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Oil Extractivism Crisis According to Venezuelan Emigrants in Santiago de Chile between 2017-2020

Crisis del extractivismo petrolero según venezolanos que emigraron a Santiago de Chile entre 2017-2020

Flavio Augusto Salgado Bustillos¹ & Marinelly Díaz Lira²

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the impact of the collapse of the oil extractivism on the life trajectories of Venezuelans who emigrated to Santiago, Chile between 2017 and 2020. Regarding the methodologies, the semi-structured interview was conducted. Through the reflective thematic analysis of 19 interviews, it was found that the crisis of the extractivist model made it difficult to manage the daily life of the subjects and set up a context of departure that promoted a forced displacement of people starting in 2016. The relevance and originality of the research lies in its approach to the Venezuelan crisis from a socio-historical perspective that made it possible to define the political and institutional background in which Venezuelan emigration takes place, to demonstrate the responsibility of the Venezuelan State in the violation of the human rights of its nationals and to characterize the survival mode of Venezuelans who decided to emigrate.

Keywords: 1. sociopolitical crisis, 2. forced migration, 3. oil extractivism model, 4. Venezuelan migration, 5. Chile.

RESUMEN

La investigación tiene como objetivo analizar las incidencias que tuvo el colapso del extractivismo petrolero en las trayectorias de vida de los venezolanos que emigraron a Santiago de Chile entre 2017 y 2020. En cuanto a la metodología, se utilizó la entrevista semiestructurada. Así, a través del análisis temático reflexivo de 19 entrevistas, se constató que la crisis del modelo extractivista dificultó la gestión de la vida cotidiana de los sujetos y configuró un contexto de salida que impulsó un desplazamiento forzado de personas a partir de 2016. La relevancia y originalidad de la investigación radica en abordar la crisis venezolana desde una perspectiva sociohistórica que permite definir el trasfondo político institucional en el que tiene lugar la emigración venezolana, evidenciar la responsabilidad de tal Estado en la vulneración de derechos humanos de sus connacionales y caracterizar el modo de supervivencia en que se encontraban los habitantes que decidieron emigrar.

Palabras claves: 1. crisis sociopolítica, 2. migración forzada, 3. modelo extractivista petrolero, 4. emigración venezolana, 5. Chile.

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INTRODUCTION³

The migration of over seven million people from Venezuela to Latin America and the Caribbean in the last five years (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021) was a total social fact, in the words of Mauss (2009). This is because there are multiple political, social, legal, and economic causes and forces involved, as well as scientific narratives that shape it. On the one hand, there are legal frameworks and government measures that restrict or contain Venezuelan mobility in the Latin American continent, and that have left their mark on the life trajectories of these migrants due to the impossibility of regularizing their immigration status and obtaining work contracts that allow them to access social protection. On the other hand, there are political discourses that criminalize Venezuelan migration and, lacking empirical basis, blame it for the increase in crime rates in cities such as Bogotá, Lima, and Santiago (Perilla, 2020).

There are also economic and political factors inherent to the context of departure and arrival, which influenced the decision to emigrate. Among the factors that triggered the crisis of the extractive model during the Maduro administration, one can count the decline in oil production (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC], 2019), the international sanctions that prevented the Venezuelan State from accessing its assets abroad (gold, dollars, and oil refineries) and selling oil on the international market, as well as the abrupt plummeting in oil prices, which at the end of 2016 were priced at USD 35.15 per barrel (Reuters, 2016).

In the case of Chile, the entry of Venezuelans through unauthorized crossing points motivated the militarization of the Chilean border, which caused diplomatic tensions with Peru and Bolivia. There were also xenophobic attacks such as those recorded in the city of Iquique during 2021, where a group of protesters burned the tents that Venezuelans used to spend the night in squares and beaches. This hostile climate towards Venezuelan migration was reflected in the Cadem survey, where 77% of participants considered the arrival of immigrants to Chile as *bad* for the country (García, 2023).

Therefore, studying Venezuelan migration in Chile from a forced migration approach seeks, on the one hand, to raise awareness in the Chilean State about the need to guarantee the human rights of more than 440 000 Venezuelans who had migrated to that country by August 2023 (Plataforma de Coordinación Interregional para Migrantes y Refugiados, 2023). On the other hand, it also aims to make visible the responsibility of the Venezuelan State in the violation of human rights of its citizens, by not being able to guarantee the ways of life or the dignity of people in a context where the Maduro government insists on classifying the Venezuelan diaspora as an economic migration, attributed exclusively to the international sanctions imposed on its administration (EFE, 2023).

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Hence the importance of examining, from a socio-historical perspective, the structural and conjunctural factors that shaped the socio-political crisis under said president.

This research is qualitative, and aims at examining the impact of the collapse of oil extractivism on the life trajectories of Venezuelans who emigrated to Santiago de Chile between 2017 and 2020. The article is structured in five sections. In the first, the concept of forced migration is used to distinguish the two migration flows from Venezuela of the last 20 years. The second section defines the conceptual categories employed in the construction of the object of study. The third section is the methodological section of the research, defining the perspective, as well as the techniques made use of for collecting and analyzing information. The fourth section analyzes the results of the research, while the fifth and final section presents the conclusions drawn from the results, and their relationship with the objective and the conceptual categories used to construct the object of study.

