

Democratization



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Social cohesion and democratic transformation

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This is a modest contribution to the dialogue on transition to democracy/democratic transformation. What I gather from two excellent articles by Juan Miguel Matheus² and Paola Bautista de Alemán³ is that political change in Venezuela requires greater depth than a transition towards democracy. This deeper change, which includes social and cultural aspects as well as political, is what they call democratic transformation. The transition is limited to political change. It is not a mere terminological change or a whim: they support it through an extensive bibliography of studies on political change.

Unfortunately, this is a theoretical dialogue. Currently, in Venezuela, political change is not on the table. The government of Maduro has entrenched itself with reforms that make change through electoral and peaceful means practically impossible, and the opposition seems to lack the strength to force change. But the government is less strong than it seems. Its weakness lies in the

1 I thank Elsa Cardozo and Victoria Capriles for their comments and corrections to the first draft of this paper.

2 Juan Miguel Matheus, "Justicia transformadora para Venezuela", *Democratización* 3 (2020).

3 Paola Bautista de Alemán, "Transformation for Venezuela: Gangster State and democratization", *Democratization*, no. 7 (2020).

impossibility of changing the policies that have led the country to its ruin. These are policies that have increasingly paralyzed the productive apparatus, as shown by the fall in oil production and the acute shortage of gasoline. Not only the supply of gasoline is in difficulties: water and electricity distributed to the population are also scarce. All this despite the abundance of oil in the subsoil and water in rivers and dams. The installed capacity to produce electricity is also much greater than what is actually produced and distributed. The government has monopolized these activities and many others, and simply does not know how to manage them. Food has been handled differently: high prices for those who can pay and boxes with basic products for those who have a *carnet de la patria* ("national card"). The situation has produced a massive emigration, only stopped by the pandemic that affects the entire world.

The condemnation of the main countries of America and Europe, which has included sanctions against high-ranking personalities and state companies, has isolated the country and has led Maduro to seek allies among authoritarian regimes. They express their solidarity, but do not have the ability or the will to make investments that can reverse the economic decline. In short, the situation is unstable and at the time this is being written there is an unexpected opening of the Maduro government to a negotiation for having freed a hundred political prisoners, but it would be risky to predict that we are on the way to democratization.

One of the rules Matheus refers to is not to jump ahead in detailing the specific measures of transformative justice in the processes of political change, as this can be counterproductive. This is an easily understandable prudential rule, but it has resulted in the dialogue being kept at a considerably theoretical

and abstract level. This article will not break the rule, but it wants to bring the reflection down to earth, to Venezuelan society, and to contribute with a bibliography that relates law to the social sciences.

The first section refers to the issue of how cohesive Venezuelan society is and the state's role. The second section will analyze what the base is and what this transformation requires.

Social cohesion and anomie

Roberto Briceño-León and I have had an extensive dialogue on violence, anomie and social cohesion in Venezuela since a long time ago⁴. *Espacio Abierto - Cuadernos Venezolanos de Sociología* will soon publish our recent works regarding this dialogue. They are summarized in this article as they are relevant to the issue of the expected transformation in Venezuela.

Social cohesion refers to the ties that unite a society, to the cement that allows it to be held together and that allows people to live together in harmony⁵. It implies a certain consensus on the normative⁶. The opposing situation is anomie, which is basically confusion about what is normative or weakening it. Different authors have highlighted different aspects of the phenomenon,

4 Roberto Briceño-León & Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, eds, *Morir en Caracas. Violencia y ciudadanía en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 2002).

5 Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, "El impacto de la violencia en la cohesión social", in *Los nuevos rostros de la violencia. Empobrecimiento y letalidad policial*, eds. Roberto Briceño-León, Alberto Camardiel & Gloria Perdomo (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2019): 43-44.

6 Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, "El impacto de la violencia...": 42.

making the subject one of the most debated in sociology⁷. Let us take the definitions offered as antithetical and instrumental for this work.

Both social cohesion and anomie are theoretical constructions, models. Normally there are no perfectly cohesive or totally anomic societies. We can conceive them as the extremes of a continuum, and the task is to locate a specific society on that continuum. Briceño-León & Camardiel⁸ propose a measurement based on a questionnaire in which the interviewees had to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a set of sentences:

- Today we respect each other more than a year ago in Venezuela.
- Today the coexistence among Venezuelans is more harmonious than a year ago.
- Today the law is respected more than a year ago in Venezuela.
- Today Venezuelans are more equal before the law than a year ago.
- Today Venezuela is a safer country than a year ago.
- Today Venezuela is a fairer country than a year ago.
- Today we are happier than a year ago in Venezuela.

