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Venezuela, from Charisma to Mimicry: The Rise and Fall of a Televised Political Drama

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Venezuela, from Charisma to Mimicry: The Rise and Fall of a Televised Political Drama

by

Rebecca Blackwell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean
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DEDICATION

I dedicate these lines to Noelia Carpio, my grandmother, whose faith in me has always made me strong.

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The Institute for the Study of Latin American and the Caribbean at USF made this study possible. It was only when Dr. Rachel May welcomed me into the master's program as a graduate assistant, and when our discussions on human rights in Venezuela began, that I understood the depth of my interest in the systematic study of social structures. Dr. May helped me remove myself from personal experience and find the path to a more detached analytical standpoint, a process that sounds obvious but that hardly ever is. Paula Lezama made possible my transit through USF and together with Dr. Bernd Reiter helped me shape the experience as one of growth and self-discovery, while showing me academic networks and methodological resources for social inquiry. In the process, I had the fortune of taking a methods course with Dr. Donileen Loseke, whose work and passion have been an inspiration. Dr. Loseke has dedicated countless hours to reading this study as well as other research I have shared with her as a student, and, from inception to completion, she has patiently provided me with knowledgeable suggestions of infinite value. She helped me revitalize my background in linguistics, by allowing me to explore my interdisciplinary background within new boundaries. Dr. Loseke has been capable of seeing through me at times, often when I most needed insightful advice (in both my personal and academic life, a gift I will never forget). I would also like to show my gratitude to Dr. Robert Benford for his intellectual generosity and personal kindness; our discussions about Venezuela and the formation of social movements helped me see between the lines of the Venezuelan narrative. Dr. Stephen Turner was also a crucial guide during this endeavor. It was his analysis of the concept of charisma that allowed

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I build on the assumption that collective emotional experience plays an important role in sustaining the group identity central to nation-making processes inspired by charismatic leaders. Through a case study of the Venezuelan government after the death of Hugo Chávez, I will examine ways in which elements of the leader's narrative are used by his successors after his death. I argue that the current political actors of the bureaucratized Revolutionary Government of Venezuela are attempting to sustain popular support by reaffirming a national identity that resonated among the masses largely due to the charisma of a now absent leader, Hugo Chávez. I wish to explore the probability or lack thereof of a sustained emotional connection of the government regime with the mass audience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, I build on the assumption that collective emotional experience plays an important role in sustaining the group identity central to nation-making processes inspired by charismatic leaders. This analysis is based on a case study of the Venezuelan government after the death of Hugo Chávez. I examine ways in which elements of the leader's narrative are used by his successors after his death. I also argue that the current political actors of the bureaucratized Revolutionary Government of Venezuela are attempting to sustain popular support by reaffirming a national identity that resonated among the masses largely due to the charisma of a now absent leader. I wish to explore the probability or lack thereof of a sustained emotional connection of the government regime with the mass audience.

More specifically, I will analyze the use of anti-American narrative, in the post-Chávez Venezuela, by new political actors. I am interested in studying the possibilities and limits of this narrative as a tool to access the power of mass emotional attachment (Shamir et al. 1993). To that end, the empirical question I wish to address is: To what extent can bureaucratic actors rely on the former leader's rhetoric to influence mass audiences? In other words, can the use of his rhetoric suffice to sustain the "symbolic interaction" (Blumer 1986 [1969]; Mead 2009 [1934]; Weber 2002 [1904]; Zerubavel 1999) that he established with his followers? My theoretical framework involves two main theories—symbolic codes and narrative—in order to observe what influences the effectiveness of a given symbolic code in official government narratives.

Symbolic Code

This study is one of many others that support the notion that symbolic codes are socially created (Swidler 1986; Wood and Rennie 1994; Clark 1997; Brader 2005; Altheide 2002; Van Dijk 1998). Swidler (1995) prefers the term “semiotic code,” which she describes as “deeply held, inescapable relationships of meaning that define the possibilities of utterance in a cultural universe” (1995:32). For the cognitive sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, symbols are the product of our “semiotic socialization”; through social convention, a specific “signifier” is attributed to the representation of a specific “signified” (1999:71). The central focus of this study is how Venezuelan state officials have accentuated a particular system of meaning for their audiences, “the United States as a villain.” The highly televised nation-making process, originally led by Hugo Chávez (Muñoz 2008; Silva-Ferrer 2013; Duno Gottberg, 2004), has repeatedly reproduced the story of a possible US intervention in Venezuela, thus attributing to the signifier of the US the signified of a villain.

Zerubavel argues that “when we regard something as a symbol, we are primarily concerned with what it represents, to the point where what it actually ‘means’ sometimes overrides any functional significance it may otherwise have for us” (1999:68). In the government’s narrative, the US functions not as a country but as an actor in a symbolic war. It is used as symbolic evidence of danger, reaching a social meaning of menace, from which Venezuelans and others around the globe need to protect themselves.

This assumed shared meaning of the US is not, however, just a natural sociomental association. Zerubavel makes a distinction between symbols and indicators to demonstrate how symbolic associations are not a natural process but are instead the product of conventionality (1999:70), unlike indicators, which are intrinsic to the signifier. For Zerubavel indicators are

inevitable consequences of which the signifier shows physical evidence whereas symbols, on the other hand, “do not presuppose any physical affinity whatsoever between the signifier and what it is supposed to represent to us. ... Of all the signs we use, the mental association between signifier and signified is the least inevitable in symbols” (Zerubavel 1999:71). Zerubavel uses medical examples to speak of indicators. A symptom of an illness would thus be an indicator, not a symbol.

In the Venezuelan case, it must be taken into account that the condition of the US as a villain has been constructed with historical or foreign references, more so than with physical proof. The villainous condition of the US in Venezuela is more based on experiences of US actions in other countries than in Venezuela itself. There are notorious cases where US involvement has been publically proven with very concrete material evidence, an example of that are the files called "Operation PBSUCCESS," released in 1997 which contained assassination instructions and evidence of training camps and financial investment for the Coup d'Etat of 1954 in Guatemala (Valdés-Ugalde 2004). However, in the case of Venezuela, the investigative work around the participation of the US in the coup of 2002 (Golinger 2005; Villegas 2009) has not been able to provide sufficient material proof that can serve as an indicator of the foreign involvement, leaving this notion of potential US intervention at the symbolic level, that is, mainly based on historical facts as opposed to current local affairs.