THE CONCEPT OF FORCED MIGRATION

If we accept the premise that Venezuelan migration is a total social fact in full development, then we must also accept that the use of conceptual categories to construct the object of study must be geolocated and limited in time. This implies recognizing the fact that in the last 20 years two migratory groups have taken shape in Venezuela. The first originated in the cycle of oil price booms experienced during the time of Chávez, and corresponds to a profile of a professional middle class that emigrated motivated by insecurity, social polarization, political discrimination, and a rejection of the Chavista political project (Dekocker, 2017).

Unlike the first, the second migration flow was configured under Nicolás Maduro, and its sociodemographic profile and motivations are more diverse, since it includes an impoverished middle class (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2019), individuals from vulnerable sectors, and young people who due to the crisis did not start or did not complete their university studies (Yajure, 2022). The difference between both flows can be clearly seen in Table 1.

Characteristics	Venezuelan migration flow between 1980-2016	Venezuelan migration flow between 2017-2022 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay		
Destinations	Spain, USA, Canada, Australia, Panama			
Means of transport	Air	Air, land, sea		
Educational level	University professional	University professional, technicians, high school graduates		
Age	Between 25 and 35 years old	Between 25 and 35 years old		
Factors that influence the decision to emigrate	Insecurity, expropriations, rejection of the Chavista political project	Deterioration of both institutions and material conditions of living		
Conceptual categories to build the object of study	Qualified migration, brain drain	Forced migration, refuge, economic migration		

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characterization of Venezuelan Migration According to Specialized Literature

Source: Own elaboration based on Clark, 2011; Dekocker, 2017; De la Vega, 2005; Yajure, 2022.

When taking into account the motivations that triggered the decision to emigrate, the sociodemographic profiles, and the routes of Venezuelan emigration in the time of Nicolás Maduro, forced migration can be defined as an external or internal movement of people generated by coercion, including threats to life and subsistence, whether due to natural or human causes. That is, this migration implies a coercion that forces subjects to flee a scenario where their lives and assets are threatened (Alcalá et al., 2007). This external coercion would reduce the field of options when making the decision to stay in or leave their usual place of residence. Thus, factors such as lack of citizen safety, poverty, and inequality threaten people's ways of life and dignity (Betts, 2013). Forced migration is therefore the expression of human vulnerability in a context of economic precarization and violation of human rights (Delgado et al., 2009).

Based on this argument, the concept of forced migration (Castles, 2003; Gzesh, 2008) or survival migration (Betts, 2013; Lester, 2010), used here in a limited and geolocalized way to characterize and analyze the massive migration flow that took place in Venezuela from 2016 onwards, is enlightening to understand how individuals, from subjectivity, transform and give meaning to their life trajectories. This is based on changes and events that are taking place in the political, institutional, and economic sphere, within specific historical contexts, to reveal the simultaneous violation of political, economic, and social rights by the Venezuelan State, who in the midst of the crisis of the extractivist model ceased guaranteeing the ways of life and dignity of people (Bachelet, 2019; Gzesh, 2008).

CRISIS OF THE EXTRACTIVIST OIL MODEL AND FORCED MIGRATION IN VENEZUELA UNDER MADURO

From the 1920s on, the Venezuelan economy has been essentially rentier, since the exploitation and sale of oil in international markets do not depend on production factors such as capital or labor. Since it has no productive counterpart, the rentier model relies exclusively on the conditions exercised by the Venezuelan State as the sole owner of the wealth found in the subsoil (Mommer, 2003). Hence, "oil rent represents a smokescreen with respect to the lag in industrialization, competitiveness, and even in the production of goods and wages" (Jeannot, 2010, p. 274). Among the characteristics of this model, excessive bureaucracy and a lack of equilibrium are highlighted—since the model depends on external factors such as demand, capital, and the price of hydrocarbons on international markets—, as well as an imbalance in power relations that gives the State a dominant role over civil society and the market (Baptista, 2005; Lander, 2018).

To these factors, a scarcely diversified productive apparatus, the export of primary goods with little or no processing, the great weight that oil has in exports, and a more active role of the State in the oil industry should be added (Gudynas, 2017).

Unlike other extractivist models in Latin America, the Venezuelan case stands out in the economic sphere due to a greater State regulation of the economic activity, the concentration on a single product (hydrocarbons), and an about 90% export of raw materials (Gudynas, 2017). In fact, in Venezuela, oil provides 90% of the foreign currency that enters the country, 50% of tax revenue, and 96% of exports (Carmona, 2010).

After the Black Friday event in 1983, which marked the end of the exchange rate of 4.30 Bs. (sovereign bolivars) per USD, inexorably anchored in the myth of Saudi Venezuela, the Caribbean country plunged into a long economic crisis as a result of devaluations, exchange controls, payment of foreign debt, inflation, and increased poverty, which at the end of the 1990s reached to about 75% of the population (Riutort, 1999; Silva & Schliesser, 1997).

The end of the Saudi Venezuela myth was also accompanied by a progressive loss of credibility of the two-party system inherited from the Punto Fijo Pact (Maya, 2005), which consisted of an agreement signed in 1958 by the political parties Acción Democrática (AD) (Democratic Action), Unión Republicana Democrática (URD) (Democratic Republican Union), and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee), to ensure governability after the overthrow of the military government of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

The compound of political and economic crisis reached its zenith in the social explosion of 1989 known as the Caracazo and the subsequent dismissal by the Supreme Court of Justice of the former president Carlos Andrés Pérez. However, during the first crisis of the extractivist model, the stock of migrants in Venezuela remained stable at just over a million foreigners (Berglund, 2005; Pellegrino, 2003), and there was a small emigration of middle-class Venezuelan professionals, mainly to the United States (Pellegrino, 2003).

