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**SPAIN AND VENEZUELA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MIGRATORY
PHENOMENON IN SPAIN DRIVEN BY THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS**

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Dedicatoria

*A todas aquellas personas que emigran de su tierra en busca de un futuro mejor;
Especialmente a mis abuelos, que me cuidan desde el cielo.
También a mis padres, quienes me han brindado las alas para volar y las raíces para
mantenerme siempre firme. Gracias por creer en mí.*

«Finis coronat opus»

Dedication

*To all those people who emigrate from their homeland in search of a better future.
Especially to my grandparents, who take care of me from heaven.
To my parents too, who have given me the wings to fly and the roots
to always stand on. Thank you for believing in me.*

«Finis coronat opus»

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INTRODUCTION

The delicate situation in Venezuela has pushed thousands of people to leave the country in search of a dignified life, giving rise to an unprecedented “migration crisis”¹, as we were able to hear daily in the international news we are receiving through the media in Spain. To the present day this migratory phenomenon has been considered by many studies as the worst humanitarian and migratory crisis in the history of Latin America (ILO–UNDP, 2021, p.13), affecting neighbouring and bordering countries in the region, as it is logical, such as Colombia, Peru, Ecuador or Chile, but also reaching our own lands on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to delve into the extended colonial and migration history that exist between these two nations, Spain and Venezuela, on the basis of the problem that the current Venezuelan *migratory crisis* has caused in the international sphere, but more restricted to explore its impact on Spanish society and politics. To achieve that, this work will analyse the migration policy at the national, EU and international dimension, as well as the status regarding the rights of Venezuelans (refugees and immigrants) residing in Spain. At the end, it is going to be assessed whether the Spanish system is effectively managing the massive migration crisis or whether there is still big room for improvement in aspects such as those related to inclusive migratory policies, employment conditions or integration and social cohesion.

My motivation for writing this paper on such an important topic lies in the good experience I had this year in the class "Latin American Community of Nations and Integration Processes in Latin America" with my current tutor, professor Beatriz Barreiro Carril. This experience motivated me to gain a deeper understanding of this great region and their politics, which have a greater impact and are highly connected to what happens in our country than what we might think at first.

Furthermore, as a student of “International Relations” I have always been interested in migratory flows and I found it very interesting to analyse it by myself, as the media and social networks that we all consume on a daily basis often show a rather negative discourse about migrants, portraying a sceptic image that could be far from reality or that do not really inform of the real reasons and implications behind it.

Therefore, I consider this topic of high relevance for us (as part of the civil society) to truly understand the real implications that the Venezuelan crisis has had on the Spanish migration policy and our politics. I truly believe it is crucial to closely study how the situations stand today, which aspects are working well, and which are not, as well as to forecast, if possible, the situation for future years.

In this respect, the importance of the following paper is justified by the relevance of the crisis it responds to, as is considered the worst humanitarian and migration crisis in Latin American history, and it is expected to persist over time. Consequently, good management of the Venezuela migration flows is also essential in the medium and long term, and not just in the immediate one.

¹ Scholars recommend the use of the term “migration in context of crisis” rather than “migration crisis” but in publications they usually refer to this sociological phenomenon as one of the most important *migration crises* of modern times, just behind the Syrian case (ILO-UNDP, 2021).

This paper is divided in four main sections. The first section corresponds to the *Theoretical Framework* which attempts to be a conceptual approach about migrations and the different status of migrants, as well as it examines and compares the existing theories of international migrations in order to determine which of all would be the most applicable to this subject under examination.

The next section deals with the drivers of the migratory massive outflows in Venezuela, detailing the most intrinsic facts that have led the country to the current social, political and economic *polycrisis*². From being one of the richest nations in the world to an exodus of individuals seeking to better their quality of life in other parts of the globe, this section provides a deep historical analysis from the years in which the former Spanish Empire was the ruler of those southern lands until the most recent events happening right now in Venezuela. In order to carry out this qualitative research, a literature review of experts and researchers from both Venezuelan and Spanish origin has been carried out. Among all the sources, it is worth mentioning the enormous help that the book “Venezuela: 1498 to the present day” of the Venezuelan historian Rafael Arráiz Lucca has offered in comprehending the Venezuelan historical and political processes sequence.

Then, the next section explores in detail what the so-called Venezuelan migration phenomenon itself is. The methodological weaknesses of this section must be considered, due to the fact that Venezuelan mass migration trend in Spain is relatively recent and there is still very little up-to-date material that can be reviewed. For a more complete and detailed picture of this case study a mixed type of resources have been consulted, including the analysis of reports and publications under the framework of the United Nations and think tanks like CIDOB³ and other relevant journals of academic institutions, as well as legal sources and international pacts. Moreover, quantitative data has also been consulted at the Spanish National Statistical Institute (INE) and the municipal register (*El Padrón*) that provide descriptive statistics on migrants of Venezuelan origin residing within Spanish territory.

I must admit up front the limitations of this study as sometimes the sources only covered until the 2022 period. In addition, there is a large lacuna in the socio-demographic analysis (with population-based surveys) of the profiles of Venezuelan migrants, thus it is not possible to draw very concise conclusions either. At the end of this section, apart from the analysis of migration policies and the dissemination of the different situations of real Venezuelan migrants, I will provide an approximation for their level of inclusion in Spanish society focusing on policy effectiveness and employment conditions. This will be carried out thanks to public interviews available in online press and the rather poor existing publications and articles on the matter. Lastly, I will reflect on the role of the public opinion and the civil society in facilitating or limiting the integration of migrants.

Finally, the work ends with a recapitulation of the main conclusions obtained during the research and some recommendations and future projections. Despite of this, given the methodological limitations of this study, any conclusion will not be absolute at all but just a partial reflection on the issue. Therefore, we should wait for new studies and research on the subject in order to complete the lacunas in this project. After the last section, the bibliography with the resources that have been consulted can be found.

² Interaction of multiple crisis at once (World Economic Forum, 2023).

³ Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITIONS

From the very beginning of the history of humankind, various important migratory events in the world have been recorded throughout the ages, as there has been evidence of migration for as long as the human species has existed⁴. People have had to move from one place to another to improve their living conditions, and essentially in search of better economic opportunities, both outside and inside their homelands (Čiarnienė and Kumpikaitė, 2008, p.43).

At the present time, there is no universally accepted definition of "migrant" at the international level, but instead, each State has its own definition, treating migrants on the basis of their very own national standards and processes (Edwards, 2016). However, without establishing a new binding category, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines, by common usage, the term "migrant" referring to 'any person who moves away from his or her usual place of residence, either within a country or across an international border, either temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons' (2019, p.132).

Consequently, a migrant is anyone who moves; regardless of issues such as legal status, the causes of movement, the voluntary or involuntary nature of the move and the length of stay in the destination country (Edwards, 2016) finding inside this quite broad definition other categories of "migrant people" themselves, such as migrant workers, international students or asylum seekers among many others, but excluding from the definition those movements that are due to 'recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimages abroad' (IOM, 2019, p.133) due to their transitory nature and because they do not imply vital reorganisation.

In current modern times, globalisation has enabled this quite ancient human migratory phenomenon to an unprecedented scale due to certain social and material advances such as the improvement of transport and its low costs, the improvement of information dissemination (return migrants, family and community networks) and the audio-visual impact of television and the internet (Dahiri, 2006). In its original meaning, globalization suggest that something is growing; that there is increasing globalism. Globalism is defined in the classical work of Keohane & Nye (1973) as "the condition of the world in which networks of interdependence exist across continents and are connected by the flows and influences of people, capital, and goods, information, and ideas" (p.225).

Some researchers argue that in the last fifty years it has become much easier for people of working age to move outside their country and change their residence abroad. In fact, according to UN data between 1990 and 2015 the total number of international migrants increased by 60%. Therefore, it is not too far-fetched to think that right now in the world more people are living outside their home country than at any other time in history. The IOM estimates that in 2020 there were 281 million people living in a country other than their country of birth, 128 million more than in 1990 (IOM, 2022).

As assessed by the UN Agency for Migration, there is a wide variety of reasons for a person to relocate their existence, life project, and in most cases their household, to a practically unknown place that implies a different social, political, cultural, and economic environment for them. Consequently, migration constitutes a complex anthropological phenomenon that cannot

⁴ In fact, the human species began to leave its place of origin, Africa, about 1.25 million years ago and reached the Americas sometime between thirty and thirteen thousand years ago (Keohane, R.O., & Nye, J.S., 1973, p.227).

be explained in a one-dimensional way. Nonetheless, the humanist theorists who have attempted to explain the reasons behind international migration have concentrated more on the economic drivers (Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, p.7).

According to neoclassical theory, international migration is driven by individual cost-benefit decisions taken to maximise income, driven by differences in wage rates between the country of origin and the country of destination (Micolta León, 2005). Under this theory, the decision to emigrate is analysed on the basis of an instrumental rationality that induces a free choice between the opportunities offered by the market inside and outside the country. Nevertheless, this type of free-will “economic migration” prevents us from fully understanding the depths and dimensions of human behaviour as it cannot fully explain why migrants choose one country instead of another to migrate to (i.e. Spain instead of Italy or England). It is imperative to keep these questions in mind because a modern state needs to be able to foresee (at least approximately) the number and type of migrants that will arrive in order to be prepared with the appropriate structures and resources to attend the arrivals. Otherwise, the disruption (i.e. overflowing public services) of this coexistence would be detrimental to everyone (Tornos Cubillo, 2006).