The questions referring to the law are aimed at measuring the normativity or the effective regulation capacity of society using

7 Nikos Passas, "Theorizing in the anomie tradition: Durkheim, Merton and beyond", in *Anomia: normas, expectativas y legitimación social*, ed. Tosca Hernández (Oñati: International Institute for the Sociology of Law, 1993)

8 Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, "El impacto de la violencia en la cohesión social", in *Los nuevos rostros de la violencia. Empobrecimiento y letalidad policial*, eds. Roberto Briceño-León, Alberto Camardiel & Gloria Perdomo (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2019).

the law. The first two measure respect and coexistence. The last three, well-being. The questionnaire or survey was passed to a sample of more than 6,000 subjects as part of the 2016 ENCOVI study, a considerably large sample in opinion studies. It should be noted that it does not attempt an absolute measure on coexistence, respect for the law or equality, but a comparison with the previous year. This type of measurement is frequent in sociology. Also, ‘a year ago’ should not be understood 365 days but as the relatively recent past. Results are shown in the table below.

Table 1

Percentages according to seven items of social cohesion	Agreement	Disagreement
Today we respect each other more	9	91
Id. Coexistence is more harmonious	10	90
Id. The law is more respected	10	90
Id. We are more equal in the law	11	89
Id. The country is safer	6	94
Id. The country is fairer	9	91
Id. We are happier	7	93
Average	9	91

SOURCE: Briceño-León & Camardiel⁹, data from the ENCOVI 2016 survey (National Survey of Living Conditions. UCAB)

It is important to consider this isolated study more broadly. Briceño-León directs the Laboratory of Social Sciences and the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence and, in the company of a

9 Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, “El impacto de la violencia en la cohesión social”, in *Los nuevos rostros de la violencia. Empobrecimiento y letalidad policial*, eds. Roberto Briceño-León, Alberto Camardiel & Gloria Perdomo (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2019): 49.

group of researchers, has produced important studies on violence, organized crime and institutions in Venezuela¹⁰. These studies show the deterioration of the Venezuelan institutional system. The opinion study shows the seriousness of the situation in the general perception: 9 out of 10 Venezuelans think that we are worse off than in the immediate past.

However, this measure does not tell us how far or close we are to anomie. That extreme can be figured in the state of nature as described by Hobbes. Of course, this is an intellectual construct, but Hobbes points out that he had had in mind the English society of his time, burdened by civil war and severe political and religious conflicts. It also refers to the relations between European nations in his time, when war was frequent. Venezuela is not there.

Due to professional deformation, I pay attention to the law and the state. Four of the seven statements that were submitted to the population have to do with the law, and my proposal is to look at this area more ethnographically from a specific case: the Tower of David¹¹. It is an imposing office building in the central area of Caracas (La Candelaria) that was taken over by the state as a result of the 1994 banking crisis. As a result of severe

10 Roberto Briceño-León, Olga Ávila & Alberto Camardiel, eds, *Violencia e institucionalidad* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2012).

Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, eds, *Delito organizado, mercados ilegales y democracia en Venezuela* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2015).

Roberto Briceño-León, ed., *Ciudades de vida y muerte. La ciudad y el pacto social para la contención de la violencia* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2016).

Roberto Briceño-León & Alberto Camardiel, "El impacto de la violencia en la cohesión social", in *Los nuevos rostros de la violencia. Empobrecimiento y letalidad policial*, eds. Roberto Briceño-León, Alberto Camardiel & Gloria Perdomo (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2019).

11 Manuel Gómez, "The Tower of David: Social order in a vertical community," *FIU Law Review* 10 (2014-2015).

floods that left many people homeless, President Hugo Chávez invited vacant properties to be invaded. That is how the tower was invaded in 2007. More than a thousand people occupied the building, formed a cooperative, refurbished the unfinished building as best they could. Not only houses arose: also supplies, a nursery school, a hairdresser, an ice cream factory, a bakery, a gym and a variety of shops. Some posters established the rules of coexistence, prohibited activities, and the way to dispose of garbage. There were people who watched over the rules and there were motorcycle taxi drivers to take people who requested it up the ramps. The occupants enlisted the help of architects who described in a remarkable book the transformation of a semi-built tower into a living space¹². There was also an increase in thefts in the area of La Candelaria, attributed by the press and neighbors to the invaders. In the media, the invaded Tower of David was considered a den of outlaws. Living there carried the stigma of criminal living. In 2012, following the kidnapping of a Costa Rican diplomat, the police suspected that the kidnappers and the kidnapped would be in the Tower of David. A huge operation was organized, but neither the kidnapped nor any evidence of criminal activity was found. The police used the situation to take valuable belongings, and residents then protested to the Ministry of the Interior¹³. The kidnappers and the kidnapped were located elsewhere in the country.

