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A Country with a Wounded Soul: Memory as a Form of Public Value

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Without memory, we do not know who we are.
Without memory, we wander in bewilderment,
not knowing where to go.
Without memory, there is no identity.
(...) Memory helps us recover our own identity
and recognize the truth,
without which there will be neither reconciliation nor encounter.
Augusto Gongora

I.

Thinking about the future of Venezuela, where, as Cruz-Diez said, "everything has to be invented"[1], implies political and technical discussions to make and become once again a productive country, stable, one that overcomes violence, hunger, and barbarism. It is then an exercise of hopeful projection, aimed at generating public value understood as those needs satisfied by the State, which with a marked quality

1 "La Carta que Carlos Cruz-Diez le escribió a la juventud de venezolana." *Prodavinci*, July 28, 2019. Retrieved March 19, 2023. https://prodavinci.com/lea-la-carta-que-carlos-cruz-diez-le-escribio-a-la-juventud-venezolana/

and timeliness, is capable of building resilient and sustainable societies.[2]

In that sense, thinking about the Venezuelan democratic transition naturally involves starting to build what we want to become, but it also entails considering the country we are and the one we aspire to stop being. It is about co-constructing that future with a historical sense and a culture of memory; such an exercise is not preconditioned by reaching a post-conflict state; rather, remembering amid conflict allows for its denaturalization.

II.

According to Rodolfo Montes de Oca, "Remembering in moments of danger is not mere coincidence or nostalgic refuge (...) Speaking about the remnants of freedom that underlie every society oppressed by authoritarianism is to speak of resistance, and this often escapes the desired images. In the suffocating everyday life, anonymous heroisms are forged, those who only did what they had to, but that help prevent the worst tyrannies from exterminating the soul of the peoples."[3]. In this way, Montes de Oca introduces his book "*The Usual*

2 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), *Valor Público y gestión por resultados* (Santiago: CEPAL, March 30, 2022). Retrieved March 30, 2023, https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/ files/ courses/files/valor_publico_y_gestion_por_resultados.pdf

3 Rodolfo Montes de Oca, *Sospechosos habituales: Diez aproximaciones a los antecedentes históricos del movimiento de los derechos humanos en Venezuela (1936-1999)* (Venezuela: PROVEA, 2022). Own translation.

Suspects" as a study on human rights violations as a historical problem in Venezuela that extends and intensifies into our present.

These include *El Carupanazo* (1962), *El Porteñazo* (1962), the massacre of *El Amparo* (1988), *El Caracazo* (1989), the murders of dissident guerrilla groups during the armed insurgency; these are the theaters of operations, the abuses of guarantees and human rights. Based on this, the Justice and Truth Commission in 2017 concluded that between 1961 and 1989, there were 10,071 victims, of which 1,412 were murdered and 459 people suffered forced disappearance.

While this Commission —created during the Chavista-Madurista government— identified the names and roles of those responsible, none faced judicial proceedings for their direct responsibility in the repressive acts[4]. Although active factors in the armed insurgency of the time, such as the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV) and the *Movimiento De Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), were pacified, a genuine process of memory, truth, and justice was not fostered. As a result, the victims of that era were left without any kind of moral or legal reparation, leaving an open wound.

Therefore, Hugo Chávez's rise in 1998 was based on a concert of resentments, which aligned with institutional crisis and a system that lost its agency, thus gaining a majority for the emergence of a radical system that has generated a complex humanitarian emergency, the perpetuation of human rights

4 Rodolfo Montes de Oca, *Sospechosos habituales*...

violations, and a migratory crisis that has made Venezuela a country of emigration, with a diaspora of 7.7 million migrants and displaced people at the time of writing this article.[5]

During the Chavista government, we have experienced the Oil Strike (2002), the mobilization on April 11, 2002, the radicalization towards 21st-century Socialism (2005), the closure of RCTV (2007), the repression of student and citizen protests in 2014, and the Popular Rebellion of 2017. In this system, Venezuelan society has been reduced by the loss of Juan Pablo Pernalete, to name just one of the 163 people killed by official repression forces in the context of political protests during 2017, who died from the impact of a tear gas canister directly to his heart.[6]

According to the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, "The SEBIN has tortured or inflicted ill-treatment on detainees —including opposition politicians, journalists, protesters, and human rights defenders— mainly at «*El Helicoide*» a detention center in Caracas." The mission has investigated 51 cases that occurred since 2014. The report details how the highest-level

5 UN Refugee Agency, Llamamiento de emergencia: Situación sobre Venezuela. September, 2023. Retrieved March 19, 2024. https://www.acnur.org/emergencias/situacion-de-venezuela.

6 Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, "Venezuela: 6.729 protestas y 163 fallecidos desde el 1 de abril de 2017," August 02, 2017. Retrieved March 19, 2024, https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/sin-categoria/venezuela-6-729-protestas-y-157-fallecidos-desde-el-1-de- abril-de-2017

authorities gave orders to lower-ranking officials. The mission has detailed that there are responsibilities in the commission of crimes against humanity that are currently being investigated by the International Criminal Court.[7]

III.

In Venezuela, there is little culture of memory, and given what we have experienced, we must build a public memory policy that leads to a process of justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The act of historical memory carries particular challenges; initially, it is a paainful action and, therefore must be done collectively. Moreover, it helps build identity: trying to remember is about seeing ourselves as a society to understand what we were, to reclaim ourselves, as a mechanism of reparation and justice.

Thus, memory has public value, potentially allowing for the creation of resilient and sustainable societies. However, this type of policy requires a very complex and broad consensus to ensure it is of high quality and timely. It demands avoiding biases, making it a naturally long process that requires the participation of a diverse range of actors.

In Venezuela, another major challenge is the dismantled public system. The fact that political parties have had their

7 Naciones Unidas, "Venezuela: Nuevo informe de la ONU detalla las responsabilidades por crímenes de lesa humanidad para reprimir a la disidencia y pone la lupa en la situación en las zonas mineras remotas," September 20, 2022. Retrived March 19, 2023. https://www. ohchr. org/es/press-releases/2022/09/venezuela-new-un-report-details-responsibilities-crimes-against-humanity

functions significantly reduced due to persecution by the dictatorship is an evidence of this dismantling. These limitations began with the elimination of public funding for these institutions, which reduced their operational capacity and forced them to take on spaces naturally belonging to other civil society actors. At the same time, third-sector organizations also suffer from operating in an increasingly restricted civic space where legal and political constraints are imporsed by the system, including stigmatization, persecution, imprisonment, and torture of the members and functions of organized society.

The remaining public actors who dissent from the system, such as unions, professional associations, religious groups, human rights defenders, and pressure groups in general, live under constant harassment. Therefore, in a democratic transition process, Venezuela will face a very fragmented social fabric, making it essential to create spaces to build trust and regenerate it.

IV.

Given the need to start building historical memory, at the Venezuelan Youth Observatory (OBJUVE), we have been working on Listening and Speaking Spaces to document and record what we have gone through as a country in recent years. Through various activities inspired by humor that encourage collective reflection, we aim to create a memory device through physical senses. For this, participants are asked to choose a memory contextualized within the current Venezuelan crisis and identify where it physically hurts.

In one of these workshops, the father of a young political prisoner said, "*Having your child imprisoned hurts your soul.*" This statement can be taken to the public sphere: We are a country with a wounded soul, and we have the arduous task of ensuring that pain and resentment never again drive the management of political and public power.

