



The High-Rise and the Shack: Rhizomatic Collisions in Caracas' Torre David

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Abstract

A 45-story tower in Caracas formerly occupied by some 5,000 squatters, Torre David was touted by international media accounts as the world's most spectacular



“vertical slum.” This, among other sensationalized accounts, failed to consider the paradoxical ways in which Caracas’ formal and informal, urban and architectural trajectories literally collided with each other in Torre David. The modern high-rise and the self-built shack—antagonist spatial typologies in Caracas’ growth—were dramatically superposed in the tower, unleashing hitherto un(fore)seen dynamics. Through site fieldwork, interviews, film production, media analysis, and historical research, we offer a nuanced theorization of Torre David that grapples with its charged tensions between the formal and informal, modern and traditional, modernity and postmodernity, reality and imagination, and capitalism and socialism. We begin our investigation with a historical account of the tower’s construction, abandonment, and ultimate occupation. This is followed by a theoretical positioning of Torre David as a social and physical space ‘in-between’. Ultimately, we argue that these tensions created a rhizomatic socio-spatial field heavily pregnant with both risks and hopes for the people, the government, and the spatial disciplines.

Keywords

Caracas; Venezuela; Torre David; occupations; housing; community organizing

Introduction

A 45-story tower in Caracas formerly occupied by some 5,000 squatters, Torre David¹ was touted by international media accounts as the world’s most spectacular “vertical slum.” This, among other sensationalized accounts, failed to consider the paradoxical ways in which Caracas’ formal and informal, urban and architectural trajectories literally collided with each other in Torre David. The modern high-rise and the self-built shack—antagonist spatial typologies in Caracas’ growth—were dramatically superposed in the tower, unleashing hitherto un(fore)seen dynamics. Through site fieldwork, interviews,² film production, media analysis, and historical research, we offer a nuanced theorization of Torre David that grapples with its charged tensions.

Countering the journalistic, secondary, and sensationalistic accounts of Torre David, we conducted ethnographic and film documentary engagements with the residents of the tower themselves, obtaining access to the tower and many of its tenants over ten times between January 2011 and August 2014. Utilizing these

¹ The building’s name is Torre Confinanzas, but it was quickly nicknamed Torre David (or Torre de David) after its main developer, David Brillembourg.

² We conducted the interviews in Spanish and translated them into English. Residents were interviewed in Torre David, and others (professors, city officials) in their place of work. The real names of the interviewees are used.

participant observations, interviews, and film, one of the co-authors, who was raised close to the tower and frequently stayed with relatives there, produced a feature-length documentary, *Vertical Slum*.³ While some of the data presented here are shared with the film, this publication and the documentary are intended to be engaged as two distinct visions of a common research project to both ethnographically and theoretically unveil actually existing dynamics in the tower.⁴ Here, we focus on theorizing these events and environments. We begin our investigation with a historical account of the tower's construction, abandonment, and ultimate occupation. This is followed by a theoretical positioning of Torre David as a social and physical space 'in-between'. In the spirit of the rhizome, we explore the multiplicities stemming from the liminal socio-spatial fields and tensions in-between the formal and informal, modern and traditional, modernity and postmodernity, reality and imagination, and capitalism and socialism present and latent in Torre David. Ultimately, we argue that these tensions created a rhizomatic socio-spatial field heavily pregnant with both risks and hopes for the people, the government, and the spatial disciplines.

The Rise and Expansion of the *Torre* and the *Rancho* in Venezuela's Urbanization

International observers extolled Torre David as an unorthodox socio-architectural experiment (Anderson, 2013; Vocativ, 2013; McGuirk, 2014), reflecting on the structure's unexpected and transgressive evolution from illustrious architectural icon to vertical self-built settlement. Emerging in a city both shaped and torn apart by modern aspirations and informal settlements, Torre David is best understood as an architectural and urban challenge to Caracas' two most conspicuous and antagonistic spatial typologies—the *torre* and the *rancho* (the modern high-rise and the self-built shack). To fully grasp how this collision became “the world's tallest illegal occupation,” we must frame Torre David's rise and fall, and rise and fall again, within the city's history of convoluted and contrasting architectural/urban trajectories.

Beginning in the 1920s, Caracas and other Venezuelan cities experienced dramatic population growth. Newly discovered oil deposits in the national territory were harnessed to bolster a prosperous and modern nation-state. Rapid rural-to-

³ *Vertical Slum* is available online at <https://binged.it/2DR0v9v>. Much of the ethnographic and architectural richness of this case is best left to the images and voices of residents presented through the documentary. We invite readers to watch the film to sensorially grasp more fully the case study.

⁴ Co-author of this piece Irene Sosa did ethnographic work at Torre David during several summer and winter breaks in Caracas until early 2014 to film her 2014 documentary *Vertical Slum*. During production, she shared preliminary footage with coauthor Clara Irazábal for feedback. During her conversations, it became evident that, aside from the documentary, the film footage that showed how people lived in Torre David and how they made sense of their experiences occupying, retrofitting, and living in the structure was also rich material to base this theoretical article on. Irazábal and Sosa started working on this article during the realization of the documentary and after its release, involving coauthor and then student and mentee Lee Schlenker.

urban migration fueled Caracas' hyper-urbanization,⁵ pressing against the physical limitations set by its surroundings. Seated in a valley, Caracas could hardly expand horizontally due to geographical limitations; thus, new rural-to urban immigrants began to occupy peripheral hillsides and riverbanks. With urban land at a premium, poor Caraqueños were left with little choice but to settle on geologically unstable terrain with precarious services, if any, and poor accessibility to the jobs and services found in the formal city.

In 1920, the government created Banco Obrero (which later became the National Housing Institute, INAVI), a public housing institution designed to reduce Caracas' and other Venezuelan cities' large housing deficits. While falling short in this task, INAVI served as a mechanism for some municipal elites and their cronies to get lucrative construction contracts. Simultaneously, some members of Caracas' upper classes reaped great profits from the nation's oil bonanza, hiring recognized architects to design their private homes. Through Dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez's (1952-1958) Plan Regulador, the city rapidly metamorphosed into a gleaming metropolis of megaprojects, highways, and skyscrapers sustained by petroleum wealth and visions of modernity (Almandoz, 2012). Through the Plan's CIAM-inspired,⁶ functionalist logic, a concurrent process of socio-spatial clustering and dispersion increasingly segregated Caracas between rich and poor. As barrios encroached on the formal city like fingers along ravines proliferating up and between the hillsides, oil- and state-bureaucrats of the emerging middle-class flocked to new upscale residential districts and suburbs (García Guadilla, 2012).

