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The photographer's body:

Populism, polarization, and the uses of victimhood in Venezuela

ABSTRACT
Political antagonism between supporters and opponents of former president Hugo Chávez has been a defining feature of daily life in Caracas for more than a decade. Despite their different political orientations, the antagonistic poles of "chavismo" and "the opposition" share striking similarities, starting at the level of political practice. I argue that Venezuela's political polarization reflects the shared logic of populism. Through the story of Jorge Tortoza—a photojournalist killed during the failed 2002 coup d'état against President Chávez—I describe how the chavista–opposition divide is produced and policed through performances of victimhood, performances that are essential to populist mobilization in Venezuela. [*populism, social movements, democracy, media, sovereignty, sacrifice, victimhood, identity, Hugo Chávez, Venezuela*]

"Liars! Coup Plotters! *Escuálidos* !"[1] What had been a slow Sunday on the Caracas crime beat was rapidly heating up. The woman shouting in our direction was wearing a bright red shirt, which identified her as a *chavista,* a supporter of President Hugo Chávez. I was with a group of two-dozen crime journalists covering a press event near the heart of the capital. We were there to observe as investigators and victims reconstructed the tragic events of April 11, 2002, when mass protests in Caracas turned violent. On that day, six years earlier, many of these same journalists had witnessed the violence firsthand. They too had painful memories. On the very spot where we now stood, their longtime friend and colleague, the photojournalist Jorge Tortoza, had been gunned down.

When we arrived at the scene of the reconstruction, the area was sealed off by 200 police in full riot gear. Several official-looking men were taking measurements, snapping photos, and documenting the testimonies of victims. For about half an hour, the journalists trailed the proceedings, waiting patiently for a chance to interview the victims and their relatives. Eventually, an interview opportunity materialized. One of the reporters struck up a conversation with a man who had been shot by the Metropolitan Police during the 2002 protests. Removing his cap, he pointed to a mass of scar tissue just above the hairline. "It is a miracle that I am alive. That day, the police ruined my life." Standing beside him, a woman in red-rimmed glasses chimed in, "And it has taken so long to bring them to justice because of the lies of the media." I braced myself for a confrontation, but the journalists took the accusation unflinchingly. The reporter closest to the woman made eye contact and nodded her head sympathetically. A second reporter added, "We are here today to tell *your* side of the story." A third reporter interjected with a follow-up question. "What do you hope that this reenactment will establish?" In a matter of moments, the journalists defused a volatile situation with practiced ease. There is always the danger that such an encounter can go wrong. When it does, journalists find themselves in precarious positions.[2]

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An imaginary divide cuts across Caracas. For more than a decade, the political antagonism between supporters and opponents of the late Hugo Chávez has been the most salient feature of everyday life in Venezuela's capital. Jobs are won and lost, friendships made and broken, institutions funded and dismantled on the basis of where a person is judged to stand vis-à-vis the chavista–opposition divide. Venezuelans have become experts at interpreting the signs of political allegiance. Sometimes these signs are obvious, like the bright red colors worn by many of the president's supporters. Other times, they must be divined by way of speculation, rumor, and innuendo. Put simply, political identity in contemporary Venezuela is not merely the outcome of individual decisions. It is also the effect of a particular political dynamic.

I argue that Venezuela's political polarization reflects the shared logic of populism, and I detail how the antagonism between chavismo and the opposition is produced and policed. Doing so not only upends this divide's givenness, its ontological status, but also demonstrates how these two antagonistic identities share striking similarities at the level of political practice. The quickest, clearest window onto this observation, ethnographically speaking, is how representations of victimhood and suffering get articulated. It is with an eye to the discursive production of friends and enemies that I follow the death of the photojournalist Jorge Tortoza. Examining the events leading up to Tortoza's murder and the afterlife of the investigation allows us to glimpse the populist logic that animates contemporary Venezuelan politics. In particular, I concentrate on the way that self-identification with victims provides the idiom for populist mobilization.

I first encountered Tortoza's story in January 2008, during the early months of my fieldwork alongside journalists on the Caracas crime beat. This article is based on participant-observation, archival research, and interviews with Tortoza's colleagues, relatives, and acquaintances.[3] For the crime journalists, the case symbolized the turbulent atmosphere that placed the press at the center of a fierce political struggle to determine the future of Venezuela. Tortoza was killed during the failed 2002 coup d'état against President Chávez, and both the opposition and chavismo adopted him as a martyr. This was possible because, like most photojournalists, Tortoza was a liminal figure. The polarization of Venezuelan politics is usually portrayed as a conflict between elites and the popular sectors. Photojournalists move back and forth between these worlds. In his professional capacity, Tortoza was associated with the opposition and cultural elites because he worked for the single most vocal anti-Chávez institution in Venezuela, the private press. However, strip away the camera and the press badge, and Tortoza was likely to be taken for a chavista because of his dark skin and working-class background, characteristics that are associated with support for the former president. The struggle over his memory illustrates both the importance of these political identities and the work that goes into maintaining the divide between them. Such Manichean distinctions between friend and foe, which become apparent in depictions of Tortoza's death, are also well-recognized hallmarks of populism (Hawkins 2010).

Populism as object of ethnographic inquiry

For purposes of this article, *populism* refers to anti–status quo movements that reduce politics to a struggle between the will of "the people"—as the rightful source of sovereign authority—and its enemy, "the power bloc" (Panizza 2005:3). To put it another way, populist movements claim to represent the righteous majority against a powerful albeit illegitimate minority. This definition draws on the most recent work of Ernesto Laclau (2005a, 2005b), and it emphasizes the practices underpinning populist mobilization as well as the ideal of popular sovereignty. In what follows, I focus on one widely recognized feature of populism—the production of friends and enemies. My contention is that theories of populism provide unique insights into processes of political polarization in Venezuela, processes that become explicit in representations of victimhood.

As an analytical framework, populism presents two related challenges. First, it is a notoriously slippery concept, and there have been numerous attempts to formulate a single, broadly accepted definition (Canovan 1981; Di Tella 1965; Germani 1978; Ionescu and Gellner 1969; Jansen 2011; Knight 1998; Laclau 1977; Roberts 1995; Weffort 1966; Weyland 2001). Among scholars, it has become a rite of passage to point out the failures of previous generations en route to a new and improved definition of populism. Margaret Canovan (1981) put it best: Rather than constituting failures, different approaches to populism attempt to explain different facets of a complex, sociopolitical tendency. The particular definition that I am working with emphasizes popular mobilization and the formation of political identities. Like much of the recent scholarship on populism, it brackets debates about clientelism, networks of patronage, and political institutions (e.g., Hawkins 2010; Jansen 2011). It also explicitly rejects the assumption that populism is a mass delusion that relies on a charismatic leader.