The neoclassical theory for migrations is part of the study of the macro-sphere (the big picture), that attempts to explain migration on the basis of the large economic differences between the countries of origin and the countries of destination. On the contrary, the labour market segmentation theory focuses on the meso-variable and does not limit itself to macroeconomic figures, but also not about the small magnitudes (which refer to personal and individual decisions to emigrate). Instead, it is concerned with the decisive social environments that mediate between the big figures and the people (Tornos Cubillo, 2006). According to this theory, the labour market is divided into two levels: the primary sector, which is the ‘good’ sector and where everyone would like to go, and the secondary sector, which offers precarious, poorly paid, difficult and even dangerous jobs that are not filled by the natives of the countries that receive migrants (Tornos Cubillo, 2006).

In other words, due to the higher level of studies in developed societies, there is a lack of sufficient number of workers willing to be employed in the secondary sector, thus creating a vacuum⁵ in the labour market, which means that employers do not have other choice rather than to hire immigrants to fill these jobs that are rejected by the natives (Micolta León, 2005). This could also explain, to a large extent, the large arrival of Romanians in Spain (Tornos Cubillo, 2006). Today both Europe and North America are host areas for about one fifth of the world’s migrant population each (Čiarnienė and Kumpikaitė, 2008). Because economic globalization exacerbates inequality among nations, migration becomes for many not just a choice but an economic necessity in order to improve their wages, as globalization has exacerbated the already existing division of wealth in certain parts of the globe (Bauman, 1998).

In Venezuela, there has been a hyperinflationary process that has destroyed the purchasing power of households and that has led to the widespread impoverishment of the entire population that needed to look for alternative job options to survive (Freitez, 2019). However, despite the chronology of income poverty and the deterioration of the living standards, in order to get the existing migratory theories correctly applied to this concrete case under examination, we cannot limit ourselves to think purely in the economic dimension, as this would imply

⁵ According to the works of Popkova *et al.* (2017) a “vacuum” in the Vacuum Theory applied to the labour market is “when there is a lack or absence of necessary skills, talents, or workforce in certain areas of the labour market that need to be filled to meet the demands of the economic system”.

forgetting that the case of Venezuelan migration takes place in a context of humanitarian crisis (Freitez, 2019).

Dr. in Sociology Micolta León noted that there is a type of migration known as “political migration” that is distinct from voluntary “economic migration” or “labour migration”, undertaken primarily to increase wealth. This sort of migration is brought on by political or religious intolerance, extreme conflict in society, or nationalist intolerance. This would include “all movements caused by any kind of war or racial or ethnic persecution, giving rise to the figures of displaced persons, exiles, isolated people or refugees” (2005, p.66).

Venezuela, which was a receiving country for international migrants, has seen a drastic change in migration patterns during the last three decades, motivated by a national crisis that includes both political and economic struggles (Castillo Castro & Reguant Álvarez, 2017). Faced with this worsening of the national crisis, the response of the largest sectors of the Venezuelan population was to flee to other countries so that they could find new opportunities to meet their essential needs (i.e. access to food or medicines) and to help family members who remained inside the country (Freitez, 2019). For this reason, experts have not hesitated in categorizing the Venezuelan crisis as a ‘humanitarian crisis’ considering that this term has been used to describe situations in which “there is a critical threat to the health, safety, security, or well-being of a community or other large group of people” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, n.d.).

This widely accepted definition could correspond to the collapse of Venezuelan economic and institutional structures, which have produced widespread extreme poverty, food insecurity, deterioration of the population's health, increased risks of morbidity and mortality (...) and has led to a significant mobilisation of international aid, added to the government's incapacity to solve the situation (Freitez, 2019). For instance, last year the European Union released over €75 million in humanitarian aid to help Venezuelans in need of assistance (i.e. medicine, food, shelter...) during the 2023 International Solidarity Conference. As an approximation, the Venezuelan crisis has received about €400 million in emergency humanitarian aid from the European Union since 2016 (European Commission, 2023).

All these characteristics fall within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (1994) definition of “complex emergencies”, which highlighted: (i) the inadequacy of local and national capacities to respond to the relief needs of affected populations, (ii) the need of an international response which goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency, and (iii) the requirement of a great demand for logistical capacity which may be in need of special coordination arrangements.

In addition, scholars underline the difference between the concepts of “migration crisis” and “migration in context of crisis”. Migration in crisis contexts (humanitarian or others) is understood as a rational, not necessarily desperate, response to a triggering event (Gandini *et al.*, 2019), that could be with no question applied to the Venezuelan case. On the other hand, the notion of “migration crisis,” which was mostly introduced by the media and specific political figures, suggests a restrictive conceptualization of the political and analytical viewpoint of states and is associated with the irrational behaviour of migrants. This expression highlights how immediate and dangerous migration is to the receiving nation states, which are, allegedly by definition, stable and homogenous entities (Gandini *et al.*, 2019).

Having explained that, now it is important to provide this academic work with some fundamental definitions in the framework of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) before moving forward. As the aim of this research is to understand the effectiveness of the Spanish migratory management, it is crucial to highlight the difference in the categories (i.e. migrant, forced migrant, refugee or asylum seeker) under international law as it determines, to a large extent, the permits that migrants are granted and, consequently, their status in the destination country.

- **International migration:** “The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals” (IOM, 2019, p.113).
- **Diaspora:** “Migrants or descendants of migrants whose identity and sense of belonging, either real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background. They can call on multiple networks, relate to different identities and share a sense of belonging to more than one community” (IOM, 2019, p.49).
- **Forced migration⁶ or forced displacement:** “A migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion. This term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons (including those displaced by disasters or development projects), and, in some instances, victims of trafficking” (IOM, 2019, p.77).
- **Refugee⁷:** ‘According to the 1951 Refugee Convention it can be defined as “a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”; or “who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (IOM, 2019, p.170-71).
- **Asylum seeker:** ‘Based on the definition of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2006), it can be defined as “an individual who is seeking international protection as a refugee, but their status has not yet been determined”. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker’ (IOM, 2019, p.14).

Unlike refugees, who are entitled to the protections outlined in the 1951 Convention, forced migrants do not enjoy such recognition. This fact has prompted a debate on the necessity of redefining “forced migration” by broadening the responsibilities of both the receiving and the sending countries. Some authors have suggested considering under this denomination “people

⁶ At the international level the use of this term is debated because of the widespread recognition that a continuum of agency exists rather than a voluntary/forced dichotomy and that it might undermine the existing legal international protection regime (IOM, 2019).

⁷ Latin America has adopted a non-binding broad definition of ‘refugee’ through the Cartagena Declaration, an international instrument adopted in 1984 as a regional supplement to the 1951 Geneva Convention (UNHCR, n.d.), to which Venezuela and most Central American countries are parties.

who are forced to escape poverty, lack of access to decent work, education, health and security services” (Freitez, 2019). In the words of Anitza Freitez⁸, this suggestion alludes to ‘human rights violations’ so this should be a necessary approach to broadening the definition of forced migration.

Forced migration can be caused when the State does not provide guarantees for the exercise of these rights (or even violates them), to the extent that people leave their place of residence against their will, either because they “cannot exercise their civil or political freedoms (i.e. of expression, opinion or association)” nor can they “enjoy the right to economic and social welfare, to work, to fair remuneration, to rest, to protection against unemployment, or to education” (Mármora, 2004, p.111, as cited in Freitez, 2019, p.42).

In the context in which this research takes place, due to a series of events that will be studied in the next section, the high level of insecurity in Venezuela has driven or ‘forced’ its population to seek for new places which could allow them to live with dignity (Castillo Castro & Reguant Álvarez, 2017). Even the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR⁹) referred to this phenomenon as “forced migration”, considering by its communiqué of 14 March 2018 that significant breaches of human rights occurred, which in fact, obliged Venezuelan people to migrate to other countries for their survival and to preserve essential rights such as life, personal integrity, personal freedom, health or food, among others (Koechlin & Eguren, 2018).

Furthermore, violations affecting all human rights (civil, political, economic, social, and cultural) are systematically repeated in the context of the current political, economic, social, and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, as evidenced by reports from the UNHRC and other international organizations. This raises concerns, particularly for the impact on women, children, indigenous people, and other vulnerable groups that are frequently disregarded (UNHRC, 2019).

The Human Rights Council Resolution 42/25 of 27 September 2019 stressed that there were at least 3.7 million people are malnourished in Venezuela (UNHRC, 2019). Given this information, it seems that hunger is one of the main drives for fleeing the country. Therefore, migration theories like the “macro-neoclassical” or “market segmentation” theories do not seem to be particularly applicable for explaining these days situation of Venezuelan “forced migration” to Spain, even if they also try to find a job that offers them a better salary, it seems that it is more a question of survival. It turns out that this phenomenon we are trying to examine is far more complex. Experts of this subject matter have come to this reflection:

...emigrating is *more* than the search for economic opportunities, for a job... It is also the search for a safe context that allows developing in a simple daily life. The emigration of Venezuelans has been growing particularly in the middle strata of the population, and

⁸ Venezuelan specialist in population and development studies, demography and international migration and migration public policy. Her academic writings have been directed to try and understand the reality of Venezuelan migrants by a series of academic research and quantitative analysis.

⁹ IACHR is the judicial organ of the Organisation of American States (OAS) established in 1959 to promote the observance and defence of human rights in Latin America. However, Venezuela withdrew from its jurisdiction in 2012.

among the most frequent reasons for leaving the country (i) not finding opportunities for individual development and (ii) personal insecurity have been identified (Freitez, 2011, p.19, as cited in Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, p.15).