Venezuela: Between Censorship and Humor as a Means of Expression

Ayrton Monsalve

The Venezuelan state has been characterized by progressively restricting freedoms within civic space, limiting its citizens' civil and political rights.

In this context, the right to freedom of expression has been one of the most severely affected, preventing Venezuelans from having full guarantees to seek, disseminate, receive, and produce information.

Organizations that defend freedom of expression and information in the country, as well as reports from the United Nations and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have documented the systematic policies that have led to the loss of freedom of expression in the country. These policies have led to the mass closure of media outlets, starting with the non-renewal of Radio Caracas Televisión's license in 2007, a measure that has since been applied to radio stations nationwide. Additionally, obstacles and restrictions on acquiring paper have affected print media, informational web portals and digital media have been blocked by the state-owned communications company, and judicial processes and asset

confiscation against long-standing media outlets such as *El Nacional* have also been imposed.

The Venezuelan state has crafted a legal framework, prominently featuring the Law against Hate, Intolerance, and for Peaceful Coexistence. Its purpose is to increasingly control and restrict the possibility of providing access to public information. It categorizes actions associated with complaints, criticism, and citizen expressions that question public management or demand accountability from government actors as crimes. This is done under the pretext and narrative that such actions could constitute acts against national interest and promote hatred.

Since the government periods of President Hugo Chávez, laws were promoted that allowed for the establishment of the so-called Communication Hegemony, a system of state-controlled media serving government propaganda. Additionally, the National Assembly elected in 2020 has developed bills aiming to judicialize and punish expressions categorized as "fascist." These bills are characterized by their ambiguity, restrictiveness, opposition to the national constitution, and human rights standards. This would represent many more violations and threats to the full exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Based on the above, it can be affirmed that legislation in Venezuela lacks the precision and consistency of legal frameworks adhering to international standards, such as the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[1], Based on the above, it can be affirmed that legislation in Venezuela lacks the precision and consistency of legal frameworks adhering to international standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The United Nations' "Rabat" Plan[2] also sets out a series of indicators and considerations for incitement to hatred to be considered illegal, requiring the study and determination of the context, the speaker, the intention, the specific content, the scope of the speech and the likelihood of causing harm. This allows for the protection of the right to freedom of expression and prevents leaving to free interpretation the possibility of attributing or not attributing citizens for their way of thinking and expressing.

This leads to an abundance of information deserts in the country, stemming from little to no coverage of local news, fewer sources of information, and a hostile climate that promotes self-censorship among citizens, media outlets, and affiliated actors. Undoubtedly, this negatively impacts exercising the right to citizen participation, the right to association, peaceful demonstrations, and of course, the right to vote.

1 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." April 30th, 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/es/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

2 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Freedom of Expression," April 30th, 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/es/freedom-of-expression

Limitations or restrictions on freedom of expression affect society's life in a cross-cutting manner, limiting individuals when they seek to participate in public discussions that concern them as citizens. This frustration hinders the possibility of a fully democratic system.

Now, the Venezuelan communication spectrum is not only plagued by limitations, restrictive laws, and impoverished infrastructure, but it also must deal with phenomena associated with the contamination of the limited information accessible. This is expressed through misinformation or the dissemination of false information to confuse, the unintentional dissemination of erroneous information, and the dissemination of malicious information based on the decontextualization of true information. These practices can violate the privacy of their authors or involved parties to cause harm. Such threats to the flow of public information undermine democratic discourse and, in the digital age, they are more, reaching broader audiences, spreading faster, and becoming more plausible, significantly complicating the landscape.

Based on the characterization of the Venezuelan context, all of the above could generate a state of disillusionment and resignation in the face of the difficulties of reporting in Venezuela. However, that is not the purpose of these lines. Once the environment under which citizenship, journalists, activists, political leaders, and media in general operate has been detailed, it is pertinent to note that, even in closed contexts, information and communication technologies, combined with creativity, offer alternatives that can break the media blockade and consolidate a social fabric capable of

creating spaces for reliable and straightforward information. They are based on alternative formats to conventional ones, which have mostly borne the weight of regulations that coerce and stifle freedom of expression. We are talking about using humor on social media to inform.

Talking about humor on social media in 2024 involves addressing a stage beyond transmitting politically based humor content through traditional media. It is important to highlight this because humor did not originate with the emergence of social media, the internet, and cyberspace in general. However, what needs to be emphasized is that social media offers humor the possibility of connecting with a larger audience due to its playful nature, its capacity for dissemination, the ability to adapt its language to various population segments, and the diversity of topics it addresses. These factors foster the emergence of communities of interest around various subjects.

Now, understanding humor as a form of counter-power, we can see its great benefits for denouncing, warning, sanctioning, and even revealing what the political power does or fails to do, as it serves as an element of information, identification, and integration through entertainment. This makes it an ideal communication code to overcome the limitations imposed by the Venezuelan context, allowing for the transmission of ideas that stimulate reflection, promote values, and build social cohesion in favor of civic and democratic causes as it can be expressed in ways that make virality on the web possible.

Similarly, in the essence of humor, we find its distance from the intent to cause harm, as, in the terms proposed for its use, it is aimed at being seen by citizens as a tool to tell their stories, inform about their surrounding realities, and creatively raise their voices to exercise their civil and political rights. Historically, in the criminal realm, there has been the principle of "*animus iocandi*", under which the person who clearly expresses that their message is intended as a joke is exempt from any responsibility, even if it reveals the reality of a situation or prompts reflection in the audience about a particular issue or political phenomenon.

In this way, it is clearly demonstrated that humor can never be conceived as an expression of hatred and is potentially inoffensive when contrasted with the threshold established by the UN's Rabat Plan. During Venezuela's civil and democratic period, this was exemplified by humorous television programs like "*Radio Rochela*" and "*Cheverísimo*" which achieved significant media penetration through incredible performances based on art, imitation, and parody, concealing at the same time a profound political critique.

Once the conception of humor as an ideal communication code in restrictive contexts has been addressed, it is crucial to revisit the idea that our communication spectrum is depressed, and we no longer have the large media corporations we had in the past century. However, we do have social media and the citizen as an active participant in communication, who becomes the protagonist in generating alternative content to receive, disseminate, and send information.

In this context, it is essential to address one of the communication formats that, when combined with humor, will enjoy greater effectiveness on the digital highway: the image. Its strength lies —amid a collapsed telecommunications infrastructure— in its lightweight size, which allows for easy downloading and forwarding to others. The image, when combined with humor, becomes a meme.

In "The Sellfish Gene"[3] (1976) by Richard Dawkins, the term "meme" is coined for the first time, independent of the Internet, social media, and information and communication technologies as we know them today. A meme is understood as an idea, style, or behavior transmitted from person to person within the same culture. It's worth asking, then, what memes Dawkins was referring to.

Beyond the image containing a brief comment that we share with our contacts on social media, we can conceive that the meme is a creation simple to generate and easy to replicate and imitate. It's an expression, behavior, thought, or phrase that, under the complicity resulting from interacting within the same culture, sparks a desire in the recipient to share it with another to the point of making it go viral. We were probably dealing with a meme when instead of discussing with others that a local or national personality or a showbiz figure said something uncomfortable, catchy, or funny, we simply started using it in similar situations that happen to us. Who hasn't said,

3 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 40th Anniversary Edition. Oxford University Press, 2016. https://archive.org/details/richard-dawkins-the-selfish-gene/page/384/mode/1up

"¡síganme los buenos!" like *El Chapulín Colorado*[4] to a friend in an adventure? Or even better, when someone jumped over a puddle in Venezuela, who didn't shout *"Ese hombre sí camina"*? alluding to former President Carlos Andrés Pérez's presidential campaign jingle.