Second, the term *populism* has decidedly negative overtones. To call someone a "populist" is to accuse him or her of pandering to "the masses," whipping up anti-institutional fervor, and using social unrest for personal political gain. As Jean Comaroff (2009) points out, these pejorative connotations tend to obscure the term's social scientific utility. They also downplay the strong affinities between populism and democracy. It was the anthropologist-turned-sociologist Peter Worsley (1969)

who first highlighted these affinities (see Arditi 2004). Worsley argued that populism, like democracy, rests on the ideal of popular sovereignty and the demand that governments be held accountable to the will of the people. Popular sovereignty—government of the people, by the people, for the people—is the rallying cry of every populist movement regardless of its political orientation. The all-too-quick dismissal of populism as irrational mass politics avoids the problems that popular sovereignty poses for democracy.[4]

Despite Worsley's early interventions, anthropologists—with a few notable exceptions (Albro 2000; Coronil and Skurski 1991; Hansen 2001; Holmes 2000; Sánchez 2001; Skurski 1993)—have steered around the subject of populism. This avoidance is due in part to the conceptual slipperiness and negative connotations discussed above. There are also historical reasons for this neglect. During the 1980s, as collective action was becoming a subject of interest within the discipline (Edelman 2001), populism was in retreat. Attention turned, instead, toward the rise of new social movements demanding democracy (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Nash 1997; Paley 2001). Across the social sciences and the humanities, there was a similar tapering off of interest in populism in the 1980s, followed by a brief revival in the 1990s. In recent years, there has been a veritable boom in studies of populism in sociology, political science, history, communications, and international relations. The concept is being applied to situations in the United States, Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia (e.g., Hawkins 2010; Jansen 2011; Mead 2011, Plattner 2010; Waisbord 2011). This does not mean that anthropologists should feel compelled to rush out to study populism. However, ethnography can usefully deepen, extend, and enrich the current debates.

Treating populism as an object of ethnographic inquiry allows us to rethink contemporary Venezuelan politics, particularly the relationship between polarization and the formation of political identities. Populist movements are majoritarian in their appeals to the popular will, yet they bring together disparate constituencies with distinct, sometimes contradictory grievances. What holds these constituencies together and makes them internally coherent is the identification of a common enemy. This enemy serves as the negative backdrop against which the movement defines itself. Political antagonism is so crucial to the formation of populist identities that it trumps any ideological program. Indeed, the enemy is often more clearly defined than the movement itself. For this reason, critics often claim that populism is empty or incoherent. What these critics overlook is the shared sense of victimhood and the firm commitment to popular sovereignty that unites populist movements. Populism sets out to right wrongs in the name of the oppressed. If the enemy is the figure that articulates and justifies populist claims of sovereignty, then the people emerge as the collective victim of that enemy. In Venezuela, this dialectical relationship between the enemy and the victim is the grounds on which populist political identities are constructed.[5]

Following the figure of the victim reveals an important similarity between chavismo and the opposition. For most of the Chávez era, Venezuela was home to two competing populisms (Samet 2013). Scholars have paid close attention to the populism of Hugo Chávez, the best example of a charismatic leader since Juan Perón. What has gone unacknowledged is that the opposition, and especially the private press, was also a case study in populist mobilization (Febres 2011).[6] The parallels between the opposition and chavismo must not be overstated, for the two movements are not mirror images of one another. However, looking at the similarities between these two political blocs may help us rethink the conceptual impasse that has led much scholarship to reproduce the chavista–opposition divide. To that end, the Tortoza case presents an excellent ethnographic example through which we can think about the construction of populist identities, the way that people try to negotiate these identities, and the tragic consequences when these negotiations fail.

The life and death of Jorge Tortoza

Jorge Tortoza was, by all accounts, a quiet man. For the better part of 11 years, he covered the Caracas crime beat as a photojournalist for the newspaper *Diario 2001*. Colleagues remember him as a consummate professional, punctual and meticulously groomed. If the press office of the investigative police opened at 7:00 a.m., Tortoza would be there at 6:30, dressed in his trademark suit and tie, camera at the ready. His punctuality and his style earned him the nickname El Gallo—the Cock or the Rooster—and from the handful of photographs that I have seen, the name fit the man: His square jaw, dark moustache, and small, expressive eyes all seem to radiate a mixture of virility and distance, a countenance more like a police officer's than a journalist's.[7]

"He was silent, he didn't talk much," recalled Fernando Sánchez, one of Tortoza's closest friends on the crime beat.[8] On that point everyone agreed. The phrase I repeatedly heard whenever anyone reached for a description was "muy callado"—"very quiet." Rarely would Tortoza indulge in the pranks or practical jokes that were the norm among most of the photographers who covered the crime beat, preferring to focus on his work. Tortoza was so reserved, in fact, that other journalists knew very little about his personal life outside of a few details. He lived in Catia, a working-class neighborhood. He was once married but had divorced. He had a young daughter. He enjoyed the occasional beer. He supported President Hugo Chávez, although he rarely, if ever, shared his political views with others. Beyond these scattered details, Tortoza's personal life was a secret, the man himself something of a cipher. As Simon Clemente,

director of photography at *Diario 2001*, told me, "There was much I never knew about his life, and I did not push him to tell me anything. It wasn't any of my business."[9]

It is no small irony that a man who was so reserved in life would become the center of so much attention on his death. On April 11, 2002, Tortoza was covering the clashes between opposition marchers and government supporters near the presidential palace when he was shot in the back of the head and did an impossible somersault onto the pavement. Over the following weeks, photos and videos of his death were widely circulated along with conflicting stories about what exactly happened that afternoon. Both sides of the political spectrum claimed Tortoza as a martyr for their respective causes. Editorials in opposition newspapers depicted him as a "defender of press freedom" (*Diario 2001* 2002b), a man whose commitment to journalism put him in the path of the government and its "savage hordes" (*Diario 2001* 2002c). In contrast, government supporters, including Tortoza's own family, claimed him as a chavista hero and the victim of an opposition conspiracy. The controversy made Tortoza the most emblematic victim of the most emblematic event of the Chávez era, what is known as "the events of April," "the April coup," "the massacre in El Silencio," or simply (and most diplomatically) "April 11."

The curious case of Jorge Tortoza is tied to the coup d'état that briefly deposed President Hugo Chávez. In total, 19 people died and scores were wounded on the afternoon of April 11, 2002, amidst violent confrontations in the streets of downtown Caracas. Responsibility for the deaths was initially laid at the feet of the national government, and less than 12 hours after the shootings subsided, members of the armed forces escorted President Chávez out of the presidential palace. Barely halfway through his term in office, it appeared that Hugo Chávez was finished. On April 12, the chairman of the national federation of private business chambers, Pedro Carmona, swore himself in as Venezuela's acting president on national television, dissolving the constitution, the national assembly, and the presidential cabinet to thunderous applause. By that evening, most of the high-profile members of the old government were in hiding; however, a few of the president's most ardent supporters started a vigil around Miraflores, the presidential palace. Despite a concerted media blackout, details of the situation began leaking out, and, by Saturday afternoon, residents of the city's poor barrios had surrounded the palace demanding the return of their president. Behind closed doors, the new government was rife with division. The Carmona regime failed to gain the support of key figures within the military and began to come undone almost as soon as it was announced. On April 13, less than 48 hours after he was forcibly removed from office, Hugo Chávez made a miraculous return to power.[10]

It would be hard to overstate the symbolic importance of April 11 to contemporary Venezuelan politics, and accounts of what happened that day bifurcate along political lines. Within chavismo, the coup has been enshrined as a mythical moment in which the will of the people triumphed over the machinations of the old regime. Supporters of President Chávez believe that this was a classic coup involving a conscious conspiracy, which was aided and abetted by the private press (Bartley and Briain 2003; Britto García 2003; Villegas 2010; Wilpert 2007). The telling and retelling of the coup story reinforces the belief that, in the final instance, the government of Hugo Chávez is supported by popular mandate. In contrast, the Venezuelan opposition is openly skeptical of the coup narrative. A number of accounts suggest, convincingly, that there was no deliberate strategy in place; rather, a chaotic series of events led to a temporary vacuum of power (La Fuente and Meza 2004; Nelson 2009). These accounts tend to emphasize the size of the popular uprising against the Chávez government and the responsibility of the president and his followers for the initial outburst of violence. Between these two competing versions of the April 11 story, there is little neutral ground. The vast majority of Venezuelans subscribe to one version of events or the other, and trying to keep both in view is like suffering a bout of double vision.