Another consideration for this analysis is that the meaning of a symbol derives from its opposition to, or contrast with, other symbols, more so than from its relation to its signifier, consequently part of this analysis focuses on observing these relationships. Understanding the construction of a symbolic villain requires understanding its contrast with the symbolic hero and the symbolic victim. The data shows how the US is presented by the interviewers and interviewee as a villain in contrast to its victims, which are peoples from all around the world. The heroes are

the people of Venezuela, represented by Chavez who was brave and strong enough to liberate them from oppression. A fourth category is associated with the villain, which is the category of the fools.

Klapp argues that “The relationship of hero, villain and fool types is perhaps best understood by considering them as kinds of deviance from a normative center of conventional conduct [and that] the three directions of deviation might be described as (1) better than, (2) falling short of, or (3) antagonism to the standards required of all group members” (1954:57).

The image of Chavez serves to build the symbol of the Venezuelan people as heroes in the battle. And they alone, in contrast to other symbolic victims and the fools (the Venezuelans who support the US), carry the legacy of a true revolutionary leader who was not afraid to confront the hegemonic villain. The US villain is by no means exclusive to Venezuela, as mentioned before. In Mexico, the term “Colosuss of the North” was a popular name given to the northern nation and associated with Porfirio Diaz’s famous quote “Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States” (Valdés-Ugalde 2004).

It is clear that the symbolic code of the American villain has a long history in Latin America, and that it stems from old policy decisions of the US regarding its southern neighbours. Interventionist policies dating back to the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 are behind this socially circulating system of meaning. The Cold War interventions of the US in Latin America were extensively documented, as shown in the example of Guatemala, where US state funds were clearly linked to military coups and widespread human rights violations throughout the region (Ferreira Navarro 2014; Valdés-Ugalde 2004).

This system of meaning has been a pivotal “symbolic code” (Loseke 2010:30) in the political narrative of the Chavista government, in spite of the fact that no specific actions have been materially demonstrated. It can be added that “symbolic codes are complex systems of ideas

about how the world works, how it should work, and of the rights and responsibilities of people in the world” (Loseke 2009:498) and that in the case of Venezuela, the US villain was an affective political narrative tool used by Chavez to gain international popularity.

Narrative, Persuasion, and Emotion

Central to my analysis is the understanding of narrative as a means to social action, identity building, and collective memory construction. Language acts in narrative as a symbolic system of signification (Zerubavel 1999). Cultural meaning systems are “often embedded in and spread through socially circulating narratives [containing] shared cognitive, emotional, and moral meanings” (Kusenbach and Loseke 2013:23).

In Latin America, the image of the US as a villain is widespread. It constitutes a socially circulating narrative that has traditionally been used by counterhegemonic movements in the region (Ferreira Navarro 2014). It can be considered part of what Mills called a “vocabulary of motives” (Mills 1940), whereby linguistic structures are used to persuade movement members to undertake action (Benford 1993). In the current narrative of the Venezuelan state, it constitutes a fundamental aspect of what Zerubavel would call a “historical narrative.” “By defining a certain moment in history as the actual beginning of a particular historical narrative, it implicitly defines for us everything that preceded that moment as mere ‘pre-history’ which we can practically forget” (1999:68).

I am interested in empirically assessing some of the mechanisms used to construct a vocabulary of motives using “prototypical characters” (Loseke 2012:256). I will explore which types of people derive from these prototypical characters. Stories of US interventions construct the plot of a second period of colonization, underscoring the heroic condition of Bolivarian

Revolutionaries. Formerly oppressed victims have turned into emancipated warriors against an external villain supported by malicious internal allies (government opponents).

This semiotic socialization has been based on the connection through narrative and storytelling between the “symbolic code” of the villain and the “emotion code” of hate. As cultural ways of feeling, emotion codes are “sets of ideas about what emotions are appropriate to feel when, where, and toward whom or what, as well as how, they should be outwardly expressed” (Loseke 2009:498). Similarly, Hochschild (1983) used the term “feeling rules” to refer to the ways people view their actions in relation to emotional conventions.

The observation that social groups have systems of meanings identifying certain emotions as “appropriate” suggests that a group will judge the identification and loyalty of its members in terms of the degree to which their emotional expressions conform to the code. As Turner and Stets argue, one of the signs that demonstrate obedience to the code is people’s employment of “the appropriate emotional vocabularies and syntax to convince both themselves and others that they are indeed abiding by feeling rules” (2006:26). In other words, those who are seen as truly part of the group will be those whose outward expressions clearly reveal that their inner emotional responses are in line with the code.

In part, this study responds to the argument made by Kusenbach and Loseke about the fact that, despite the long history of recognition that emotions are critical to social life, research on the topic would benefit from more qualitative empirical analysis (Kusenbach and Loseke 2013). They point to the general tendency to focus on the subjective emotional experience of individuals, leaving a need for more conceptual tools to operationalize processes of meaning making in collective emotional experience.

Kusenbach and Loseke propose that emotions themselves can constitute socially identifiable systems of meaning. They argue that qualitative studies of collective emotional experience, including “mass convergence in emotional experiences” (2013:23), is thus enhanced by asking questions about the historical, cultural, and political contexts and antecedents of such experiences. This empirical analysis addresses the emotional vocabularies and syntax in the current rhetoric of the Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela to better understand its systems of meaning.

HISTORICAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

The television broadcast that constitutes the central object of study in this paper took place two years after the death of Hugo Chávez, the undisputed leader of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. The symbolic code used as the axis of the program is that of the US villain.

The same day of the telecast, the president of the United States, Barack Obama, had issued an “Executive Order (E.O.) declaring a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States posed by the situation in Venezuela.”¹ The targeted sanctions in the E.O. implement the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014. The Executive Order imposed sanctions on seven specific individuals whom the White House deemed corrupt. The sanctions were to freeze the assets of these individuals within US jurisdiction, to prohibit US citizens from conducting transactions with such assets,² and to suspend the sanctioned individuals’ entry to the United States.³ However, the language used in the Executive Order was capitalized on by Venezuelan state officials and the telecast’s conductors in this case as well, to reinforce the symbolic code of US villain.