The meme serves as a channel of expression for thoughts or ideas that can range from everyday occurrences to generalized thoughts about entertainment, leisure, events positioned in public opinion, and, of course, politics. Its effectiveness depends on its simplicity and its ability to resonate with collective identity. This is why its digital aesthetic is not so elaborate, as it must be accessible at all stages of its creation: conception, development, and dissemination.

In turn, when combining memes and politics, we enter the field of polientertainment, which, according to Jörg-Uwe Nieland[5], is "the intersection of actors, topics, and political processes with the culture of entertainment." This is not new, as it has been preceded by formats such as talk shows, parodies, and cinematic and television fiction. However, memes give humor a democratizing character because it is accessible to everyone, not only in terms of consumption but also in content production. This allows citizens to express themselves and communicate easier political messages for others to digest.

4 El Chapulín Colorado, translated as The Red Grasshopper, was a popular Mexican television show that parodied superhero movies that aired in the 70s.

5 Jörg-Uwe Nieland, "Politainment." In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, editado por Wolfgang Donsbach, 973. Blackwell, Londres, Reino Unido, 2008.

This format is capable of mobilizing reflections on public matters, using its humor to communicate situations related to these issues. It sparks interest in these topics in a context of mass communications, where generating distinctive resources to capture the audience's attention and navigate misinformation, erroneous information, malicious information, and censorship is vital. Similarly, in restrictive contexts like Venezuela, memes cloaks dissenting opinions in layers of humor, sarcasm, and irony, thus invoking the previously mentioned principle of *Animus Iocandi*, which allows for expressions without them being interpreted as offensive or defamatory.

This leads us to the conclusion that humor, combined with simplicity, citizen participation in the active process of content creation, and the empowerment of Venezuelans on social media, is a viable option for continuing to communicate, express ideas, and nurture public discourse in favor of democracy and civil and political rights.

From the Manual of Authoritarianism: The Destruction of Public Space (The Case of Venezuela)

Mariví Marín Vázquez

The construction and protection of public space are directly correlated with the state of civil and political liberties. Therefore, its robustness indicates a society's democratic quality, creating an adversary of authoritarian regimes, which seek to prevent the germination and spread of ideas and social movements that challenge the ruling political power.

Public space, as a place for building social identity and a catalyst for political transformations, originates in ancient Greece, considered the cradle of Western civilization. The concept of the public square as a physical space for civil gatherings and assemblies, facilitating joint decision-making, gained prominence there. This concept became the foundation for the separation of powers and the original meaning of democracy as it is known today.

Defined as the place where every citizen has the right to move, be, and act,[1] public space becomes the foundation of democratic structures, allowing citizens to move freely and participate in consolidating a more democratic and inclusive society.

The democratic, inclusive, mobilizing, and transformative nature of public space drives authoritarian regimes to confine, diminish, and ultimately dominate it. To achieve this, power structures employ fear as a weapon to repress citizens' natural impulse to transform an ecosystem that restricts their freedoms, aiming to change the political model.

Authoritarian regimes' goal in their struggle to remain in power is to eradicate dissent and prevent political transformation. Over the past few years, ProBoxVE has studied patterns in the methods used by authoritarian regimes in the region to control the narrative and dominate public space.

Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and, in some instances, El Salvador emerge as Latin American countries where power seeks to prohibit, curtail, and weaken the structures that protect civil and political liberties while attacking public spaces on multiple fronts. These regimes seem to follow a sort of guide to avoid the alternation of power at all costs.

The *Manual del Dictador* (Dictator's Manual) is structured into five sections, each generating specific actions that

1 Julio Alguacil, "Espacio público y espacio político. La ciudad como el lugar para las estrategias de participación". *Polis Revista de la Universidad Bolivariana*. (20). Retrieved from: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id =30502011

progressively diminish public space and undermine the foundations of a democratic country. The breakdown of democratic institutions, media censorship and attacks on freedom of speech, persecution of dissident actors, creation of legal frameworks to regulate communications and manipulation of public discourse are the foundations for specific strategies. Together, these strategies form an ideal structure to consolidate an authoritarian apparatus that dominates and oppresses the space from which the social fabric and public opinion are built.

In Venezuela, public space has been cornered and diminished over the past 25 years through policies progressively and continuously implemented by the Chavista regime to avoid the alternation of power and establish itself as the sole political actor. This has been achieved through a radical change in the institutional structure via multiple legal reforms and censorship, domination of media narratives, persecution of dissent, and manipulation of narratives on social media. The ruling party has built a robust structure to consolidate its power, employing a scheme that seeks to validate itself through ostensibly democratic elections while excluding the participation of actors who pose a real threat of change to its power structure.

The Lost Institutionality in Venezuela

Since Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999, Venezuela has undergone structural changes within its institutions. The immediate creation of a new constitution through a Constituent Assembly, which replaced the then Congress of the Republic,

marks the beginning of a series of legal changes and mobilizations that restructured the order and functioning of the country's institutions.

The progressive destruction of the independence between public powers (executive, legislative, and judicial) and the creation of new powers (citizen and electoral) laid the foundation for the domination of Chavismo throughout the public structure. With great popularity, Hugo Chávez's government had the necessary votes to control the National Assembly, from which the representatives of the other powers were appointed, thereby consolidating total dominion of the institutions that safeguard democracy. However, that was not enough; both Chávez and Maduro usurped the functions of the legislature (despite it being in their favor) through the figure of the Enabling Law, introduced in the new Constitution, which grants the Executive the power to legislate by decree. This consolidated the structure of totalitarianism centered on the executive.

Deinstitutionalization changed through the powers' domination and "reengineering" and establishing a new hegemony in popular and military power.[2] Consolidating communal councils as local power entities and restructuring the military institution, which took on a political-partisan character, aimed to garner greater support for Hugo Chávez's entrenchment in the presidential chair. Additionally,

2 Roberto Mansilla, *El Legado de Chávez: Estructuras de poder e institucionalidad en la era "post chavista"* (2014). Retrieved from https://www.igadi.gal/es/analise/el-legado-de-chavez-estructuras-de-poder-e-institucionalidad-en-la-venezuela-post-chavista/

introducing new property types (community, social, state) provided the basis for undermining private property and a wave of expropriation. It is estimated that during Chávez's 13 years in power, 1,440 expropriations, including companies, warehouses, and land, were carried out.[3]

In this manner, the Chavista government dominated the public powers until independence was completely blurred in its range of action. It ensured the support of the military power along with the surveillance of its supporters in the communal sphere. It also established itself, to the detriment of the economy, as the largest employer by expropriating private companies and generating laws to strengthen its ideology throughout the country's institutional framework.

Censorship of Traditional and Digital Media

For many, the breaking point in Chavismo's construction of a communication hegemony and media censorship was marked by the non-renewal of the concession to the television channel RCTV in 2007. This was followed by the purchase of other national television channels and print media by businessmen with interests aligned with Chavismo in 2013 and the closure of print media due to a lack of paper, primarily affecting those not aligned with Chavismo. This escalation included the closure of radio stations throughout the country since 2003.

