous espressos that Chávez requested with a subtle tap on his porcelain cup fueled his seemingly superhuman energy.

Just when it seemed that Chávez would talk straight through lunchtime, he opened the floor to questions. After calling on several reporters from international and national commercial outlets, Chávez turned to a woman from a community newspaper outlet. She was one of the few nonprofessional community media producers alongside Catia TVe at the press conference. The woman had dark-brown skin and looked to be in her late thirties. In a remarkably calm voice she asked the president to discuss the model of communication he thought was necessary to build twenty-first-century socialism. I had observed how this question had been carefully planned before the press conference began, when the director of a new bureau within the Ministry of Communications and Information devoted to community media asked

the six representatives of community media outlets present that morning to agree jointly on a question for the president.

The community newspaper reporter followed up this carefully vetted question with a second query for Chávez that departed from the prearranged script. "Mr. President," she said, "if you'll permit me, knowing the freedom of expression that we enjoy plainly here in Venezuela when we are responsible with what we say, I'd like to tell you about an act of bureaucracy in our community." Given the way that select liberal notions of press freedom were so frequently used to delegitimize the Bolivarian Revolution, I was surprised to observe this community newspaper reporter invoke press freedom. She went on to describe how the government had stopped construction on a housing project in her neighborhood without offering her community an explanation. With all eyes in the room firmly resting on her, she launched a *denuncia*—a complaint or denunciation—about government bureaucracy and corruption. Chávez listened, his eyes narrowing. He made notes in pencil on a legal pad. When she was finished, Chávez restated his commitment to press freedom and turned briefly to her complaint. He asked the community reporter for more details and promised to have the corresponding minister look into the problem.

I never learned whether or not this community reporter received a response from the minister. But it was clear that the reporter transformed what could have been a tightly constrained performance of grassroots participation into an opportunity to raise a pressing concern for her community and hold Chávez accountable to rectify corruption. What was so remarkable was that, although a language of press freedom had become for many critics the go-to political grammar to discredit the Bolivarian Revolution, this community reporter mobilized this same discourse of enlightened liberalism in her denuncia to declare her solidarity with *and* criticism of the Chávez government in order to demand more commitment for social provisions from formal state institutions.

While community media producers like this reporter and Nestor and Jesica rejected a liberal ideology that prioritizes the press's independence from the state, they were also clear that they did not want to replicate historical socialist prescriptions for cultural producers to act as the vanguard of the party-state. Catia TVe producers were disillusioned by the failures of liberal capitalist democracy in Venezuela and wary of repeating the mistakes of previous socialist experiments. And yet both liberal democratic and socialist ideals shaped how Catia TVe producers developed and realized their community media project and how scholars, pundits, activists, journalists, and

politicians evaluated their media practice. A central conceptual and political challenge for state-aligned community media producers has been to articulate media freedom in terms that build on and depart from the dominant Western liberal tradition of press freedom and experiments with socialist media. This book tracks this reckoning.

Through their participation in community media production in this and countless other moments, Catia TVe producers began to see not only the media but also the state as unstable projects of human construction. Their experience undermined the idea, reproduced by successive Venezuelan governments, that the state was something they could not participate in or change. Their participation in both the technological process of production behind media representations, and in the sociopolitical dynamics involved in the production of the state allowed them to challenge the dominant notion that the state was a magical monolith beyond the reach of human action that functioned apart from them. Their practice of media production encouraged Catia TVe producers to view the state not as a central headquarters of power or a chief threat to individual liberty but, instead, as a process they could shape.

Plan of the Book

Chapter 1, "State–Media Relations and the Rise of Catia TVe," charts the development of community media in the context of modern Venezuelan state formation. I describe Catia TVe's transformation from a film club formed on the heels of the 1989 popular uprising to a legal and well-funded television station by 2007. While Chávez's policies were often framed as a vast departure from previous relations between purportedly autonomous arenas of media and the state, this chapter places the Chávez government's approach to media within a long history of struggle, collusion, and compromise between commercial channels and Venezuelan governments.

Chapter 2, "Community Media as Everyday State Formation," examines how Catia TVe producers juggled multiple definitions of the state as they documented the formation of a communal council (an innovative local governance structure) and produced coverage of the 2006 presidential elections alongside ViVe TV, an official state television outlet. Catia TVe producers at times constructed and depended on notions of a reified state, autonomous and separate from society, to build their authority and engage in social activism. Nevertheless, in their everyday practice they defied the fixity of the boundary between state and society and advocated for activists to embrace statecraft.

Chapter 3, "Class Acts," analyzes the cross-class collaboration and conflict that emerged at joint training workshops between Catia TVe producers—the majority of whom lived in Caracas's barrios—and their allies at the official state channel, ViVe TV, most of whom were from middle-class families. I explore the problems that developed as community and official state media producers collaborated to create revolutionary television and used "popular culture" as a basis for the construction of Venezuelan socialism.

Chapter 4, "Channeling Chávez," explores the limits and possibilities of theories of populism, a heavily debated framework, to understand the Bolivarian Revolution. I assess how Catia TVe producers negotiated the contradictions of Chávez's centralized leadership and defined the concept of "the people" as working class and popular.

Chapter 5, "Mediating Women," highlights the connections between media production, public speaking, and gendered authority. While women producers at Catia TVe made remarkable gains in the field of media production, they nevertheless faced persistent gender-based oppression within the station. I argue that the distinction between democratic community and domineering state apparatus prevents scholars, methodologically as well as theoretically, from tracing the way that gender hierarchy was produced in Bolivarian Venezuela.