Although by the 1980s Venezuela had ceased to be an attractive country for international migration, there was no significant increase in human mobility aimed abroad. This occurred basically because the Venezuelan State oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, S. A. (PDVSA), adopted a strategy at that time that privileged production volumes over the final price of an oil barrel. Venezuela produced more than three million oil barrels daily (Monaldi, 2007). Although this strategy did not allow the State to profit at large from the sale of these products, it was useful in meeting the requirements of the social process in a prolonged cycle of declining hydrocarbon prices in international markets, which lasted for more than 17 years.

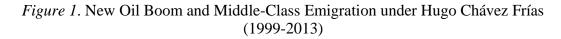
However, this period was not free of political instability such as the coup attempts and the social upheaval of 1989, experienced during the second term of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989-1993). All of this was immersed in a long cycle of low hydrocarbon prices (1980-1999) that had diminished the State's capacity to reduce poverty and refloat the economy.

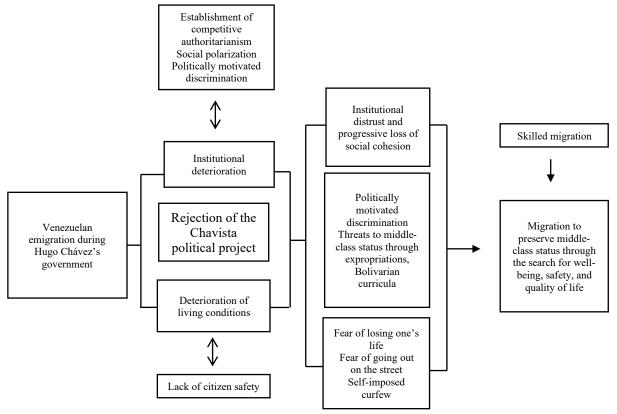
Once his political project was legitimized through the promulgation of the 1999 Constitution, Hugo Chávez Frías capitalized on a cycle of high oil prices (1999-2013), to implement social programs aimed at co-opting the popular bases through social missions and the direct transfer of resources. According to Elías Jaua (vice president, minister in Chávez's time), between 1999 and 2012, 62.46% of the national budget was used for social spending, which is equivalent to investing USD 551 639 million in social programs (Jaua, 2015).

Only between 2011 and 2012 there was an approximate increase of 45% of the real expenditure of the central government, and a public expenditure of around 52% of the gross domestic product (GDP), with a fiscal deficit close to 15% of the same (Bandler, 2013). All of this was fueled by an oil barrel price that reached the USD 103.4 in international markets (Pérez, 2014). Under the Chávez government, a competitive authoritarian regime of military origin was also established in Venezuela (Levitsky & Way, 2004) through the establishment of clientelist networks aimed at gaining the loyalty of social organizations, communal councils, and the army.

Despite the new cycle of oil boom experienced by Venezuela under Chávez, factors such as the lack of citizen safety (Dekocker, 2017), political polarization (Clark, 2011), rejection of the Chavista political project (De la Vega, 2005), and social conflict (Dekocker, 2017) contributed to shaping a middle-class migration flow similar in its sociodemographic characteristics to that which left Venezuela during the 1980s (Pellegrino, 2003), as shown in Figure 1.

6





Source: Own elaboration.

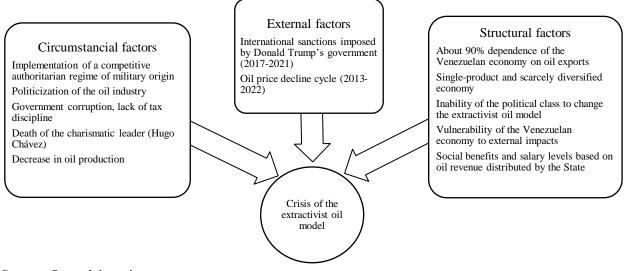
The opposite happened during the government of Nicolás Maduro, when the combination of structural and circumstantial factors combined to implode the extractivist oil model that has been in force in Venezuela for a century (Figure 2). These structural factors include: the excessive dependence of the Venezuelan economy on oil exports; the growth of luxury consumption and administrative corruption in times of oil boom; a single-product, and thus scarcely diversified economy; and legal frameworks aimed at guaranteeing social benefits and salary levels based not on the productivity and competitiveness of companies, but on the oil revenue distributed by the State (Romero, 1988).

Among the conjunctural factors that led to the crisis of the extractivist model, international sanctions against the Venezuelan economy, an abrupt fall in oil production from 3.2 million barrels per day in 1998 to 700 000 barrels per day in 2019, and a new cycle of low oil prices that extended to the war in Ukraine stand out (OPEC, 2019; Pérez, 2014). All of this taking place within a political context marked by the militarization of public administration, by corruption, and by the deinstitutionalization caused by the establishment of a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky & Way, 2004).

Oil Extractivism Crisis According to Venezuelan Emigrants... Salgado Bustillos, F. A. & Díaz Lira, M.

Consequently, the Venezuelan sociopolitical crisis of the 21st century can be explained by the inability of the political establishment of the past and the present to subvert the historical dependence that the State and Venezuelan society have had in relation to oil revenue (Baptista, 2005), by the impossibility of said State to manage and regulate its economy in the face of external imbalances, and by the poor management of the extractivist model by the governments of Chávez and Maduro, which was manifested in the increase in government corruption (The Economist, 2020), the misuse of public resources to finance electoral campaigns, and the politicization of PDVSA, which caused the firing of more than 18 000 workers. Hence, the drop in hydrocarbon prices from 2014 onwards was simply the catalyst that precipitated the decline of the oil-based rentier model in Venezuela (Rosales, 2018).