As with the story of April 11, there are conflicting accounts of who killed Jorge Tortoza, and the identity of his killer remains an unsolved mystery. My purpose is not to get to the root of what happened that day by playing the detective or teasing truth out of rumors. Instead, I am interested in the stories themselves and what becomes visible in their telling. In particular, I am interested in how divergent stories of Tortoza's death illustrate the work that goes into maintaining the boundary between the chavista and opposition camps.

The chavista–opposition divide

Photojournalists like Tortoza are liminal figures in terms of the boundary between antagonistic political identities. They illustrate that, despite its rhetorical force, the dividing line between chavismo and the opposition is in no way self-evident, nor is it absolute. These two political identities subsume preexisting racial, gender, and class divisions, which are bound up with deep histories of imperialism, colonialism, and revolutionary struggle in the Americas. If it is common to categorize these divisions in terms of their cardinal directions (e.g., "left" vs. "right" or "global South" vs. "global North"), the enactment of political and social identity always exceeds such dichotomies at the very moment it pronounces them. This is because, as loose political coalitions, both chavismo and the opposition encompass multiple, conflicting social identities, and each coalition is crisscrossed by its own internal divisions. The boundaries that define these two alliances and that distinguish one from the other are all the more important because they are so porous.

Indeed, the work of classifying politics into these warring camps goes on not despite such ambiguities but because of them.

To paraphrase Laclau, populist movements in Venezuela have no necessary class, race, or gender basis, yet their claims to represent the true voice of the people are predicated on the performance of such identities. Take chavismo. During the 1990s, the movement that crystallized around Hugo Chávez valorized "el pueblo" (the people) against a corrupt "oligarchy." In Venezuela, as in much of Latin America, the figure of el pueblo carries strong racial and socioeconomic connotations, which chavismo fashioned into a powerful, positive political identity. For chavistas, el pueblo is a masculine force of revolutionary, democratic change. As Luis Duno-Gottberg (2009, 2011) has argued, el pueblo is the insurgent threat that always hangs over the city. Yet, despite the explicit political equation of chavismo with the popular classes, it is not clear that the movement is disproportionately supported by the urban poor. Both Carlos Lagorio (2009) and Noam Lupu (2010) have demonstrated that support for President Chávez cuts across socioeconomic divisions. This suggests that chavismo does not simply "represent" the discontent of the popular classes but produces it as an expression of its own political legitimacy.

In the case of the opposition, the performance of collective identity has proved more challenging. Unlike chavismo, the opposition is not associated with any single person but, rather, with a heterogeneous collection of institutions, parties, and public figures. The opposition emerged as a political movement shortly after President Chávez came to power, and it gained momentum during the 1999 constitutional referendum. Although dominated by the owners of capital, it has embraced a range of political positions—neoliberal, social democratic, even dissident Marxist—not to mention divergent networks of patronage. Along with the private press and the Catholic Church, the opposition includes the two parties that ruled Venezuela for nearly 30 years (Acción Democrática and COPEI) and almost half a dozen newer parties (among them, Causa R, Nuevo Tiempo, Podemos, and PPT), many of which were formerly part of President Chávez's political coalition. Conspicuously absent from this heterogeneous coalition is any form of ideological coherence. The only thing that holds the opposition together is its strident rejection of chavismo and its claim to speak out on behalf of "respectable citizens." In many regards, this valorization of respectability resembles the paternalistic populism of an earlier era, which imagined a tutelary relationship between enlightened elites and el pueblo (Coronil and Skurski 1991).

Both chavismo and the opposition draw on preexisting socioeconomic divisions that provide the idiom of political struggle. This struggle is couched in Manichean terms. Whereas "el pueblo" and "respectable citizens" are the positive, legitimating political identities that aim to recruit the largest possible support base, the figure of the enemy is the negative category, a kind of scapegoat, against which each movement defines itself. There is no opposition without the "abomination" of Chávez and his supporters. Likewise, without the opposition of "escuálidos," the chavista movement would lose all coherence. It is the perceived injustice, corruption, and wrongdoing on the part of these enemy others that forms the basis of both movements. A sense of victimhood and outrage is articulated in the language of race, class, and gender. From the perspective of many in the opposition, rightful authority has been usurped by a gang of poor, dark, and dangerous thugs; from the perspective of many chavistas, it has been stolen by the same effete, white elites that have exploited the country for centuries (Duno-Gottberg 2011).[11] Either way, partisans on both sides see themselves as victims who mobilize the force of popular sovereignty against the abuses of power.

Of course, not everyone in Venezuela is a self-identified partisan. Thanks to a wealth of polling data, we know that a large swath of voters reject both chavismo and the opposition (Toro 2012). Despite the presence of this third political bloc, the logic of populism insists that everyone must choose a side. As a result, the labels "chavista" and "opposition" are frequently imposed on people who resist being grouped into one camp or the other.

This dynamic—whereby an absolute political identity is imposed from the outside—was dangerously apparent during the events of April 11. This was especially true for photojournalists like Jorge Tortoza, who were precariously positioned between the two worlds. Their professions linked them to the opposition and the elite world of cultural production, yet most of these photographers came from the popular classes and eked out a very modest existence. Under normal circumstances, this in-between status gave them tremendous social mobility. However, in the context of April 11, their in-between status became untenable. As battle lines were drawn, cameras took on the aspect of weapons and photographers were transformed into friends or foes.

The news coup

"Whoever killed Tortoza shot him because he was taking photos." Seated behind the editor's desk in the spartan offices of *Diario 2001,* Ricardo Mateus spoke with the authority of an eyewitness. On the afternoon of April 11, he was working the crime beat just a few blocks from where Tortoza fell. For veterans like Mateus, Tortoza's name brings back memories of that fateful day, memories that kaleidoscope with the unsettling awareness of their own vulnerability. Rather than disappearing into the background of the event they were covering, journalists found that they were targets of attention on April 11. This was particularly true of

the photographers, who stood out because of their equipment. "It was not a stray bullet," Mateus emphasized. "It was aimed at him."[12]

Tortoza died during the bloody finale of what was one of the largest political demonstrations in Venezuelan history. Despite a light drizzle, hundreds of thousands of anti-Chávez marchers gathered on the morning of April 11 demanding the president's resignation. The march was scheduled to snake across the affluent eastern districts of Caracas and to culminate in a rally at the steps of Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), the state oil company and the engine of Venezuela's economy. Around noon, incited by the rally, the marchers swung westward, crossing the invisible boundary that partitions the city down political and socioeconomic lines. Although the march permit only extended to the offices of PDVSA, there had been talk that the demonstration would continue all the way to the Miraflores presidential palace, more than 11 kilometers away in the heart of chavista territory. In anticipation, several thousand Chávez supporters had surrounded the palace. There was a general sense that if the two groups met, there would be bloodshed. Sonia Tortoza had said as much to her brother over coffee that morning (Ledezma 2003). Indeed, the march had been in the back of Tortoza's mind that morning when he chose to wear a photographer's vest and jeans rather than his traditional suit. The vest gave him more room to store additional lenses, and the jeans would make it easier to move quickly in case of trouble (Ledezma 2003).