If we look at the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, we will realise that it broadened the definition of “refugee” for it to include ‘people impacted by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive human rights violations, and other circumstances that seriously disturb public order’ (OAS, 1984). According to this interpretation, those forced migrants from Venezuela would be recognised with the refugee status as well, with the protection this entails.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2017, Venezuela ranked third (just behind Afghanistan and Syria), in number of asylum seekers and refugees over the world (Koechlin & Eguren, 2018). This is why it has become imperative to address in this *theoretical framework* the distinctions in the legal status of the different types of migrants under international law.

And this leads us to the following possible theory to explain the Venezuelan migratory phenomena to Spain: the historical-structural theory of international migration. Unlike the other theories that were unable to explain why migrants choose to migrate to a particular nation rather than another, because otherwise all the Latin American immigration that is in Spain would go instead to another European country with a higher GDP per capita, the historical-structural theory contends that migrants tend to go to countries that have disrupted their economies beforehand (Tornos Cubillos, 2006). According to this hypothesis, migration would occur from countries that have been colonised or have been affected by the economy of a more powerful¹⁰ country, to the metropolitan areas of their former empires (Tornos Cubillos, 2006).

By using this theory, it could be explained in large extent what is the reason behind choosing Spain as one of the most popular nations for Venezuelans to emigrate in the last decades. And in fact, it continues to be the most popular destination country in Europe (IOM, 2020). It is undeniable that both nations share an important linguistical and cultural (even if not geographical) proximity which “dates back to colonial times” (Castillo Castro & Reguant Alvarez, 2017, p.60). Indeed, it has been rare to characterize the relationship between Spain and its former colonies in Latin America as one of otherness; rather, it has traditionally been defined in terms of a shared cultural identity and fraternity, which is embodied by the concept of *Hispanidad* (León, 2019, p.28), sharing values and a common religion.

Finally, as there has been significant historical evidence of Spaniards and their descendants on Venezuelan territory, I pose a question that I will intend to address in the course of the research: “Has this colonial past and exchange of migratory flows helped the Venezuelan immigrant population of present times to obtain the Spanish citizenship, or the residence permit in some cases, more easily?”

¹⁰ Here I use the expression “more powerful” referring to the Spanish Empire that during the 18th century was a prosper overseas empire with large flows of trade and commerce thanks to its “colonies”. This does not imply, however, any comparison in the contemporary era, as there should not be “more powerful” nations than others and all deserve the same amount of respect for their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If this were completely true, it would account for a significant portion of the forced migration phenomena of Venezuelans who opted to flee to Spain, as the legal status and possession of the nationality in the destination country are clearly decisive determinants to explain migratory flows.

Lastly, after having compared the different relevant approaches of the international migration theories while taking the historical and social context of this case-study into consideration, I may conclude that the historical-structural approach seems the most suitable theory for a context as multidimensional and layered as the Venezuelan. Accordingly, this research provides the historical perspective of the crisis and the exchange of migratory flows.

THE VENEZUELAN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS

Before reflecting on the reception of Venezuelans on Spanish territory, it is important to understand the magnitude and the origin of the deep crisis that motivates these migratory flows. That is, to understand the process by which Venezuela has evolved from one of the richest nations that welcomed thousands of international immigrants to becoming a “Fragile State” from which its inhabitants are trying to flee, generating the largest *migratory crisis* that experts have ever documented in Latin American history.

I. Historical Background

After more than three centuries under the control of the "New Granada" of the former Spanish Empire, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (hereinafter Venezuela¹¹) has had a challenging political trajectory since gaining completely legal independence as a sovereign and independent state in 1830 (Langue, 2009).

It all stems back to Venezuela's arduous independence process, which began in 1810 with conspiracies led by Creole (*criollos*) merchants and landowners, who sought to end the commercial monopoly and the abuses committed by colonial officials from the Spanish Peninsula (Musa, 2019). Throughout this process Venezuela went from being a group of provinces without legal-administrative cohesion to a General Captaincy (1777), then to a Republic (1811–1819), then to a department of the Republic of Colombia (1819–1830), and finally to a Republic again (1830), as a consolidated new state.

The first time they could establish a free-will government was when the City Council of Caracas assumed the government of the municipalities that constituted the General Captaincy by a law drafted and signed on 19 April 1810 (Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p.164). Afterwards, on 5 July 1811 the act of independence is signed, and Venezuela officially separates from Spain. This day is celebrated in Venezuela as its National Day (Andrés Bello Agreement for Educational, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Integration, 2023).

Venezuela's 1811 act of independence is considered as the first modern Magna Carta of the Latin American world and marked the "brilliant beginning of Latin American constitutionalism" according to jurist Diego Valadés (El Colegio Nacional, 2022), as it was followed by those of Colombia (1813), Mexico (1813), Argentina (1816) and Chile (1818) (Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p.171). Despite this achievement, 1812 saw a series of calamitous events for Venezuelan patriots' society, such as the 26 March earthquake catastrophe that completed the destruction of Venezuela's political edifice (Parra-Pérez, 1939, p. 403, as cited in Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p.176), leading to the temporarily loss of the republic. From those years onwards, a long period of political instability began in which one important figure emerged: Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), pioneer in the campaign for Venezuela's separation from the Spanish rule.

From 1812 Simón Bolívar, also known as *El Libertador* (The Liberator), led the fight for the independence of some current Latin American countries including Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela (Chirinos, 2023). He wrote this same year the *Manifesto of*

¹¹ The name *Venezuela* comes from 'Little Venice', and it can be attributed to Juan de la Costa since it is on his return from the expedition with Alonso de Ojeda, it can be found that in his famous map of 1500 (*Planisferio*) the name is written for the first time to designate the Gulf of Coquivacoa (Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p.9).

Cartagena, the first of many political treatises of his authorship. Its goal was to analyse the mistakes made by the dissolved Venezuelan republic for the benefit of the people of the New Granada (Britannica, 2024).

The Liberator aspired to form an alliance of nations¹² that would guarantee an effective defence against possible external threats. In 1819, Bolívar proclaimed the “Gran Colombia” (1819–1831) at Angostura, the first step of the regional initiative that he was dreaming to implement. He was finally able to materialise it after defeating in Boyacá the royalist army led by Pablo Morillo in support of the rule of the Spanish crown (Chirinos, 2023). This marked the start of an extended dispute with the royalists until the next decisive victory of the pro-independence forces at the Battle of Carabobo (1821), an event led by Bolívar that was definitive in assuring the liberation of Venezuela (Musa, 2019). This military triumph also allowed the creation of Colombia and the beginning of the campaign for the Liberation of the South. (Rojas, 2010, p.189) Bolívar also freed Ecuador, which became a part of the Gran Colombia, a temporary nation that would soon fall apart (La Vanguardia, 2021).

Making the campaign of 1824, which was to result in the emancipation of Upper and Lower Peru, and the total expulsion of the Spanish from the American continent, Bolívar arrived in Lima on 7 December of that year and from there he would summon The Congress of Panama (1826). He invited the governments already constituted in South America to send their representatives to the great Assembly in order to discuss there the basis for a future Confederation of American Nations in an attempt at international legal unification of the Spanish America (Velarde & Escobar, 1922 p.37). This is considered to be the most far-reaching step, within public international law, for the constitution in Ibero-America of an effective League of Nations, from which contemporary organisations such as the Organisation of American States (OAS, 1948) and the United Nations (UN, 1945) have possibly been inspired by (Cova, 1953, p. 180).

After the Gran Colombia was dissolved in 1830, Venezuela finally became a sovereign and independent state. Following the fragmentation, José Antonio Páez (1790–1873) became the first president of the Fourth Republic of Venezuela in 1931 (Musa, 2019). From 1830 to 1870, the Venezuelan state was based on a liberal democracy, which distinguished the principle of equality before the law from the right to vote, although the political, economic and social results achieved fell short of what the elites of the time intended (Plaza, 2001). Then, Venezuela saw a number of important political transitions from 1870 to 1948. Guzmán Blanco oversaw a period of centralisation and modernisation (1870–1888), which was followed by the instability of military dictatorships and short-lived regimes. From 1908 until his death in 1935, Juan Vicente Gómez ruled in a dictatorial way, consolidating central authority (McBeth, 2003).

After a period of ten years of transition, a coup d'état in 1945 led to the authoritarian dictatorship of Pérez Jiménez until 1958 (Arráiz Lucca, 2013). Thereafter, Venezuelan politics have remained mired in difficulties until the present day, but what is undeniable is that since its discovery in the early 20th century, the Venezuelan oil or “black gold” has benefited the nation in economic terms as much as it has accentuated its political tensions.

¹² Simón Bolívar wanted to see the whole South America united into a single nation, going beyond the localist concept of the native homeland and blurring borderlines by thinking under a “continental consciousness” sentiment that aimed to emancipate the whole region in order to become a superpower in the international arena (Cova, 1958). For this reason, Bolívar is also known as the precursor of Ibero-American *regionalism*.

II. The Oil Curse

There is a widespread notion that having plenty natural resources to exploit in developing countries does not always constitute a blessing but is quite the opposite. This is called the “Resource Curse” or “Paradox of Abundance”, a theory whereby countries that are rich in natural resources like minerals or fuels are more likely to have lower growth rates than those that do not have abundant natural resources, because the rents generated by these assets can create imbalances in the economy of a country and boost corruption, which in turn leads the leaders of these nations to embezzle and/or misuse these revenues inefficiently (Sachs & Warner, 1997).