Through the 1970s, the country accrued huge profits do to OPEC's oil market management, allowing Carlos Andrés Pérez's (CAP) first administration (1974-1979) to raise oil prices, boost exports, and curate mass-spending projects—including the Parque Central complex, which boasted Latin America's two tallest towers. Antonio Paiva (film interview), Professor of Economics at Universidad Central de Venezuela, recalls:

This [is the period] when the competition among the banks begins. One bank, for example, hires a French architect, the next decides to one-up them with an American one... the Polar Building, for example, with its glass structure, became an icon in Latin America. At that time Mexico was the only country with a building like it.

These publicly subsidized projects contributed little to public housing, instead focusing assistance on private developments and upper-middle-class

⁵ High urbanization rates were experienced in the country during this period. In 1930, only 30% of the population resided in cities, by the turn of the century this had increased to 93.5% (García Guadilla, 2012). The primacy of Caracas in the country also expanded since the 1930s: By 1926, Caracas' population was 135,253 and 4.4% of Venezuela's population; whereas by 1961, it was 1,116,245 and 14.8% of Venezuela's population (González Casas, 2012).

⁶ The Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was an organization founded in 1928 and disbanded in 1959 to spread the principles of the Modern Movement focusing in architecture, urban design, and planning.

neighborhoods. The government thus helped investors cash-in on the bonanza while building highly subsidized units for those with little housing insecurity (Fossi Belloso, 2012).

It is during this regime, under the leadership of banker and developer David Brillembourg, that much of Torre David's district, Libertador, was redeveloped to make way for its future as the so-called "Wall Street of Caracas" (see Fig. 1). This urban renewal intervention was facilitated by liberalized zoning regulations, which allowed for the construction of skyscrapers and other 'temples' to Venezuela's financial wealth and transformed the once sleepy urban center into a modern Central Business District. Soon both national and international banks—encouraged by Brillembourg and other investors—erected their regional headquarters in Libertador District, further anchoring the city's quest for cosmopolitan urbanity through "socially classifying" architectural devices (Grubbauer, 2014, 336; Castoriadis, 1987).⁷

With 70% of Venezuela's revenue stream coming from petroleum extraction, sudden fluctuation in international markets soon rained on the parade, exposing the fissures in Caracas' socio-spatial composition. In an attempt to sustain its "Saudita Lifestyle," Venezuela became exorbitantly indebted to international lenders, resulting in an imposed International Monetary Fund's (IMF) "structural adjustment program" that devastated the country's economy. Even after the damaging "Black Friday" (*Viernes Negro*) of 1983, when the national *bolívar* currency experienced a radical devaluation in relation to the US dollar, the federal government largely continued its carefree-spending lifestyle, with the subsequent presidencies of Luis Herrera Campins (1979-1984) and Jaime Lusinchi (1983-1989) dumping large sums of money into corrupt, dead-end projects.

⁷ Similar to what Torre David experienced, many of these high-rises, including the building that housed Banco Latino, were left unfinished and are now uninhabited or informally occupied. Others even more ambitious than those built were slated for construction but never reached such a point.



Tower of David complex in urban fabric

image: Rework of cadaster map by author (JdB) -  some rights reserved

Figure 1: Location of Torre David in a central area of Caracas and at the intersection of formal and informal, traditional and modern urban fabrics. Credit JdB, Creative Commons (2015).

With dreams of reliving the bonanza of 1974-78, Venezuelans re-elected Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1989. The people were shocked when just twelve days after taking power he imposed a set of sweeping neoliberal measures. Included in this package was the privatization of state-owned companies, tax reform, and, most significantly, an increase in the price of gasoline, which fueled an upsurge in transportation costs. Three days later people protested in the streets, and thousands of barrio inhabitants came down from the hills and took over the city center in response to the maligned economic reforms. Known as the Caracazo of 1989, these days of popular protest and violent government response (with a debated number of deaths⁸ and millions of dollars lost in property destruction) became a landmark juncture in Venezuela's history. Not only did the Caracazo initiate a national process of contestation against the imposed neoliberal reforms, but through the

⁸ Official figures place the death toll at 277, but other estimates indicated well over 1,000 fatalities (Coronil and Skurski, 2019).

masses' occupation of public spaces and private businesses it also confronted the country's petrocrats with one of their most feared urban nightmares: the barrios-dwellers' descent into and seizure of the formal city center.

Instability did not dissuade Caracas' growth. CAP's economic reforms disproportionately impacted Venezuela's poor and led to increased migration from the impoverished countryside to the main cities. It was during this period that Caracas' barrios expanded fastest. High joblessness rates in the interior of the country led many national and international migrants to Caracas' slums, where economic opportunities concentrated and informal economies and involvement in the drug trade offered some a chance of socioeconomic mobility (González Téllez, 2012).

Drug-related crime was rampant throughout the 1990s, producing a popular conception of the barrios as crime-dens and of their inhabitants as criminals (*malandros*) (Pedrazzini, 2014). In a process similar to that seen in other parts of Latin America—for example in the larger cities of Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, and El Salvador—private and para-police forces sprouted up in both elite and poor neighborhoods, stimulating people's retreat indoors or into gated communities, shopping malls, and other consumer spaces where citizens felt safer (Irazábal, 2009; Handal and Irazábal, 2019). Not only did these security practices further segregate the city, and particularly its barrio inhabitants, but they also resulted in the privatized commercialization of urban public space (González Téllez, 2012).



Figure 2: Caracas' drastically segregated socio-spatial composition: Formal high-rises in the forefront, self-built settlements in the background. André Cypriano, 2014.

In spite of the spatial segregation, social conflictivity, and privatization of public spaces that define Caracas since the 1990s, barrio residents have, in the past twenty years, made strides forward not only improving the quality of their housing construction, but also fostering legitimacy in the public eye. With the election of Hugo Chávez as president in 1999, support for housing rights and land seizures offered newfound legal and political opportunities for squatters and informal

urbanites (Irazábal, 2004). Though at times through ambiguous or contradictory discourses and actions, Chavez's housing and land rights platform codified squatters' rights, securing tenure for informal inhabitants by protecting them from police and juridical repercussions, as expressed in the 2009's Urban Land Law and Organic Emergency Law for Lands and Housing (Irazábal, 2007a).