It was the looming threat of violence that explains why crime reporters like Tortoza were covering a political rally in the first place. Earlier that morning, Tortoza and his colleagues had made the trip to the town of San Francisco de Yare, nearly an hour outside the city, to cover the aftermath of a much smaller demonstration, in which a dozen opposition protesters sustained injuries. The trip was long and uneventful. As it turned out, the injuries to protesters were relatively light. Tortoza and his work partner, reporter Jenny Oropeza, arrived back in Caracas around the same time that opposition marchers there were streaming toward the presidential palace. After following a false alarm to the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), the two journalists split up to cover the march. They met again an hour later on the edge of the conflict. Oropeza realized that the U.S. flag design on the thigh of her jeans made her conspicuous. In the eyes of many, this small symbol would mark her as an opposition marcher. Fearing for her safety, Oropeza headed back to the newspaper while Tortoza elected to stay behind.

One of the last people to see Tortoza alive was his fellow photojournalist Henry Solórzano. The two met near the massive white stairs of El Calvario, just south of the presidential palace and drifted a few blocks east to the corner known as La Pedrera on Baralt Avenue. This was one of the main corridors of the conflict, the site where the shootings were most concentrated. Here the two parted ways. Solórzano remembers glimpsing Tortoza one last time through the smoke and confusion, then moving up another block looking for a better photograph. When he returned a short while later, Tortoza had disappeared. "People were shouting that a photographer had been shot. Seeing the body on the ground, I ran towards him shouting 'Tortoza! Tortoza!'"[13] A few other journalists were with the wounded man, including Tortoza's close friend and fellow photojournalist Fernando Sánchez. It was Sánchez who had the presence of mind to convince a Metropolitan Police officer to use his motorcycle as a makeshift ambulance. The officer transported Tortoza to the Vargas hospital, where he died later that night.[14]

Journalists who covered the events of April 11 unanimously believed that Tortoza was intentionally singled out. It was not just Tortoza, though, who was in the crosshairs. Anyone who was carrying a camera or who looked like a journalist was a potential target. This is one of the few points of agreement that different versions of the story share. No fewer than seven journalists were wounded covering the events of April 11; a total of six photographers or cameramen were shot, and one reporter was struck in the head with a baseball bat.[15] Often added to this tally is an eighth victim, an undercover intelligence officer who was disguised as a photojournalist (Nelson 2009:34). To the list of injuries were added a multitude of near misses. Simon Clemente from *Diario 2001* was threatened with his life just north of Miraflores.[16] Alex Delgado with *El Nacional* remembered bullets whistling past his head in El Calvario.[17] Francisco Toro and videographer Megan Folsom were told by a mysterious stranger that they should leave immediately because the camera made them likely victims (Nelson 2009:46–47). Rather than working under the aegis of neutrality and being allowed to fade into the background of events, photojournalists were treated as active participants in the events of April 11. The camera did not hide them or protect them. It made them immediately visible and, therefore, doubly vulnerable.

Tortoza's death came as tensions peaked between the private press and the Chávez government. It is no small irony that the private press became the president's most visible adversary. Throughout the political crises of the 1980s and the 1990s, key figures in the Venezuelan press had promoted the popular movement that eventually brought Chávez to power. The history of this turbulent period is well documented, especially the protests and subsequent massacre of thousands in Caracas at the hands of the Venezuelan armed forces (Coronil and Skurski 1991; *Cuadernos del CENDES* 1989; López-Maya 2002). What scholars often overlook is the critical role that the press played in channeling popular outrage over crime, corruption, and neoliberal reforms against Venezuela's two-party system. Journalists, by contrast, are acutely aware of this history. The

crisis forged an unspoken alliance between the press and the city's popular sectors. During my interviews and conversations with veterans on the Caracas crime beat, many recalled the solidarity that residents of the city's poorest neighborhoods expressed with them during these turbulent times. After Chávez won the presidency in 1999, all of this would change.

Although key sectors of the private press had supported the candidacy of Hugo Chávez, within a year of his election, all four of the major television stations in Caracas and all but one of the newspapers had adopted a stridently anti-Chávez editorial line.[18] The feud between the president and the private press became very bitter and very public. Chávez lashed out at his adversaries in the "media dictatorship" that was trying to usurp his government and the popular revolution (*El Nacional* 2001c). In turn, the president was branded "a dictator," "a tyrant," "an autocrat," and another Castro in the making (e.g., *El Nacional* 2001a, 2001b).

Accounts of April 11 that are sympathetic to President Chávez—most famously, the documentary film *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*—argue that the Venezuelan media masterminded the coup (e.g., Britto-Garcia 2003). Although this perspective tends to downplay the culpability of the president and his supporters, there is ample evidence that a powerful group of media owners, editors, and opinion makers helped set events in motion. In the months leading up to April 11, news coverage returned time and again to two subjects: the president's declining popularity and loud rumblings of discontent within the military (Botía 2007:263–270). Press elites fanned rumors of a coup, and in at least one important case these elites actively and intentionally planted them (La Fuente and Meza 2004). The press also played a pivotal role in promoting the march. The time and place of the demonstration were only decided at the last minute, April 9, and it took a Herculean effort on the part of private television and radio stations to get the word out. Without the massive pro bono publicity campaign, it is unlikely that anyone at all would have shown up on the morning of April 11. In addition to promoting the march, some of the more radical news outlets pushed it toward a confrontation. For example, on the morning of April 11, the headline of *El Nacional* read, "The final battle will be at Miraflores" (2002b). This headline did more than use combative imagery. It seemed to publicly proclaim marchers' intentions to violate their permit by crossing into chavista territory. When violence broke out, it was immediately interpreted as "a massacre" instigated by the president and his supporters. The best evidence of the massacre was video footage of government supporters firing from the overpass near the presidential palace. Although they were in a shootout with the Metropolitan Police, the footage made it look like they were firing on unarmed opposition marchers. Images and stories like this one gave the ensuing coup d'état a patina of legitimacy. Finally, on April 13, while a group of powerful media owners and directors met privately with Pedro Carmona (Villegas 2010), the rest of Caracas was experiencing a news blackout. Journalist-turned-opposition-blogger Francisco Toro recalls searching the television and radio stations in vain for any kind of news. "If the anti-Chávez news media were not reporting, it must mean that the new anti-Chávez government was in trouble. By not covering the news they were, in effect, trying to prop up Carmona" (Nelson 2009:216–217).

Setting aside the question of responsibility, there can be no doubt that Venezuela's mainstream media outlets threw their weight behind efforts to oust Chávez. If the people driving these efforts were owners, high-ranking editors, and opinion makers, it was beat journalists like Tortoza who found themselves, literally and metaphorically, caught in the crossfire.

The Janus-faced martyr

In death, Jorge Tortoza became a political symbol, visible in a way that he had never been in life. Along with numerous obituaries and articles memorializing his career, Tortoza was honored with no fewer than four posthumous awards for journalism, including two national prizes (*El Nacional* 2002c; *El Universal* 2010). The press office of the investigative police in downtown Caracas was renamed the Jorge Tortoza Press Office (*Diario 2001* 2002d). A commemorative plaque in his name was placed on the corner of La Pedrera "in honor of those who fell for the country" (Aporrea 2004). His name was included in the Journalists Memorial in the Newseum in Washington, DC (*Diario 2001* 2002e). Each of these honors presented another opportunity for both sides of the political divide to publish articles about Tortoza and the circumstances of his death, articles that shrouded tragedy in the idiom of Christian sacrifice.