Aside from emotion codes attributed to the symbolic code of the US villain, emotion codes referenced in the broadcast also refer to two main groups: *Chavistas* and *escúalidos*, that is, those

¹ Downloaded from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/09/fact-sheet-venezuela-executive-order> on May 28, 2016

² <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp1132.aspx>

³ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35766.htm>

who support the government and those who do not. To understand these references, it is important to understand the immediate “pre-history” of the Bolivarian Revolution and the use of national television broadcasting by Chávez himself.

Acosta-Alzuru (2014) argues that in Venezuela political polarization defines national life, altered and embodied in part by the complex relationship between the revolutionary government and the media, where the terms *Chavistas* and *escúalidos* were born and grew strong.

The connection between a charismatic leader and his audience occurs when he manages to change people’s expectations of what is and what is not possible through demonstrations of his personal extraordinariness (Turner 1993, 2003, 2011). The leader’s exceptionality is seen as a sort of magic and a compelling force that enables personal transformations in people who become obedient followers. A leader who takes risks that would not normally be regarded as possible and manages to succeed changes the parameters of risk. The “eternal commander,” as he has been posthumously called through government-funded propaganda campaigns, was an outspoken detractor of US imperialism, neoliberal economic policies and Venezuelan local elites. His anti-hegemonic bellicose rhetoric gained much international support for. He became a hero, offering a world of new possibilities through the symbolic interaction embodied by the revolutionary process. His followers were able to see themselves as co-protagonists of a new order.

Chávez first became known for leading an attempted coup d’état against president Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992. He was jailed after this event and released two years later. He founded a party called the “Fifth Republic” and was seen by voters as an alternative to the political order (the fourth republic, which I argue is framed as the “pre-history”) that had been in place in Venezuela since 1958. He ran an aggressive campaign that was broadly supported by various leftist political parties including the three major ones: the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), founded in 1931;

the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), founded in 1983; and the People's Electoral Movement (MEP), founded in 1967. As it became apparent that anger against the established political order was coalescing around Chávez's candidacy, the social democratic and Christian democratic parties, AD and COPEI, which had been the principal protagonists of the preceding 40 years of two-party democracy, joined together for the first time in support of a single candidate, in order to have a chance of defeating Chávez.

Chávez criticized the progressively decomposing two-party democracy (Lupu 2010), which he promised to abolish, along with corruption and poverty. Chávez projected himself as the successor of Simón Bolívar, the Venezuelan who led the nineteenth-century war of independence across northern South America. Humberto Jaimes argues that Chávez

stirred up the psyche of Venezuelans, opening old wounds that were sleeping in the collective mind, so his [presidency] served as a sort of cultural and social purgative. [...] The speeches of the commander reminded thousands of Venezuelans that they are also a country of indigenous, mestizo and black people, and not a Caucasian country; that Venezuela extends beyond the concrete towers of the metropolitan area; [...] that the lower classes must be treated with dignity. (2003:165)

Chávez won the 1998 election with an overwhelming 56.20% of the vote.⁴ The political leader declared his election as the beginning of a Bolivarian Revolution, conceived as a process of refounding the Republic. He stated that the revolution was to be carried out in phases, starting with a constitutional assembly, followed by a phase of socioeconomic restructuring. Throughout both of these phases, Chávez also argued that it was essential to construct a collective identity (Harnecker 2005). National symbols, like the flag, the code of arms, and even the country's name, were modified (Alvarez 2006) to create visual and symbolic representations that could build a

⁴ <http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/documentos/estadisticas/e006.pdf>

sense of solidarity among previously more detached constituencies, a common practice in nation-making processes (Anderson 2006).

In his discourses, Chávez identified two very distinctive groups in Venezuelan society: those who were part of the revolutionary process and those who were not. The revolutionaries were presented in such a way that the self of the leader was discursively merged with the selves of his followers. Together they became “the new man.” Chávez and his followers formed a communion of thought, with the leader always at the forefront as the regulatory entity, delivering moral and value judgments during weekly discourses on national television. Venezuelans had to be with or against him. It was his idea of the self, expressed in various forms of identity constructions that became the centerpiece of the political project. A consequence of this personalization was the progressive increase in the use of the term “Chavista” to refer to the supporters of the revolution, gradually replacing most other terms.

Chávez used many terms to identify the opposition, including “oligarchs,” “fascists,” “terrorists,” and “traitors” (Bolívar 2015). In 2002, when the opposition organized massive street demonstrations against the regime, he began to use the term “escuálidos,” which literally means both very dirty and very emaciated. Chávez said the opposition demonstrators looked “esquálidos” because they weren’t happy; they had no color, nor strength, nor any clear direction—as opposed to his followers, who were just the opposite, the anti-imperialist heroes. He then began to use the term to designate the organized opposition as a whole as well as any person who did not share his political ideas (Sanz 2004: 61).

As pointed out by Frajman (2014), while Chávez was in power, he and his team made intensive use of television to maintain the personal connection between the president and the people. They used a program called *Aló Presidente* (*Aló* is the Spanish word for saying hello over

the phone) as a central element in their media strategy. A total of 378 shows with an average duration of 5 to 6 hours were aired on Sundays between 1999 and 2012. This is important because these shows set a precedent for political propaganda in the region which the show analyzed in this study stems from. In these shows, Chávez was the center of attention. He spoke directly to people who, in the early shows, would call on the phone. Chávez called them by their first name and discussed their requests. The leader spoke of Venezuelan folk culture, making specific references to daily matters and cultural heritage in all areas, from food to music. Snow and Benford (1992:141) argue that “the frame strikes a responsive chord in that it rings true with extant beliefs, myths, folktales and the like.” Chávez indeed stressed the need to understand one’s own history and placed himself as one of Venezuela’s historical figures, by claiming to be both reenacting Simón Bolívar’s political ideals and representing the long-awaited change for the Venezuelan people. Chávez intertwined an anti-status-quo rhetoric with a familiar tone, frequently using colloquialisms and personal stories.