This political climate brought new opportunities for Caracas' house-poor populations. Families left homeless by economic hardships and environmental disasters increasingly occupied the central city's abandoned spaces and buildings. As María (film interview), a former resident of Torre David, described: "I was living in Guarenas [a peripheral city of the Greater Caracas Area] in a small rancho but the mudslides destroyed it about six times and so I was tired of stopping and starting the construction over and over again."

Under Chavez, many barrio inhabitants became increasingly collectivized, nurturing a culture of autonomous construction and an affiliation to the Bolivarian project of democratic socialism that informed not only their political allegiances but also their communal and spatial practices (Irazábal and Foley, 2008a; Irazábal and Foley, 2012). Government initiated projects, such as the *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (CTU) and the *Consejos Comunales* (CC) helped build popular power and deepened democratic participation. These community-led organizations helped further legitimate barrio communities, which still suffer from stigmatization and discrimination, strengthening their territorial autonomies and encouraging residents to diagnose, plan, and self-manage their development (García Guadilla, 2012, 191; Irazábal and Foley, 2008b; Irazábal and Rodríguez, 2010; Rosas Meza, 2012, 78).

Yet, formal state support for and recognition of the barrios still have much room to improve. Along with some stalled or incomplete upgrading projects, various state-financed urban development projects impinge on barrio settlements, fueling residents' dispersion and relocation. In some instances, the critiques frequently aimed to indict barrio expansion—such as environmental degradation (Auyero, 2011) and an absence of public space (Hernández-García, 2013)—could be equally directed at some state-led projects (Chacón, 2012, 251). The state's lackluster provision of public housing before the Grand Housing Mission Venezuela⁹ launched in 2011 was no unique to the recent Chavista administrations. Between 1928 and 2000, 996,000 units of public housing were created in Venezuela, while during that same period, 2,400,000 self-built units sprouted up in Caracas' barrios alone (Rosas Meza, 2012, 270). Over time, both the state and the private sectors have fueled Caracas' economic and spatial polarization by failing to provide adequate affordable housing and services for the more than five million people living in the city's metropolitan area (García Guadilla, 2012, 192). Even in the early 2010s, over 80% of *caraqueños* were unable to afford proper housing

⁹ To this date (February 2020, <http://www.minhvi.gob.ve/>), the government claims to have built more than 3 million social housing units in the country since 2011 through its program *Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela*, yet demand for public housing outpaces the government's supply.

(Inter-American Development Bank, 2012). The remarkable case of Torre David and its inhabitants emerges at the crux of these ongoing and intersecting socio-spatial struggles.

The Rise and Fall, and Rise Again, of a Great Venezuelan Tower

The Rise

The “Venezuela Saudita”

During Carlos Andrés Pérez’s first presidential administration (1974-79), Venezuela’s oil-induced spending spree converted a series of grandiose architectural and urban aspirations into built realities. Domestic and international investors, along with city planners, politicians, and developers, were caught up in the fervor of international showmanship, seeking to embed radical economic imaginaries in the erection of urban spectacles (Grubbauer, 2014). The historic core of the city was transformed with iconic architecture to shape Caracas’ image as a global city—in the hopes of selling ‘place’ to firms, tourists, and residents (Irazábal, 2005; Irazábal, 2007b). City boosters encouraged rapid growth by streamlining permits and lowering taxes on corporate development projects.



Figure 3: Ranchos (shacks) in Barrio Mariche, Caracas. Irene Sosa, 2014.

Soon after, David Brillembourg, the principal investor in Torre David, envisaged his plan to build “Caracas’ Wall Street”—a scheme beginning with his tower, which would boast Italian marble, a helipad, private swimming pools, and twenty-three elevators. With a renowned design team led by architect Enrique Gómez and eighty million dollars from Caracas’ city agencies—Torre David would be, according to engineer Manuel Cardenas (film interview), “a symbol of

somebody who wanted to distinguish himself and, as all emperors do, consecrate his empire by building his very own throne.”

The Fall

David as Goliath: The Giant Tumbles Down

Despite the tumult of the 1980s and the nascent IMF austerity package, favorable interest rates and overzealous stock predictions precipitated a financial boom from 1989 until 1993. David Brillembourg and his Grupo Confinanzas were at the heart of this speculative expansion. They broke ground for their new headquarters, Torre David, in January 1990. A year later Brillembourg fell ill, preventing his further involvement in the project. When he died in April 1993, his visionary plan, Caracas’ premier architectural emblem, was well on track for its target opening date of July 1994, but this was not to be.

The Burst of Venezuela’s Political Economy

That same year, the IMF austerity measures caught up with Venezuelans and the tower was left 60% finalized with much of the material for its completion idle at the construction site. The economy experienced a banking and financial crisis so devastating that its rippling aftermath never fully subsided (Almandoz, 2012). Torre David found itself in limbo—championed by boosters with faith in its greatness, yet paralyzed by economic contraction and abandonment that would soon crystallize into a full-blown crisis. In the unprecedented economic freeze, half of all banks operating in Venezuela were bailed out by the government’s deposit-insurance agency (Bank Deposits’ Social Protection Fund, FOGADE), costing about 20% of the national GDP. Among the dozens of government-confiscated financial institutions was Brillembourg’s Grupo Confinanzas, and with its seizure came Torre David.

While the same happened to other development sites in Caracas, Torre David’s symbolism and grandeur conferred to it a distinct significance. Yet, the tower sat unfinished and vacant under FOGADE’s ownership. In spite of numerous attempts to rehabilitate or auction off the building—including one idea to transform it into the mayoral offices (Anderson, 2013)—nobody rescued the desolate structure.

Desacralization of the Icon

Stripping

For 13 years, pilferers and black-market looters earned money by shedding bits of Torre David and other unoccupied skyscrapers' façades and selling them below market-rate. As Zulma Bolívar (film interview), urbanist with the city of Caracas, noted:

People sought out ways to sell things that could be recycled... Such was the case of the steel and aluminum that were not only taken from Torre David, but also from other places. They just took whatever had any value to resell them.

By the mid-2000s, Torre David had become a symbol of dereliction and collapse, a “sad relic of the hopes and ambitions harbored by Venezuelans in the 1970s and early 1980s, and an inescapable reminder of the economic upheavals that followed those boom years” (Brillembourg and Klumpner, 2013, 89). With neither present nor prospective investors or tenants, Torre David's partially dismantled frame evoked an image of desolation and decline that haunted the city throughout the post-bust years.



Figure 4: Torre David dominates the skyline from Sarría, Caracas. Irene Sosa, 2014.