This sacrificial idiom is nowhere more apparent than in photographs of the fallen photojournalist. Three photos of Tortoza that were widely circulated correspond to three overlapping aspects of his posthumous identity as victim, hero, and martyr. One is the photo taken moments after he was shot. Tortoza is laid out on the pavement, his camera still lassoed around his neck, a trickle of blood pooling behind his head. This is Tortoza the victim. The second is a photo taken years earlier by his friend Carlos Ramirez that shows him leaping off the roof of a news truck, surrounded by smoke, his camera in hand and his jacket billowing up like a cape. Tortoza the hero. The third photograph is the least spectacular, but it is the one that has had the longest lifespan. It is a headshot of the photographer looking sadly toward the camera, his white shirt unbuttoned and a cross dangling against the naked skin of his chest. Tortoza the martyr.

The opposition immediately appropriated Tortoza's sacrifice in the service of its cause. With one or two

exceptions, the private press cast him as the victim of attacks on journalists that were incited by Chávez himself. Overnight, Tortoza became a symbol of resistance to government aggression, a man who put his own body on the line in pursuit of press freedom. His story merged with the larger narrative about April 11 as a massacre of innocent citizens at the hands of the president and his horde of followers. Prominent journalist Roberto Giusti summed up this view in a speech dedicated to his fallen colleague. "On April 11, Tortoza was turned into a symbol, an object of hatred thanks to the government's criminal and irresponsible instigations against journalists. Tortoza did not die accidentally; they killed Tortoza for being a reporter, because his camera carried the proof of a massacre of which he ended up a victim" (*Diario 2001* 2002a). This speech was delivered months after the failed coup. By this time, it was widely known that Tortoza had been sympathetic to President Chávez, but this did not stop Giusti from framing the photographer's death as the result of his selfless opposition to the government.

Although chavismo was somewhat slower in appropriating Tortoza's death, it was even more explicit in its use of the sacrificial idiom. The progovernment version of April 11 likens Chávez's calamitous fall and his miraculous return to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ. Within this narrative, Tortoza and other victims of April 11 were adopted as martyrs who sacrificed themselves on behalf of the popular revolution. There were faint hints of this story in the private press. However, clearer evidence of this perspective is buried in Tortoza's old locker at the offices of *Diario 2001*. It is in the form of a six-stanza poem, handwritten on a single sheet of white typing paper. Dated April 12, 2002, and titled "Homage to a great Hero," the poem was written by one Miguelina Campos, who "did not know you . . . / but felt a great pain / when I saw you fall / bathed in blood, sir." Campos's poem echoes the same tropes that we find in Giusti's speech. What is peculiar, though, is the fifth stanza: "You are, Tortoza, a great Hero / Of this great Revolution / With your death you helped / To free our Nation / From many things, Sir." The phrase "great Revolution" indicates that the poet, in all probability, identified Tortoza with chavismo.[19] Within weeks, the link between Tortoza and chavismo was strengthened, thanks to the interventions of his family. Insisting that the fallen photographer had considered himself a chavista, the Tortoza family denounced the perversion of his death by the very institution that he had served in life. Like Chávez, Tortoza would come to be portrayed as the victim of media manipulation, a man whose legacy was scandalously appropriated against his own wishes.[20]

When the shooting stopped and the sharp pain of suffering was replaced by the pale fame of martyrdom, Tortoza was the one victim claimed by both communities of mourners. To which camp did he belong? Who could rightfully claim the victim's suffering, the hero's daring, the martyr's sacrifice? This is the question that confronts investigations into the photographer's death, yet it tends to obscure the underlying political dynamic at work. Rather than forcing us to "choose a side," these mirroring images of Tortoza demonstrate how the legitimacy of both "sides" was reproduced through the sanctification of his death.

Victimhood, sacrifice, and populism

Through the idiom of sacrifice, the two dominant stories of Tortoza's death transformed his victimhood into a rationale for popular mobilization against an external enemy. This deployment of sacrifice is consonant with some of its characterizations by classical anthropology. Dating back to William Robertson Smith (2002), studies of ritual sacrifice have traced a correlation between violence and the formation of collective identities (Bloch 1991; Frazer 1995; Freud 1990; Girard 1977). Sigmund Freud, René Girard, and Maurice Bloch have all argued that self-identification with the sacrificial victim serves as a medium for group formation. For Freud (1990), the victim of sacrifice is the father or alpha male, who is simultaneously an object of envy and reverence. Similarly, Girard's (1977) scapegoat is a surrogate victim that is chosen from within the community. Bloch (1991) is even more explicit about this self-identification with victims, placing it at the center of his analysis of ritual transformation from prey into hunter. Every one of these accounts shows how the assertion of power—by the father, the king, the hunter, the state—derives legitimacy from its identification with the victim. Populist claims to sovereignty mimic a similar pattern.[21]

Self-identification with victims is a recurrent albeit underappreciated feature of populist movements. Time and again, scholars have described how the insurgent force of popular sovereignty grows out of a shared sense of injustice that pits righteous victims against the iniquities of the powerful. It is from this position of victimhood that populist movements assert themselves as the true and legitimate expressions of popular will. As with sacrificial rituals, suffering becomes the grounds on which a collective identity is established and sovereignty is asserted. Such a dynamic clearly infused the stories about Jorge Tortoza and the other victims of April 11. Through their association with the victims of April 11, both the opposition and chavismo portrayed themselves as legitimate responses to the illegitimate use of force. I do not mean to suggest that the sanctification of these victims was a conscious ruse to justify political action. Nonetheless, the act of mourning served as a powerful public spectacle through which both camps claimed the mantle of popular sovereignty against an external enemy.

In the turmoil that followed the failed coup d'état, the idiom of sacrifice acted as a privileged medium for the performance of popular sovereignty, a performance that simultaneously sanctified the victims and demonized their

killers. The investigation into Tortoza's death was more than merely a quest for justice. It had the potential to become a search for scapegoats against whom popular outrage could be channeled. Through Tortoza, both the opposition and the Chávez government attempted to portray themselves as victims, their opponents as murderers. Each coalition attempted to perform its own version of legitimate power by drawing a distinction between the righteousness of its cause and the wickedness of its political adversaries. One of the casualties of this struggle was the humanity of the victims.

Tortoza's fellow photojournalists did their best to extricate their friend from this posthumous predicament. Just a few weeks after his death, the National Circle of Graphic Reporters held a march under the banner "Tortoza somos todos"—"We are all Tortoza." Everyone wore white T-shirts with the slogan framing a mournful photo of the martyr. His mother Rosa was there along with his two-year-old daughter in pigtails and two hundred or so photojournalists. One of his colleagues told me that the purpose of the march was to repudiate the politicization of Tortoza's death, to call for national unity amidst tragedy, and to urge the speedy resolution of the case.[22] No politicians were allowed to join the procession, and the document that the marchers presented to the National Assembly asserted their political neutrality. "We do not opine, we do not interpret. We merely collect information and that is the work to which we are dedicated" (*El Nacional* 2002d). It was to no avail. Their own newspapers and television stations continued to portray Tortoza as a freedom fighter. In the streets, people continued to see the photojournalists as political partisans. And despite their efforts to reach out to Tortoza's family, the photojournalists found themselves the objects of suspicion.

Who killed Jorge Tortoza?