Kirk Hawkins (2010) claims that what Chávez wished to transmit was more profound and less specific than just an ideology, that is, a more unconscious cosmovision.⁵ Given the type of content of the show and the Goffmanian presentation of self that Chávez performed, it is relevant to look at the structure of his TV show to recognize its influence on the new Venezuelan political narrative. Frajman has described the structure of *Aló Presidente* as follows:

At first it was primarily a phone-in show that allowed individuals to speak to the leader, and focused on highlighting the government’s achievements. Media professionals mediated the exchanges on air. Gradually, particularly following the attempted coup against Chávez in 2002, the emphasis turned more to the image of

⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt used the term cosmovision to describe a way of looking at the world, one that was not necessarily reflective yet always intuitive, encompassing the values and intuition of peoples, nations, and cultural groups and containing the essential character of language and spirituality or that which was metaphysical (Santiago 2011).

the leader, and his interaction with his followers became more unmediated. Crowds around the set began to be the norm, with many of those present becoming the beneficiaries of the government's largesse on national television. (2014:504)

However, what at the beginning had been a show displaying a man conducting a revolution for the people and with the people gradually became the story of the man himself and of the great achievements of the revolution. Frajman suggests that the show was used to "shape the political debate, to publicize the accomplishments of Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution, to attack the opposition and make surprising announcements, and to strengthen the bond between leader and followers" (2014:503), and I would add that asserting Chávez's authority was also of great importance. Chávez presentation of self was that of a leader, a religious figure, a father, and a man with the regulatory moral values that all revolutionaries were expected to follow (Zúquete 2008). Chávez conducted the symbolic socialization process within the Revolution. He used very strong insults against his enemies, told educational tales, held personal conversations with his guests, callers, or members of the audience present at the set. Chávez gave lessons, clarified ideological concepts, discussed international and national affairs, and very often gave orders and reprimanded his team members as a father would his children, calling them by their names or even nicknames and reprimanding them on the air.

Chávez spoke of moral virtue and a fight against the evil forces of the Venezuelan political past, always aided by US imperialism. When scandals involving members of his team were made public, Chávez would reprimand them on the TV show, asserting his role the moral leader.

Chávez won the 2012 elections (his fourth reelection) and died soon thereafter, leaving a void in the power structure that could be solved only by a new electoral process. Article 233 of Chávez's 1999 Constitution, states, "Pending election and inauguration of the new President, the President of the National Assembly shall take charge of the Presidency of the Republic." However,

Diosdado Cabello, president of the Assembly at the time and until December 2015, was not appointed, and instead, Nicolas Maduro, who was endorsed by Chávez, was.

The narrative analysis conducted herein aims at examining the stories told by current government officials in the bureaucratized post-Chávez Venezuela. This is a close examination of one specific and most relevant sample: an interview with Roy Chaderton, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Venezuela who, at the time of the broadcast, was the Venezuelan Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS). The interview was broadcast as the central part of a television program called *Zurda Konducta* on March 9, 2015, two years after the death of Hugo Chávez.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Analytic Method

The original data for this analysis is in the form of a two-hour video currently available on YouTube.⁶ The 2-hour telecast contains in its first hour an interview with Chancelor Roy Chaderton, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Venezuela who, at the time of the broadcast, was the Venezuelan Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS). The interview was broadcast as the central part of a television program called *Zurda Konducta* on March 9, 2015, two years after the death of Hugo Chávez.

This 11:00 p.m. broadcast, was transmitted on the Venezuelan National Television Station. The verbatim translation of the TV show had diminishing returns, so I selectively transcribed portions of interest, more specifically portions of the interview and the presenter's introduction to the interview. I did the transcription directly as a translation. The original audio is in Spanish, so I translated as I transcribed the data. The total selection of the TV show that I transcribed had 12,227 words (as translated). Although I did not transcribe the entire telecast, I did go through the process of listening to it in its entirety 12 times.

Only the following two elements were fully excluded from being transcribed and translated:

1. The lyrics of the songs throughout the program. Most of the music of the program is instrumental, and the few songs that do have lyrics compete with the voices of the

⁶ Accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEjDFyz5ui0> on June 4, 2015.

speakers and it is extremely difficult to understand their content. It is possible to determine that the few songs with lyrics (3 of them during the interview) are in Spanish and belong to the new wave of Ibero-American rock.

2. The second hour of the program after the interview of Chancellor Chaderton. Although these videos contained text that further reinforced the construction of the symbolic code US villain, they mainly repeated the same contents commented during the interview.

Through a process of lumping and splitting (Zerubavel 1996), I organize the data into conceptual categories, always keeping in mind those elements connecting the symbolic code of the US villain with emotion codes, and the relationships between the different “types of people” (Klapp 1954). I paid special attention to story telling and the roles of these types of people within them. An important focus of analysis was the identity construction evidenced in the descriptions of these types of people and their roles, and their relationship with categories widely used by Chavez himself, exemplified in the videos used in the introduction and closure of the program. The symbolic interaction Chavez established with his followers through his warlike rhetoric and historical references is copied in the rest of the program. The data analysis shows how the program hosts frequently announce that they will follow Chavez’s lead. What I intend to explore is to what extent the use of Chavez’s voice or style by new government officials and agents of propaganda dissemination can influence the effectiveness of a symbolic code.

Relevance of Roy Chaderton to Venezuelan Foreign Policy

There are several reasons why this particular interview is a very significant example of the current political discourse sustained by Venezuelan government officials:

1. The political relevance of Roy Chaderton to Venezuelan foreign policy
2. The significance of the TV program *Zurda Konducta* in the use of mass media by the Bolivarian Revolution
3. The political timing of the broadcast, given the fact that that same there had been an executive order again Venezuela issued by the US government.

Roy Chaderton is a lawyer, a politician, and a diplomat. He is a senior member of the Venezuelan Diplomatic Service who, by the time Chávez came to power, had already served in diplomatic missions in Poland, Germany, Belgium, and the United Nations for the governments of the so-called fourth republic, during the period of biparty democratic governments prior to the Bolivarian Revolution. He had also been, between 1985 and 2000, Ambassador to Gabon, Norway, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as Director General of International Policy. Chávez rose to power in 1999, and Chaderton was then appointed Ambassador to Colombia. In 2002, he became Minister of Foreign Relations, a position he held until 2004, and then he became Ambassador to France from 2004 to 2007. In 2008, he was appointed Ambassador to Mexico as well as Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States, where he served until 2015. At present, Chaderton serves as deputy at the Latin American Parliament in Panama and has been appointed to accompany the peace talks between the Colombian Government and the FARC. His most current appointment is as the Director of International Affairs for the Partido Socialista Unido de

Venezuela (PSUV), the official governing party, a position that grants him power as what Van-Dijk (1998) would call an “ideologist” in the government.