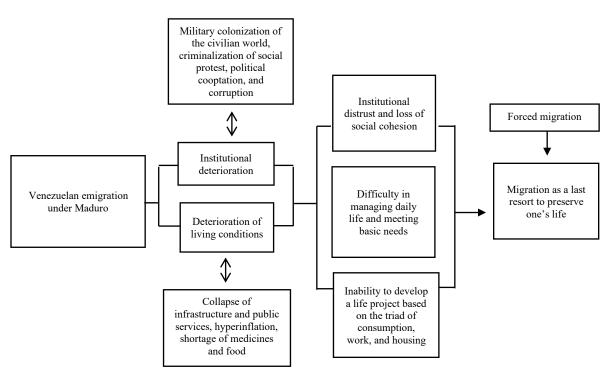
Source: Own elaboration.

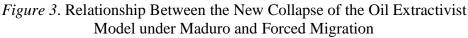
Faced with the decline in oil revenues, the government of Nicolás Maduro declared an economic emergency in 2016, which gave him full power to reorganize public finances, prevent tax evasion, increase production, and speed up procedures to import products necessary for consumption (Meza, 2016). At the beginning of 2017, the Venezuelan president declared an economic emergency for the second time, so as to counteract the effects of the drop in oil prices in international markets. On that occasion, Maduro warned the Supreme Court of Justice about the unviability of the rentier model, given that during 2008 Venezuela had received USD 48.325 million from crude oil exports, while in 2016 only USD 5.291 million were received (El País Uruguay, 2017).

This crisis of the extractivist model warned by Maduro was accompanied by an accrued fall of 43.7 in the GDP in the last five years (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019) and a minimum wage of USD 7 a month, which in 2019 only covered 4.7% of the cost of the basic food basket (Bachelet, 2019). This deterioration of the material

8

conditions of living, together with the implementation of a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky & Way, 2004), caused a forced displacement of people during the Maduro administration (Freitez, 2019), as shown in Figure 3.





Source: Own elaboration based on interviews.

Therefore, forced migration, the current socio-political crisis, and their relationship with the extractivist model serve as an argument to understand how in Venezuela under Maduro, more than seven million people (UNHCR, 2021) made the decision to emigrate "within the constrictive framework of a set of structural factors that offer people only a restricted range of options for their personal and family survival" (Parella, 2022, p. 42).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative, using the semi-structured interview as the information collection technique. The semi-structured interview was chosen as a technique for collecting information not only because it enables to understand how social reality is constructed through a set of rules, values, and symbolic distinctions that allow to navigate one's daily lives (Bauman, 2007), but also because it contributes "to developing the informational potential of conversation to the fullest, as an object of research" (Canales, 2000, p. 36).

10 Oil Extractivism Crisis According to Venezuelan Emigrants... Salgado Bustillos, F. A. & Díaz Lira, M.

The nineteen interviews that make up this research were conducted between June and December 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The following devices were used to collect information: cell phones, digital recorders, and notebooks for taking notes (Table 2).

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Educational level	Marital status	Place of residence in Santiago	Year of arrival in Chile
1	F	38	Master's	Married	Independencia	2017
2	Μ	51	University	Married	Santiago Centro	2017
3	F	60	Master's	Married	La Florida	2019
4	М	69	High school graduate	Married	San Miguel	2018
5	М	29	High school graduate	Single	Vitacura	2019
6	F	57	High school graduate	Estranged spouse	Santiago Centro	2018
7	М	65	High school graduate	Married	Santiago	2018
8	F	33	University	Estranged spouse	Independencia	2019
9	F	48	Higher technical	Married	Santiago	2017
10	F	70	University	Married	Santiago	2018
11	F	38	University	Cohabitation	La Reina	2019
12	F	33	Higher technical	Single	Santiago	2019
13	F	49	High school graduate	Married	Santiago	2018
14	F	66	University	Estranged spouse	La Reina	2019
15	М	25	High school graduate	Single	Santiago	2019
16	М	45	High school graduate	Cohabitation	Santiago	2019
17	F	53	Doctorate	Estranged spouse	Providencia	2018
18	Non-binary	39	Higher technical	Cohabitation	Santiago	2017
19	F	69	University	Married	Santiago	2018

Table 2. Sociodemographic Data of the Interviewees

Source: Own elaboration.

Snowball sampling was used to select the sample, which consists of asking informants to recommend possible participants who may be relevant to the study, given their status as individuals who emigrated during the extractivist oil crisis under the government of Nicolás Maduro (Flick, 2015). The decision to use this type of sampling was due to the difficulty in finding potential interviewees within a context overall marked by mobility restrictions, derived from the pandemic and the self-care measures implemented by some individuals to protect themselves from possible contagion. As such, the criterion applied to the sampling consisted of the selection of:

1) individuals of legal age; 2) individuals who migrated to Chile between 2017 and 2020, a period in which there was an exponential increase in Venezuelan migration to other countries in the region.

The sample consisted of six males and thirteen females; all of them were living in the city of Santiago, and were between the ages of 25 and 70 years at the time of the interview.

The research made use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to systematize the information obtained from the interviews, and then examine the position of the interviewee as an author, with respect to what he says based on reflections and meta-comments. Finally, the Atlas Ti software was employed to analyze the results. Through this systematization, a total of 19 codes associated with their respective quotes were identified.