Chapter 6, "Reckoning with Press Freedom," explores how Catia TVe producers approached press freedom in the context of the Chávez government's controversial 2007 decision to remove RCTV, a commercial television station, from the public airwaves. Instead of approaching the state as a barrier to press freedom, community media producers in Caracas approached statecraft as a potentially liberatory process of collective engagement. The book ends with a glimpse of Catia TVe in 2015. I explore how community media producers have weathered the loss of Chávez and how a few of Catia TVe's founders understood their own missteps and the economic and political crisis they faced.

Channeling the State analyzes how people from Caracas's poor neighborhoods, together with their middle-class allies, used the process of media production to engage in forms of everyday statecraft with the goal of building an alternative to liberal capitalist democracy.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. In all but a few cases, I use pseudonyms to protect identities.

2. Scholars debate whether or not the Bolivarian Revolution was, in fact, a revolution. The central question is, as Benjamin Arditi asserts, "How radical must radical restructuring of the cosmos be in order to call it revolutionary?" I see "revolutionizing" as "a transgression that questions the existing consensus" (Arditi 2007, 117) and "an attempt rationally to design a *new* political order" (Donham 1999, 1). It was clear to me from the first extended period of fieldwork I conducted with Catia TVe in 2003 that community media activists and many of their allies aimed to radically restructure their social order. My participants sought broad, sweeping societal change and were part of a massive movement in popular political participation.

3. I have been strongly influenced by the work of Ferguson and Gupta (2002); Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001); Joseph and Nugent (1994); and Nugent and Alonso (1994).

4. Timothy Mitchell (1991) calls this the "state effect."

5. For further discussion of the state and the possibility of "taking power," see Wilpert (2007), debates over Holloway's *Change the World without Taking Power* (2002), and Ciccariello-Maher (2013).

6. In Venezuela, the affluent population is largely light-skinned, while people from poorer neighborhoods generally have darker complexions. Race is not understood in Caracas according to a black/white binary as it has been historically constructed in the United States. Racism works through a sometimes subtle demarcation of color hierarchy that, as elsewhere in Latin America, ultimately "enforces and promotes the idea that 'white' is 'better'" (Stam 1997, 45). Under the Chávez administrations, Afro-Venezuelan activist organizations had limited success in drawing attention to structural racism and advancing civil rights. The 1999 constitution and many government officials under Chávez continued to refuse to recognize Afro-descendant Venezuelans as a distinct group (García 2007). Nevertheless, Afro-Venezuelan groups made

strides. They worked to gain support for the 2011 Law against Racial Discrimination. Activist organizations also succeeded in their effort to include a question about ethnic descent in the 2011 national census. In this first effort to gather national data, 0.8 percent of those queried identified as Afro-descendants, 52.1 percent as *morenos* (dark and mixed race), 3 percent as black, 43 percent as white, and 2.7 percent as indigenous.

7. Founders of Venezuela's democracy combined liberal democratic commitments to private property, individual freedoms, universal suffrage, and the constitutional rule of law with Simón Bolívar's communitarian vision of the republic, which included communal rights to resources. Coronil calls this hybrid philosophy "rentier liberalism"; it combines core liberal tenets, such as the right to private property, with the landowner's commitment to distribute the profit from the oil trade, often called rent (1997, 88–89). The rentier liberal state, in other words, collects rents (or fees) for oil through contracts with oil companies and redistributes these rents to the population, while at the same time defending the rights of individuals to amass private capital (a basic commitment of liberalism). For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between land, capital, and labor, and the importance of the capture of foreign exchange, see Coronil (1997, 45–66) and Purcell (2015, 168–73).

8. I join a group of researchers who have analyzed how grassroots groups in Venezuela that were aligned with the Chávez-led state and supported financially by state institutions negotiated their autonomy, "outsider" militancy, and local control (Antillano 2005; Azzellini 2010; Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Fernandes 2010b; Valencia 2015; Velasco 2011). This scholarship challenges the mainstream political science approach that has long dominated research on Venezuela, as elsewhere in Latin America.

9. Liberal thought tends to mark dependency as negative and constraining, and sees autonomy and dependency as contradictory. Liberal approaches can make it difficult to recognize "other kinds of political and social projects and moral-ethical aspirations" (Mahmood 2007, 149). My understanding of dependence, independence, and interdependence draws on feminist and disability studies literature, as well as recent anthropological analyses of sovereignty. See Cattelino (2008), Fine and Glendinning (2005), and Fraser and Gordon (1994).

10. If the Chávez government's commitment to liberal norms was unclear, so were the liberal norms themselves. Internal debates among committed liberals rage about the limits of press freedom. What those who dismissed Chávez as censor-in-chief obscured was how, even within in the liberal Western tradition of freedom of expression, there is considerable disagreement about whether this freedom should be "absolute," i.e., whether people should be able to say whatever they want regardless of the consequences, or if governments should play a role in regulating speech, including by deeming certain expressions unacceptable "hate speech." While during Chávez's presidency a narrow understanding of press freedom dominated how prominent observers evaluated Venezuela's media world, the tradition of press freedom, like liberalism itself, is in fact "heteroglossic," meaning that it is "under constant negotiation, reformation and critique" (Coleman and Golub 2008, 258).