And as it often involves the intervention of some local officials and politicians, experts also speak of “Political Resource Curse”, that undermines public policies in the countries that suffer from it (El País, 2019). This concept is of great importance for political science as it offers a *theoretical framework* for comprehending the political, economic, and social processes that take place in those nations that are highly rich in natural resources. Venezuela is often cited as an example of this phenomenon and indeed, according to the available academic studies, the ongoing political and economic collapse of Venezuela serves as a warning about the potentially catastrophic consequences that resource wealth can have on developing nations (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Venezuela holds some of the largest proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world and specially in the Americas, only behind the United States (Rodríguez, 2006). However, this apparent blessing has also caused some of the deepest problems in Venezuelan society and politics, and some critics have even blamed many of the current illnesses of the country on oil and its mismanagement by the government (Kelly de Escobar & Romero, 2002).

Back again to the times of *El Libertador*, Bolívar nationalised in Venezuela the Mining Ordinances that had been in force in New Spain by the Decree of 24 October 1829, a transcendental step in reserving the ownership of subsoil resources to the nation (Rodríguez, 2006). Nonetheless, the regime of concessions was used by regional and federal rulers to exploit these resources. This consisted in providing a “license” to exploit those resources to the closest friends of the government, making use of the national oil as a personal asset in order to generate large profits, thus building the wealth of a few families from the elite, as well as bringing corruption in the national industry and social inequality from the early beginnings of the history of the nation (Kelly de Escobar & Romero, 2002).

The “Oil Curse” is also known as the “Dutch Disease”, a term coined during the 1970s after the Netherlands discovered natural gas in the North Sea (Brookings, 2017). Both are terms created to explain when, due to the surge in foreign capitals brought by the natural resource industry, there is an appreciation of the domestic currency (the *bolívar*¹³ in the Venezuelan case) as the result of a surplus in *dollars*¹⁴ available in the market that reduces the exchange rate, devaluates the national currency and boost imports that are comparatively cheaper than national products (Posada, 2015, p.125). This redirects capital and labour from other economic sectors, like manufacturing and agriculture, which analysts claim are more crucial for the expansion and competitiveness of a nation and could end up being an important structural problem in the developing country (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). As a consequence,

¹³ Since 1879 the *bolívar* is Venezuela's monetary unit in honor to *El Libertador* Simón Bolívar.

¹⁴ In this case dollars is the used currency for foreign direct investment in oil.

overdependence on oil has led to a lack of diversification in the economy of Venezuela, making the country highly vulnerable to the international market global fluctuations of oil prices (Stan, 2024).

Historically, the economic and social behaviour patterns of Venezuelan society were characteristic of this *oil culture*, even when only a relatively small portion of the labour force was directly employed in this industry, constituting barely 1% of the total national labour force (Rodríguez, 2006). This has only led to an important fiscal imbalance, lack of investment in infrastructure and human development in Venezuela (Stan, 2024, p. 20).

To a certain extent, the petroleum boom has enabled to reframe potentially volatile people's problems as more bearable resource problems, and that explains why there was more capital investment by the government than human development (Black, 1980, p. 72). In fact, experts conclude that Venezuela is "the archetype of a 'failed petrostate', where oil still plays a significant role over the fate of the nation almost a century after it was discovered" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

By the time General Juan Vicente Gómez passed away in 1935, Venezuela was already suffering from the Dutch disease and had the value of the *bolivar* skyrocketed and oil accounted for more than 90% of Venezuelan exports (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). In an effort to increase the government revenue since foreign companies controlled most (around 93%) of the Venezuelan oil sector, Gómez's successors aimed to reorganize the oil industry with the 1943 Hydrocarbons Law, which obliged foreign corporations to give to the Venezuelan government half of their oil earnings, increasing the government's income by more than six in just five years (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

In 1945 the policy of concessions was finally brought to an end and, in 1948, the authoritarian regime of Pérez Jimenez introduced the right of reversion by which the nation would re-acquire the granted plots of land becoming the owner of all permanent works that were already constructed such as buildings, wellbores or warehouses (Rodríguez, 2006). This would facilitate the nationalisation process of the industry in the following years.

In 1950, while the rest of the world was struggling to recover from World War II, Venezuela had the fourth richest GDP per capita in the world, experienced a sustained growth period until the 1980s (World Economic Forum, 2017). Looking back to the 1960s, Venezuela played a decisive role in the creation of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in an attempt to connect with other countries that exported big amounts of petroleum, most of which were Arab, whose leaders were also concerned by the declining prices of that time (Black, 1980, p.73).

Attended by the former Venezuelan Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo, the Baghdad Conference took place in Iraq in 1962 under the need to coordinate the individual policies of the exporting countries, so that they could increasingly control their national oil industries, which was then in the hands of foreign companies. And to this day, this organisation still sets the price of oil for a significant portion of the total global production (Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p. 385).

That same year the Venezuelan Petroleum Corporation, the country's first state oil business, was founded and the income tax on oil corporations in Venezuela was raised to 65% of profits (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Afterwards, following the steps of other producing countries over the world, Venezuela reserved the oil industry for itself through the Natural Gas Law (1971) and the Law on the Exploitation of Hydrocarbon Products (1973) (Rodríguez, 2006). It becomes evident that the country wanted to decrease the foreign overdependency in domestic affairs they were so concerned about, and to promote the public sector as a mechanism for income distribution.

In the early 1970s, Venezuela experienced a period of economic prosperity and attracted highly qualified Latin American immigrants from countries experiencing socioeconomic crises and military dictatorships, such as Chile, Argentina or Cuba, who came to Venezuela in search of freedom and economic opportunities. These individuals satisfactorily contributed to the socioeconomic development of the nation (Yépez & Marrero, 2021). Actually, from the late 1950s to the late 1990s, Venezuela was considered a stable model democracy in Latin America by other countries in the region (Rojas, 2014).

In 1976, at the height of the oil boom, President Carlos Andrés Pérez created *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)*, a state-owned enterprise to oversee all the oil exploration, production, refining and export processes. The company was given significant amount of autonomy just until the 90s, when the government brought it under its direct control (Strauss Centre for International Security and Law, n.d.).

Following the 1980s, the Venezuelan economy underwent major changes. The war in the Middle East, between Iran and Iraq, pushed oil prices to even higher levels; while the average price of a barrel of Venezuelan oil in 1978 was \$12.04, in 1980 it was \$26.44 per barrel (Arráiz Lucca, 2013, p. 373). In 1982, Venezuela was still the richest economy in Latin America, however, there were some negative factors, like fluctuations in oil prices, currency devaluation, outflow of capital and an increase in foreign debt mainly because purchasing foreign refineries such as the American *Citgo*, that characterised what was to be known as "the lost decade" (Strauss Centre for International Security and Law, n.d.).

From then on, things went rapidly downhill, which is a paradox hard to understand: the external debt appeared when Venezuela's oil revenues were at their highest. In the mid-1980s, the oil glut and falling oil prices eventually decimated the Venezuelan economy, which failed to diversify (World Economic Forum, 2017). According to the World Economic Forum (2017), it was at this time that Venezuela had its first confrontation with inflation, where rates peaked with a high 84.5% in 1989. Venezuela underwent a recession and resorted to use international reserves to finance the external expenditures (Mandry Llanos, 2009, p. 174). It then became clear that the Venezuelan economic model was no longer working well due to the lack of sufficient oil resources, the massive increase in debt and the beginning of the fall in oil prices. As a result, Venezuela was forced to change its political course and a new era for the nation of *El Libertador* began.

Against this complex background, everybody knew that a reform of all public authorities was needed. And that is precisely why the re-elected government (with the 52,88% of votes) of Carlos Andrés Pérez launched a set of orthodox liberal economic measures and a fiscal austerity package as part of a financial bailout by the International Monetary Fund in 1989 (Arráiz Lucca, 2013). However, these measures provoked deadly riots, even if many of them were innocent people who were actually not involved in the vandalism of the protests of "*El Caracazo*" (Arráiz Lucca, 2013).

In the face of the social outbreak, the government of Pérez experienced a crisis in its 1990 election results, culminating in an unexpected military insurrection in 1991 by the insurgent barracks of Maracay, Maracaibo and Valencia, which would end up failing but, that would also eventually come to power by peaceful means, after having sought it by force (Arráiz Lucca, 2013).

At that time, the figure of Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías (1954–2013) emerged as part of the insurgent armed forces. In 1992, he launched a failed coup d'état that made him nationally famous (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The growing discontent over the political and economic mismanagement of the two-party democratic era made that the population partially justified these coups (Buxton, 2018).

With political tensions heightened, in March 1993 President Pérez, who had lost even the support of his party, was removed from office and Dr. Rafael Caldera would triumph in the next elections of 1994, following the neoliberal policies that tried to correct the previous problems (Mandry Llanos, 2009, p.175). Yet, he was not much successful, as by 1996 there was a 99.9% inflation rate (World Economic Forum, 2017).

The dissatisfaction and division between the different sectors of the Venezuelan society would end up favouring the rise to power of Chávez, who in April 1997 managed to mature a “peaceful and democratic revolutionary strategy” that disconcerted his adversaries and defeated them in their own electoral arena on 6 December 1998 (Sánchez Otero, 2024). He was elected under the promise that Venezuela would reduce people’s poverty and that he would raise living standards by relying even more on the national energy wealth (World Economic Forum, 2017).