3 "Hugo Chávez expropió casi 1.200 empresas en diez años". *El Economista,* 2013. Retrieved from: https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/empresas/Hugo-Chavez-expropio-casi-1200-empresas-en-diez-anos-20130307-0045.html

Currently, the restriction on access to information and freedom of expression in Venezuela through traditional media is nearly total. Many opposition spokespersons have been censored in the traditional media since Juan Guaidó was proclaimed interim President in 2019 following the contested 2018 presidential elections. As a result of this progressive censorship, social networks have become almost the only space for the opposition or dissidents to express their messages, which poses a significant challenge in a country with structural problems in internet service.

Twenty years after the approval of the Law of Social Responsibility of Radio and Television, commonly known as the Gag Law, which began the construction of a legal framework to censor traditional media under Conatel's supervision,[4] the Chavista government continues to reinforce censorship on an even greater scale.

The most recent **Law against Fascism**, which was approved in its first discussion in the National Assembly on April 2, 2024, represents a new level of generalized censorship,[5] aside from fines previously established in the *Ley Mordaza* (Gag Law), this law **introduces penalties of up to 12 years of imprisonment for non-compliance**. For instance, Article 11 of this law stipulates that radio, television, electronic media, print

4 "Sin voz ni voto: La Ley que perpetúa el autoritarismo en Venezuela". *ProBox*, 2024. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/publicacion/sin-voz-ni-voto-la-ley-que-perpetua-el-autoritarismo-en-venezuela

5 Andrés Cañizales, "La Ley Mordaza en Venezuela". *Chasqui, Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación*, September 2003, no. 83. Retrieved from: https:// www.redalyc.org/pdf/160/16008309.pdf

media providers, whether public or private, and social networks must ensure spaces free from any fascist, neo-fascist, or similar content, with the definition of fascism left to the regime's discretion.

The impact of censorship established over the years is felt throughout the country. The Institute of Press and Society of Venezuela (IPYS Venezuela), in its study "Atlas of Silence,"[6] reported that by 2022, more than 7 million people (21% of the population) lived in news deserts, areas where access to local information is insufficient.

Digital media also do not escape authoritarian attacks. The new community of independent media, which has found refuge on the Internet from the paper crisis and censorship, is also affected by Conatel's decisions. The regulatory entity has blocked at least 62 websites of independent media and organizations in Venezuela[7] that offer information about the structural crisis the country is experiencing, which the regime wants to conceal.

The blocking of web pages and the digital harassment of citizens, political actors, and social leaders in networks clearly violate digital rights, which the United Nations considers comparable to fundamental human rights.[8] Moreover, it repre-

6 "Atlas del silencio". Estudio, *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela.* Retrieved from: https://ipysvenezuela.org/atlas-del-silencio/

7 "Atlas del silencio"…

8 "Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela", Report*, Centro para los Defensores de la Justicia*. 2024. Retrieved from: https://centrodefensores.org.ve/?cat=1#:~:text=524%20VIOLACIONES

sents another step in the curtailment of Venezuelan public space in favor of consolidating the authoritarian Chavista regime.

Persecution of Journalists, Activists, and Civil Society

Authoritarian regimes' quest for public space domination extends beyond attacks on the media; the persecution of journalists, activists, and civil society is also pervasive. At ProBox, we have monitored constant online attacks directed at civil society members who have either confronted or reported irregularities that may challenge Chavismo's status quo.

One of the most notable cases involves the coordinated attack and defamation against journalist Roberto Deniz following his investigation into the illegal dealings of businessman Álex Saab with the Venezuelan government.

On March 17, 2021, Deniz[9] cited a thread of tweets summarizing the investigation published by Armando Info about Álex Saab, triggering a defamation and attack campaign against the journalist under the hashtag #DenizVendePatria, which amassed approximately 8,915 tweets. Our ProBox study then revealed that at least 72 accounts using the tag were likely bots or automated accounts, generating 27.97% of the messages. Upon scrutinizing the accounts involved in the campaign

%20AL%20DERECHO%20A,cuando%20se%20documentaron%20396%20agresiones

9 "Libertad para Saab y cárcel para quienes lo acusen, exige la tropa tuitera". *ProBox*. 2022. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/es/publicacion/libertad-para-saab-y-carcel-para-quienes-lo-acusen-exige-la-tropa-tuitera

against Deniz and noting the alignment of the original tweet's profile with narratives associated with Radical Officialism, we found that 73.63% of the accounts participating in the trend against Deniz had also engaged in trends promoted by the program "*Con el Mazo Dando,*" led by the Chavista leader Diosdado Cabello.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents. By 2023, the Center for Defenders and Justice[10] recorded 524 attacks against defenders, marking a 32% increase compared to 2022. According to the organization, in an electoral context, restrictions on civic and democratic space escalate, leading to the criminalization, repression, and social control of civil society.

The most recent incident involves the arrest of Rocío San Miguel,[11] director of the NGO *Control Ciudadano* (Citizen Control), on February 9, 2024. An unidentified security force took her to an undisclosed location. Sixty hours later, prosecutor Tarek William Saab announced her apprehension "by virtue of an arrest warrant against her for alleged involvement in the conspiracy and attempted assassination plot called White Bracelet."[12]

10 "Situación de las personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Venezuela" Informe…

11 "#LupaElectoral: el ataque al espacio cívico previo a las presidenciales en Venezuela" *ProBox*, 2024. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/es/publicacacion/lupaelectoral –el –ataque -al- espacio- civico- previo-a-las-presidenciales-en-venezuela

12 Own translation.

On February 11, groups of accounts associated with the ruling party and anonymous networks promoting the hashtag #RocíoNoEsSanta on social media platforms, aiming to attack and defame the activist in response to civil society's demand for information on her whereabouts through the hashtag #DondeEstaRocio days earlier.

This is not a single incident in Venezuela; the targeting of citizen organizations has a decade-long history. Since 2014, Vice Minister William Castillo has been describing NGOs as "international franchises" attacking Venezuela, becoming a key figure in discrediting organized civil society.

In January 2021, the Maduro government escalated its direct actions against NGOs and human rights defenders by arresting the directors of *Azul Positivo*. The following month, Javier Tarazona, director of *Fundaredes*, was arrested and remains incarcerated amid continuous judicial delays.

During these events, accounts associated with Radical Officialism,[13] circulated the hashtag #TarazonaMercenario, celebrating his arrest and accusing him of conspiring and "collaborating with the FARC," labeling him a "CIA emissary." This hashtag garnered approximately 1,642 tweets, with 15.29% of its messages likely originating from automated or inauthentic acconts.

13 "Maduro y la cacería de activistas: caso Javier Tarazona". *ProBox*. 2022. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/es/publicacion/maduro-y-la-caceria-de-activistas-caso-javier-tarazona

In the same year, with a National Assembly dominated by the ruling party, the draft International Cooperation Law was introduced to the legislative agenda, causing alarm among organized civil society, which was suspected of receiving funds to "destabilize." Although this proposed law did not progress further in parliament, its principles were mirrored in the instrument approved in 2023 and reintroduced at the beginning of 2024.

Furthermore, opposition politicians have been frequent targets of arrests and attacks throughout the Chavista government's tenure. The most recent attacks have been directed at María Corina Machado, who currently leads the opposition following her victory in the Opposition Primary held in October 2023.