Chaderton is a crucial political figure because international affairs have been critically important for the Bolivarian Revolution. Galbán and Molero de Cabeza (2008) speak of the sacralization that Chávez proposed regarding his own role as a political leader in the domestic arena and his heroic deeds in the international arena, where he gained respect by using very strong language against the US. In this study, I analyze a similar rhetorical stance on the part of Roy Chaderton. The use of irony by a senior member of a diplomatic body is especially significant in this regard, since making pejorative remarks in public spaces without any apparent consequences presumably adds to the construction of “heroes” of the resistance against the amplified threat of the US enemy.

Significance of the TV Program *Zurda Konducta*

Zurda Konducta is a talk show where various political topics are discussed and where political actors from the Chavista government are interviewed. In the 83 editions of the program that are available on the show’s web page, all the political actors interviewed are supporters or representatives of Chavismo. The show is broadcast on the state-owned television channel Venezolana de Televisión (VTV). Chávez’s Sunday TV show *Aló Presidente* was also broadcast on the same station.

Zurda Konducta does not imitate the format of *Aló Presidente*, the original political show featured by Chavez himself. The hosts of *Zurda Konducta*, however, do use a similar type of language as Chavez used and make references to similar topics (they use colloquial language and anti-imperialist rhetoric, often with metaphors of war; personal storytelling is frequent; and they

make constant references to historical events). VTV is the most important and widely broadcast state-owned television channel, used regularly by the government for political propaganda.

I used the original location of the data excerpts in the YouTube video to mark which segments are used. Excerpts are noted by indicating the minute in which they appear in the original video. The 2-hour telecast contains motion graphics with a very modern aesthetic. The background music is often hard rock, heavy metal, or electronic music. Three videos of Hugo Chávez are used to introduce and close the program and constitute my first set of data. The second set is the introduction by the commentators of the guests of the night, and the third is the interview with Chaderton.

DATA ANALYSIS

Melodrama and Symbolic Associations

A melodramatic narrative is one where emotions are elicited by clear distinctions between what is good and what is evil (Anker 2014:23), but as Zerubavel (1999) posits, shared meanings are not necessarily natural sociomental associations. Symbolic associations can be constructed through language between signifiers and signifieds regardless of how unlikely the association between them would be without the semiotic socialization. Associating symbolic and emotion codes to shape roles of victims, heroes, and villains is essential to the construction of a melodramatic narrative.

Rhetorical figures like irony (implying opposite meanings) and hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration) are used in these data in ways that create a two-dimensional melodrama (Simons 2007). There is a semantic range of “us,” which is characterized by positive value and a semantic range of “them,” characterized by demonization and clowning.

The program opens with two videos of Chávez speaking of resistance to power. One of the videos is comment Chavez makes to the cameras in what seems to be a casual interview. The other two, one used to open the show and the second one used to close the interview section of the show, are video of political meetings where Chavez describes the imperial dominance of the US and the strength for resistance of the Venezuelan people. In the first video, Chávez was standing alone telling a personal story and looking directly at the camera. He narrates a story about wanting to play the guitar since childhood and realizing, as an adult, that being left-handed made the task very

difficult. He then declares that the right-handed people wish to rule the world and declares, “We are here, the left-handed people are here, left-handed conduct, that’s it, left-handed conduct!” (00:16). The right-handed people are the antagonists, the “them,” who wish to oppress all others. Chávez uses the image of himself as a child to help shape the construction of the goodness of the victim, which is typical of melodramatic tales (Anker 2014). By beginning the telecast with this video, the antecedents for the Chavista moral worldview are established. “Us” means goodness, art, culture, hope, a child with the desire to grow culturally, “them” means oppression.

The second video of Chavez continues to knit the moral ground. He speaks to a crowd of people in a public meeting. This video narrows even more the melodramatic structure of the overall narrative. A still shot of Chávez with his signature and the phrase “Chávez Forever” is the opening image. A newscast from 2008 appears, with a ticker that reads, “Commander Chávez. In 72 hours the US ambassador must abandon Venezuela.”

The video makes reference to a revolutionary promise of social resistance. The expulsion of the US ambassador was being announced.⁷ Chávez says in the video:

(0:19) “If there were an aggression against the people of Venezuela, then there will be no oil for the people or the government of the United States. Shitty Yankees, you have to know that we have decided to be free, no matter what happens or how much it costs us. It’s enough! It’s enough! Of so much shit from you Yankies. It’s enough, It’s enough! Ojala⁸, as our Arab brothers say, Ojala, Inshala, As-salāmu ‘alaykum⁹, ojala someday the people of the United States will have a government with whom one can communicate, ojala, someday, son, sooner than later that country may have a government that respects the people and the governments of Latin America. We don’t ask them for anything more. Only that they respect us, because we deserve respect. [*the audience begins a chant that says, ‘like this, like this, this is how you rule’ while moving their fists in the air*] I expect, and I am not going to ask the other governments to do the same that we do, no. Everyone is free,

⁷ Accessed at <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/17496/chavez-expulsa-al-embajador-de-eeuu-de-venezuela/> on January 4, 2015.

⁸ The Word Ojalá derives from the Arab Word Inshala, which means “God willing”

⁹ Arabic Muslim greeting that means “peace be with you”

but...well, well, the day when all of us South Americans begin to sing like a single rooster, they will respect us. Yes, they will respect us. That is the secret. The day we speak with just one voice, we will be respected by the powerful of the world. They have kept us divided. Each one defending their own interests. We don't. We defend and will always defend, the dignity of our people to the last consequences."

This semiotic layer establishes the morally condemnable nature of Yankees, who are dangerous and abusive but not to be feared by "us." An "us" that includes other victims around the world "our Arab brothers." The symbolic code of the US is connected to the emotion code of anger by Chávez. The program addresses the revolutionary commitment to social resistance in honor of the everlasting ubiquitous leader who fought so hard for "us." Resistance defines the position of Chavistas as heroes, even in the absence of Chávez.