Penetrating

The election of left-leaning president Hugo Chavez in 1999 created a socio-political opening, and in a few years, occupations spread across the city. Not only some homeless people, but also people living in precarious housing, and those that lost their housing to weather events and other disasters resorted to occupying vacant and underutilized buildings and lots in Caracas and other cities in

Venezuela. Also, some working class and middle-income class people that could not afford housing within the formal housing market proved their luck in some occupations.

In this context, on the rainy night of October 17, 2007, a large group of house-deprived *caraqueños* found their way to Torre David. Coming predominately from barrios and previous occupations, they ranged from street vendors to professionals, mostly families with children, whom the tower's two security guards would not let wither out in the rain. Elvin Marchan (film interview), former treasurer of Torre David's occupation, remembered:

While my wife was at work, a cousin of hers told her a group of people was getting ready to take over a building by Avenida Andrés Bello. I told her that I would not go because I thought those people were just a bunch of thugs, good-for-nothings who just wanted to take advantage of an empty building... When we took over the building there were people from all different neighborhoods of Caracas.

As word of the large occupation spread, the squat grew rapidly and people started exploring the building's potential, eventually rehabilitating 28 floors with familial and communal spaces. *Caraqueños* with housing needs came to Torre David hoping to capitalize on an excellent location and a solid structure. Wilmer (film interview), a longtime resident, said: "[The building] was salvation for us... We were pleased first and foremost because we had a place to sleep." For 7 years, hundreds of families—including Evangelical Pentecostals in support of *Chavismo* and anarcho-socialism—settled in and made a home of Torre David, successfully repurposing a complex whose originally intended users had been some of the country's most wealthy and conservative. In the eyes of the occupants, Torre David became a place of refuge from the precarious and often life-threatening settlement conditions and livelihoods experienced in the barrios, offering infrastructural protection from the socio-natural risks (violence, flooding, and landslides) that plagued many residents' previous communities.

Shitting

Settling into Torre David proved no walk in the park. With chunks of its façades missing, just over half of its floors inhabitable, and most of its interior overrun by decay, Torre David was in dire need of repair and retrofit. A corpse that no one had previously occupied, the complex lacked basic infrastructural necessities: there were mid-air gaps between buildings and along staircases; no elevators to transport people or goods multiple stories; no water, power or waste management systems; and no viable ventilation ducts. Stenches from accumulating waste were nauseating. As María Avedaño (film interview), a former resident, noted:

I went crazy because there were enormous rats that prevented me from falling asleep and the lines to use the mirror or go to the bathroom were enormous; but I said ‘no, I have to get me this apartment: cowards don’t do well in war.’

Elvin (film interview) shared similar experiences: “there was nothing there but rubble, glass, pipes, no electricity, no toilet. I spent the whole day cleaning everything up and only then did I bring my things over.” Highlighting the precarity of the situation during the first few months, María continued: “Why did I stay in the basement of the building for three months without a tent? Because I, like most others, needed housing.”

Not just an architectural risk, but an environmental and public health one, living in Torre David proved, in the beginning, arguably more hazardous than living in many barrios—where jury-rigged and self-managed infrastructural projects provide a level of built and social cohesion (Bolívar, 1998). The new residents recognized that organized action needed to be taken to curtail the public health, infrastructural, and sanitary threats that riddled Torre David.

“Born-Again” Resacralization: Grassroots Planning and Management

Occupying an aging, unfinished building posed significant health, sanitation, and safety perils, yet Torre Davis’ initial settlers diagnosed, managed, and developed solutions to the problems afflicting their habitat. The residents divvied up space on each of twenty-eight floors, agreed to communal maintenance of the grounds, and appointed coordinators for salient functions—such as security, tenant affairs, internal circulation, water distribution, etc. Collective self-sufficiency became Torre David’s predominant ethos (Brillembourg, 2014, 330). As Maolis Castro (film interview), one of the first journalists from a mainstream newspaper to write about the tower, noted: “It was very organized, very orchestrated... a community in which everybody had to perform tasks.”

Governed by a popular assembly of floor representatives, Torre David quickly transformed into “a stage for participatory democracy,” in which collective living and management—popular among socialist-leaning squatters throughout Latin America—prevailed over traditional rentier relationships (McGuirk, 2014, 184). As Elvin mentioned, “we decided to organize ourselves to do the cleaning, to take care of the excrement and all that. We organized cleaning days on Sundays. Everyone had to participate, and if they had to go to work, they needed an excuse.”

Residents’ perseverance, ingenuity, and collaborative work led to the creation of a church, recreational facilities, commercial outlets, restaurants, a weight-room, and self-designed residential units within the tower. The occupants established a housing cooperative—the *Cooperativa de Vivienda Casiques* [sic, *caciques* were indigenous chiefs who fought against the Spanish conquest] de Venezuela — that allowed tenants to forgo rental fees, requiring only monthly maintenance payments. With no component of Torre David’s upkeep outside of

collective responsibility, the residents defined the rules and managed their coexistence. With this organization in place, residents negotiated with the state-owned electrical and water companies agreeing to service a huge debt that the tower had accumulated in the years of abandonment, all of which was eventually paid off using condominium-type fees from coop members.



Figure 5: West façade of Torre David showing the street-side view of the tower’s newly constructed residencies. Irene Sosa, 2014.

In a feat of architectural industriousness and social engineering, Torre David’s residents refashioned not only its built, but also its social and symbolic identity. Torre David was no longer a mausoleum to Venezuela’s financial demise. Rather, in some design and socialist circles, it was lionized; and, for the inhabitants themselves, it was a proud product of labor and autonomous power. Defying the media accounts that sought to demonize them as criminal and indigent (Anderson, 2013), Torre David’s residents constructed a collective livelihood that—through political and religious solidarity, and in the face of government negligence¹⁰—restored a decrepit mammoth in Venezuela’s downtown and fashioned a safer, cheaper, and better alternative to the continually encroaching barrios (Sosa, 2014).