III. The 21st Century Socialism

The alliance of Hugo Chávez won 96% of the seats in the Constituent Assembly that was convened in 1999, ending the mandate of Rafael Caldera, who did not even want to hand over the presidential sash himself at the inauguration ceremony (Sánchez Otero, 2024; Arráiz Lucca, 2017). Chávez swore his mandate on the 1961 Constitution on 2 February 1999, even if his election manifesto included the near drafting of a new Magna Carta. Once the National Constituent Assembly was established, the drafting of the new constitution began immediately (Arráiz Lucca, 2017, p. 387).

The Fourth Republic founded by General Páez in 1830 would be replaced by the “Fifth Republic” born in 1999 under Chavez’s “Bolivarian Revolution”, that were a series of social and economic measures that directly sympathised with the poorest sectors of the Venezuelan society in order to get the necessary social support. In this political project, the State was the guarantor of the welfare of the excluded population through the use of the resources and income of the nation, which came from oil exploitation (Castro Herrera, 2016, p.79), and that resulted in an unprecedented degree of independence and sovereignty of Venezuela in the international sphere (Sánchez Otero, 2024).

From 2001 to 2007 a new six-year presidential terms begun to Venezuela, overcoming a failed coup d'état attempt in 2002 and with oil prices in full recovery (Arráiz Lucca, 2017). It is at this point that the Republic was renamed to the ‘Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela’, the current name of Venezuela in these days. Article 1 of the Magna Carta reads: "The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is irrevocably free and independent and bases its moral heritage and its

values of freedom, justice and international peace on the doctrine of Simón Bolívar, *El Libertador*. Independence, freedom, sovereignty, immunity, territorial integrity and national self-determination are inalienable rights of the Nation” (Venezuelan Constitution, 1999). This new (and current) Constitution can be considered as the most important basis of the political project of the Fifth Republic. In the first place, it was impregnated with ‘Bolivarian’ ideas as it can be read in the preamble and in Article 1 wherein Simón Bolívar, the heroic figure from the Venezuelan Independence wars, is directly mentioned.

Furthermore, it introduced other important changes in relation to the 1961 Constitution. Firstly, the bicameral nature of the Parliament (the legislative power) disappeared, and it was renamed to the National Assembly. It had a single chamber even though Venezuela was, and is still, a federal state. For the opposition, this determined a composition that was not only incongruous but also unfair, since the four states with the largest populations, of the twenty-two that compound the national territory, were going to hold the majority of seats in this "National" Assembly (Plaza, 2001, p.20).

Chávez introduced other progressive changes in the political sphere through the Constitution such as the figure of the executive vice-president, appointed obviously by him, or the extension to six years with immediate re-election of the presidential term. This way, he ensured his continuity and expanded his power and influence on internal affairs, becoming the Venezuelan head of state with the most personal power in the history. In addition, in order to establish this personalistic system of governance Chávez suppressed any possible criticism in the media and penalised political opponents through legal procedures that would weaken the integrity and independence of Venezuelan institutions from then onwards (Bull & Rosales, 2020). Even some authors spoke of *authoritarianism* in terms of how the power was exercised and, by comparing the Constitutions of 1961 and 1999, they evidenced that it was the beginnings of a cult in Venezuela centred on the personality of a leader (Langue, 2009).

He began the construction of the political regime called “Socialism of the 21st century” that after his death was continued by others in line like current president Nicolás Maduro. Chávez significantly extolled the importance of ethics or morality in the new structuring of power and in the education of the people in the socialist political principles during the Fifth Republic (Plaza, 2001, p.20). He was a charismatic leader and a talented spokesman with such a degree in the emotional even affective register, a master of rhetoric (Langue, 2009, p.263). As a faithful admirer, he constantly quoted Simón Bolívar in his speeches, enshrining the fetish of the national saviour myth, who sacrifices himself for his homeland in times of crisis to save it from chaos, as he also wanted to see himself (Plaza, 2001; Langue 2009; Mesa 2010).

On the anniversary of the death of *El Libertador*, Chávez even said that he was the ‘First Great Precursor of the Socialist Revolution in the World’ and a ‘Forerunner of Equality in Venezuela’, likening him to a deity that humanity ought to emulate and offering not only a consoling account of the past, but also a promise of the future so that citizens would believe in his political project (El 19 Digital, 2020). Nevertheless, what experts say is that there has always been a “Bolivarian Manipulation” throughout the whole Venezuelan history of political thought rather than a real institutional reinforcement in the Republic, and this has favored an inevitable Venezuelan political personalism and populism¹⁵ (Langue, 2009).

¹⁵ The classical definition of populism comprises a “type of political-electoral mobilisation in which a charismatic leader discursively appeals to an ill- defined ‘people’ versus ‘the establishment’”. In radical left populism the mobilisation is towards urban and rural popular sectors of the population (Hetland, 2018).

According to Senior Researcher at the Real Instituto Elcano Carlos Malamud “Simón Bolívar is in reality an elusive character who adapts to what each spectator wants to see in him” (El Mundo, 2021). “We can all find the socialist Bolívar, the revolutionary, the conservative or the liberal one, depending on what we are looking for”. Undoubtedly, Bolívar is an attractive historical figure, “a national hero who, in the end, awakens positive feelings in Venezuelan society, and only produces unanimity” (Langue, 2009, p.261).

In fact, Bolívar has been used as a source of ideological legitimisation and “political endorsement” like it was the case of the presidential elections in December 2006 (Langue, 2009, p.259). Chávez sought and found in Bolívar an inspiration of “anti-imperialism, socialism and independence from the US global influence” (El Mundo, 2021). As a matter of fact, 2006 was the glory year of the “Bolivarian Revolution” since Chávez won the elections with a near 63% of the votes and the price of oil began an escalation that would not end until 2009, allowing the state to live in abundance thanks to the national company PDVSA (Arráiz Lucca, 2017; El Mundo, 2021). The period between 2004 and 2009 is known as the “golden years” of Hugo Chávez's presidential administration (Langue, 2009). However, since he took office, relations between the United States and Venezuela, that had been stable for so many years thanks to petroleum's foreign trade, deteriorated considerably.

With his strong nationalist and ‘social hero’ rhetoric, Chávez sought to demonstrate that he would be different than his predecessors in almost all policy areas, both internal and external. As mentioned before, he further expanded his electorally acquired power to a hegemony in which he had the last, and sometimes only, say in fundamental decisions regarding all the national institutions (i.e. oil industry, the military, the National Assembly, regional and municipal governments, the judiciary...). In addition, he even exceeded and overstepped the limits safeguarded by the 1999 Constitution without facing any real consequence (Kelly de Escobar & Romero, 2002).

Chávez noxiously enjoyed an unprecedented degree of autonomy never seen before by any other president of the Venezuelan Republic, and it affected foreign policy and specially the relations with the US, that began to mistrust its trading partner and main oil supplier (Kelly de Escobar & Romero, 2002). He even went so far as to break a 35-year military alliance with the United States alleging that US officials in Venezuela were carrying out propaganda against him (El País, 2005). Furthermore, he “de facto” severed relations with the United States in 2008 by expelling the US Ambassador of the time Patrick Duddy (ABC, 2008) insisting in his governmental discourse on the “dire consequences of the imperialist strategy” of the “Devil Empire”, in Chávez words (Langue, 2009, p.274).

This new direction of increasing antagonism with respect to the United States and other regional partners like Colombia led to Venezuela's international isolation, wherein seeking for new alliances moved the country very close to China, Iran or Russia (Bull & Rosales, 2020). During high oil prices Venezuela engaged in commodity-backed loans that modified the structure of the Bolivarian rentier model that, along with the sanctions imposed by the US and the fall in oil prices in 2009, led to an unchecked economic crisis (Bull & Rosales, 2020).

In 2010, parliamentary elections were held for the period 2011–2016, in which the opposition won a significant number of votes, however they were not recognised the right to be on the leadership of the National Assembly neither to obtain some of the chairs of the Parliamentary Standing Committees. This, together with the increasing direct and indirect (through pro-regime groups) purchase of television and radio stations as well as newspapers by

the state created a significant democratic rupture in the country leading to the full consolidation of the so-called authoritarian regime facing increasing political polarisation and protests (Romero Méndez, 2015 p.74).

Aware of his delicate health condition because of cancer, the leader of the Bolivarian Social Revolution decided to delegate the representation of his government and the *Chavista* process in Nicolás Maduro, the by then Vice-President (Romero Méndez, 2015). After Chávez's death in March 2013, Maduro inherited an already existing economic crisis, which was created in large part by Chávez's spending to get re-elected against the leader of the opposition Henrique Capriles (McCarthy, 2017).

IV. The Venezuelan Crisis during Maduro's Regime (from 2013 to 2023)

New presidential elections were held on 14 April 2013, in which Nicolás Maduro won by a narrow margin of 50.61% of the votes, followed by the opposition candidate Henrique Capriles with an astonishing 49.12%. Maduro then became the new president of Venezuela confronting a solid rejection from the opposition parties who questioned the results of the election and never considered them legitimate (Romero Méndez, 2015, p.77).

Maduro had notable obstacles to overcome when arriving to the Government. Firstly, he had to replace the charismatic Chávez and win supporters to his regime as he lacked the significant political influence his successor did have. Secondly, after years of the same failing economic model, some policy adjustments seemed to be required. Maduro had to choose between reforming policies at the risk of losing influence in the *Chavista* movement or supporting the military to maintain his position of power. In the end, he opted for the latter, which was detrimental for Venezuelan economic growth and democratisation (McCarthy, 2017, p.130). Over the course of the years, the social productive model set in the Simón Bolívar National Development Plan (2007–2013) and then its implemented in the National Plan 2013–2019 radicalised its interventionist and statist agenda, demolishing the Venezuelan private sector (Romero Méndez, 2015).