12 Alfredo Brillembourg & Hubert Klumpner, *Torre David. Informal vertical communities* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publisher, 2013). The project won the Golden Lion in the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2012. Alfredo Brillembourg, one of the authors, is a Venezuelan-American architect who has taught in universities in Caracas as well as in Columbia and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich.

13 Manuel Gómez, "The Tower of David: Social order in a vertical community," *FIU Law Review* 10 (2014-2015).

The Tower of David case shows that the main violators of the rules were the head of state who incited the invasion of property and the policemen who robbed the occupiers. The squatters themselves were needy people who saw in the invasion an opportunity to solve the serious personal problem of homelessness or a business opportunity, but who quickly generated a social order with rules that remind those of us who have studied law of the Twelve Roman Tables. This situation is not exceptional in Venezuela. The neighborhoods of Venezuelan cities have been formed by invasion and by buildings outside the urban regulations, but they have counted on the complicity, or at least the indifference, of those who are in charge of protecting property and enforcing urban regulations. They usually generate their own rules of coexistence¹⁴. The Tower of David case is striking because the invasion responded to an incitement from the Head of State, something that was new because neither the heads of state nor the ministers had done it in the past. On the other hand, the police taking advantage of a home visit to seize citizens' property is not news. In other words, the state is not a source of social cohesion, it does not support the normative, but rather devours it. Cohesion arises from society itself.

14 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo & Pedro Nikken, *Derecho y propiedad de la vivienda en los barrios de Caracas* (Caracas: FCE & Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1979).

Rogelio Pérez Perdomo & Teolinda Bolívar "Legal pluralism in Caracas", in *Illegal cities*, Edesio Fernandes & Anne Varley, eds. (London: Zed Books, 1998).

Roberto Briceño-León, "The contribution of informal institutionality to safe cities in Venezuela", in *Reducing urban violence in the Global South. Towards safe and inclusive cities*, eds. Jennifer Salahub, Markus Gottbacher, John de Boer and Mayssam Zaaroura (London: Routledge, 2019).

Teolinda Bolívar & Josefina Baldó, comps, *La cuestión de los barrios* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, Fundación Polar & Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1996).

Tolerated invasions are not only common in Venezuela; it is practically the rule in Latin America¹⁵. Everywhere, the invaders generate an order, a kind of parallel law. In the sociology of law there is talk of legal pluralism and informal legal systems. Briceño León¹⁶ prefers the term “informal institutionality” and describes numerous arrangements of this type in Caracas. The emergence of informal systems or order without the law is not exclusive to Latin America either. Ellickson¹⁷ analyzes this situation in Northern California. This leads to the analysis of the role of the state in democratic transformation and the place of law and informal institutions.

Democratic transformation, informal institutions and the rule of law

The work of Méndez, O'Donnell & Pinheiro¹⁸ has drawn attention to the incompleteness of the transition to democracy in Latin America. Most countries escaped dictatorships in the 1980s and 1990s. The new governments were democratically elected,

15 Antonio Azuela de la Cueva, *La ciudad, la propiedad privada y el derecho* (México: El Colegio de México, 1989).

Antonio Azuela de la Cueva, “Los asentamientos populares y el orden jurídico en la urbanización periférica en América Latina,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 55 (1993).

Hernando de Soto, *El otro sendero* (Bogotá: Editorial Oveja Negra, 1987).

16 Roberto Briceño-León, “The contribution of informal institutionality to safe cities in Venezuela”, in *Reducing urban violence in the Global South. Towards safe and inclusive cities*, eds. Jennifer Salahub, Markus Gottbacher, John de Boer and Mayssam Zaaroura (London: Routledge, 2019).