Chaderton tells a story of the US committing human rights crimes around the world based on financial interests. He uses rhetorical figures like hyperbole, personification (treating the US as a person), irony and metaphor. He makes emotional and physical references by using nouns like "fondness" and "addiction." Consider, for example, the following two examples characterizing the United States (they)

(34:09) "They have a fondness and an addiction¹⁰ to war. They need war, because war is a business. War means killing, on the one hand. But because it is not profitable to resuscitate, because resuscitating has not yet been invented, reconstruction is the business. So reconstructing Iraq, for example [a silence is made, he nods and then continues] Halliburton! A company of which Dick vice-president of the US Cheney was president. They would sell to them from burgers to boots to weapons or medical equipment...it is a war conceived to be a big business"

(35:50) "...just think of the amount of deaths they caused in Guatemala, Salvador or Colombia...everywhere, and then there are also the selective deaths, in the senses that they are numerically less in countries like Uruguay and Brazil. So the Barbarians of our time are the imperial governments. The empire is making a strong

¹⁰ The words used in Spanish are "afición" and "adicción" which have a similar sound, giving poetic rhythm to the phrase

effort to destroy the ‘bad’ example Venezuela is, because we have resisted for over 15 years”

The irony implied by the use of the term, “resuscitation,” ridicules “them.” Venezuelan is portrayed as a heroic “us” that resists an empire’s desire to destroy a dangerous, brutal empire.

Several semiotic layers contextualize the melodramatic plot constructed in this telecast of *Zurda Konducta*. Perhaps the most relevant element is the framing of the communicational instance within a “morally polarizing worldview” (Anker 2014).

Although melodrama has traditionally been associated with moral conservatism, the political left has also made extensive use of the genre (Gerould 1994). In this case, for instance, the blame for world oppression of the minorities, “the left-handed” is placed on the leaders of the “right-handed,” The United States. The people of Venezuela, the “us,” are strong and willing enough to resist this powerful enemy because Chávez redeemed them. The melodrama is not just about a pure but courageous victim and an evil enemy, but also about the loss of physical man turned into a deity by death, The eternal commander, as he has been posthumously called through government-funded propaganda campaigns. Chávez acts as the prototypical character (Loseke 2012) after which the heroes of the story are shaped.

In the interview, consonant with Gerould’s (1994) concept of the melodrama of the left, Chancellor Chaderton victimizes Venezuela but also attributes to it a capacity for resistance to a great enemy. Chaderton says:

(36:31) “The great disruptor is the empire. They cause problems everywhere; they cause tragedies, death, the destruction of countries. Libya, for example, could have been a hard country, but there, everyone could eat, everyone had access to education, the country was unified, in the midst of a tribal culture which could have caused serious problems. However, Gaddafi’s iron hand kept the country united. Today the country is mostly dominated by the Islamic State, which is a creature of the United States, like Al-Qaeda was their creature too.”

These lines come after a discussion commentator and interviewee have over the existence of an international media protection of the US. One of the program hosts had asked a question about the “media axis” (36:20) “A question about the media axis, Madrid, Miami, Mexico, Peru against Venezuela...” Chaderton interrupts and says: (36:56) “Do not forget Santiago in Chile, there is where the anti-chavista left resides” another host asks: (37:02) “Do they publish the same kind of information about human rights violations in the United States as is published against Venezuela?” Chaderton then answers: (37:17) “No because it is understood that those incidents that occur in the United States are not the responsibility of the system but random acts by deviant individuals” By mentioning the Human Rights violations of the United States that will not be covered by the international press, Chaderton is denouncing the extensive media coverage of the human rights violations of the Venezuelan government during the student protests of 2014. This is not explicitly said, but the political timing of the interview coincides with the questioning of the repression the government exercised against the student protests a year before in Venezuela. Speaking of the iron-hand of Gaddafi as the unifying factor of a people in this context implies that perhaps the oppression of the students in 2014 was, after all, simply necessary for the greater good.

In sum, anti-imperialism is the moral value of the Venezuelan government, the leaders of the true heroes, the Chavistas. An evil enemy seeks to destroy Venezuelans, and there are many other economic powers that support the evil US, and its creation of monsters like Al Qaeda. This is a melodramatic construction of a clear division between the evil “them” and the impeccably good “us.”

Types of People

A melodramatic narrative throughout the interview has established who are the villains and the heroes, but the entire production and design of this program is also part of the bureaucratized Revolutionary Government of Venezuela. This is national television and from it an active attempt is daily reinforced to sustain popular support by reaffirming a national identity largely built on the discursive legacy of a now absent leader, Hugo Chávez, who is the prototypical hero. Even though this program is about the sanctions by the US of seven individuals, the story of these specific individuals is not told, since they would not reinforce the prototype of a hero. They were sanctioned for acts of corruption. The story of Venezuela's achievements in terms of social development as a result of the revolution's emancipation is not told either, because the socioeconomic crisis at the time of the interview would not help either the reinforcement of the hero prototype. Only the evilness of the US is described, and its allies and victims around the world are referenced. The symbolic code of a villain in relation to its victims and allies is the resource that is left to construct the prototype of the hero.

The "eternal commander" works as the main prototype character. He acts as a powerful outspoken and now ubiquitous detractor of imperialism. The US, represented by Obama (as excerpts of the telecast analyzed further down will show), as the prototypical character, are the evil murderers in the name of neoliberalism. Venezuelan local elites and international media are the allies, the enemies that are in some cases powerful and in some cases fools.

The stories told so far imply that Chávez is good, morally superior, and an authority figure, while his opponents are evil and need to be stopped. The main conductor of the program makes a linkage from the very introduction of the show between the program's narrative and that of Chávez. The conductor says that the program is truthful and implies that it is also rebellious, in the image

and likeness of the late leader: “you are welcome to the only program that does not do audiovisual speculation” (03:20), which attests to the good and truthful nature of the program’s intentions. He then adds, “We begin with the left hand, with Chávez’ left hand.” By saying this, he states that he will act as Chávez would. This last phrase “with Chávez’ left hand” is repeated four more times by the conductors throughout the program.

Our perception of the world is influenced by our socially constructed preconceptions, some of which may be individual, but most are unquestionably social (Zerubabel 1999). The idea of “acting as Chávez would” is a clear example of a socially constructed preconception. Chávez represents a way of perceiving the world. A Chávez type of person is morally sound and courageous. A Yankee type of person is abusive and dangerous.

From the introductory segments of the data, what Goffman would call the “platform format” is established. A platform format is the arrangement that constitutes “the set up to convey an activity to a given audience” (1983:17). Both the videos and the conductor’s introduction serve to delimit both the melodramatic plot and the types of people in the tale.