Since Machado was elected the leader of the opposition, ten of her collaborators have been arrested, with seven remaining in detention, seven more subject to arrest warrants, and six seeking refuge in the embassy of Argentina in Venezuela. Additionally, at ProBox, we have observed that the opposition leader has been subjected to misogynistic attacks on social media.[14] Between January 2023 and January 2024, ProBox identified 74,827 instances of gender-based attacks against María Corina Machado, categorized into three main fronts: disparagement of capabilities (67%), references to the body (21%), and sexualization (12%).

14 "La misoginia avanza a la sombra de las tendencias en redes sociales". *ProBox*, 2024. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/es/publicacion/la-misoginia-avanza-a-la-sombra-de-las-tendencias-en-redes-sociales

Legal Frameworks for Internet Regulation

Having nearly completed the regulation of message dissemination through traditional media under Conatel surveillance, the digital public sphere is now facing constraints through legalizing censorship in digital spaces and social media. The approval of the Law against Fascism in its initial discussion seeks to regulate the last available spaces for dissent in Venezuela.[15]

On April 2, Vice President Delcy Rodriguez presented a proposed law against "fascism" on behalf of Nicolás Maduro from the podium of the Venezuelan National Assembly. Concealed within its 30 articles is the total legalization of censorship, repression, and the curtailment of the right to protest.

This proposal also aims to legalize censorship at all levels. Article 11 stipulates that providers of radio, television, electronic media, printed media, both public and private, and social networks must ensure spaces free from fascist, neo-fascist, or similar content. Violators of this law will face imprisonment and hefty fines.

Chapter IV of the law establishes sanctions for "fascist acts" and "apology for fascism", as well as administrative penalties for those who finance organizations or activities deemed fascist or disseminate "prohibited messages". The prescribed prison

15 "Sin voz ni voto: La Ley que perpetúa el autoritarismo en Venezuela". *ProBox*, 2024. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/publicacion/sin-voz-ni-voto-la-ley-que-perpetua-el-autoritarismo-en-venezuela

sentences range from six to twelve years, while fines may reach up to $100,000 for those who finance or promote messages prohibited by law.

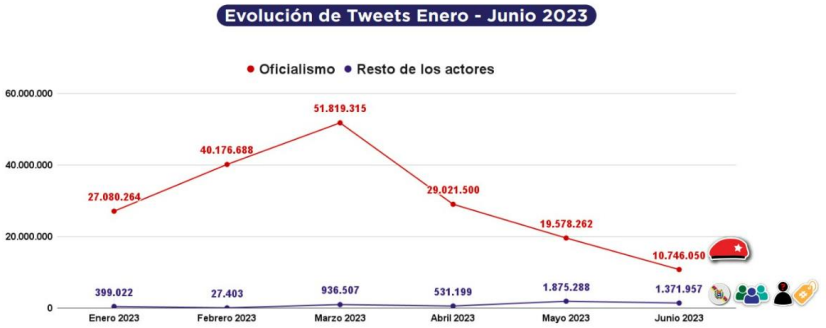
Manipulation of Digital Discourse

Chavismo has developed and refined a communication strategy to impose its narratives on social media. Twitter, now X, has been the primary platform dominated by Chavismo inorganically for many years. During this time, the ruling party has disseminated propaganda and misinformation and diminished the reach and impact of civil society conversations on this platform.

In 2023, the ruling party was the dominant actor on X, generating 82.1% of socio-political hashtags, a pattern that has persisted since the ProBox Observatory began studying the Venezuelan digital socio-political conversation in 2019.[16]

When examining the number of tweets comprising the 474 trends, the ruling party's dominance is particularly concerning. At least 97.2% of all socio-political messages in Venezuela between January and June 2023 were attributed to hashtags promoted by the State. This translates to over 178 million tweets, with 170 million promoted by the Ministry of Popular Power for Communication and Information (MippCI) alone.

16 "El Oficialismo y su control de Twitterzuela en lo que va de 2023". *ProBox,* 2024. Retrieved from: https://proboxve.org/es/ publicacion/ el-oficialismo-y-su-control-de-twitterzuela-en-lo-que-va-de-2023



As the presidential election looms, with social networks emerging as crucial public forums for debate, Chavismo's communication prowess in disseminating propaganda and disinformation holds the potential to sway the balance and shape the national public agenda.

Nevertheless, despite Venezuela's classification in the most recent Freedom House report[17] as one of the Latin American countries lacking citizen freedoms, where public space is constrained, it is noteworthy that 2.3 million Venezuelans participated in an independently organized opposition primary aimed at selecting a unity candidate ahead of the 2024 presidential elections. According to the international organization, this underscores Venezuelans' determination to challenge the authoritarian governance of current President Nicolás Maduro through democratic channels and, ultimately, persist in the struggle for the reconstruction of their usurped democracy.

17 "Freedom in the world". Report, *Freedom House* (2024). Retrieved from: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf

Alonso Moleiro: "People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back"

Pedro Pablo Peñaloza

The journalist and political analyst maintains that despite the increase in repression and the closing of civic space in Venezuela, democratic society continues to resist and demand that their right to choose be respected.

–At the time of this interview, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez is presenting the Anti-Fascism Law project to the National Assembly. What impact could this legal initiative have on Venezuela's already deteriorated civic space?

It is concerning that the political statement surrounding the presentation of the law is entirely unilateral, with a complete blindness to what has occurred, an absolutely ideological, even religious, view of what has happened in recent years, where the government evades its total responsibility for the economic chaos and the structural causes that produced this collapse.

It is concerning because it is developing during an electoral campaign and seems like the gestation of a political vendetta. In Venezuela, there has been no open debate about what has

happened during this time with the repression and the investigations by independent experts and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The government has ongoing cases in the International Criminal Court. How will it invert the burden of proof so as to wash its hands of the situation with such a proposal? It is worrisome that the possibility of having rational discussions with arguments in Venezuela is being weakened.

The only thing the government is doing is tightening its authoritarian framework and threatening beyond reason. This particular law seems dangerous to me, especially because of the way it was introduced: the Vice President herself goes to Parliament and is received with pomp, the topic of a commission from Nicolás Maduro is addressed, and Jorge Rodríguez gives an unprecedented preamble where he virtually absolves Chavismo of any responsibility for the national collapse.

A sort of punishment is suggested for those who protested against the current state of affairs, including the total scarcity of medicines and food, the state of absolute chaos, and the rampant crime at that time; in other words, the brutal Venezuela we have had to live in these years. The debate about protests and their limits must happen, but with fair play. In Venezuela, the institutional framework is broken, there is no political agreement, alternation is inhibited, and we are invited to vote just so nothing changes. This understandably frustrates people. To me, this law seems to express how public debate is being distorted.

–The Anti-Fascism Law has its precedent in the Anti-Hate Law, which has been used to persecute dissent. Waiting in line is the law that seeks to control non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and simultaneously, political and social leaders are being imprisoned, accused of being conspirators. How can we move forward amid this minefield?

The debate must be conducted with great intelligence and knowledge of language, carefully choosing the words used, ensuring that the arguments have an inclusive, connected criterion, where there is an invitation to criticism. One thing that is lost in Venezuela is what Rousseau called the general interest. In a democracy, the national interest was always invoked. If something was poorly done, they would say: "This is a contract detrimental to the interests of the Republic." That was an argument from when Venezuela was a Republic, not the madhouse it is now.

Since shared responsibility in governance is broken, there is little talk about the general interest, but we must discuss the impact certain decisions have had on the total destruction of the country. Maduro and Jorge Rodríguez have spent a good amount of time hiding things like economic figures and denying migration statistics. The government's attitude is completely irrational.