17 Robert Ellickson, *Order without law. How neighbors settle disputes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

18 Juan Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell, Paulo Pinheiro, eds., *The (un)rule of law & the underprivileged in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

but for most citizens the situation did not change much. Their civil rights continued to be disrespected. The police continued to abuse the most vulnerable ('underprivileged'). The situation is not unknown in countries with consolidated democracies, such as the United States and European countries. The Black Lives Matters movement has exposed police abuses against people of African descent in the United States and other countries. Another example is abuses against temporary migrant workers in Germany. These examples show severe moles in countries that we consider stable democracies and well-established rule of law. This raises the contemporary conception of democracy.

A classic on democracy like Tocqueville's¹⁹ makes us smile today. The America that Tocqueville visited was not democratic for our patrons. Only a limited number of men had the right to vote. Women and people of African origin (mostly slaves) were excluded. Women and slaves not only could not vote, but were subjected to abusive behavior by their masters. The search for protection or correction was very limited. This is what the lack of civil rights means. However, the United States looked like a democracy compared to Europe where power was concentrated in a hereditary monarchy and aristocracy, that is, in a small number of people born to run society. Today we believe that democracy requires respect for the political and civil rights of all and that the power of those who exercise it is limited by law²⁰. That is why democracy today is associated with the rule of law, respect for human rights and a significant degree of economic freedom, although countries –even the so-called democratic ones– do not fully correspond to the model of democracy and the rule of law.

19 Alexis de Tocqueville, (1835-1840): *La démocratie en Amérique*, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1990).

20 Robert Dahl, *On democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

Matheus²¹ and Bautista de Alemán²² advocate a transformation of the Venezuelan political system. The transition to a new regime does not seem to be enough. The Venezuelan state has decayed to such a degree and has been so captured by criminal networks that a change in government and a transitional justice approach is not enough. This study agrees with these approaches, but wants to go a little further on the issue of what needs to change. A study by Valdés-Hernández²³ raises the extreme. If totalitarian regimes produce anthropological damage, the transformation approach must be very radical. It should go to the mindset or culture of every citizen or most of them. Would Venezuela be in that situation?

I do not know of studies on the effects of the Chavista revolution on the culture and personality of Venezuelans. Vargas-Arenas & Sanoja Obediente²⁴, two distinguished anthropologists linked to Chavismo, have a rather programmatic work that insists on the necessary changes in the vision of history for the transformation of culture. Apparently, the transformation that they were proposing had not yet taken place in 2013 and it is doubtful that much progress has been made since then, although efforts have not been lacking. Quintero²⁵ analyzes the changes in the field of history by reviewing school manuals. Although

21 Juan Miguel Matheus, "Justicia transformadora para Venezuela", *Democratización* 3 (2020).

22 Paola Bautista de Alemán, "Transformation for Venezuela: Gangster State and democratization", *Democratization*, no. 7 (2020).

23 Dagoberto Valdés-Hernández, "Cause, symptoms and consequences of anthropological damage produced by totalitarian regimes", *Democratization* 7 (2020).

24 Iraida Vargas-Arenas & María Sanoja Obediente, *Historia, identidad y poder* (Caracas: Editorial Galac, 2013).

25 Inés Quintero, "Enseñar historia en Venezuela. Tensiones y conflictos", *Caravelle, Cahiers du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien* 104 (2015).

Inés Quintero, "Uso político de la historia en la Venezuela de Chávez y Maduro", *Estudios Públicos* 152 (2018).

there have indeed been changes, these have not been substantial. The new history has continued to deepen the cult of Bolívar and other national heroes, with some changes in which heroes now stand out. Among these are Ezequiel Zamora and Hugo Chávez, while other heroes have fallen from grace. There has also been a degradation in the quality of the texts. Ellner²⁶ analyzed the cultural and educational aspects of the revolution. He found that it was focused on education, ideology, the transformation of values and skills for work, but that internal conflicts and institutional weakness did not allow it to go very far regarding its purposes.