The major catastrophe was imminent, but the singular thing is, contrary to what everyone would expect (the fall in oil prices being the major trigger), the continued domestic fuel subsidies and a distorted foreign exchange market were the main causes of the recession that started in the same year that Maduro was elected, even before the oil price collapse (Bull & Rosales, 2020). Chronic commodity shortages in Venezuela began precisely in 2014, despite high oil prices (McCarthy, 2017, p.129). Therefore, it can be argued that the price collapse from 2013 onwards an extension of the previous crisis.

During 2014, the economic crisis worsened due to the collapse of oil prices, the balance of payments deficit, the growth of foreign debt, and the growth of the informal economy and corruption in the misuse of foreign exchange (Romero Méndez, 2015, p.81). Gradually, this situation led to a deep economic crisis characterised by inflation, unemployment and shortages of basic goods, essentially food and medicine. Moreover, in the absence of a less dependent oil policy that could guaranteed a sustainable economic development for the long run, it was predictable that poverty levels in Venezuela would increase in the upcoming years and experts were already alerting about this since 2012 (Castro Herrera, 2016).

The response by the Venezuelan society arose that exact same year. The opposition pushed street demonstrations and social protest, being just the start of the current Venezuelan social and institutional crisis. Maduro's reaction to these protests was repression: the national security forces responded to protests demanding economic and social rights with unreasonable violence and other repressive measures (Amnistía Internacional, 2024).

The Venezuelans who dared to criticise Nicolás Maduro's government were subjected arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and torture with the collusion of the judicial system. Leopoldo López, one of the leaders of the opposition, was imprisoned in 2014 and sentenced to 13 years and 9 months in 2015 for “inciting violence” (Buxton, 2019).

The Venezuelan government even confirmed 455 cases of enforced disappearances since 2015. Although many of them were released at the end of 2014, the majority remains unsolved to the present day, as politically motivated arbitrary detentions continued to occur systematically from then on (Amnistía Internacional, 2024). This called into question, for not only the citizens but also many NGOs and other international actors, the democratic character of Nicolás Maduro's regime (Romero Méndez, 2015, p.81).

Both the government fiscal shortfalls and a new authoritarian regime led by new president Maduro, maintaining tight control over the country's economy, left the management of vast natural resources in the hands of illicit and para-state actors (Bull & Rosales, 2020). Russia was one of the biggest supporters of Maduro's regime as he provided strategic relations in military, oil, and economic aspects. For instance, Rosneft, a Russian oil corporation, acquired a significant stake in *Citgo* in exchange for a loan to Venezuela (McCarthy, 2017, p.131). The Venezuelan approach to this partnership only allowed the strengthening of corruption and illicit businesses, as well as authoritarian governance and the deterioration of all “democratic” institutions (Bull & Rosales, 2020).

Under the Obama administration, Venezuela was already declared a “extraordinary threat to the US national security” in 2015 Executive Order 13692, as a first step in initiating sanctions on a group of Venezuelan officials for human rights violations in the face of the 2014 protests (Bull & Rosales, 2020). Nonetheless, under Trump's administration (2017–2021) the US adopted a far more combative posture with sanctions that aimed to isolate the country and that have directly exacerbated the crisis, like pressuring American and European banks to avoid business with a in need of funds Venezuela (Hetland, 2018, p.289). Moreover, the US has also threatened with military interventions and has always acted in support of the Venezuelan opposition to the regime (Bull & Rosales, 2020).

In 2015, while 96% of Venezuela's total export revenues came from oil, and the situation was becoming increasingly destabilising for the economy and the national security due to the increase in the presence of organized crime, consequently, almost half of the population in Venezuela identified themselves as pro-opposition (Castro Herrera, 2016; McCarthy, 2017). Consequently, the National Electoral Council (CNE), the governing body that exercises electoral power in Venezuela, called for parliamentary elections for the end of the year. The population's rejection of Maduro's government materialised in the victory of the Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD), a coalition of political parties in the opposition, with around 100 seats in the National Assembly, leaving approximately only 50 for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) marking the end of the control of Maduro's party in the organ but, as he declared, they lost one battle but not the war (BBC, 2015).

Since then, governmental measures to limit the opposition's ability to act in the National Assembly have taken place. For instance, in 2017 the Supreme Court of Justice deprived the National Assembly of its constitutional powers and transferred them to the executive branch, an action that was considered a *self-coup d'état* by the opposition and the international community including the OAS (EFE, 2017). In April of that same year Venezuela officially began the process of withdrawal from OAS, which would not be completed until two years later in April 2019 (Voice of America, 2019).

Three national elections were convened for three different organs in 2017 under conditions that “were not totally free and fair” (Buxton 2018, p.420). Maduro declared on May 1st that he would call a National Constituent Assembly by using his presidential authority, as allowed by Article 347 of the 1999 Constitution. This decision was widely criticised and seen as an attempt to consolidate power by delegitimising the National Assembly, which led to further protests and more violent repression by the state security forces (Buxton, 2018).

The economic, political and institutional crisis in Venezuela led to severe consequences on a day-to-day basis of its population (i.e. food shortages or inadequate healthcare service) (McCarthy, 2017, p.129). Maternal and infant mortality increased significantly along with vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles and diphtheria spread; and infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Barely three years after Maduro's takeover, at the end of 2016, ENCOVI (the National Survey of Living Conditions) revealed that poverty rose to 82% of the Venezuelan population, and extreme poverty up to 50% (McCarthy, 2017, p.133). That same year Venezuelan asylum applications in the US increased by 150 percent, surpassing requests from other nations (McCarthy, 2017, p.134).

At the end of 2016, Venezuela entered into a hyperinflationary spiral which would not be relegated until 2019. In addition, MERCOSUR¹⁶ suspended Venezuela as a member in 2016 as a form of pressure on the government for changes, but this action was not successful, at least in the short term (Buxton, 2018). In fact, the annual inflation for 2017 in Venezuela, estimated at 2,616%, was the highest in the world, even surpassing countries with civil wars such as Syria (Buxton, 2018, p.412). Moreover, Venezuela was declared in 2017 as one of the top-five most dangerous countries in the world because of its high homicide rate¹⁷ (Buxton, 2018, p. 414).

That same year ENCOVI reported that 30% of the population was eating less than two meals a day in 2017 and that population was experiencing a significant weight loss (Buxton, 2018, p. 413). It is indeed very tough to know the true extent of the health and food crisis in Venezuela because the authorities stopped publishing official data in 2007, so that they could avoid having to admit their social policy mistakes and mismanagement of public funds (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In fact, the Venezuelan government has denied for many years the existence of a ‘humanitarian crisis’ based on its own definition of “lack of raw materials for basic food production or a state in civil war” and even refused, for fear of intervention, outside help for medical supplies or food in spite of the demands of NGOs like *Caritas* (McCarthy, 2017, p.133). Fortunately, there was a change in the government's discourse in 2018, when they stopped denying the humanitarian crisis outright and began to acknowledge the existence of an economic crisis, however attributing it to the sanctions from the US. In contrast, the US kept

¹⁶ The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) is a regional integration process that promotes the principles of democracy and economic development as fundamental pillars of integration. Venezuela is currently suspended from all rights and obligations inherent to its status as a State Party to MERCOSUR, in accordance with the second paragraph of Article 5 of the Ushuaia Protocol on Democratic Commitment.

¹⁷ Around 15 people per day were killed in violent clashes with the police and the military.

insisting on the Venezuelan official's close relationship with drug trade and money laundering affairs, as is the case of Tareck El Aissami¹⁸. (Human Rights Watch, 2018; El País 2017).

A 2018 InSight Crime report identified not less than 120 Venezuelan officials involved in illicit activities, and ironically one of them was the leader of the recently created National Constituent Assembly, Diosdado Cabello, who was considered as the second most important character of the Bolivarian Revolution. He was sanctioned in May 2018 for being directly involved in drug trafficking activities (Bodemer, 2023, p.22). It would be proven thereby that the initial objectives of the revolution initiated by Chávez (including social justice, redistribution of wealth and increasing the inclusion of the population in decision-making) were not continued from these last decades onwards and, in fact, all the social progress was reversed.

Following the creation of Maduro's National Constituent Assembly (2017–2020), the opposition lobbied the US, the OAS and the EU to demand immediate elections, the release of political prisoners and sanctions against government officials (Buxton, 2018). A new round of talks convened in the Dominican Republic began supported by the EU, the Vatican and the UN General Assembly, in which the former president of Spain, Rodríguez Zapatero, led the Dominican Republic's *Mesa de Diálogo* from March 2016 to February 2018 (El Confidencial, 2019). Furthermore, in the context of previous discussions in the framework of the sessions of the Permanent Council of the Organisation of American States and given the deepening political, social, economic and humanitarian crisis of Venezuela since 2017 and its negative collateral effects for the region, eleven Latin American countries along with the US and Canada issued a joint statement describing the National Constituent Assembly as “the definitive dismantling of democratic institutionality in Venezuela” (Chaves García, 2020).

Moreover, the Lima Group¹⁹ emerged as a regional coalition of countries with ideological (centre-right) affinity that exercised a form of multilateral *ad hoc* diplomacy advocating for dialogue between the parties in conflict with the aim of defending democratic institutions in Venezuela (Chaves García, 2020).