Torre David as Rhizomatic

Developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980; Guattari, 1995, 1996), “rhizome” or “rhizomatic” is a philosophical concept inspired by botanical stems that unfold through a diversity of paths. They use the terms to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. Contrary to arborescent conceptions of knowledge, which work with dualist categories and vertical and linear connections,

¹⁰ Torre David’s residents had requested government help for the retrofitting of the building, recognition of tenure rights, and official designation as communal council several times to no avail.

a rhizome works with planar and trans-species connections. Following on the biological concepts of mutualism and hybridization in which two different species interact together to form a multiplicity—a rhizome is a unity that is multiple in itself. It evolves through ceaseless relations between semiotic chains, presenting history and culture as a wide array of connections with no specific origin or destination—always in the making. The evolution of the rhizome resists chronology and predetermined organization,¹¹ instead favoring a nomadic system of propagation.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) explain the rhizome by the following principles: connection and heterogeneity (any point can be connected to any other); multiplicity; asignifying rupture (if broken, a rhizome will start up again on one of its old lines or new lines); and finally, cartography and decalcomania (a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model). Contemporary urban theorists of the rhizome (Ballantyne, 2007; Doverly, 2011; Doverly and Ross, 2011; Petcou, Petrescu and Querrien, 2013; Springer, 2016), and particularly those studying Latin American cities (Berenstein Jacques, 2001; Hernández and Borden, 2005), have understood peripheral informalities, transcultural building praxes, and postmodern spatial dynamics through rhizomatic logics, treating organic forms, resilient collectivities, and a-linear processes as constituent of flourishing rhizomatic networks.

It is in the spirit of the rhizome and its scholarly trajectory in Latin America that we explore the imbricated and mutually-constituting multiplicities present and latent in the semiotic assemblages and possibilities rooted in ideas, ideals, and practices of/in Torre David. They stem from the liminal spaces in-between the formal and informal, modern and traditional, modernity and postmodernity, reality and imagination, and capitalism and socialism.

Formal and Informal: In-formality is In

Torre David was intended as an emblem of Venezuela's political and corporate ascendancy. As our fieldwork makes clear, the fact that people of a low-income class informally occupied the tower proved more than an ironic reversal of fate. It was a transgressive affront—adding insult to injury for the city's formal developers—as if the occupiers were saying: “Previous ‘Lords of the Valley’: watch us, the ousted, make room for ourselves in ‘your’ polis. We are not going anywhere, we *are* the new Caracas.”

Torre David explicitly confronted the formal city with socio-spatial realities that beforehand many hardly acknowledged. While the barrios are visible in the slopes of Caracas's valley, they are for the most part ‘out there’—considered

¹¹ While the story of Torre David is attached to a chronology here as an explanatory discursive device, this chronology is not presented as a unitary space, containing a single truth. Instead, the tower is shown, through time, to have a multiplicity of meanings, thus the use of the rhizomatic analogy.

separated and different from the formal city. The residents occupying Torre David, however, brought the barrio *inside* the formal city—even more, inside the very building conceived to represent modernity and progress, the antithesis of poverty and informality. Caracas' socio-spatial segregation—legally sanctioned and (re)produced by both the colonial and the capitalist city, an order by which the city grew and functioned since its inception (García Guadilla, 2012; Irazábal and Foley, 2012)—was thus threatened. Torre David's residents simultaneously adhered to living arrangements similar to those found in many formal housing cooperatives, transposed and adapted spatial and technical wisdom from the barrios, and transcended the falsely dichotomized line between formal and informal dwelling/settlement.

Rather than reading Torre David as a clash between the formal and the informal, however, we understood it as a rhizomatic concupiscence between two types of informality. First, the informality of the elite (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004; Roy, 2005)—with its exceptional (often extra-legal) access to money and finance, celebrated as a sign of socio-political stature and entrepreneurial competence—which originally brought the tower about. And second, the informality of the poor—with their self-built housing in untenured land (Bolívar, 1988; Rosas Meza, 2012). As an expression of the former, elite informality, Torre David was erected to embody the ultimate “state of exception” (Agamben, 2005; Vainer, 2011). Its occupation and transfiguration into a living barrio subverted this original state of exception. It created an exception of the exception, a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, the impediment of the original exception—the wealthy's intended creation of an uncontested symbol of modernity and affluence in the city. On the other hand, the creation of a barrio out-of-place (quite literally where, according to formal rules and regulations, it was not supposed to be) became the actually-existing exception.

The poor's supposedly out-of-placeness in the tower was, thus, precisely what made their emplacement so remarkably visible. Their placeness could then be seen as a challenge to the establishment of the political and economic classes, which previously held them “out of sight, out of mind.” No longer out of sight, informality—as an architectural-urban form, social status, and political order—became in-sight, in site, in-side, simply, *in*.



Figure 6: Resident working on construction in Torre David. Alejandro Cegarra, 2012.

Modern and Traditional: Tradition as (Not) Modern

Torre David sought international posture, yet ultimately became a soaring symbol of modernity's failure—an open wound and a shameful exposure of disproportionate ambition and financial demise. As such, this radical economic imaginary must be understood through its built and occupied form as a contested representation of power struggles and hegemonies (Irazábal, 2003; Vanderbeek and Irazábal, 2007; Irazábal, 2008a). Torre David's rhizomatic socio-spatial tensions manifested through its inhabitants' negotiations of modern/traditional architectures and livelihoods and their creative new hybridizations.

When Jane M. Jacobs (2004) asserted that “tradition is (not) modern,” she meant to indict the widespread assumption among social scientists and designers that tradition is past and backward and modern is present and forward-looking. Architecturally, Torre David is the cross-pollinating result of traditional/modern knowledges, technologies, and amenities, hybrid aesthetics fueled by its residents' cultural backgrounds and middle-class aspirations. The apartments' visual landscapes, both interior and exterior, were neither traditional nor modern, but rather rhizomatic blends of the *barrio* and the gated community (Caracas' two fastest-growing and antagonist settlement typologies) (McGuirk, 2014, 139). Using the technical and collective traditions of *barrio* construction and social conviviality (Rosas Meza, 2009, 2012), inhabitants attained for the tower what developers could not—functioning systems of sanitation and services, circulation, recreation, and maintenance. At the same time, the building access was gated and controlled and many of the individual residential units had personalized façades.



Figures 7a and 7b: The Atrium, intended as the tower’s grand entrance, displayed private balconies with decorative markings that made each housing unit unique. Irene Sosa 2014.

In the realms of space creation, management, and capital investment, residents “look[ed] backward, to their experiences of the barrio, in order to move forward, toward a normalized idea drawn from middle-class standards” (Brillembourg and Klumpner, 2013, 208). Drawing from the trial-and-error tactics used in the barrios, residents adapted the tower’s structural infrastructure, creating and separating residential units with brick infill. When design plans were frustrated by the existing tower design, residence broke through walls recreating the circulatory and ventilation logics found in barrios. Through these actions residents’ asserted control over a portion of Torre David’s territorial hierarchy (Habraken, 2002). Similarly, their complex and personalized internal decorations revealed both their cultural pride (evident in familial, religious, and political iconography) and their social aspirations. It is critical on both micro- and macro-spatial levels to see

Torre David's rehabilitation not as a stark contrast between tradition and modernity, but rather as an emergent and ever fluxing expression of architectural and urban traditions-as-(not)-modern, which have been incubating for decades throughout Caracas (Almandoz, 2009; Fossi Belloso, 2012; González Casas, 2002).