It can be argued that the express policies of changing the culture and the vision of history have not been successful, but that the revolution may have achieved transformations not necessarily sought. I am not aware of studies on the subject, but the hypothesis can be formulated that the enormous failure in solving social problems and in managing the economy may have discredited certain types of policies associated with the regime. It can be conjectured that the first to reject the nationalization or expropriation of a company would be its own workers, or that announcements of a minimum wage increase or price regulation would be viewed with extreme distrust by the population as a whole. Socialist rhetoric may have much less traction today than it did in the 1990s. Government policies may be questioned as socialist. Thus, the government did not make significant investments in public transportation when it could, and at the same time kept the price of gasoline very low for a long time, which encouraged private means of transportation. This policy is the antipodes of socialism. What is undeniable is that the orientation has been anti-business due to the abundance of confiscations and

26 Steve Ellner, "Venezuela's social-based democratic model, innovations and limitations," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43 (2011).

expropriations of companies and properties. A socialist rhetoric has also been used. The hypothesis is that in a poll or in a free election, not just the government, but also socialism would have very limited support.

Another feared effect is that the direct subsidy policy may have made Venezuelans more dependent on the state. The recent covid-19 pandemic and the quarantine measures that led to the closure of companies ordered by the state has shown rather the opposite: the entrepreneurial nature of Venezuelans, at least in my area, Northeast Caracas. My cell phone was damaged and the premises of the company that sold it to me and repairs it was closed in compliance with the regulations, but in a small neighboring kiosk there were people who offered to repair it. The mechanic shops had to close, but if you needed their services, you just need to make a call and the mechanic would take it to the closed shop and return it fixed some time later. People willing to help park your cars and take care of them while you make a purchase proliferate. People clearly did not stay home waiting for state assistance.

The failure of the revolution to produce a reasonably prosperous economy and a more cohesive society should not be seen as an excuse for not working on a democratic transformation. The triumph of Chávez and his proposal to radically change the political system, including absurdities such as frying the heads of the corrupt in oil, was due to deep dissatisfaction with party democracy. These were instruments for patronage without a real commitment to respect citizens being appreciated. The police were abusive, torture or ill-treatment were a common instrument, the poor were completely unprotected before a machinery of

justice that treated them with negligence and cruelty²⁷. There was an electoral democracy, but the rule of law was very weak and the rights of citizens, especially the most vulnerable, were not respected²⁸. This affected the quality of the political system. There was really no reason for the majority of the population to feel loyalty to a political system that treated it despotically.

The situation is now much more dramatic than in the 1990s. The judges are now even less independent and the abuses against the population much greater. Perhaps the most explicit and egregious are the People's Liberation Operations (OLPs) also called Humanist People's Liberation Operations (OLHPs). They are in charge of a special police force, the FAES, which searches for those identified as criminals in their homes and kills them. They are death squads and they are extrajudicial executions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has requested its dissolution, but this does not appear to be in the government's plans. Of course, the Public Ministry and the judges must turn a blind eye, and seem to be barely authorized to investigate when someone of some importance within Chavismo falls victim to these humanist operations.

The state, and especially the entire apparatus of repression, needs to be renewed and reeducated. It is difficult to see how current prosecutors and judges can be counted on for a justice that is in charge of punishing the worst human rights violations.

27 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, coord., *Justicia y pobreza en Venezuela* (Caracas: Monte Ávila, 1987).

28 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, "Venezuela 1958-1999. The legal system of an impaired democracy", in *Legal cultures in the age of globalization. Latin Europe and Latin America*, eds. Lawrence Friedman & Rogelio Pérez Perdomo (Stanford University Press, 2003).

Matheus's²⁹ work is relevant as it focuses on this area of transformation. I also agree that this is not the time to design in detail what transformative justice can look like.

The importance of state transformation should not make us forget the importance of society and of its action. A conceptual clarification must be done. The rule of law cannot mean submission to state law, whatever it may be. Informal institutionalism or legal pluralism must be considered as part of the rule of law. It is important to allow and encourage society itself to generate its rules. In previous articles, I have analyzed how lawyers in Venezuela have transformed their occupation. Transactional law has flourished and lawyers write contracts that they know will never be brought to court not only because they run counter to formal regulations but because going to court is submitting to corrupt and unpredictable instances. The costs and hassles are incalculable. Contracts solemnize promises and in case of conflict the lawyers themselves become mediators³⁰. This is anomalous in the positivist view of law that associates law with the state, but it is of enormous interest to understand that law can be independent of the state. This is how 'rule of law' should not be understood as the submission of the population to state law, in short, to the state itself. The creation of law by society itself should not be seen as anomalous, but as normal in law. The constitution and the law should not be thought of as instruments of the state, but as a guarantee of the freedom of the people and a search for social cohesion. Of course, the state has an important

29 Juan Miguel Matheus, "Justicia transformadora para Venezuela", *Democratización* 3 (2020).

30 Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, "Anomia, cohesión social y derecho en tiempos de catástrofe", publication admitted to *Espacio Abierto, Cuaderno Venezolano de Sociología* (2020).

role that unfortunately it does not always fulfill and frequently misrepresents.