Nearly ten years after his death, Tortoza's case remains one of the unsolved mysteries of April 11. Despite numerous public declarations that the case was nearing its conclusion, no one was charged with the shooting. There were many hypotheses. Over the course of my research into the circumstances surrounding Tortoza's death, I encountered perhaps a dozen different versions of the story. Most of these belong to what I call the "mainstream" political discourse, which reads April 11 down partisan lines. On the surface, these mainstream accounts seem to contradict one another. Some pin Tortoza's death on chavista gunmen and set blame at the feet of the government, while others describe it as part of an opposition conspiracy. However, all of the mainstream versions of the story agree that Tortoza's murder was politically motivated and that his killers were responsible for setting in motion the chain of events that eventually led to the deaths of 19 civilians and the ouster of President Chávez. In the mainstream political discourse, identifying Tortoza's killer means assigning blame for what happened that day.

However, there are also two accounts of Tortoza's death that trouble the chavista–opposition divide. I call these "subaltern" accounts because they contradict the dominant framing of April 11 and because they are formulated from a position of socioeconomic marginality. One of these subaltern accounts belongs to Tortoza's brother, Edgar. The other belongs to Tortoza's fellow photojournalists on the Caracas crime beat. Both refuse to make Tortoza a martyr for chavismo or the opposition. Following the ways in which these stories diverge from the dominant discourse allows us to glimpse the dynamic that collapses multiple accounts into a set of opposing narratives about Tortoza's death and, by extension, about who bears ultimate responsibility for April 11. These narratives also reveal how people struggle to forge their own identities in a highly polarized context. Like Tortoza, his brother and his colleagues are precariously positioned. Before describing their version of events, I briefly sketch two mainstream versions of the case that I encountered in my archival research.

The mainstream versions

The first mainstream account of Tortoza's death maintains that he was killed by chavista gunmen. Suspicion fell on a group of armed civilians firing from the Llaguno overpass, a bridge three blocks north of where Tortoza fell. It was fueled by a video of the shooters captured by the television channel Venevision and broadcast repeatedly by the private press.[23] Forensic evidence later would dismiss the hypothesis that the Llaguno gunmen had killed Tortoza. Instead, the investigative police determined that the shot came from ground level and that it had been fired from close range. Seven months into the investigation, reports surfaced that the police possessed photographs of the presumed shooter, a man who was mingling with pro-Chávez demonstrators on Baralt Avenue (*Diario 2001* 2002f). Shortly thereafter, pictures were leaked to the press showing a wiry man in his late forties or early fifties, wearing blue jeans, a white oxford shirt, and a yellow baseball cap with a blue brim (*El Universal* 2003). Although the investigative police originally confirmed that the man in the yellow hat was a potential suspect, they were never able to identify him and would later deny the validity of the photos altogether. To this day, most of the crime reporters who are familiar with the case believe that this mysterious figure was responsible for the murder. From their perspective, the inability or refusal to find the man in the yellow hat smacked of a government cover-up.

The second mainstream account ties Tortoza's death to an opposition conspiracy hatched within the military and tacitly supported by the press, the private sector, and the U.S. government. According to this version, Tortoza was gunned down by hidden snipers who were planted by

the coup plotters with the intention of creating a violent confrontation.[24] The story's logic is baldly sacrificial. It argues that the opposition manufactured a martyr to force the president out of office. It is supported by firsthand experience of the march's bloody conclusion. Witnesses to the event believed that shots were coming from the upper levels of nearby buildings. In the aftermath of the killings, police searched three of these buildings for hidden gunmen and arrested ten suspects. All of them were eventually released. Although a thicket of rumors surrounds these arrests, the police dismissed what they called "the sniper myth" just a few months into their investigation (*El Nacional* 2002a). The story refused to die, thanks, in part, to the testimony of CNN correspondent Otto Neustaldt. On April 10, Neustaldt received a phone call telling him that there would be a number of deaths during the demonstration, after which a group of high-ranking military officials would make a statement. Although the CNN correspondent would later distance himself from these statements, most progovernment accounts of April 11 focus on this story as evidence of a premeditated plot (e.g., Villegas 2010).

Edgar Tortoza's story

Edgar Tortoza and I were sitting in a café in downtown Caracas overlooking the National Assembly, old newspaper articles spread out in front of us like evidence. "The whole thing was premeditated," he said. "My brother found out something about the newspaper that he was not supposed to know. He wanted to leave." Edgar spoke rapidly and with a strong Caracas accent, his hands resting atop the blue half-shell of his motorcycle helmet. For more than ten years, he had pushed for a resolution to his brother's death, which he believed was masterminded by Israel Márquez, the former director of Tortoza's own newspaper.[25] Despite his government connections—Edgar was president of the government-backed Association of Victims of April 11 (ASOVIC), and he worked part-time for Cilia Flores, one of the most powerful figures in the Chávez government—the case had come to a standstill long ago. Edgar and the Tortoza family had few resources at their disposal, and he, for one, felt that justice had not been served.[26]

Most of the crime reporters dismissed Edgar's story as political propaganda, but even they admitted that the circumstances surrounding the case were unusual. Hours after Tortoza was killed, the two sons of Israel Márquez, along with a companion, Carlos Aristimuño, were detained as suspects in the murder.[27] All three were carrying concealed weapons (a Walther PPK, a Beretta 9mm, and a Glock 22) and they were in possession of Tortoza's camera. The brothers claimed they were innocent bystanders who were near the head of the march when Tortoza fell. Recognizing the photographer, they contacted their father and rescued the camera at his behest. According to the arresting officer's report, members of the crowd identified the three men as shooters. Gunshot residue tests seemed to confirm that their weapons had not been fired, and so the three were released within 24 hours. Nearly four years later, the attorney general's office reopened a case against the arresting officer on charges of tampering with the evidence (*El Mundo* 2006).[28] According to Edgar, the original residue tests were forged and they marked the beginning of a cover-up intended to shield the Márquez family and the newspaper.

Following the twists and turns of Edgar's story was like falling into a mystery thriller, complete with missing photos, falsified documents, and a ballistics riddle. It involved everyone from the police to the courts, the public prosecutor's office, and figures inside the Chávez government. At the center was the Márquez family, who plotted the murder and then conspired to cover it up as part of a personal vendetta. Although the story seemed to merge with the larger narrative about April 11 as a "media coup," Edgar maintained that his brother was the victim of a private feud and not a political assassination. In this key respect, his story was at odds with the official versions of what happened on April 11. Rather than associating Tortoza's death with the coup plot, he believed that political circumstances hid a common murder. From Edgar's perspective, unmasking the killer would not unravel the riddle of who was to blame for the violence that precipitated the coup. More striking still, he believed that powerful individuals appointed by the Chávez government were party to the cover-up. Aside from prosecutor Danilo Anderson (who was investigating Tortoza's death at the time of his own spectacular assassination), Edgar trusted no one, not even his ostensible allies. He asserted that powerful "interests" prevented the resolution of the case, interests that implicated actors on both sides of the political divide.