The only thing left here are massive and bloodless statements in an election. In Venezuela, what people are asking for is not another dictatorship, but the restoration of constitutional order and the right to political alternation. In

Venezuela, some achievements were taken from us; on January 23, 1958, political alternation was achieved. People voted for Chávez, Venezuela was Chavista, but it no longer is, and it wants to exercise that right. That is the whole problem in Venezuela.

We must proceed with caution. What is Maduro doing? He is trying to inhibit the majority's voice by attacking civil society, hence the NGO law that is being discussed. It is clear that the government halted that agenda due to the dialogue issue, signed some agreements, and is now disregarding them. We don't know what will happen in Venezuela. I don't know if we will end up like Nicaragua, but we are on that path.

–While the list of abuses is already endless, the Chavista regime's refusal to allow the candidacy of Professor Corina Yoris marks a milestone in the history of the regime's arbitrariness. How can we play in that electoral terrain?

Everything that comes from there will be vetoed; that's where we're heading. Hopefully, the population will consolidate the idea of doing things in one direction. One of the good things proposed is that there is an interest in voting. Let people interpret, and there will be a rush in the direction of a name, even if the name is not perfect.

The approach has to be bloodless; what the country is asking for is a right that is being denied to us. It's not asking to deny the right to Chavismo. Chavismo is on notice, which is understandable because the population's levels of anger are very high. But the crisis should be handled differently.

Sometimes bad things happen, so we can't rule out a major onslaught against civil society here. Hopefully, it's just a threat, but we're at a point where they could say that to stay in power, they have to mutilate part of the country and not be accountable for the rest. What was the dialogue for in the end? Wasn't it to solve the problem?

This is an everyday issue. We must strive to tell things as they are, resist that cartelized vision that Chavismo proposes. There are still areas where things can be done; it's important to be aware of that. Dignified journalism can still be practiced.

–Despite censorship and self-censorship? Open media outlets blacklist opposition figures and echo Chavista propaganda.

It's a very complex situation, with many economic difficulties, limitations on reading, government blockades, and all kinds of censorship. Mass media outlets are already subdued, except for small spaces where things can be said. On social media and websites, very interesting efforts are being made, with many foreign media outlets having Venezuelan journalists who are doing well. I think we need to focus on ensuring that information circulates and there is clarity in understanding what is happening. Why have we reached this point, what does this country want?

I believe that Chavismo is a historically very compromised project, very wounded, it has lost popular faith, it's hanging on by a thread, it has been losing virtues, and now it's a violent,

distrustful, explosive movement because it has lost the majority.

Yes, I do believe there are still spaces for a certain level of debate, and there are areas within Chavista society where there might be people willing to listen. If we go to an election, it's because we're seeking a solution. Important things have been done here, collaborative journalism, alliances, and very important issues are being investigated regarding critical matters. There are difficulties in spreading information, certainly, but the network exists. I think those channels need to continue to be developed very carefully.

–Do you see in people the willingness to continue maintaining those spaces, or is a certain conformity already being imposed, "settling" to avoid reprisals and focus on a future as distant as it is uncertain?

A part of the country is like that. If the government continues to tighten its grip, another part will reach that point too. That's what dictatorships are about. But there are many people who don't go along with that. There are people who do journalism and the work that needs to be done, understanding that we are not in the Venezuela of democracy, when you could say things with guarantees.

In civil society, there are vibrant, active areas, but of course, the repressive environment could worsen that situation. There is still a lot of activism, commitment; look at the 600K network raised by María Corina Machado, that's a political expression of discontent. It's not about politicizing the discussion be-

cause even people who stay and start a business honestly demonstrate a way of resisting.

– You were asking: What was the purpose of the dialogue in the end? How would you respond to that question?

All those negotiations are highly compromised because the government seems to be disregarding the content of what was agreed upon. I hope there's some kind of channel, but just look at how Maduro responds to Presidents Gustavo Petro, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, and Gabriel Boric, as well as other left-wing leaders, as if he doesn't care at all. However, I believe those spaces must be maintained.

What Venezuela needs to achieve and is demanding is a fair election, with a "Plan República" working for the entire country, with a national vision of the consultation, where the opposition has the right to win and administer power, and for Chavismo to stop mocking the contents of the Constitution or burying its head in the sand, which is what it has been doing for a while. This society has a sufficient level of complexity to face the problem. This is not the society of the Gómez era, and this is also a different world, but we are indeed in a complex situation.

–The experts point out that the Chavista regime has transitioned from being a competitive authoritarian regime to a hegemonic one with totalitarian traits. How can one resist the onslaught of a government that seeks to control everything?

Resistance is a daily fact, extrapolitical, that everyone maintains, keeping society functioning as part of a fabric. Teachers, professionals, all activities, in some way, resist. What do they resist around? That is a debate that must be had. Whether it makes sense or not, the viability of a project, pushing your ideas and roots, your family in this country.

Chavismo faces a country that mostly opposes it and a civil society that still has strengths, which has demonstrated surprising order and civility. The primaries were a way to self-manage the discontent peacefully and express it with total transparency, despite all the sabotage. They were a demostration that, almost without a campaign, María Corina Machado has that mandate without making a big act but going from town to town.

People are not foolish; they are conscious and want their country back. The idea of Venezuela must endure. I don't know what will happen next year, I don't know how hope will be, I think Maduro has the first option to retain power, but I believe there is a country that has a chance, that needs to express itself in a certain direction, and that also needs to maintain the level of information, awareness, patience, firmness, and wisdom.

Now, where will we be in two years? Hard to say. If Maduro has the power to do as he pleases, there's little we can do to stop it. Chavismo forgets that here, they are the ones armed, it has always been like this. Those guns are theirs and then they talk about fascism.

Here, there's no republican pact, there's a de facto situation like in Iran, where you go to vote and choose a president who has limits because he's caged in a theocracy. Just like here, where you choose governors and nothing more. That has to change. As long as one has a head to think and a tongue to speak, they have to do it.

Airport Historiography? Notes on the Craft of Historians in the Decade 2013-2023[1]

Jesús Piñero

This essay is part of *Prisma*, a project coordinated by Raúl De Armas and sponsored by AB Ediciones, which gathers the voices of 17 outstanding young Venezuelans from various fields of knowledge and is soon to be published.

Examining Venezuelan historiography over the past decade requires considering two inevitable processes inherent to any analysis of the current situation in Venezuela: the digital revolution, which the world embarked upon at the turn of the century, and the humanitarian crisis that has gripped the

1 These notes are not absolute nor do they pretend to be; they represent a brief overview, the author's personal vision, and are based on various sources, including interviews conducted with several representatives of Venezuelan historiography in the 21st century, which have been published in different media outlets such as *El Estímulo, Prodavinci, Cinco8* y *La Gran Aldea*. Some of these interviews were compiled in *Miradas reversas. 15 historiadores cuentan su historia*, Alfa, 2021. Among these notes, one very important aspect is missing: the systematic compilation of contributions from colleagues who, for various reasons, have emigrated. On these efforts, which are currently scattered, we hope to write in the future, when we have more time... and space.

country since 2014. While the former revolutionized communication formats globally, shifting from paper to screen, the latter compelled Venezuela to undergo a similar transformation due to the crisis and censorship plaguing traditional media outlets: radio, print, and television. The confluence of these two processes has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of Venezuelan society, fundamentally altering conventional modes of interaction. The field of historians has not been exempt from this transformation, as the profession has been evolving since the last decades of the 20th century.