NEW COLLAPSE OF THE EXTRACTIVIST OIL MODEL AND ITS IMPACT ON VENEZUELAN MIGRATION TO CHILE

The *Decadence and general decline* code network was built through the perception that the interviewees had about government management during the term of Nicolás Maduro. This network is extremely relevant to the present research, as it allowed to address, from the concept of forced migration and the extractivist oil model, the structural causes that triggered Venezuelan migration to Chile in the 2017-2020 period, as well as asking oneself how the second collapse of the extractivist model affected people's lives.

To answer this question, a network was created from 19 codes generated through the *ready coding* and *open coding* functions, available in the Atlas Ti 8 menu, as shown in Figure 4.

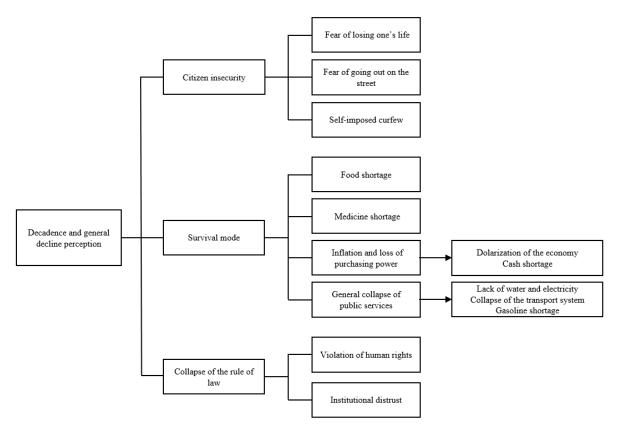


Figure 4. Collapse of the Oil-based Rentier Model and Difficulty in Managing Daily Life

Source: Own elaboration using the Atlas Ti 8 software.

According to the testimony of some interviewees, the decadence and general decline of the oilbased extractivist model began with the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013, and was perceived as a phenomenon that developed in a short period of time, as evidenced in the following interview excerpt:

Well, yes, the decadence had already begun when he died and Maduro took power, that is, there was already a decline [...] the issue was the speed at which everything happened. We fell into decadence, but from one day to the next (Fiorela, personal communication, June 21, 2020).

In light of the question, *how the crisis affected your personal, family and work life?*, the *decadence and general decline* code emerged from the interviewees' imagination, so as to understand the effect that the collapse of the extractivist model had on people's lives and to weave together, through their stories, the sociopolitical scenario that prompted individuals to make the decision to emigrate. The deterioration of the material conditions of living began to be felt when "things began to become scarce, food, medicines, spare parts, and all that impacted us" (María, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

Survival Mode

By means of the survival mode code, the interviewees also described a feeling of alertness in the face of the progressive deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the threats to their ways of life, as evidenced in the following story.

If I had stayed, I would be dead already, I had nothing to eat, and luckily we neighbors helped each other, one of them had relatives who had farms and sold us meat and let me pay later. In my block where I lived, three families are still there when the most, all the others left (Ifigenia, personal communication, July 16, 2020).

This woman, originally from Acarigua (Portuguesa State), states in her story that, if she had stayed, she would have died due to lack of food. As she herself comments, her situation was precarious in Venezuela and she had to resort to networks of friends and neighbors to access animal protein. However, bartering and contact networks were not enough to survive in the midst of the extractivist oil model collapse, since the inhabitants had to figure out how to make food last on a day-to-day basis.

You had to be inventive. For example, we made arepas last with beetroot, with Italian squash, with yuca, with potato. We made the flour mixture grating all of that, and that was how we made the flour last a month (Héctor, personal communication, August 6, 2020).

Therefore, being or feeling as in survival mode was crucial when making the decision to emigrate: "I was in survival mode, the lack of safety, and the health issue. Those are already reasons for you to run away" (Fiorela, personal communication, June 21, 2020).

The dichotomy between leaving or staying due to the impossibility of accessing basic goods is also shared by another of the interviewees, who stated: "I was forced to leave. I had to leave for the well-being of my children, so that they could eat well, dress well" (Ismelda, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

Food Shortage

As observed in the previous section, the survival mode code is associated in the interviewee's stories with the food shortage and medicine shortage codes. According to the Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida (ENCOVI) (National Survey of Living Conditions) (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2019), carried out by the main universities in the Caribbean country, the Venezuelan population lost, on average, 11.4 kilos, as a result of food shortages. This study also warns that at least 8.2 million Venezuelans consumed two or fewer meals a day during 2017. Regarding this situation, one interviewee reports that he had to queue up from the night before to be able to acquire food.

Look, things got tough, really tough, because you couldn't get anything. What's more, I remember now that at the end of 2016, while I was standing in line at a supermarket, my blood pressure dropped. I didn't know anything about that. [...] While standing in line at the supermarket, I left at 12 at night and at about 3 in the morning I got beriberi. Thank God that a friend and an acquaintance of mine were also in line there. Thank God, they took me home in a car (Adriano, personal communication, September 23, 2020).

The food shortage undoubtedly reflects the hardest part of the collapse of oil extractivism in Venezuela, since it affected the daily life and the mental and physical health of Venezuelans, and even placed them in dilemmas such as this one: "I could no longer buy dog food for my dog, either I ate or my dog ate" (Fernanda, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

Sometimes, people saved part of their lunch to eat for dinner, as evidenced in the following account: "lunch was three things, eat two so you can have dinner" (Karla, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

Medicine Shortage

According to the 1999 Magna Carta, the Venezuelan State has the responsibility to guarantee the right to health as part of the right to life. Under this constitutional mandate, various government initiatives were created in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela to guarantee the right to health enshrined in Article 83 of the National Constitution. Among these initiatives are the Farmapatria Network of Public Pharmacies—created with the objective of guaranteeing the population access to medicines at fair prices—and the High-Cost Pharmacies—intended to guarantee medicines to patients suffering from diseases such as cancer, hemophilia, lupus, osteoporosis, hepatitis, arthritis, and kidney failure. Although both programs continue to operate, various organizations have denounced, since 2014, failures in the supply and distribution of medicines. Regarding this problem, the National Hospital Survey reported that in 86 hospitals of 38 Venezuelan cities, the shortage of medicines and surgical materials reached about 80% (Médicos por la salud, 2018).