The photographers' perspective

Edgar Tortoza and his brother's fellow photojournalists faced one another from either side of the chavista–opposition divide. If Edgar embraced his political position within chavismo, the photographers were associated with the opposition. While the two parties had very different interpretations about what happened that day, there were surprising resonances between Edgar's story and the one told by the photojournalists. At the outset of my research, I fully expected that the crime photographers would echo the account given by the crime reporters, that is, that Tortoza was killed by the chavista gunman in the yellow hat. After all, they worked with the reporters day in and day out, so it would seem natural for them to reach the same conclusion. Much to my surprise, most of the crime photographers explicitly rejected the chavista gunman theory. They remained convinced that Tortoza and the other photographers were targeted by snipers. When I asked who killed Tortoza, they all shrugged their shoulders and said that they did not know and that we would never know. However, they were certain

that the shots came from above, although they refused to speculate whether the hidden gunmen were working under the auspices of the government or the opposition. From their perspective, that missed the point entirely.[29]

The point, for the photojournalists, was their own vulnerability. Caught between warring factions, they found themselves the targets of animosity of progovernment supporters and the sacrificial victims of the opposition. As one photographer put it, they were "cannon fodder" (Ortiz et al. 2002). Like Edgar, they were suspicious of authorities on both sides of the political spectrum. If most distanced themselves from the Chávez government, they entertained no illusions about the benevolence of their own employers. Indeed, labor disputes frequently put them at odds with media owners and high-ranking directors. Photojournalists and cameramen in Venezuela were poorly remunerated and rarely recognized despite the dangers of their work. They had developed a strong sense of professional solidarity with one another based on shared work experiences and a common socioeconomic background that was different from their employers'. The photojournalists were deeply affected by Tortoza's death, and they resented the way that the newspaper deflected financial responsibility. They saw, clearly, that they were the ones taking on all the risks for a cause in which they had little or no stake and from whose success or failure they had little to gain. I interpret their silence about the identity of Tortoza's killer as an indictment of power holders on both sides of the political spectrum and a tacit acknowledgment that danger comes from "above." Their perspective offers us an alternative way of understanding the political dynamic that created two Tortozas, each of them a reflection of the enemy other.

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Taken together, these divergent accounts of Tortoza's death provide a glimpse of the tenuous alliances behind the façade of political polarization. Rather than disprove the division of the country into opposing factions, the revelation of this multiplicity demonstrates that polarization is a powerful political dynamic that orders disparate social groups into two, seemingly coherent political blocs. These factions are always provisional, and a more complete story of the coup would need to consider all of the social sectors aligned and in conflict for control of the state, not to mention the material conditions governing these relations. Research that is sensitive to the internal contradictions of chavismo and the opposition provides a more grounded understanding of the two competing movements, their historical development, and the lived experiences of the actors involved. This, in turn, can serve as a starting point for further investigation that compares the ends to which people mobilize populist practices (democratic or otherwise).

Following the figure of the photojournalist Jorge Tortoza demonstrates how the chavista–opposition binary shapes political identities. It is not simply what one believes that determines how one is hailed but how one is perceived by others. This is hardly a problem for those who openly identify with chavismo or the opposition. However, there are millions of border cases in Venezuela, people like Jorge Tortoza whose allegiances are neither obvious nor fixed. For them, the dance of political identity is decidedly more complex.

As it stands, the vast majority of accounts of Tortoza's political identity in life and the details of his death are also arguments about who bears responsibility for the violence on April 11. They are narratives that create a distinction between friends and enemies and allow no space for third parties. When taken to its logical conclusion, this representational practice of sorting the world into opposing camps creates a kind of split vision. This, in turn, might explain why, despite their commonalities, the Tortoza family and Jorge Tortoza's fellow photojournalists were estranged from the start and why a third narrative—of shared responsibility between parties on both sides of the political divide—is rarely acknowledged.

Conclusion: The photographer's body

The Tortoza case is just one example of the political logic that divides Venezuela into two camps, each a reflection of the other. Just as there is a chavista Tortoza and an opposition Tortoza, nearly every issue of political import in Venezuela appears in split screen. A visitor cannot help but notice that the state press and the private press seem to report from two different worlds. It is not simply that these outlets have different standards by which they define newsworthiness but that they have different beliefs about what is factual. Dueling narratives about violent crime, health care, urban infrastructure, the impact of social programs, and the state of the national economy reflect two conflicting attempts at constituting reality.

One of the challenges of an ethnographic approach to contemporary Venezuela is finding a space from which to understand the phenomenon of political polarization without succumbing to it. What I have argued in this article is that, starting at the level of collective identity formation, an important parallel links Chávez's Bolivarian revolution and the movement against it. Both movements adhere to a populist logic in which they define themselves as victims in opposition to an external enemy. By pointing to this parallel, I am not suggesting that these two movements are identical. There are worlds of difference between chavismo and the opposition, differences that I have bracketed for the purpose of this article. In the wake of Hugo Chávez's untimely death, empirical research on the formation and the trajectory of these political identities becomes all the more pressing. As we interrogate the distinct positions that chavismo and the opposition take up on issues like the economy, the role of the state, and foreign relations, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these political identities

are nonetheless linked and that both derive their legitimacy from the claim to represent the sovereign will of the people against the machinations of the enemy other.

Photojournalists like Jorge Tortoza are essential to these populist performances of sovereignty. They mediate the distance between the corporeal bodies of citizens and the imagined body politic, between mortal persons and the immortal "people." The suffering body bridges this divide. If such suffering is indispensable for the functioning of modern sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 2006), it is the photographer-as-journalist who transforms the suffering body into spectacle. This is not simply a mechanical transformation in which bodies necessarily become fodder for a political machine (although this is one possibility). Rather, the spectacle of suffering is a performance through which sovereignty is repeatedly asserted, subverted, and reconfigured. In populism, spectacles of suffering—of crime, punishment, torture, disaster, deprivation, and abject poverty—link the performance of political identities to the figure of the victim.

Populist mobilizations are justified by an idiom that internalizes sacrifice and externalizes guilt. It is through this sacrificial idiom that victims are transformed into martyrs and lines of allegiance are drawn. In Tortoza's case, death made him a candidate for martyrdom for both the opposition and chavismo. This transformation from victim into martyr was incomplete for two reasons: First, it was impossible to resolve his existence in life with a simple political identity upon his death; second, it is still not clear who bears the ultimate responsibility for his murder. However, the unsuccessful attempts to appropriate his suffering allow us to glimpse the manner in which populist movements attempt to manifest sovereignty. It is through victimhood that "the people" can be, momentarily, conjured.

This yearning for an unmediated expression of sovereign power, in which the people become flesh, is a yearning for an impossible union. The experiences of photojournalists attest to the fraught practice of suturing diffuse, fragmented bodies into a single body politic. Nowhere is this more evident than in the testimonies of photographers who cover violence.

Take the case of Tortoza's colleague Fernando Sánchez, who is still haunted by his memories of April 11. It was not just the death of a close friend that troubled him, but his own divided loyalties in the aftermath of the shooting. Seeing Tortoza's near-lifeless body on the ground, Sánchez's first instinct was to marshal help, to lend comfort, to mourn. Yet, amidst the trauma and tragedy of Tortoza's suffering, Sánchez was aware of his own predicament. When he returned to the newsroom, he could not go back empty handed. To do so would mean tendering his resignation. Thinking back on the incident, he imagines the voice of his old colleague chiding him, "You have to do it. You have to take the shot. If I were in your place, I would do the same." That disembodied voice provides some solace for his traumatic memory of training his camera lens on the body of his dying friend. He refers to it as an act of *desdoblamiento,* which literally means splitting or dividing and figuratively refers to an out-of-body experience. In that moment, Sánchez imagines himself divided between two bodies, trapped between a body in pain, which desperately calls out for his attention, and an imagined body politic that it is his duty to serve.[30]

If populism attempts to unify disparate experiences under a common political banner, ethnography reveals the contingency of these populist articulations. Both chavismo and the opposition are fraught with internal contradictions that the spectacle of suffering effectively conceals. My point is not to condemn populism but to probe the limits of democratic politics. If popular sovereignty is the positive condition of our political present (Chatterjee 2006), what happens when that sovereignty is stripped of its liberal garments? What choices do we face? At the dawn of Thatcherism, Stuart Hall (1980, 1985) cast the future as a competition between democratic and authoritarian populisms. Whether or not we accept this as an accurate description of the current conjuncture in Venezuela, Hall's analysis returns in the form of a question. Is it possible to imagine a popular solidarity that starts with a community of sufferers yet resists the temptation to extract its pound of flesh?