The US is cruel and vicious. The conductor of the program announces that the program will address

(03:57). “the Manichaeism and imperial madness, the need to generate conflict everywhere, of transporting conflict everywhere, although they [the US], internally, erode human rights and have a population subjugated to an economic crisis while doing everything to try to lower oil prices so countries like Russia, like Iran or Venezuela end up incapable of fulfilling economic obligations with the US people”

Symbolic codes and emotion codes are combined here to develop a type of person (Loseke 2012). Three main types of people are established in the the data: (1) the US villain, (3) the Chavistas, who the heroes, (2) the victims, who are the people of Venezuela before Chavez liberated them

and other victim brother peoples around the world and (3) the allies of the US, who are divided into fools and powerful allies.

The conductor describes the US's insistence in harming Venezuela and the Venezuelan people's moral strength and capacity to resist, and uses Obama as the prototypical villain:

(07:10) "Obama launches a sort of national emergency. ... They want us to give up by deterrence. [They] try to make us abandon our impregnable will of following up on Chávez's idea. And we tell them, 'We have a problem in our spine that does not allow us to bend our knees.' We respond with Bolívar's words: 'only through rebellion can a people attain freedom and through freedom can a people be powerful'"

Venezuelans are strong and ferocious, they are the heroes:

"This a ferocious people, this is the people of Chávez, the people of Bolívar, the people of Sucre, the people of Manuelita Saenz, the people of Atanasio Girardot, the people of Ricaute [heroes from the independence period of the nineteenth century], the people of El Che, the people of Fidel Cartro [independence heroes of contemporary revolutionary history]" (05:55).

The program conductor mentions the prototypes of allies within the Venezuelan opposition by calling their names: (06:05) "It is wonderful, Mr. Ledezma, if you are watching us, Leopoldo López, Capriles Radonsky, Maria Corina Machado, you are the Corinthians." The commentator presents these public figures from the political opposition as prototypical characters representing the internal enemies, who help the US. The Venezuelan opponent type of person is then based on them. He continues to indicate how opposition people have no faith in the relevance of the revolution, and that makes them fools: (07:30). "Even if some people in the opposition may say, 'Obama, Obama!' [with dismay] do you think Obama is going to pay any attention to Maduro? Maduro is a midget in diplomacy" implying that they do not understand the strength of Maduro. The Venezuelan opposition represents a group of foolish allies to the US. A commentator asks:

(40:43) “Do you see a war scenario, like the one you are describing with your tale especially about Lybia, Syria and Iraq in Venezuela? And what is your opinion about those Venezuelans that are perhaps in the US, whom we have seen in recent days, protesting in front of the OAS offices...who are maybe full of political thirst and emotion, because Obama ventures with this type of announcement, like the one he uttered today [*referring to the US Executive Order*].

Chaderton answers:

(41:12) Well, those people that protested in front of the OAS have caused me serious trouble, maybe I will open an inquiry about them with Jorge Rodriguez, who is a psychiatrist. Because in the morning when I arrived to the debate about Panama, the one we won 29 runs to 3, the young people, little daddy’s boys and girls that were there, some of the girls were very pretty, by the way [*laughs*], they were waiting for us and screamed at me “fascist, fascist!” And I thought, they are calling me a fascist? And yes, they were talking to me! With that identity problem, I went into the debate and I don’t know how we managed to make it go well, because I was beside myself. Then, when I came out, they scream at me again: “murderer, murderer!” This is so naïve, I would even say they had a certain lightness which makes me think that they are like robotic youth, so poisoned that they believe anything you may tell them....Those young people pee themselves out emotion when they see a gringo.”

It is implied that the Venezuelan opposition is ignorant and not worthy of respect. Saying that he may open an inquiry about them with Jorge Rodriguez who is a Chavista politician but also a psychiatrist is an ironic phrase referring to their madness. Also, making reference to the young women’s beauty, calling them daddy’s boys and girls, robotic youth who pee themselves when they see a gringo, serves to construct a “type” of person. He is implying that the people who participate in the student movement: are rich spoiled and alienated fools. This is again a reference to the student protests of 2014. Chaderton clowns and degrades (Klapp 1954) the youth of the opposition. Klapp says about clowning the fool that

If the treatment of the fool is gentler than that of the villain, this is only because he is regarded as too silly or senseless to mean what he does or accomplish his aims; but he is nonetheless an offender against norms of propriety, and hence is a sufferer of comic justice. (1954:61)

So two types of allies are clearly distinguished in the tales told in the interview: (1) powerful people, especially from the media (the media axis) but also from political factions in other countries (the Chilean left) that act as accomplices to the US, and (2) the fools, who are Venezuelans inside Venezuela or living in the US who are ignorant and blinded by capitalism, represented by the specific political figures mentioned in minute 6:05 as the Corinthians and the young ignorant, snobbish and spoiled pretty boys and girls from the student movement.

As Zerubavel (1999) argued, the meaning of a given symbolic code derives from its relationship to other symbolic codes. So in this case, the US villain is contrasted in relation to the symbolic codes of its allies, some of which are powerful and some of which are just fools.

Chaderton declares, (35:30) “The US is the greatest violator of human rights in the world. ... Their judicial system is history,” yet he adds that the international press [the allies] would never denounce these violations in the way they would denounce violations in other countries like Venezuela because there is “a network of complicity” (37:15), that is, a network of allies. The level of credibility of this statement made by Chaderton contrasts with the credibility Chávez may have had back in September 2006, when he said at the 61st Assembly of the United Nations, in New York City that Bush had left a smell of Sulphur in the podium. At the time of Chaderton’s interview the Venezuelan government had been accused of grave violations of human rights and corruption scandals and the “hierarchy of credibility” (Loseke 2010:35) of revolutionary politicians was significantly lower.

According to Zúquete (2008), Hugo Chávez sacralized himself and the political project by using religious metaphors, he made himself out to be a hero comparable to a god. For Galbán and Molero de Cabeza (2008), on the other hand, the main rhetorical characteristics of his narrative

was the warlike metaphorical articulation, by which he made himself a hero comparable to a liberator like Simon Bolívar was. What is clear, however, is that his role as the uncontested political leader of the revolution was boosted by his rhetoric which he used to position himself as the prototypical hero of the revolution. The deed of demonizing Bush with a humorous remark in an international official space, without any apparent negative consequences (no official sanctions were issued), added to the construction of him as a “hero” of the resistance against the threat of the US villain in the international arena. The interconnection of the symbolic code of US villain and the emotion code of anger and disrespect made by a hero of resistance was, in this case successful, turning this incident into a widespread cultural reference.