In this scenario, the Federación Farmacéutica Venezolana (FEFARVEN) (Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Federation) estimated that in 2018 eight out of ten medicines were not available in pharmacies, while the shortage was around 90% in the case of high-cost drugs for diseases such as cancer, diabetes, thyroid, hypertension, and HIV (Fuente, 2018). The report on Venezuela prepared by the United Nations Office for Human Rights denounced that the Venezuelan State had violated the right to health due to the shortage of medicines and the deterioration of clinical and hospital infrastructure. To these deficiencies should be added the lack of contraceptive methods and antiretrovirals (Bachelet, 2019).

As can be seen from the complaints issued by various organizations, those most affected by the unavailability of medicines were pregnant women (Bachelet, 2019), the elderly, and chronic patients (Doctors for Health Network, 2018). In this regard, the reports of international organizations and the stories of the people interviewed are in agreement, as evidenced in the following interview excerpt.

My husband got sick and I had to take him to Barquisimeto. I was desperate and so were the kids. I couldn't get any antibiotics to fight the disease because they were already in short supply, and I had to ask people who traveled to Colombia for them. I remember that they prescribed me azithromycin because he had pneumonia, and it was very hard to get, I already

had my two children here, and well, they convinced me to come (María, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

The lack of medicines was perceived by international organizations and by some interviewees as a violation of fundamental social rights by the Venezuelan State, which even threatened life itself; this is reflected in the following account: "I have to have the right to have basic medicines in a pharmacy. Even food, we are talking about food, medicines, they are violating my life" (Mirna, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

Inflation and Loss of Purchasing Power

Poverty in Venezuela was, in the recent past, associated with a lack of opportunities, informality, low levels of education, rurality, and agricultural work (Riutort, 1999). Nowadays, it is related to income poverty, since this phenomenon affects 96% of the population (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2019). In relation to the loss of purchasing power, a product of hyperinflation, the interviewees experienced a decrease in consumption in areas such as clothing, footwear, and recreation.

My purchasing power was good, I was used to buying clothes, partying, I used to do so many things. And then, with Maduro, I couldn't do any of that. In fact, I had my jeans fixed a lot, I had my shoes repaired a lot, or I would tell my sister who was in the United States to send me clothes, because that kind of thing couldn't be done here anymore. It wasn't thousands anymore, now you needed millions if you wanted to buy something (Héctor, personal communication, August 6, 2020).

As expected, hyperinflation also resulted in changes in consumption patterns in Venezuelan households, whose budget was now mostly destined for the basics: "everything went to food and transport, housing, there was no right to anything else" (Pedro, personal communication, June 27, 2020).

In Maduro's Venezuela, 62% of the population classified themselves as lower class (Latinobarómetro, 2018). For older adults, hyperinflation ended the dream of obtaining a decent retirement, as revealed in the following relation.

The salary and the stamps were not enough; when I left, my salary was merely enough for a bag of flour and at most for a carton of eggs, you see, I just got a call from the engineer who worked with me who is retired, and she told me that with her salary she can only buy a pack of sausages now, and she told me that my coworkers are depressed because they can only buy a bag of flour with their salaries now. They tell me that there is no more staff at the hospital, everyone has left. Me being here, she called to tell me that my benefits check came out, after 25 years of service it was for 80 000 sovereigns, which is not even enough for a carton of eggs, when back then one would wait for retirement to buy a car, to renovate the house; it's horrible (Ifigenia, personal communication, July 16, 2020).

Oil Extractivism Crisis According to Venezuelan Emigrants...
Salgado Bustillos, F. A. & Díaz Lira, M.

Still, people who had managed to retire before emigrating to Chile saw their pensions vanish into thin air: "Well, I retired, had my pension, you are retired for life, but my salary was never enough [...] so you collected but the pension was not enough, you made it to the end of the month but barely" (María, personal communication, June 2, 2020).

Dollarization of the Economy and Cash Shortage

The survival mode that Venezuelans were in was exacerbated during 2017 and 2019 with the emergence of two new problems that they had to face in their daily lives. The first was a de facto dollarization of the economy, which occurred with the government's approval of relaxing the exchange control in force since 2003, allowing private banks to open exchange desks to facilitate currency transactions between individuals. According to Maduro, this measure was to "serve for the recovery and deployment of the country's forces. It is an escape valve. Thank God it exists" (El Nacional, 2019).

The second phenomenon was the shortage of cash that made economic transactions difficult, such as withdrawing money from ATMs, paying for transportation, paying pensions, and purchasing goods and services. According to the president of the Federación Nacional de Jubilados (National Federation of Retirees), Emilio Lozada, senior citizens needed to make up to six trips to collect their full pension, which in 2018 was barely equivalent to USD 1.5 a month (AFP, 2018; El Emprendedor, 2020). Therefore, the lack of cash in Venezuela made managing daily life more difficult. Not only did Venezuelans have to wait in line to buy food, but they also had to buy cash at 20% and 30% rates, because the monetary cone had lost validity as a consequence of the inflationary process and successive devaluations. Regarding this problem that affected people's daily routine, one of the interviewees recalls the following: "I lived through the time when there was no cash, when there was no point of sale in stores and the bank limited cash withdrawals. The Chinese sold cash at a very high price, they took twenty or thirty percent from you" (Juan, personal communication, December 14, 2020).