Notes

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1. *Escuálido* is a derogatory term used by the late Hugo Chávez to describe persons associated with the opposition. It connotes squalor as well as weakness or frailty.

2. This account draws from my conversations, interviews, and field notes dated March 16, 2008. Hereafter, I cite such material using an abbreviated format that includes my initials and the date of the events described. Here, for example, the citation would read RS 03.16.08.

3. Most of the individuals I interviewed for this article were journalists. Although a handful strongly identified with either chavismo

or the opposition, the majority of my informants were reluctant to side with either camp. Some went so far as to claim that they were "ni-ni" (neither one nor the other). In most instances, I found it inappropriate to ask direct questions about journalists' political allegiances. Few of my informants were interested in placing themselves in a political box, and it would be difficult for me to assign them to one. This indeterminacy was part of the empirical reality of political identity for Venezuelan journalists.

4. Popular sovereignty as an ideal of self-rule is the common denominator shared by populism and democracy. The two challenges of using populism as an analytical term roughly correspond to two problems that popular sovereignty poses for democracy. First, there is the problem of representation. If a diffuse and dispersed "people" are imagined as the ultimate source of political authority, then how does this authority become manifest? Populism attempts to resolve the problem of representation by collapsing the divide between government and the governed. The claim of every populist movement is to embody the direct, unmediated will of the people. This is only possible through a logic substitution or synecdoche, in which a part comes to stand in for the whole. The clearest examples of such stand-ins are the populist leader, who symbolically embodies the will of the people, and the sacrificial victim, who embodies their suffering. The task set out by Laclau (1977, 2005a) is to follow the representational practices through which the popular will is constituted (see also Jansen 2011). Ethnography is especially suited to such an approach. Second, there is the problem of force or coercion. If democratic legitimacy is based in part on self-rule, then how are internal conflicts settled? Populism attempts to resolve this problem by directing force outward. It imagines the will of the people as a unified front, one that is only challenged by external enemies. Taken to extremes, popular sovereignty can lead to the kind of tyranny that Alexis de Tocqueville feared. Of course, it does not lead there automatically, and to insist that populism is authoritarianism is to deny the very grounds on which democracy rests (Canovan 1999). Rather than assuming that all populist movements lead to a tyranny of the majority, an ethnographic approach to populism looks at its specific social and historical instantiations.

5. These findings resonate with research on victims' movements and the emergence of mass incarceration as an outcome of "punitive populism" in the United States and the United Kingdom.

6. One important exception was the 2012 presidential campaign of opposition candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski, who intentionally distanced himself from populist rhetoric, only to embrace it once more in his 2013 campaign against Nicholás Maduro.

7. This description is based on a combination of archival research and interviews: RS 03.16.08; RS 03.01.09; RS 03.11.09; RS 03.12.09; RS 02.23.09; RS 08.04.10.

8. RS 03.25.10.

9. RS 03.01.09.

10. My account of the coup draws on archival research at *El Nacional* and *Diario 2001* and on a number of secondary sources (Brítto Garcia 2003; La Fuente and Meza 2004; Nelson 2009; Wilpert 2007).

11. In a recent article, Duno-Gottberg (2011) describes this dynamic as "ethno-populism."

12. RS 07.01.09.

13. RS 03.11.09.

14. RS 08.31.10.

15. Those injured included Jonathan Freitas, of the newspaper *Tal Cual;* José Antonio Dávila, of the now defunct television channel CMT; Enrique Hernández, of the news agency Venpres (now AVN); his brother Luis Enrique Hernández, of the newspaper *Avance;* Jorge Recio, a freelance photographer; and Miguel Escalona, a reporter from *El Carabobeño* (Defensoría del Pueblo 2003).

16. RS 03.11.09.

17. RS 03.01.09.

18. In Caracas, the only exceptions were the state-owned television channel VTV and the popular newspaper *Últimas Noticias*.

19. In Venezuela, the term *revolution* is associated almost exclusively with President Chávez and his supporters. The opposition discourse favors terms borrowed from liberal democracy.

20. RS 08.01.10.

21. The difficulty with adapting these theories of sacrifice to populist movements is that they tend to read collective identities as the outcome of ritual violence. However, in the case of April 11, political identity predated the outbreak of political violence. Interpreting Tortoza's death through the lens of religious sacrifice, then, tends to obscure the real historical practices through which the violence was appropriated for specific ends. If Tortoza was not a sacrifice in the traditional sense, a sacrificial idiom nonetheless clearly framed the narrative of his murder. In this case, the sacrificial idiom is related to populism as an element of Christian political theology that links victimhood to sovereignty.

22. RS 07.30.10.

23. The footage was deemed so important that in 2002 Venevision reporter Luis Alfonso Fernández was awarded the prestigious King of Spain Prize for broadcast journalism. A great deal of controversy surrounds this footage because it pinned blame for the death on Chávez's supporters and helped legitimate the president's ouster. The controversy begins in the editing of the footage, as summed up by two dueling documentaries, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (Bartley and Briain 2003) and *X-Ray of a Lie* (Schalk 2004). The first documentary argues that the gunmen were not shooting on peaceful marchers and that they were actually returning fire from the Metropolitan Police. Using the same footage that was edited by Venevision, *Revolution* shows a wide-angle shot of the scene with the following commentary: "What the TV stations did not show is this camera angle, which clearly shows that the streets below were empty." *X-Ray of a Lie* argues that the editors of *Revolution* were themselves guilty of manipulation, editing out the presence of the police truck at the very top of the screen. While some have accepted this as a debunking, this argument caricatures *Revolution* in much the same way that *Revolution* caricatures the opposition. What all of these accounts leave out is the possibility of mutual complicity on the part of multiple actors across conflicting sectors.

24. The story clearly invokes the February 1989 massacre of hundreds of civilians in Caracas by the Venezuelan armed forces. This event—commonly referred to as the Caracazo or El Sacudón—marked the beginning of the end of Venezuela's two-party democracy and a series of failed neoliberal reforms. In his run up to the presidency, Chávez frequently invoked this period as a turning point in his political consciousness and in the consciousness of el pueblo. For an explanation of the historical and political significance of the Caracazo, see Coronil and Skurski 1991 and López-Maya 2002.

25. In March 2010, Israel Márquez was murdered outside his home in what the police described as a failed carjacking. He was shot seven times while trying to defend himself and his wife.

26. RS 08.20.10; RS 08.21.10.

27. One year later, *El Nacional* (2003) published a list of people presumed responsible for more than 20 crimes on April 11. This article connects Nelson Márquez to the murder of Jorge Tortoza.

28. Although many have expressed skepticism about the case set in motion by public prosecutor Danilo Anderson, the hypothesis that the Márquez brothers were responsible for the murder is more than a fringe conspiracy theory. Four years earlier, the highly regarded opposition newspaper *Tal Cual* leveled similar charges about a cover-up. *Tal Cual* (2002) claimed that documents were changed, that bullets were hidden, and that the

Márquez brothers' guns had, in fact, been fired. This accusation was reprinted the following year in *El Nacional* (2003). As recently as 2007, reputable journalists like Vladimir Villegas (2007) continued to link Tortoza's murder to the Márquez family.

29. RS 03.01.09; RS 03.11.09; RS 03.12.09; RS 08.30.10.
30. RS 08.31.10.

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