Despite of the efforts by the international community, there were elections at the end of 2018 and Maduro returned to power by a manipulated electoral process in which irregularities in the results, intimidation to voters and the ban to the participation of other popular candidates were the order of the day (US Department of State, 2020). The process and results of the 2018 presidential elections were widely questioned so the opposition and several nations refuse to recognise Maduro's legitimacy for his second term (2019–2024). Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets in response to a call by the president of the democratically elected National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, who called on the people of Venezuela to mobilise in support of the restoration of constitutional order in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

During a mass protest on 23 January 2019, the new leader of the opposition Juan Guaidó announced he was assuming power as interim president of Venezuela relying on Article 233 of the 1999 Constitution and promised free and fair elections in Venezuela. He was soon recognised by more than 50 countries, including Spain, the United States and most Latin American nations/members of OAS (HuffPost, 2024).

¹⁸ Former vice-president of the Venezuelan Republic.

¹⁹ The Lima Group emerged at the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers of Chile, Perú, Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil held in Lima in August 2017 with the aim of establishing initiatives to safeguard democratic institutions in Venezuela peacefully. Spain is part of the group as an observer.

However, support for Guaidó began to wane when an attempted military uprising failed in April 2019. By January 2020 all his efforts to create a transitional government had failed. Today, the leader of that illusionary change is completely out of focus and out of Venezuela, living as a *political refugee* in Miami, United States (HuffPost, 2024). The fact is that even within this presidential crisis Nicolás Maduro and his allies continued to control all Venezuelan institutions with the exception of the National Assembly, and in January 2021 the EU stopped recognising Guaidó as president but continued not to recognise Maduro as the legitimate president either (Reuters, 2021).

Despite of the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU, Maduro still had the strong support of Iran, China, Cuba, Russia and Turkey (The Washington Diplomat, 2021). In 2021, regional and municipal elections were criticised by international observers for failing to meet democratic standards, however Maduro's party (PSUV) still maintained control of the majority of offices (EU Election Observation Mission, 2021).

On another front, hyperinflation, which had spiked extraordinarily in previous years, began to moderate during the post-pandemic era due to the rise of oil prices and a “de facto” *dollarisation* of the economy. Right now, the US dollar has become the preferred currency for daily transactions, although the *bolivar* remains the official currency even if is not really used by any citizen (IMF, 2022).

The situation in Venezuela has hardly changed in recent years but a new figure has emerged on the political scene: María Corina Machado. This woman was a deputy member of the National Assembly and is now the founder of the political movement *Vente Venezuela*. She won the Venezuelan opposition primaries with an overwhelming majority and will now be the united candidate for the opposition against Maduro in the next 2024 presidential elections (HuffPost, 2024). She, like many other Venezuelans, denominates Maduro's government a (narco-militarist) *dictatorship* with which one cannot negotiate, as Juan Guaidó did in the past without much success. She promises fight against corruption, reuniting Venezuelans separated by the diaspora, massive privatisation of the country's economy including PDVSA and to be the change that Venezuela needed (HuffPost, 2024; ABC, 2024).

It should be mentioned that Machado will not be able to be on the ballot for the presidential elections this July as she has been conventionally disqualified, which is why Edmundo González is taking her place. Despite of this, she continues touring Venezuela in an effort to restore the opposition's hopes after years of demobilization (BBC, 2024). A recent survey found that 50.74% of Venezuelans would vote for González, compared to 13.70% who said they would vote for Maduro (BBC, 2024). As the OAS warned: “The only solution to fix the crisis in Venezuela is a regime change that could lead to a democracy with rule of law and independent branches of Government” (The Washington Diplomat, 2021) and it seems that after several years of political, social and economic struggle it could happen in the near future.

VENEZUELAN MIGRATORY PHENOMENON IN SPANISH TERRITORY

Having explained in the previous chapter the more intrinsic complexities in Venezuela's political and social trajectory, the ups and downs of the extraction of oil business, the two periods first of trade-partners and then of tensions and sanctions with the United States, together with the humanitarian crisis that accentuated from 2014 with the onset of shortages, violence and extreme poverty, we now can have a more general overview of what factors have triggered Venezuelan outflows of migrants.

I. Overview of the Subject Matter

As expected, shortages of food, medicines and other basic service have caused widespread suffering among the population which were forced to migrate in the absence of any other option to survive, searching for opportunities to better their lives outside their country. Mass migration became the only alternative to the economic and institutional crisis of the repressive and authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro, the president whose legitimacy in office by democratic terms is still under debate.

The growing political polarization and the two waves of violent anti-government protest in 2014 and 2017 have led to over 120 deaths (El País, 2017). Moreover, reports indicate that it was the state repression of the police and the security forces against the opposition the ones responsible for two-thirds of the total of deaths (Hetland, 2018).

Due to this brutality, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigated those officials responsible for alleged *crimes against humanity* and signed an agreement with the government of Venezuela seeking to bring justice to the victims. However, national authorities have so far failed to implement any of the substantial reforms to the judicial and law enforcement systems that would be necessary to meet their commitments to the ICC Prosecutor (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Even if it is not possible to establish a rigorous analysis with official national data, both because of their scarcity and their unreliability, recent investigations and reports exist in order to visualise the shocking diaspora of Venezuelans around the world. In fact, the UN estimates that from 2014 to 2021 around more than 3 million Venezuelans had crossed the border due to the untenable situation in their homeland. The most common routes were land-based (normally by foot and in precarious situations) to countries of the region, being Colombia the most affected and followed by Peru, Ecuador and Chile (Bodemer, 2023, p.22-23). This, of course, when there were still no mobility restrictions and other impairments motivated by the pandemic. Based on these figures, in words of many scholars and important personalities such as Filippo Grandi²⁰ this contends “the largest Latin America exodus in modern times” (El País, 2021).

After seven consecutive years of economic contraction (2014–2021) that cut nearly 80% of Venezuela’s GDP, finally the country experienced a tenuous recovery in 2022, due in part to increased revenues from high oil prices and a revival of private sector trade (International Crisis

²⁰ Filippo Grandi is the 13th and current UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In 2021 he announced, along with the President of Colombia, a Temporary Protection Statue for Venezuelans living in irregular situations in Colombia in order to identify them and grant protection permits to alleviate the complex situation of millions of people just after having lived the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

Group, 2022). Despite of this economic upturn in 2022, far from reversing the situation, the number of Venezuelans abroad reflects an increase of around 1.4 million people leaving the country between May 2022 and August 2023. (International Amnesty, 2023). Based on this, we could state that political factors have become even more important than the economic determinants to leave Venezuela.

However, as explained in the *introduction*, it is not easy to make any absolute statement regarding this subject under study, since there is no real agreement on the number of Venezuelans abroad, nor are their conditions, status and other characteristics of the population (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p. 251). This might be due to the fact that the current Venezuelan government has intentionally handled the national statistics with opacity, both in their production and dissemination phases, as their political discourse has always been to underestimate (or even ignore) Venezuelan emigration²¹ in order to avoid their accountability (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p. 249-250). Because of this, the subject of Venezuelan international migration has acquired a greater complexity over the years.

The most recent figures published by UNHCR indicate that there are more than 7.7 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide (out of the total of the 30 million Venezuelan population) and more than 1 million asylum seekers pending recognition as refugees worldwide (UNHRC, 2023). Even if the Venezuelan population meets the criteria to be recognised as refugees according to the definition derived from the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees this definition has only been applied in exceptional cases like in Mexico and Brazil, rather than uniformly across the region (Feline Freier & Castillo Jara, 2021).

There are approximately 20 countries that host the majority of Venezuelan emigration abroad, being the United States the most popular destination until it was displaced by Colombia in 2017, when overland routes became the most common strategy for this new trend of South-to-South migration (Freitez, 2019). Around 85% of the Venezuelan migrants are families with children and elderly, or otherwise vulnerable people, who face serious dangers on the escape route to reach other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and that are staying there with no prospect of return to Venezuela in the short or medium term (UNHCR, 2024).

As a matter of fact, Venezuelans have established expat communities that have influenced local politics and raised fears about regional instability across the Americas. This significant flow of Venezuelans abroad could only become a priority on the international agenda. It is very curious to note that, as it was explained in the *theoretical framework*, many have recognised this delicate situation as a “migratory phenomenon in context of crisis” and not a “migration crisis”, and the Governments of the Latin American region have not been the exception (Gandini *et al.*, 2020, p.110).

Moreover, the way in which the different affected nations have responded is very curious too. The general response was not trying to return Venezuelan population to their country, thus respecting the principle of non-refoulement, but acknowledging that this case is a product of a generalised humanitarian crisis, which would turn Venezuelans into “forced migrants” (Gandini *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the objective was instead to promote migratory policies, in some cases with exceptional measures like those “Special Permits to Stay” of Colombia and Peru, in order to integrate the Venezuelan population (temporarily and/or

²¹ The Government has been labelling expats as the “privileged traitors of the nation” as well as it has been ignoring the increase of the diaspora (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019).

permanently) into the receiving societies by promoting an open-door policy with some progressive measures. However, despite the initial good intentions, the truth is that the region was generally unprepared for this mass exodus and continues to face difficulties in its management (Gandini *et al.*, 2020, p.117).

As demonstrated, this subject can be studied from many different perspectives and approaches. With this in mind, we must remember that the interest of this academic work is to connect the Venezuelan migratory phenomena with Spain by observing the implications it has had at a national level, constraining significantly the study to the situations of these Venezuelan migrants and refugees that are living in Spain. Therefore, regionalist approaches will not be discussed although its importance is still recognised. Having understood the high complexities of the Venezuelan crisis, this chapter focuses now on the case of Spain as a receiving country.