A similar experience is conveyed in the following interview excerpt:

Cash began to disappear, there was no transportation, there was a line for gasoline, standing in line for gas, I had to do that [...] You had to stand in line at a bank and they didn't give you what you wanted, they gave you a limited amount. You spent three days at a bank and the car that transported the money didn't arrive. No, there is no money, so you went home and the next day you went back until the money arrived; it wasn't much, but it was a little something to pay for transportation (Karla, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

Collapse of Public Services

The constant interruptions in the electricity supply affected daily life to the point of generating mood disorders and setting in motion the desire to emigrate outside of Venezuela, as recounted by one of the interviewees, who lacked electricity supply for seven consecutive days:

The country was breaking down with the passing days. The light went out for a whole week. You can imagine a week without electricity. That week left a deep mark on me, because I cried, during the day everything was fine, but when night came, you couldn't buy food, because there was no way to get past a certain point, they sent us to lock ourselves up because of the insecurity in those areas. That left a mark on me, that on Sunday, the seventh day, that was a Sunday, that left a mark on me and I thought, I have to leave, that was no longer fair. Can you imagine what seven days without electricity are like? (Karla, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

People reacted similarly to the lack of access to water; the lack of the vital liquid became a determining factor when making the decision to emigrate:

The issue of utilities, of access to water where I lived, was a nightmare. I have two small children and so my life revolved around water. That is, I couldn't go out if the water was supposed to arrive, no, I can't go out because the water will arrive, that is, my life was based on when I was supposed to get water [...] it was becoming noticeable, it was something that turned into madness. The two things that caused me to flee were my struggling with water [...] I was already stubborn about that (Mirna, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

In both accounts, all the scarcity that the interviewees endured before making the decision to emigrate to Chile becomes evident, as well as how problems such as the lack of water, electricity, medicine, and food came together in the decision to want to migrate.

Deterioration of the Transport System and Gasoline Shortage

In the interviewees' accounts, the *deterioration of the transport system* and *gasoline shortage* codes are associated, on the one hand, with a perception of disbelief in the face of the paradox of being an oil country without fuel and, on the other, with a criticism of the Maduro administration, whom the interviewees hold responsible for the debacle of the oil industry, which went from producing 3 120 000 barrels per day to 712 000 barrels per day as a result of the operational and financial deterioration of the oil industry (OPEC, 2019).

As discussed above (see Figure 2), this abrupt drop in production, combined with low oil prices, international sanctions, the bureaucratization of PDVSA, and the excessive dependence of social programs on oil revenues, precipitated the collapse of the extractivist model. In addition, there was poor management of said model and government responsibility in the configuration of the current crisis; that is how most of the interviewees perceive it, at least.

Before Chávez, the refineries were working well; in fact, the Paraguaná refinery became the world's leading refinery complex. And what happened then? They stopped doing maintenance, the refineries collapsed; what's more, Venezuela imported gasoline, Venezuela does not even have gasoline to supply itself, and that is because of State policies, the government has a very high percentage of blame for the current situation in Venezuela (Jesus, personal communication, July 11, 2020).

This perception of the role of the State in shaping the crisis is also shared by another of the interviewees.

From being such a rich country, from having oil, to not finding any gasoline, the transport did what it wanted, they stopped working at 11 in the morning, they didn't want to move, because the road was bad there, things were breaking down more and more every day. You had to get wet because the transport didn't go up, you had to walk. And you had to be responsible in your work [...] Before I came here, the previous year, there was no transport anymore, there were buses and you had to climb on top, but not anymore, now there is no transportation, people go on foot to buy food downtown (Karla, personal communication, June 17, 2020).

This account shows how the management of daily life became more complex as public services and the transport system collapsed, and the shortage of gasoline became evident in an oilproducing country with the largest hydrocarbon reserves in the world.

Lack of Citizen Safety

In the stories, the *lack of citizen safety* code appears linked to the *fear of losing one's life, fear of going out on the street,* and *self-imposed curfew* codes. All of this in a context where Venezuela, since the time of Chávez, was among the most violent countries in the world and in Latin America, with a homicide rate of 89 violent deaths per 100 000 inhabitants (Briceño et al., 2009). In this scenario, the lack of citizen safety was experienced by the subjects as a constant feeling of fear that limited their schedules, mobility, and social life, as reflected in the following account:

As a retired woman with my older children, when we were still well off, I used to go everywhere [...] but then things changed and you couldn't even go out in Caracas because of the insecurity. I used to meet up with my friends and come back home until early in the morning, because I don't have any young children, but then the time came, a long time ago now, that I stopped doing that, that I became afraid to go out alone even in daytime (Amelia, personal communication, July 14, 2020).

Thus, this fear of being a victim of crime translated into a loss of freedom, as well as into an inability to enjoy urban life and public spaces intended for recreation.

Collapse of the Rule of Law

Under this code, the perceptions that the interviewees have on government management in areas as diverse as the actions of the police forces and the electoral power are grouped. In Venezuela there is a climate of institutional distrust, as revealed by the Latinobarómetro survey (2018) and the Democracy Index prepared by The Economist (2020), in which Venezuela ranked 143 out of 167 countries evaluated in 2020.