This outlook can have an impact on the conception of transformative justice. This should not be seen only from the action of state agencies but as a process in which the action of citizens, that is, of the victims and supporting organizations, play an important role. Of course, the state party must contribute its resources, but we should not expect everything to come from the state.

The other aspect is action on society and, especially, on educational matter. Civic education is important and has been neglected for the past four decades. In the past, there was a course called 'Moral and Civic Education' in high school that was replaced in the 1980s by pre-military and military education. In a project started at the Universidad Metropolitana around 2004, an exploratory study of the civic culture of students who were finishing high school in a municipality of Caracas was carried out in both public and private institutions. They were students very close to having the right to vote or they already had that right. The result showed ignorance and evaluations that caught our attention. They were simple questions in the form of bullets. An example of a question: "The police know that a man raped a woman. Is it appropriate for him to torture him to make him confess?" The answer should be a simple yes or no. A high percentage answered affirmatively, ignoring that torture is a serious crime in Venezuela and internationally and that, according to the law, confession before the police or obtained by torture is worthless. In defense of the young people, it should be pointed out that we all know that the police torture and that probably no one has told them that this is contrary to national and international law. The confusion

regarding the extent of the power of the President of the Republic was quite general, but this did not surprise us given the country's political practice. In pre-military and military education nothing is learned from this. Unfortunately the investigation could not explore beyond its preliminary stage.

I agree with Vargas-Arenas & Sanoja Obediente³¹ that history education is important in the creation of identity and values, but surely I differ from their proposals. In particular, I believe that the cult of heroes, especially military heroes, has been overstated in Venezuela. The history of Venezuela cannot be a list of battles and rebellions. They fought for political projects, for images of the nation. These projects and images are more important. Bolívar was a centralist; Zamora, a federalist. Chavista history hides this crucial difference. What was at stake? The struggle for independence is Manicheanly presented as a struggle between good and evil. It is not presented as a conflict mainly between Venezuelans in which arguments were discussed. A story that presents the ideological and political conflicts of the past would help us to understand it better and also to understand the conflicts that we live in the present. In my opinion, this is a more interesting discussion than the long list of battles with which our children and young people are overwhelmed and the construction of altars to put heroes who are simplified and taken out of their historical context.

Let us respect the recommendations echoed in Matheus's article³² and avoid details. But this is a conversation that should be continued.

31 Iraida Vargas-Arenas & María Sanoja Obediente, *Historia, identidad y poder* (Caracas: Editorial Galac, 2013).

32 Juan Miguel Matheus, "Justicia transformadora para Venezuela", *Democratización* 3 (2020).

Communication in Spain, as well as the most used by users between 16 and 30 years old. Its account opened in April 2016. The flag, the unity of Spain, and the Catalan independentists are present from day one. The photos are simple, unedited, seeking to attract the youngest voter: "Student! Don't give up on Selectividad, with your study you are already rendering a great service to Spain." The most successful content is a video attacking Podemos: "We don't want the Podemites, Bolivarians, and Communists to like us. We have come to represent #EspañaViva".

In the case of WhatsApp, the study reveals that "it is the most used social network in Spain. The formation of Santiago Abascal used this channel during the Andalusian elections to launch massive messages instantly". After starting in June 2018 and in just days they gained 2,000 users. Today, political organizations keep these numbers secret.

In the final part of the study, observations are made about the management of social networks by Jair Bolsonaro, the so-called "Brazilian Trump", a right-wing populist leader. The journalist from the same media outlet, Tom Avendaño, reviews how Bolsonaro bypassed the legal filters of television advertising and developed them for the Facebook platform, where he had more than 8 million followers. And he adds: "He also relied on the other great Brazilian platform: WhatsApp. In that country of 147 million voters, 120 use the app daily, most up to 30 times a day. Suddenly, 81% of his voters used the tool, compared to 59% of his great rival in the elections, Fernando Haddad, according to the Datafolha institute". In this way, thanks to the development of a direct contact strategy, he was able to reach audiences in a massive way. Avendaño affirms that the line followed by Bolsonaro

responds to the one Trump used in 2016: "saturate the messaging market. In the case of the Republican politician (Trump), they managed to make 50,000 daily variations of each ad according to the information they obtained from each of the millions of users on Facebook" (Viejo & Alonso, 2018)⁴⁵.