Many of the circulating images of the US villain in the narrative of the Venezuelan government today have their origins in the use of the codes of Hugo Chávez. Current Venezuelan actors like Roy Chaderton imitate constantly the ironic and warlike rhetoric of Chávez’s narrative, but they may not succeed in become prototypes of heroes themselves due to changes in the political sphere like the human rights violations of 2014 during the student protests. The sort of symbolic connections that new Venezuelan political actors create may not be using sufficiently expanded socially circulating narratives in the Venezuela post-Chavez. For instance, in this interview, Roy Chaderton constructs a fictional story of a US invasion and describes with irony the foolish characteristics of some internal allies of the US, as exemplified earlier. He uses Chávez’s vocabulary, “escuálidos” (the word means “scrawny” in English, and it is a term Chávez used for opposition members) and “chavistas.” He makes an ironic joke and resorts to a warlike rhetoric to refer to the opposition as fools. Chaderton establishes the premise that a Venezuelan oppositor could be foolish enough to ask the US for an invasion but would in the process be killed as well. The joke ends as follows:

Those who would hurt us would not have pity on anyone. Besides, bombs do not have identification devices for political militancy of any type. Bombs are generous because they share harm equally with everything they come into contact with. Guns fulfill the same purpose, and snipers always point to heads. But a time arrives when the head of an “escualido” is not any different from the head of a Chavista, except for its content. The sound produced by an escualido’s head is quieter—it’s like a click—because the cranial space is empty.

The problem with this particular metaphor is that by the time it was used, students of the opposition had actually been shot in the head during the student protests of 2014 by armed law enforcement agents of the Venezuelan government. Until Chávez’s death, broadly known accusations against his government had to do, mostly, with acts of corruption, institutional deterioration, and technical incapacity, but not with violations of human rights. When Chavez made remarks like this, it was not as easy to associate them with concrete violations of human rights within Venezuela. The construction of the prototypical fool could have been effective if Chavez had said something like this. But Chaderton’s use of irony here trying to relate the symbolic code of an external enemy to the symbolic code of an internal foolish type of person does cannot escape to the socially circulating knowledge of the visible human rights violations committed by the government after Chavez’s death.

CONCLUSIONS

For Eakin (2006), narrative is not only the container of a story but actually the reflection of lived experience. The collective emotional experience of Chavism sustained the group identity while the revolutionary process was inspired by the charismatic leader. However, today, although the leader's narrative is being constantly imitated, perhaps to try to reaffirm a collective identity, the bureaucratized revolutionary leaders do not seem to have the same "emotional attachment" (Shamir et al. 1993) with their audience.

Perhaps the group identity of Chavismo, which was central to the original nation-making processes inspired by Chavez, can no longer exist in the dramatic conditions of socioeconomic and sociopolitical crisis the country is going through. The death of Hugo Chávez may not have represented the death of a warlike and religious rhetoric, and a melodramatic narrative with pure evil and pure good, but it may have been the end of emotional communion among Venezuelans that could have lost faith in political project that uses more rhetoric resources to sustain power than effective social action.

Using elements of the leader's narrative will not restore popular support to his successors. A bureaucratized Revolutionary Government does not represent the prototype of holy warrior hero. On the other hand, minor diplomatic sanctions like the US executive order against specific individuals accused of corruption does not represent a major source of national security concerns. To reinstate Chavismo as a national identity and to restore an emotional connection between the

people and the government regime would require more than a symbolic interaction based on the figure of a dead leader.

The anti-American narrative, in the post-Chávez Venezuela may not be effective to influence mass audiences if the villain does not offer further elements to make a stronger association between the symbolic code villain and the emotion code of hatred. Theoretical tools of analysis like symbolic codes and narrative can be very valuable instruments to ask empirical questions regarding the moral grounds upon which problematical political behavior is based.

The understanding of the symbolic universe of a people, their ideas about how the world works or should work, is required for effective political propaganda. In this regard, Zeruvabel's (1999) distinction between indicators and symbols gains importance. Perhaps what makes a socially constructed connection between a signifier and signified to create an effective symbolic code is its proximity to being perceived as an indicator. In other words, the more a symbolic code seems to be naturally attached to an emotion code the more effective it will be.

The fact that in Latin America, the symbolic code of the US villain constitutes a socially circulating narrative traditionally effective for counterhegemonic movement mobilization (Ferreira Navarro 2014) it may not be enough to serve now as a "historical narrative" (Zeruvabel 1999:68). In other words, it may not be a strong enough symbol to serve as the milestone for the current historical narrative considering that it competes with other historical narratives such as corruption scandals of counterhegemonic governments still in power also known for very recent human rights violations.

If social groups follow systems of meanings and identify emotions as appropriate or inappropriate and will establish systems of loyalty for its members based on the degree to they must obey the code, then understanding the operationalization of such systems of obedience is

crucial to understanding social groups. As seen in the theoretical discussion, emotional vocabularies and syntax are key aspects of these operationalizations. Understanding meaning making in collective emotional experience requires asking questions about historical, cultural, and political contexts. When grave sociopolitical crisis emerge and democratic practices are threatened it is important to understand what factors contribute to the prolongation and reinforcement or rejection and termination of obedience to the dominant political forces.

The data in this study shows a prominent Venezuelan political actor who belongs to the political force in power use, on the state television channel use a vocabulary and syntax that could, under different circumstances, create an emotional experience of outrage with serious practical consequences. However, the sociopolitical situation is such that such types of vocabularies and syntax are used regularly without drastic practical consequences. The melodramatic narrative has dominated the political narrative to such degree that the hyperbolic division between good and evil no longer seems to be impactful. Behind such a desensitization lies a moral mesh that needs to be empirically observed if the melodrama is to be controlled. Pure heroes, villains and fools can only serve a political tools to hide shades of gray where deeper social problems may be found and addressed sensibly. Simplifications of types of persons can only lead to very dangerous simplifications of types of solutions. A country with a crisis as deep as that of Venezuela can only benefit from analytical efforts seeking to dismantle the simplifications that its political narrative has fallen into.

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