Institutional distrust was embodied in the interviewees in the form of fear, both towards the police and towards other citizens: "I was so afraid that a thug or a policeman would approach me" (Mirna, personal communication, June 25, 2020).

This institutional distrust was also directed towards the National Electoral Council, an organization singled out by the international community and the Venezuelan opposition for its lack of guarantees and transparency in the 2018 presidential elections. This negative perception is shared by one of the interviewees, who refers to the actions of the Electoral Branch.

The corruption and the handling at the government level were worse, with all those traps and with the elections, there was no way or manner to win an election, the National Electoral Council was 100% ruled by the government, there was no option for anyone else (Jesus, personal communication, July 11, 2020).

In the accounts of the interviewees, the *institutional distrust* code also appears linked to an unfavorable perception of government management originating from the inability of the Maduro administration to manage and resolve the sociopolitical crisis.

CLOSING REMARKS

The record of the crisis or deterioration of the humanitarian situation promoted by international organizations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR; United Nations Organization, UN; Organization of American States, OAS) to characterize the situation in Venezuela is useful to describe the effects of this crisis on people's lives. However, it is insufficient to reveal the relationship between cycles of boom and collapse of oil prices and migration flows within a development model in force since the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). Therefore, the concept of *oil extractivism* was useful in this research to define, from a sociohistorical perspective, the historical institutional background where Venezuelan emigration was configured in the last five years, and to revitalize the debate on the role of the State in people's lives, thus revealing the structural condition of the crisis and evidencing the effect of international sanctions on the Venezuelan economy.

Given the single-product nature of the Venezuelan economy, the notion of oil extractivism also proved valuable in relating a set of apparently unrelated phenomena: shortages, hyperinflation, and the collapse of basic services with the intrinsic weaknesses of the development model, which were exacerbated under Nicolás Maduro by the combination of external, structural, and circumstantial factors. Therefore, the current crisis of extractivism in Venezuela has multiple causes that distinguish it from the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, when a long cycle of decline in oil prices was the main catalyst that led to the end of the Punto Fijo Pact and the arrival of Chávez to power.

This relationship between the external and internal factors that shaped the crisis would be determined, first of all, by the very nature of the extractivist model, which places the State as the sole recipient of oil revenue, the State also making use of public spending to transfer petrodollars to the non-oil economy. Between 1999 and 2018, the governments of Chávez and Maduro

increased the monetary base by approximately 2 500 000% as a strategy to sustain public spending (Sutherland, 2018). There was also negligence in the management of oil revenues in both governments, since the various funds created to manage the surpluses derived from high oil prices in international markets (National Development Fund, China-Venezuela Joint Fund) were used to exacerbate public spending during electoral campaigns, and to finance military spending without any type of audit (Transparencia Venezuela, 2021).

Then, the scarce industrial fabric and the excessive dependence on oil revenues by the State have to be taken into account. It will suffice to remember that oil represents 96% of exports and 90% of the foreign currency that enters the country. Thirdly, the inability of the State to regulate its economy in the face of external imbalances must be considered, such as international sanctions and the decrease in oil prices.

Thus, the intrinsic weaknesses of oil extractivism and the circumstantial factors that caused the decline serve as a reference to examine and evaluate how the Maduro government managed the crisis of the model by applying six strategies: devaluing, dollarizing, making exchange controls more flexible, raising the price of gasoline, lifting price controls, and printing inorganic money. As evidenced in the accounts of the interviewees, the implementation of these measures generated a hyperinflationary process that had a considerable impact on the life trajectories of people, who reported that their salary and pensions were barely enough to buy a carton of eggs or a bag of flour.

The collapse of basic services, reflected in the accounts of those interviewed, was one of the main causes that triggered the decision to emigrate. Faced with this problem, the State also played a crucial role, since in Venezuela the basic services (water, electricity, telephone, internet, gas) are in the hands of the State. This State ownership was reinforced during the Chávez government through a process of nationalizations. However, these services have not been managed efficiently under Maduro, due to lack of investment and maintenance, and because of corruption (Altez, 2019).

Under this argument, the collapse of extractivism during the government of Nicolás Maduro not only dramatically affected people's ways of life, but also caused the Venezuelan State to violate the social and economic rights set forth in the 1999 Constitution, as reflected by some interviewees, who claim that the scarcity of medicines and food violated their right to health and their right to life.

Thanks to the stories collected, hidden phenomena were revealed in the scientific narratives on Venezuelan migration, such as institutional deterioration, whose most evident consequences are the lack of independence of public powers, institutional distrust, and corruption. Therefore, the accounts not only show the deterioration of the democratic fabric, a product of the establishment of a competitive authoritarian regime, but also reveal the situation of extreme vulnerability and the social, economic, and political pressures to which individuals were subjected before making the decision to emigrate.

From this perspective, the way of survival of the interviewees represents, on the one hand, the strategies they deploy to manage daily life and try to meet basic needs through barter, support

networks, and rationing, and on the other hand, it describes the obstacles and shortcomings that individuals had to face in Venezuela. This was also manifested in the subjects as a state of mind that drove them to emigrate in the face of an external coercion that threatened or put their way of life at risk. It is from there that understanding Venezuelan emigration under the umbrella of forced migration aims at consolidating a new scientific narrative that allows to demonstrate, through facts, that the mobility of Venezuelans abroad during the government of Nicolás Maduro was of a forced, involuntary nature, and motivated by humanitarian reasons. It would thus be possible for the signatory countries of the Cartagena Declaration to grant Venezuelan migrants refugee status, and do everything possible to guarantee their human rights.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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