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El Bus TV: Face-to-face journalism as an act of resistance.

Living in a country in crisis means making an effort to recognize it in all its nuances and discomforts. When you practice journalism in a territory with more than seven million people who are disconnected, isolated, and focused on survival, the only apparent way to understand them, to leave a record of their pain and scarce joys, is to get closer.

You walk, and sit down in a plaza.

You go out, and get on a bus.

You arrive at a popular market, and stand on a street corner.

Because to pay attention, you have to stop and, in some cases, ask the bus to stop. The Bus TV has done it this way since 2017: young journalists take to the streets to share news that cannot be found through traditional information channels because they have been censored or have disappeared.

In Venezuela, getting informed *the way we used to* is a memory.

Of the printed newspapers that once existed, all that remain are advertising posters that lose their color each day in the newsstands. They are a kind of *souvenir* from a country that experienced freedom of the press and then gradually lost it, until arriving at what it has today: an ecosystem of independent media outlets trying to survive with scarce financial resources, website blockages, persecution, and the criminalization of journalists, as well as the distrust of a wounded society.

For more than 20 years, the habit of staying informed has been something associated with older generations. The practice of turning it into a participatory exercise, a collective discussion, was lost. Perhaps that is why intervening in the daily routine —reading the news on buses— was the only way to begin stimulating something very human and necessary for anyone who aspires to live in a democracy: understanding that they have the right to know what is happening around them.

Innovative. Creative. Necessary. Strategic. Part *guerrilla*, part resistance.

Those are some of the words a reporter from El Bus TV has heard after finishing a newscast or putting up a news poster in a remote town in Venezuela and asking, “What do you think of this initiative?”

It has happened in Apure, the Capital District, Táchira, Trujillo, Mérida, Zulia, Miranda, Bolívar, Amazonas, La Guaira, Lara, and Falcón. It is as if the frame they carry with them, or that sheet of paper covered with news, were reviving a forgotten tradition: keeping up with what is happening in the country.

May 27, 2017. That day marked 10 years since the closure of Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), and it was the date on which El Bus TV aired its first newscast on a bus along Avenida Francisco de Miranda in Caracas. While just a few blocks away, protesters were already marking more than three months of mass demonstrations demanding civil rights and a change of government, the newscast recalled an event that had become a landmark, paving the way for an information blackout.

What Laura Helena Castillo, Abril Mejías Romhany, and Claudia Lizardo, the project's co-founders, did not know was that they were also opening the door to a new journalistic experience for dozens of students and young journalists across the country.

The temporary effort to break the pattern of news consumption became a little school of journalism, reminding everyone, day after day, that someone still believes in this profession and can practice it despite the circumstances.

This can even be put to the test. If you ask any reporter what El Bus TV does, they will answer without hesitation: "Hyperlocal, offline, and service journalism."

It is not a magic formula, much less something easy to grasp at first. Even so, it sticks in their minds because it has become the way they connect with the country, even if that country is represented only by a small group of people.

Every week, they take to the streets to confront a country that has been suffocated, almost by necessity, by a cruel system, and in the process they have discovered that a news story can provoke all kinds of reactions. In their audience, they see kindness, honesty, humor, and something that is often lost behind a

computer screen but serves as a gauge of a country that moves every day: the possibility of documenting public opinion.

El Bus TV has been able to confirm that people are indeed willing to exercise a basic, constitutional, and inherently human right: freedom of expression.

There are many examples, both recent and from years past.

In late 2019, I took to the streets for the first time as a reporter for El Bus TV. Our news route was Avenida San Martín, in the west of the capital, known for its proximity to famous “Chavista territories” and to several major public hospitals: Maternidad Concepción Palacios, Hospital Pérez Carreño, and Hospital El Algodonal.

One of the stories we read that afternoon was a summary of a report by armando.info about properties in Caracas purchased by relatives of Cilia Flores, the wife of former president Nicolás Maduro. It generated the most comments. One came from an older woman, who said that in the future, if the government changed, those houses should be sold and the money invested in housing.

I remember how nervous I was when we recorded her testimony. The irony is that, at that point, the possibility of a pandemic had not yet crossed anyone’s mind, but Venezuelans were already aware of something: depending on the healthcare system was more of a sentence than an opportunity to heal or survive.

Years later, the number of testimonies of that kind —direct, critical, and destabilizing to some— declined amid growing

fears of persecution, repression, and being accused of treason, especially after July 28, 2024.

Persecution, arbitrary detentions, and charges of incitement to hatred brought against more than 20 journalists. *Operation Tun Tun*, which left more than 3,000 civilians, activists, and community leaders in the country's prisons. Constant surveillance of public spaces. An increase in censorship. The risk involved in showing one's face or sharing an opinion. All of this was enough to make us understand that the context was different from what we had experienced and that this meant finding a *camino verde*,¹ an alternate path, to continue reporting safely.