The advent of the 21st Century

At the onset of the current century, historian José Ángel Rodríguez convened 40 historians for a compilation aimed at diagnosing Venezuelan historiography. The striking heterogeneity of the group was evident not only in terms of age, gender, or political leanings —comprising both men and women, young and seasoned individuals with distinct perspectives— but also in their diverse lines of research, approaches, and methods of delving into the past. These ranged from traditional political studies to exploring *new* sources such as visual arts, music, cinema, and photography sources. The term "new" is emphasized here because nearly half a century has passed since their emergence, and these formats are now integral parts of our society.

Conducting a similar expedition —which José Ángel Rodríguez successfully achieved— at present seems challenging. The once-unified community has fragmented, with many participants still active in the field yet impaired by the political

polarization that emerged later on despite their shared presence in academic spaces such as universities, archives, and libraries. The commemoration of the bicentennial of independence is proof of this: while from the private sector and some corporations, such as the Fundación Polar, the editorial Alfa, the National Academy of History and its regional academies, critical studies were printed and books were reissued, from the public sector material was also produced that, beyond partisan and ideological purposes, invited the questioning of traditional historiography and the promotion of *insurgency*. In both cases, there was a drive to disrupt the *statu quo*.

By the end of the first decade, right at the bicentennial year of independence in 2011, historian Ángel Almarza had already identified the emergence of a new official history. In his chapter "Two centuries of poorly narrated stories," from the book *El Relato Invariable. Independencia, Mito y Nación*, edited by Inés Quintero, Almarza dissects the themes and forms of an insurgent historiography promoted by the National Center of History. This organization, established by Hugo Chávez in 2007 and as stated on their website, aimed to oversee Venezuelan state policy regarding knowledge, research, protection, and dissemination of national history and collective memory. This move was likely in response to criticisms from the National Academy of History, composed of opposition figures, and a recognition of the pervasive influence of political polarization on historical investigations.

The reinterpretation of the past not only involved the rewriting of history books, academic research, and educational curricula in primary and secondary schools —leading to the

creation of the Bicentennial Collection, a series of books that effectively supplanted the publishing market for school textbooks in public schools— but also extended to national commemorations and anniversaries. Statues were erected while others were toppled, and the names of highways, parks, squares, and numerous public spaces were changed under state auspices, which since 1999 have also borne the "Bolivarian" moniker. Moreover, alongside this *insurgence* against the traditional homeland historiography, perceived as inheriting the legacy of nineteenth-century elites, emerged the construction of a new pantheon of heroes, *more inclusive* despite the continued centrality of Simón Bolívar, a white Creole from one of the main families of the eighteenth century.

Beyond these endeavors —many echoing the longstanding stance of the National Academy of History— Venezuelan historiography as a whole has remained dynamic. This was the conclusion drawn by historian Tomás Straka in a historiographical assessment covering the profession's state over the 25 years spanning from 1988 to 2013. Straka emphasized the proliferation of scholarly studies and the establishment of historical research centers that gained prominence towards the end of the twentieth century. Historians now hold postgraduate degrees from various universities and even top the lists of bestselling books in the country. Luis Prados and Maye Primera aptly titled a piece in *El País*, quoting Inés Quintero: "History as self-help." Fueled by nostalgia and a quest to understand the present, Venezuelans have grown interested in reading books on distant and recent history.

According to Straka, these new publications and scholarly contributions delineate emerging trends in twenty-first-century historiography, aspiring to be more empirical and less theoretical. The new generation of historians gravitates towards "studies of concrete problems" as a prevailing trend, yielding noteworthy results in many cases. Fewer scholars seek to evade the meticulous archival work by relying solely on sociological or economic theories, as Straka termed it: the demise of the concealing historian and the resurgence of methodological specificity. The resurgence of political and intellectual history, the reconfiguration of regional history, geohistory as an indispensable discipline, and the advancement of new social and cultural history are among the trends highlighted in Straka's assessment of the preceding quarter-century. These trends underscore the vitality of a historiography poised to confront the next decade's challenges.

Thus, by the first decade of the 21st century, we encounter a professional and mature historiography that, far from merely summarizing, describing, and echoing the old paradigms of the past, engages in historical problematization through internal critique and external analysis. The foundation of this historiographical development lies in the School of History at the Central University of Venezuela, under the leadership of Germán Carrera Damas. Unlike the historical narratives of the 19th century, which idealized events or figures in alignment with the State, or the historiography of the first half of the 20th century, which often served to legitimize existing power structures, Venezuelan historiography of the 21st century represents the culmination of theoretical and methodological

endeavors that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, following the ousting of the government of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. As historian Elías Pino Iturrieta has aptly noted, this development is not coincidental.

Airport historiography and new formats

The decade from 2013 to 2023 presents a multifaceted landscape for various reasons. As mentioned earlier, the advent of the digital age was so profound that no country could remain untouched: by 2010, the rise of social media and new online platforms had become a global reality. In Venezuela, this phenomenon was not only fueled by globalization and its pervasive influence but also by the decline in oil prices and the statist economic policies implemented by Hugo Chávez's government, culminating in a humanitarian crisis affecting society and endangering traditional media outlets. The collapse of the publishing market, triggered by the economic downturn, led to a decline in historiographical production due to university dropouts and emigration.

In this context, Venezuela transitioned into the digital era not by choice but out of necessity. This transition, as observed in historiography and many other fields, involved a shift in platforms: the few historians who remained and retained an interest in continuing their profession no longer solely focused on writing books or articles for peer-reviewed journals, or at least not with the same frequency and enthusiasm as before. Instead, they began publishing within the emerging digital media ecosystem that arose in response to the challenges posed by the crisis. Whereas publishing historiographical studies in

books was once a challenging endeavor, the devaluation of the bolivar and the crisis within publishing houses meant that publications now depended on author recognition and the topic's marketability. Consequently, reprints of works by renowned historians became prevalent, and biographies and studies on specific events and periods proliferated.

Today, historical narratives are also crafted for the general public-individuals interested in the past given their current experiences but who are not experts in the field, although they seek to maintain rigor and critical analysis, as highlighted by Inés Quintero in her radio program *No es Cuento, es Historia*: "For a historian to condense content into such a concise format requires an extraordinary effort, but the radio format demands it." However, this trend is not intended to replace the depth of other scholarly research; rather, it represents an adaptation for non-specialist readers. Tomás Straka echoes this sentiment: "Not all work should cater to a general audience; there are academic studies, specialized journals, and highly specific topics. Therefore, pursuing historical knowledge must be a collaborative effort, where there is a dialogue between those who lay the groundwork and those who eloquently convey the findings that captivate the audience"[2].

It is a lucid narrative, diverging from academic technicality and the cloistered environment, which finds a niche in digital media with attention-grabbing titles. Historian Germán Carrera Damas referred to these dissemination studies as "airport historiography," likening them to the engaging content often

2 Own translations.

found in magazines and books within airport lounges. In an interview discussing the National Academy of History and the social responsibility of historians, he remarked, "I have ceased to attend for several reasons, among them the shift towards what I like to call '*airport historiography*' and similar endeavors that are not for me."[3] This responsibility fosters historical consciousness, which, in our view, hinges on public interest.