Modernity and Postmodernity: Rhizomatic (Post)Modernities

A centerpiece of Venezuela's quest for modernity and built iconicity, Torre David was envisioned as an expression of history and progress conceived as linear; when recognition, image, and status were thought to follow from the implementation of a grand vision (Bani-Hashim, Irazábal, and Byrum, 2010; Grubbauer, 2014). Torre David's trials are a testimony to the traps of hegemonic modernist architecture and political philosophy.

The concepts of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt, 2000; Fourie, 2012) and 'varieties of modernity' (Schmidt, 2006) allow us to break away from the rigidity of modernity's deceptions and reimagine Torre David's initial conceptualization. If we understand modernity as a historically- and culturally-specific process through which a civilizational group either negotiates its pre-modern identity with rationalist ontologies (Eisenstadt, 2000) or converges towards a pre-defined grouping of modern 'types' (Schmidt, 2006), we can reconcile Torre David's emergence as a negotiation between global financial assimilation and regional economic supremacy. Its proposed model for architectural and economic modernity comes into conflict with its regionally competitive image (the idealized financial core of a then-plummeting region) and local informalities (characterized by both government deregulation and informal occupation). Rather than seeking a modernity unrecognizable to its own trajectory or one that falls into a prefixed categorical typology, Torre David's specific (post)modernities arose out its own miscalculated visions and haphazard circumstances, a rhizomatic array of historical vectors and political-economic convergences.

Reality and Imagination: Mediated Constructions

Perhaps the ultimate disassociation between the actually-existing Torre David and its virtual, postmodern imaginaries results from the ways the tower was appropriated by members of the global professional, political, and media elite in pursuit of their interests. Three examples illustrate the semantic games or purposeful social constructions of meanings played upon the Torre and its inhabitants.

First, the international design firm Urban-Think Tank and photographer Iwan Baan won the prestigious Golden Lion for the Best Project at the 2012 Venice Architectural Biennale. The award went to an exhibit that conveyed the barriozation of the tower through spectacular photography and a chic commercial stand selling exoticized *arepas* (a Venezuelan popular meal staple). The prize neither recognized the inhabitants of Torre David as co-winners nor granted them monetary compensation or further their professional prestige, as it did for the

winners. The project proved highly controversial in the global architecture community, sparking a flurry of letters and articles in Venezuelan and international newspapers and professional magazines debating whether the project *was* architecture or simply supported “illegal occupations” and a distorted image of Venezuela. The controversy fed on and fueled the current polarity in Venezuelan society surrounding issues of urbanization (Saieh, 2012; Irazábal and Foley, 2010).

Second, in 2012 an accusation appeared in multiple international media outlets claiming that a prominent foreign diplomat had been kidnapped by a Venezuelan mafia and taken hostage in Torre David. The reporting asserted that the community in Torre David was complicit with this crime and nurtured vice through ex-prison leader Alexander “El Niño” Daza’s regime. Soon, 350 security agents from various organizations raided the building, making about 350 households leave their apartments and congregate at the street level. Days after this accusation went viral on the Internet, the kidnapped person was found somewhere else, yet no clarification or apology was ever issued to help restore the reputation of Torre David or its inhabitants. Ultimately, the then Venezuelan Minister of Interior and Justice Tareck El Aissami declared the whole plot was a plan to destabilize the national government, amid an international campaign to discredit it (López, 2012).

Lastly, the popular terrorist fiction series *Homeland* used Torre David in one of its episodes. *Homeland* is based on the Israeli series *Hatufim (Prisoners of War)* and produced by Fox 21, a Rupert Murdoch company. In this particular episode, after a large terrorist incident in the US, a protagonist is carried away to hide in Caracas. Torre David is the only architectural icon presented to the audience to distinguish the city, effectively portraying it as *the* symbol of the Venezuelan capital. The tower is conveyed as a haven for terrorists and murderers where children use guns and drugs—the image of the poor, drug-addicted Venezuelans on international screens. Lying on the floor after being beaten by the Venezuelan police, the protagonist receives a drug and injects it into his veins. The set includes posters and graffiti alluding to the current political regime in Venezuela, the Bolivarian Revolution, as well as a mural depicting a figure similar to the late president Hugo Chávez. Yet, none of this was actually filmed in Torre David. Instead, an abandoned apartment building in San Juan, Puerto Rico was used to recreate this particular imaginary of the tower (Bracci Roa, 2013).

In all three cases, the spectacularization of the tower is predicated on disempowering—if not invisibilizing, disfiguring, and demonizing—its residents (Anderson, 2013). Defying reality, Torre David reemerges from these constructions as rhizomatic entanglements of global and local agendas, ideological wars, and conflictive spatial practices that overlap with one another in a fragile and contested, yet ever-morphing and surviving system.

Capitalism and Socialism

The most ideologically salient rhizome related to Torre David emerged in the tension between its capitalist origins and socialist aspirations—paralleling the

core paradox of the Bolivarian Revolution itself. Torre David was to be the pinnacle of Venezuela's capitalist ascendancy; the top two floors, for example, were built as a presidential suite in which David Brillembourg could reign over the entire city. A prime economic and ideological concern facing the Chavista regime upon assuming power in 1999 was how to reconcile the implementation of socialist programs upon a bureaucratic and urban infrastructure that had multiple tributes to capitalist accumulation and wealth (Irazábal and Rodríguez, 2010). As filmmaker Alfredo Zambrano (film interview) explained:

The building had or still has this power of being a symbol of capitalism that shows you the individual power of those involved... Yet now that we have embarked on a socialist system, I think that was what stopped or in part led to not selling this building, as well as to people coming there to live without any [evicting] consequences.