They began by pausing some forms of reporting: the news-casts on buses. Recorded testimonies were no longer published. Photos began to be edited to protect those who protested or gave statements to reporters. The content remained informational, but it was different.

The reporters began creating news posters to explain other topics: gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, mental health. And more space was made for stories about identity.

There was a collective realization: to preserve more hyper-local memory and to make an effort to disseminate useful news to the communities El Bus TV passes through. That was a *camino verde* for listening to a country that had been forced into silence.

1 "Camino verde" ("green path") is a Venezuelan expression for an unofficial shortcut or alternative way of achieving something, outside the usual or formal route.

Reporting the basics, the things that may seem unimportant, does something essential to journalism: it connects with people.

Before the elections, El Bus TV did just that. It told the story of residents at a nursing home in Mérida who wanted to vote but needed help getting to the polls. It also interviewed a woman in Los Puertos de Altagracia, Zulia, who offered her motorcycle to take people to their polling places. It explained, using news posters, how to register to vote for the first time.

And after that date, forever etched in the mind of every Venezuelan, El Bus TV prioritized providing the basics through a hyperlocal lens: where to get medical tests at low cost; what activities a community cultural center is planning; the schedule for a tournament organized by a local sports group on the neighborhood court; when the gas truck will arrive and how much the gas cylinder will cost; the story of a sanitary pads bank that inspired the creation of the first sanitary pads bank in a community in El Vigía, Mérida.

What came before and after matters. The great task is to make it visible in the communities around us. To accompany the process, even without knowing what will happen, may be the formula.

Perhaps it is because, from the beginning, this model of journalism has been confrontational. It offers people news, and they decide what to do with it. What is never lost is rigor, mobilization through listening, answering questions, and making visible the fact that other possibilities exist for the country. Sometimes that new possibility is simply beginning to feel represented in a news story or discovering a new point of view.

But as with everything in journalism, there are circumstances you neither choose nor can predict. January 3, 2026, and what followed is an example of that.

After Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores were taken out of the country, a new reality emerged. The first few days were filled with uncertainty: What should we report? How should we do it? What do people want to know? Can we talk about *what everyone knows*? How do you name what happened?

To find those answers, the compass was always the people, the contact with the streets, because that is where we all began to experience the desire to express ourselves again.

The reporters watched that process escalate. Before opinions, came questions. Then came testimonies about everyday problems: inflation, wages, and basic services. And that was when the door began to open to what could not be named: the release of political prisoners, complaints about the price of gasoline, the opening to the United States, the courage to use certain words, such as freedom, democracy, and human rights.

As a journalist and a reader of El Bus TV's national reports, it was impossible not to say: *something different is happening here*.

No one can say for certain that this will be the bridge to a political transition. Nor can it be called the absolute return of freedom of expression and the end of persecution, since there is still a struggle to lift the blocking of more than 60 independent digital newspapers, the closure of more than 200 media outlets has not been forgotten, and more than one journalist has been detained since then. But it is clear that this is an opportunity to make adjustments and remember what we have lived through with precision, and that means working collectively.

This collaborative effort is traveling on buses and appearing on the walls of regions considered information deserts through El Bus TV, which, in this new phase, is sharing news from independent Venezuelan media outlets. In this process, audiences have gained access to information they cannot find on social media, that remains scarce on radio and television, and that they had assumed no longer existed. The surprise is mutual: those who posted it are surprised by the level of interest, while those who read them, consciously or not, are struck by what they learn and by the reawakening of their right to information. And within that capacity for wonder lies *resistance* as well.

Resistance in its different forms: expressing opinions, paying attention to the facts, expressing emotions, sharing information individually through a community WhatsApp group, mobilizing. In short, the changes that come from knowing about something.

There is a record of this.

In Trujillo, a state that experienced the terror of persecution and arbitrary detentions in the aftermath of the elections, Manuel Medina, a reader and guardian of news posters, finds the courage to share his opinion about the death of a political prisoner in state custody.

In Apure, the residents of Llano Alto, a neighborhood in Guasdalito, say they are dissatisfied with the minimum wage and that union members have the right to protest for their rights, which are also theirs.

In Zulia, a young political leader decides to share that he served as a poll watcher in the elections after reading a news poster about young people's political participation in Venezuela.

Every time a testimony like this emerges, the same question arises: would this have been possible before January 3, 2026?

Each person's answer depends on their circumstances, but for a large part of the population, the answer is obvious and monosyllabic: no.

Since its first broadcast on May 27, 2017, El Bus TV's reporters have repeated the same sign-off: "We'll keep reporting." It is non-negotiable, and it is delivered with the forcefulness and seriousness that face-to-face journalism demands. When you are the one saying it, after a news story that stirs things up, it can send chills down your spine.

Because if resistance is one thing, it is persistence; and resistance, for those who have ridden this news bus, means *continuing to report* despite the obstacles and potholes along the route. In this oil-rich country, there is no shortage of fuel: the people, their questions and curiosities, our own recent history, the profound need to explain ourselves and understand one another.