Conclusion

Without an enemy, there is no people. For populism, it is not possible to build the notion of the people if, first and above all, the enemies, the anti-people, are not defined. The people will understand each other only to the extent that their enemies are understood. Therefore, its unity and homogeneity are built from what precisely threatens these two apparently virtuous conditions. More important than defining who makes up this people, first and perhaps enough will be to define the agents that threaten them. Once that happens, the populist's "good people" will be built.

In this sense, and based on the fact that populism will continue in force as long as the enemies have legitimacy, the media will not cease to have visibility and prominence in the confrontation that populism engages and proposes. Even in a totalitarian system, where the media could be hijacked, those media enemies will then be foreigners. For example, in left-wing Latin American populism, Fox News, CNN, among others.

Finally, the battle that populism proposes against the media poses several dilemmas for the owners. Being victims of populist power, the editorial lines could find themselves in the obligation -by an instinct of defense and survival- to further politicize their

⁴⁵ Ídem.

contents, to seek alliances in the party ranks with agents opposed to power and to accept the confrontation with populism. The risk, ultimately, results in a partisanship of the medium, a loss of meaning in the purpose that naturally corresponds to it (to inform), and in a suitable place for politics to only develop on the television set, in the radio booths, and in the opinion columns, no longer in the street and in the headquarters of political parties.

Conclusions

One of the purposes of *Democratization* is to manifest our intellectual work and contribute to the national and international political debate. Those of us who work in this editorial project are historically woken and, with humility, we place our reflections and findings at the service of all. Frequently, when studying other political processes, I value with special admiration the stories of those who stopped to think “on the spot” about the reality that they had to live. These documents have been especially helpful to me in discovering the social and political humor of complex and sobering moments. I am sure that the time will come when it will be necessary to study the Venezuelan political process and I hope that this initiative will contribute to such purposes.

This issue includes articles that follow up on two topics that we identified as important in previous issues and that deserve our attention: the concepts of "autocratic learning" and "transformation". The first refers to the path of authoritarian improvement that the Chavista revolution has crossed since 1998. It describes the accumulation of experiences that has allowed it to grow in resilience and overcome deep crises. Recognizing these dynamics can allow to anticipate decisions and reactions with the aim of disturbing the comfort of a regime that looks like teflon, because everything is slipping. The longevity of the Chavista dictatorship forces us to continue delving into this issue. I can see that it will be necessary for the medium term to precisely analyze the political process that began on January 23, 2019, to see what the regime has learned during this period. There remains a debt in intellectual analysis and in the exercise of politics: democratic

learning. It will also be convenient to stop and ponder over what this struggle has taught those of us who resist the dictatorship.

The second concept is that of transformation. In Venezuela, people started talking about transition in 2014. The massive protests that took place in the country that year introduced the term to public opinion. Seven years separate us from that moment and we have not yet managed to achieve political change. Defining when a transition starts is a complex task. There are seldom milestones that mark change. Generally, this precision corresponds to the authors who later approach the phenomenon to study it. It is often even difficult to reach consensus around that detail. In Spain, for example, there are those who say that the transition began with the murder of Carrero Blanco; others, with the death of Franco, and some, with the Law of Political Reform. In Chile, the dissensions are greater. In my studies I locate the beginning of the transition in the promulgation of the 1980 Constitution, because that document –lacking in legitimacy– contains the mechanisms to which the Democrats turned to advance towards freedom. Nonetheless, some authors place it in the referendum of 1980. What I want to say with this is that we are still in the eye of the storm, and only once it has settled will we be able to establish milestones to describe what we experienced.

What we can see in the midst of the storm is the dimension of the damage left by the autocratic wake of the Chavista revolution. If in 2014 we began to talk about transition, in 2020 it is convenient to start reflecting in terms of transformation. The destruction of Chavismo is so profound that it requires broad levels of reconstruction. Does this demand of reality mean that liberation must be achieved through rupture? No. A transformation can be initiated by means of an agreed liberation

or by rupture. Let us remember Germany in two moments: 1945 and 1989. There is no relationship between transformation and the genre of political change. What can make a difference is the deliberate transformative disposition of those leading the process. That is what we encourage with the contributions offered by the development of this concept in Venezuela.