The rhizomatic fusion of capitalist relations and socialist policies playing both in Venezuelan society at large and within the tower resulted in a system of production, management, and spatiality in the tower which may have been, in fact, the truest manifestation of Chavez's signature slogan: "Socialism of the 21st Century"—more democratic, organic, and vernacular than the really-existing socialisms of the 20th century. This aspirational structure was in a constant state of physical and social transformation; its concrete structure its only fixity—the rest proving adaptive, growing, and living as rhizomes do. Torre David was a micro-manifestation of the political-ideological era in which the majority of its drama unfolded: the Chavista administrations. *Chavismo* itself has proven to be a rhizomatic political theory and practice (Monedero, 2008; Irazábal and Foley, 2008b; Ellner, 2011; Irazábal and Foley, 2012; Ellner, 2013). A changing and sometimes compulsive politics, Chavismo as a force both inspired and subverted Torre David's political-organizational ethos.

Formally organized as a housing cooperative that also featured commercial, religious, recreational, and communal spaces, Torre David was a mixed-use complex. As an embodiment of and laboratory for the ideas undergirding Chavismo without the explicit blessing of the Chavista government, Torre David functioned as a mix of representative and deliberative democracy, with subgroups wielding various amounts of power, ultimately ceding to the building's operations manager and two other executive administrators.

Torre David's residents exercised a trial-and-error mastering of circumstances, a cultivated and multilinear autonomy that thrived where formal government policy and planning fell short. They muddled through the evolving and sometimes contradictory conditions that defined Chavismo. Significant stakeholders in the Torre had diverse positionalities, including government functionaries, radical Chavistas, and religious Pentecostals, whose politically- or spiritually-disciplined behaviors and solidarity contributed to the cooperative's

success. Most fundamentally, the tower's community leaders rose above Caracas' polarized politics by navigating complexities and contradictions to effectively propiciate architectural, political, and socio-spatial conviviality.

Not surprisingly, within the tower's plurality, Chavismo maintained a dominant identity, with 95% of the tower's inhabitants belonging to the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*.¹² Many Chavista-inspired socialist economic policies defined Torre David's organization, such as the absence of rentier relationships and a collective contribution to the maintenance of facilities and utilities as people were able to. When tenants moved to another city or part of Caracas, they were forbidden from renting or selling their space for any monetary gain; unless they had furnished the unit with capital investments, for which they could recapture the value. Torre David's distinctive blend of socialist and capitalist routines similarly appeared in residents' commercial behavior. While residents saw their housing-cooperative model as an expression of Chavista revolutionary socialism, it was simultaneously an entrepreneurial incubator that allowed many to acquire additional income and provide concomitant services in a unique mixed-use development.

Sustained through the exploitation of Venezuela's oil wealth, Chavismo has always been an ideological and pragmatic tussle between capitalism and socialism—a tension that Torre David seemingly mimicked to its advantage. Utilizing the fundamentally socialist economic tenets of autarchic self-sufficiency and cooperative sovereignty to aspire to middle-class lifestyles, Torre David's residents created a paradoxically vibrant, resilient model for urban economic wellbeing that rewarded individual sweat equity while supporting collective ambitions.

Limbos: Now What?

The People

During 2014, the tower was—for the first time—the subject of major government scrutiny. After weeks of media conjecture and misinformation regarding its fate, the Minister for the Revolutionary Transformation of Greater Caracas, Ernesto Villegas, announced the implementation of Operation Zamora, a full-fledged plan to evict, securitize, and eventually transform Torre David into something else yet not known. Operation Zamora came as a surprise to many who had observed Torre David's evolution over the past twenty-four years.

News of government meetings with residents and inspections of the tower came at the end of May 2014, when a landmark encounter between Villegas and the tower's inhabitants led to discussions about possible 'solutions' to the

¹² The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), the largest political party in Venezuela, is a socialist party created by the fusion of some of the socio-political forces that support the Bolivarian Revolution.

‘problem’ of Torre David (Noticias24, 2014; Aporrea, 2014a). Then, after issuing a census of Torre David and its inhabitants—confirming that almost 1,200 families were living there—Villegas announced the decision to have state security personnel stationed throughout the complex, per residents’ request (Globovisión, 2014). Though thoroughly impressed with the residents’ level of organization, Villegas noted on multiple occasions that the President Nicolás Maduro¹³ administration did not promote ‘illegal occupations’, later announcing that another large squat at the nearby Sambil La Candelaria shopping complex would soon be also disassembled and ‘solved’ (El Universal, 2014; RunRun, 2014).

On July 22, 2014, news broke that residents were being relocated to Ciudad Zamora, a new, large government housing development developed as part of the Grand Housing Mission Venezuela one hour outside of Caracas, in the city of Cúa. Appalled by what they called the ‘safety risks’ and ‘undignified living conditions’ in Torre David, several government ministries initiated the relocations, promising extended and enhanced public busing services from Ciudad Zamora to downtown Caracas. Hundreds of families accepted the government’s housing offer and moved into Ciudad Zamora at no cost to themselves. Nearly four hundred other families, however, initially refused to leave, yet agreed to move to the tower’s lower floors, per Villegas’ seemingly conciliatory request: “We will not go against anybody’s will” (Avendaño, 2014). Other residents, such as María, had a hard time leaving due to health conditions and limited mobility. Yet by the end of November 2014, 64% of the tower had been evacuated, with infill construction demolished from the highest inhabited floor (28th) to the 17th. By early 2015, the tower’s evacuation had been completed.

While Operation Zamora was deemed a ‘success’ in the eyes of the government and some residents and observers, for others, it was an affront to the popular autonomy and self-sufficiency cultivated for seven years in Torre David—with many residents preferring mutual collaboration and autonomy, rather than government co-optation. Not only did the displacement forced people to a long home-work commute, but it also disrupted the place-based roots established in La Candelaria, where many children attended school (El Nacional, 2014). As María (film interview) shared before moving out:

I am sad because our community will be broken up. Some will go one place, others will go somewhere else... Yet, they go with what we taught them. Because a united community “will never be defeated”...[long silence]... but ours was defeated.

Operation Zamora jeopardized the very social capital that the community had developed and effectively relied upon.

¹³ Maduro is the serving president of Venezuela since 2013, winning the national elections after Pres. Chávez’s death by 50.6% and the 2018 reelection by 67.8% of the vote. However, with the support of the US and some other governments worldwide, Maduro’s presidency is being disputed by Juan Guaidó since January 2019, enlarging the political and economic crisis in the country.

The Government

President Nicolas Maduro's administration, on whose behalf Villegas was the spokesman for Operation Zamora, referred to the relocations as a productive, fair, and dignified process for all. In interviews with state media, Villegas not only presented the operation as voluntary, but also framed it as a cooperative partnership—in tandem with the government, yet initiated by and in the best interests of the tower's residents (Correo del Orinoco, 2014a).