Digital platforms such as *Prodavinci*, *Cinco8*, and *La Gran Aldea* currently serve as venues where historians like Inés Quintero, Tomás Straka, Elías Pino Iturrieta, Rafael Arráiz Lucca, and Edgardo Mondolfi Gudat, among others, remain active in the profession, each with their distinct research focus and manners of communication. They are not merely subjects of interviews regarding specific topics or projects; they also serve as frequent contributors and columnists. For instance, Pino Iturrieta's Sunday column in *La Gran Aldea* delves into historical subjects intertwined with contemporary citizen issues. These are not mere commentaries on current events but rather reflections grounded in historical episodes or parallels with the past, written by a historian who will soon enter his eighth decade of life, more than half of which has been devoted to professional historiography.

However, despite their constraints -usually in length- digital articles are not the sole tools historians utilize. Pino Iturrieta has ventured into audiovisual media with *Manual de Malas Maneras*, a podcast he produces with journalist Adriana Núñez Rabascall, offering historical perspectives on current

3 Own translation.

issues. Similarly, Rafael Arráiz Lucca, along with Henrique Lazo, hosts *Eso es un Tema*, a live radio show with substantial audience figures, featuring different guests each day. However, Arráiz Lucca's most notable endeavor is *Venezolanos*, a podcast he records for Unión Radio, chronicling key events, processes, and figures in Venezuelan history. He mentions that the episodes have been listened to 400,000 times, an unprecedented pedagogical reach for a free production, unlike a paid book.

Inés Quintero embarked on a similar project in the past with Banesco's support. Her micro-series *No es Cuento, es Historia* was compiled into two books published by Dahbar and later adapted for publication on Instagram. The trajectories of these two historians illustrate the profession's evolution, which no longer necessitates the composition of lengthy treatises spanning hundreds of pages to fulfill its purpose; rather, it can achieve this aim in a didactic and accessible manner through media resources. This adaptation to the present not only allows for greater reach and dissemination of research, but also makes a profession, often disregarded for not being economically profitable, more viable, as evidenced by support for film and theater productions like Héctor Manrique's *Mi Último Delirio*.

The new generation

These formats and platforms have cultivated an important yield: the interest of a new generation in knowing and studying the history of Venezuela. Many are university undergraduates, while others are pursuing postgraduate and extension courses. By 2013-2023, the generation José Ángel Rodríguez brought together in *Visiones del Oficio* is consolidated. Although still

fragmented, new scholars of the past, affected by the humanitarian emergency, are paving the way in various discussion spaces. The Rafael María Baralt History Prize attests to this: sponsored by the National Academy of History and the Bancaribe Foundation for Science and Culture, its objective is to promote and stimulate historical research conducted by recently graduated young historians aspiring to establish a career and reputation in historiography.

Since its inception in 2008, when the first call was announced, until 2023, 15 promising historians have been recognized with the Baralt Prize, several of whom are now established figures in national and regional historiographies of the Americas: Gustavo Adolfo Vaamonde, Rodolfo Enrique Ramírez-Ovalles, Ángel Almarza, José Alberto Olivar, Sócrates Ramírez, Lorena Puerta Bautista, Luis Daniel Perrone, Gustavo Enrique Salcedo, Alejandro Cáceres, Eloísa Ocando Thomas, Francisco Soto Oraa, Esther Mobilia Diotaiuti, Jesús Piñero, Andrés Eloy Burgos, and Betnaly González Yañez. The impact of this award is already evident: these scholars are either forging their careers beyond Venezuelan borders in prestigious institutes and universities, or they remain in the country, receiving accolades and distinctions, becoming reference points in their respective research areas, and occupying significant positions in academia.

For an issue of *Cuadernos UCAB*, the postgraduate magazine of the Andrés Bello Catholic University, published at the end of the first quarter of 2023, Tomás Straka, the edition's coordinator, sought to highlight the role of young people in the study of history. Drawing on his experience with a series of

books aimed at introducing new authors from the influential workshops of the Rómulo Gallegos Center for Latin American Studies (Celarg) in the 1990s, Straka demonstrated that the new generations' interest is not unique to our times but has been a constant concern within the realm of intellectual production. Titled *Nuevas Voces*, the issue includes six works by young historians undergoing training in the Doctorate in History at that institution, who converge on common themes despite employing different approaches and methodologies.

This analysis draws the following conclusion: "(...) all the texts focus on contemporary history, especially the Cold War; and, significantly, contrary to the usual parochialism of our historical studies, they adopt a global perspective. Perhaps because they are products of globalization, because they are digital natives, and because of their ability to communicate in multiple languages (at least in most cases), their boundaries are not restricted by the contents of Venezuelan archives or the Spanish language. They know how to navigate online document repositories, have contacts in various locations —a byproduct of migration— and are not intimidated by foreign languages. They have achieved this more or less independently, as neither contemporaneity nor global history characterizes the interests of most of their educators (...)"[4], interests that align with those of other young people worldwide.

The Cold War emerges as a central theme within the context of the 20th century, one of the primary subjects of study for young historians. The fervent interest in understanding the

4 Own translation.

colonial period, independence, and even the 19th century that prevailed in the 1990s and during the republican bicentennial seems to have waned. For this generation, the past century, viewed as the backdrop to their turbulent present, has become the primary focus of the papers they submit in their graduate programs and even for the doctoral theses they aim to present in the future. The examination of this period, while not new to historiography, now begins with a review and comprehension of other aspects from a temporal distance rather than through the presence of eyewitnesses: it is not just the major events that interest this generation, but also the personalities.

This shift can be interpreted as an attempt to find references for the present, detached from the controversies that entangled older historians who, being born and raised in the 20th century, were direct witnesses to its key political events. A case in point is the ongoing passionate debate surrounding October 18, 1945: nearly a century later, it still evokes conflicting interpretations due to its historical consequences and the differing accounts of its protagonists. Thus, the approaches taken by young historians towards this period not only represent a fresh interpretation of events from a global perspective but also, perhaps more significantly, a departure from the passionate biases that have characterized earlier historiography, thanks to the temporal distance from its primary narrators.

However, the outlook is not entirely optimistic. Amid the digital age and the exacerbated humanitarian crisis, new historians, like other professionals - especially journalists - must confront new challenges. Despite having access to numerous

repositories, libraries, online archives, and platforms for disseminating their findings and conclusions, the internet poses a challenge: ensuring accuracy *vis-a-vis* the proliferation of fake news. These falsehoods not only affect contemporary news or recent history but also distort historical facts themselves. In late 2022, for example, a headline in *Semana* magazine claimed to have discovered the death certificate of the Liberator, Simon Bolivar, although, in reality, this document had been public for years. It underscores the challenge of verifying information amidst the deluge of misinformation.

Closing remarks

In conclusion, these new ways of creating and disseminating history have elicited reactions in a country subjected to the rule of a single party for a quarter of a century. However, this monolithic narrative has failed to sway society, which instead has shown resistance to the alteration of its historical narrative, demonstrating an interest in uncovering its origins and tracing the trajectory of historiography. This resilience persists despite the distortions propagated by official propaganda and even on social media, where misinformation proliferates. Although these platforms have served as avenues for open discussion, they have also become breeding grounds for fake news, bots, and trolls that glorify authoritarian leaders of the past, such as Juan Vicente Gómez or Marcos Pérez Jiménez, thus stifling the criticism and debate essential for the study of history, where there is no room for dogmatic assertions or condemnations; rather, it is a space for nuanced understanding within its context: temporal, spatial, and *man*.

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