For many years, residents of Torre David had discussed the notion of active and sustained collaboration with the government, hoping that mutual respect could be fostered. Yet, for the better part of Torre David's communal existence, the government had turned a relatively blind eye, abstaining from providing a formal stance on its fate. So when the first people's assembly occurred in May 2014—with Villegas promising to “not demonize Torre David” and “build socialism through dialogue, respect and recognition” (Aporrea, 2014b)—a great optimism surfaced, reigniting the ongoing conversation about the tower's rehabilitation and its residents' future. Yet, after debunking rumors of the tower's sale to Chinese real estate developers, the government swiftly unveiled an evacuation plan in conjunction with two days of public meetings to consider possible reuses, a surprise to many who had hoped the government would, alongside residents, make Torre David more habitable. Ángela Acosta (film interview), a member of a *consejo communal* and community organizer, wondered then:

Why not assume the challenge of giving the country a [community] center that could serve as a seat of popular power?... One could develop mixed activities, with space for communal councils and neighborhood centers to develop the economy. What is done today [during the public forum] is historic, but what we fail to do also has the potential to be historic.

In the end, the occupation of Torre David posed a fundamental problematization of the capitalist city in a manner that not only crisped the nerves of the capitalist class. More critically, it tested the ‘true colors’ of the socialist government. One thing is to rhetorically acknowledge the right to the city and the right to housing for the poor, and even advance housing programs that partially tackle those needs, and another altogether more daring and challenging is to stand by the people that grab those rights for themselves, in the process de facto subverting the political order.

The Spatial Disciplines

The case of Torre David should push the spatial disciplines—architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, planning, and geography—to rethink the conceptualization of (Latin American) urban space—ultimately questioning the intents, means, and ends of these disciplines in self-built and managed settings. Posing challenges to the practices of finished architecture, collaborative design,

participatory planning, and anarchist geographies (Springer, 2016), the case of Torre David allows us to reconceive of who and what the built environment is for—along with who should be planning, designing, and managing it.

More than a case of do-it-yourself (DIY) urbanism enacted by Torre David's residents, collective autonomous construction and living, or filling-in where the government fell short, Torre David was a comprehensively organized and planned adaptive reuse project initiated, managed, and maintained by a collective of low-income families who strove to equitably inhabit it. As opposed to communes or other collective living models—which often remove themselves from a deemed unsavory system—Torre David's residential model actively engaged with the city and political-economic system in which it was operating, allowing residents to meet their ever-changing needs.

Not only does this defy the traditional principles and ends of formal design, but it also suggests an alternative to the notion that either architecture or plans should, at any point in their existence, be in a state of 'completion.' Rather, Torre David points to the validity of the 'urban laboratory' model, in which buildings—and blocks, neighborhoods, and whole cities—are constantly evolving according to their inhabitants' social and spatial requirements. In other words, Torre David suggested a dismantling of the myth that the designer or planner is the producer of perfect or complete objects (Brillembourg and Klumpner, 2013) and instead proposed a reimagining of the professional role as that of a facilitator and *bricoleur* (Innes and Booher, 1999; Irazábal and Foley, 2010).

This case proved particularly transcendent as a rhizome, with the building functioning as a mixed-use, mixed-economy community with adaptable zoned spaces. In this sense, Torre David shows city designers, planners, and policymakers in densifying metropolises that skyscrapers can be both architecturally pragmatic and socially and ecologically responsive, a corrective and collective option for urban living.

Lastly, residents' ingenious social organization and restorative design demonstrate both the viability and challenges of autonomous and community-based planning. Instead of relying on governments or private firms to provide affordable housing, create economic opportunity, or manage ongoing operations, Torre David's residents proved that self-construction and management of property and communal life can be productive and fulfilling strategies in times of housing shortage, economic malaise, or governments' benign neglect. As Torre David's treasurer Elvin Merchin (film interview) said of residents' resolve three years before the relocation:

In the past...you couldn't have done this sort of thing. But now we are here and we haven't pushed to go to other places. We have fought for housing, which we didn't have beforehand, and now we've been here for five years. People are often surprised when they see what we've done, but when one wants to improve something, one does it.

Conclusion

This theorization of Torre David attempts to grapple with its charged tensions in-between the formal and informal, modern and traditional, modernity and postmodernity, reality and imagination, and capitalism and socialism. We argue that these tensions at play during Torre David's occupation created a rhizomatic socio-spatial field pregnant with ongoing risks and hopes for the people, the government, and the spatial disciplines, still unresolved despite the tower's vacancy.

We think there was space for a third-way between the benign neglect that left the tower's residents to their own means and the buy-out/hollow-out of the community promised by state-granted, dislocated individual housing solutions. Sympathetic professionals and a socialist government could have supported residents in making Torre David a testing ground for "an endogenous development nucleus"—a social(ist) typology the Venezuelan government had explicitly wanted to promote in the country through participatory initiatives and collective forms of production (PDVSA, 2005; Howard, 2008).

A decisive public-private-people partnership (Irazábal, 2016) of integral rehabilitation could have supported and celebrated the level of community self-realization already acquired by the residents of Torre David, upgrading infrastructure, bringing it to adequate standards of sanitation and safety, and providing services in the tower, such as child care, school, health and community centers, gyms, and recreational areas. A temporal relocating of people floor by floor to nearby Venezuelan Grand Housing Mission projects while completing the works could also have prevented the rupturing of the social capital nurtured in the community.

Supporting self-management with the formalization of the housing cooperative and/or other communal institution could have provided legal, financial, and training basis for project development in manners that supported an appropriate mixed-use, mixed tenure (public, collective, private) complex, while securing permanent housing affordability. Further, self-reliance and economic wellbeing may have been nurtured through the provision of entrepreneurial loans and training for small businesses and cooperatives.

These and other alternatives had strong potential had there been sufficient resistance to eviction. A strange and unfortunate twist in Torre David's rhizomatic history resulted in none being adopted. The autonomy of the community did not openly clash with state-led socialism. Instead, the majority of residents yielded to the attraction of legally owning a home, which they were only offered outside of Torre David, and thus the building was quickly and peacefully evicted with minimal contestation on the part of its occupants (Sosa, 2014).

In the end, nonetheless, Torre David most clearly elucidates that formulas for successful and vibrant urban spaces are not the prerogative of governments, professionals, or developers, but should rather be people-generated or at least

generated in partnership with people (Irazábal, 2016). In coming up with solutions themselves, communities—like Torre David’s—have substantial potential for creating more equitable and sustainable cities, yet this potential is often resisted or underused.

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