II. The Spanish Case: From Exodus in the 20th Century to Welcoming Mass Migration in the 21st Century.

As it has been assessed throughout the first section, Venezuela and Spain share both cultural and historical links since the fifteenth century that have produced a significant crossbreeding of peoples. Centuries after the colonisation process both the Venezuelan and the Spanish society are still multicultural and multi-ethnic and united by a common language (Arráiz Lucca, 2013). According to the *Español en el Mundo* Yearbook 2023 of the Cervantes Institute, Spanish is the second mother tongue in the world and the fourth in the world in terms of the number of speakers, connecting millions of people (Ministerio Español de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones, n.d.).

Back to the role of globalization in the important migratory events of humankind described at the introduction, some may say that “globalization has restored to the greatest European capitals the faces of their former empires” as nowadays London is the home in Europe for Indians and Pakistanis, just as Paris is for French-speaking Africans and Madrid for Latin-Americans (El País, 2022). Per contra, there was a time in which the situation was the other way round, and around 10 million displaced people sought shelter in the Latin American region as exiles fleeing poverty and political persecution (Nieto Morales *et al.*, 2016).

Not so long ago, the Europeans were the ones who undertook a great migratory movement in search of new economic opportunities or fleeing political and/or religious persecution during the 20th century (Sallé Alonso & Van der Eyne, 2009). The political and military conflicts, which took place on the European continent between 1840 and 1930, affected not only Spaniards but millions of people, who sought to establish their lives on the other side of the Atlantic. Between those years Argentina was the country of preference, absorbing half of the migration flow (Sallé Alonso & Van der Eyne, 2009, p. 26).

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the post-war period, thousands of Spaniards were forced into exile. Between 1939 and 1949, Mexico became the Latin American nation which received the most refugees (Sallé Alonso & Van der Eyne, 2009, p.28). The migratory movements of Spaniards continued the entire century until 1975, when democracy was restored after the death of dictator Francisco Franco. It is important to highlight that between 1946 and 1958 Venezuela became the second most popular destination for 45,000 Canaries, Galicians, Asturians, Andalusians, Basques and Catalans from Spain due to the rapid economic growth the country was experiencing thanks to the intensification of oil production

(Sallé Alonso & Van der Eyne, 2009, pp. 32-58). Even so, the first movement of Spaniards to Venezuela is recorded much earlier, during the 19th century, when a large number of people from the Canary Islands decided to start a new life in a land of similar natural characteristics (Ministerio Español de Trabajo y Economía Social, n.d.).

In the postwar era, the majority of Spaniards were young or middle-aged males from Galicia and the Canary Islands, with a certain degree of professional training, who arrived in Caracas while Venezuela was one of the countries that had the greatest future projection in the region thanks to the oil boom that had already taken place in those years (Campos Álvarez, 2020; Ministerio Español de Trabajo y Economía Social, n.d.).

Most of the Spanish immigrant community of that time in Venezuela was initially in low-skilled jobs and later ventured into self-employment, becoming with time successful entrepreneurs and significantly contributing to the advancement of the Venezuelan economy and its modernisation process (El Nacional, 2024). It is also important to highlight how the Spanish migration represented an important work force that shaped the economic and social structure of Venezuela (Sallé Alonso & Van der Eyne, 2009, p. 90). In this situation, migration had the ability to influence two societies and created permanent connections as seen by the significant Spanish diaspora in Venezuela and its ongoing legacy.

In less than a quarter of a century, the situation turned the other way around and Spain went from being a country of emigrants (mainly political refugees during Franco's regime and high qualified workers) to becoming one of the countries in the European Union that receives the largest number of immigrants (Muñoz de Bustillo & Antón, 2010).

Although there was a small resurgence of Spanish immigration to Venezuela when economic growth resumed between 1973 and 1980, it experienced a significant decline between 1981 and 1990 due to the economic crisis driven by the foreign debt that brought with it the devaluation of the *bolivar*, and which led many first-generation immigrants from Europe to return to their places of origin (Campos Álvarez, 2020). It can be argued that those were the first signs of the beginning of a drastic change in Venezuelan and Spanish international mobility.

It was at the end of the 1980s, during the government of the socialist Felipe González, that Spain started to become a destination country for immigrants from impoverished countries mainly from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe that were seeking a prosperous future at a democratic South European country in the process of industrialisation (Nieto Morales *et al.*, 2016). With the beginning of the 21st century the reception of Latin American immigration in Spain would intensify until today's new era of migration.

As years went by and prosperous Spain industrialised even more, there was an increase in the importance of Latin American immigration in the country, being one of the expected effects of globalisation. It can be argued that with globalisation (or the increase of globalism²²) Latin American countries with relatively unfavourable standards of living, wages, job opportunities, social stability and political stability would more easily be emitters of peoples and knowledge to countries in a comparatively better position (García Arias & Restrepo Pineda, 2019, p.13). From this perspective, the differences in the economic structures of countries would be the most influential aspects, thereby allowing the neoclassical theories of migration

²² See the works of Keohane & Nye (1973) cited at the *Theoretical Framework*.

to be applied. But, beyond the purely structural factors of a state encompassing salaries or stability, other notably significant drivers for choosing Spain as a destination country cannot be forgotten such as the linguistic and cultural proximity, our shared customs, values and traditions as *Hispanos* or the more favourable policies that Spain has towards nationals of former colonies when it comes to favouring naturalisations or guaranteeing dual nationality (Ayuso & Pinyol, 2010, p.13). Furthermore, the reception networks for a community as the diaspora progresses are crucially beneficial to help to reduce the costs of accessing and settling in a new country's market (Ayuso & Pinyol, 2010, p.13).

In the light of the available data from Spain, Latin Americans immigrants went from constituting only a 17.4% of the country's foreign population in 1996 to represent a solid 35.8% in 2007, becoming undoubtedly the main group of foreign immigration in Spain (Muñoz de Bustillo & Antón, 2010). Despite of this, according to 2007 data, Venezuelan immigration was not significant yet, as the lists of immigrants were headed by Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Argentina (Hanson & McIntosh, 2012). These nationalities (mostly Andean) accounted for two thirds of the total Latin American immigrants in Spain, while Venezuela accounted for a timid 3.3% (Muñoz de Bustillo & Antón, 2010). This is due to the fact that Venezuela has never been a state with a tradition of migration, attracting migration instead (García Arias & Restrepo Pineda, 2019, p.11).

III. Venezuelan Migration in Spain: Profiles and Strategies

As it has just been explained, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st surprised Venezuela with an abrupt change from its traditional status as a receiver to an expeller of population (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019). Based on recent publications, the Venezuelan migration was very sporadic and unnoticeable until it started to be taken into consideration with the rise to power of Hugo Chávez in 1999. Even so, the migratory flows actually started during the times of the *lost decade*, when part of the middle and upper class of the population fled the country (mainly to the United States) following the famous event of “*El Caracazo*” in 1989 (García Arias & Restrepo Pineda, 2019, pp. 12-15).

The combination of political and economic events discussed in the first section led to a significant outflow of Venezuelan entrepreneurs and professionals, generally highly qualified and with resources for investment during the first years of the new century (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.245). As it has been shown, the fundamental causes of the Venezuelan migration phenomenon of those years are directly related with the establishment of the “Bolivarian Revolution” since many citizens did not agree with the new political ideology of Chávez, that started to move towards a regime in which the State became the exclusive employer and the source of all personal rights (Dekocker, 2018, p.259).

In view of the historical link between Spain and Venezuela, it was somehow expected that the group of people born in Venezuela but registered with Spanish nationality (inherited of their parents or grandparents who moved to Venezuela during the 1950s) opted to scape Chávez's regime seeking for new opportunities for their businesses and professional careers in Spain, where they could integrate more easily in an European country that was starting to be considered attractive due to its economic take-off (Dekocker, 2018, p.303). At the beginning, the Venezuelan migrants did not motivate their migratory project from the economic hardship experienced in its country of origin, as it would be a fundamental factor later (Dekocker, 2018, p.332). Instead, they moved from South to North (i.e. United States or Spain) constituting and

organized, safe documented and skilled migration in the face of the fragility of economic freedoms and rights, in particular towards private property, in Venezuela (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.334).

According to some authors, there is a hypothesis that Venezuelans who emigrated for interconnected political, social and economic reasons between 1998 and 2013 also sought to maintain and reproduce the way of life that they had in the new destination, and that was the added value they hoped to obtain on leaving their country (Decocker, 2018, p.296). This was called the “theory of social and cultural reproduction” and was first introduced in social sciences by the neo-Marxist ideology (Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, p.8). This approach to the study of migration emerges as an alternative to most of the migration theories that associate the reasons for leaving the country of origin with precarious economic circumstances. Instead, it focuses on the purchasing power of people, that would determine in which strata of the social class or group they are (i.e. upper-middle class, bourgeois...), and it explains that, afraid of losing their status in society, migrant’s goal would be trying to reproduce in the country of destination the totality of their previous social life (material but also cultural, political, ideological...) or even improve it more in the social hierarchy (Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, pp. 9-10). This theory, however, would only apply for those Venezuelan migrants that arrived at Spain as a destination country before 2015, as they did not seek improving their economic level since they were already from the favoured social class of Venezuelan society whose motivations were to reproduce their lifestyle in Spain and that inserted quite well into similar strata of society that welcomed them happily (Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, p.19).

Between 1998 and 2015, the Venezuelan immigrant group remained almost invisible in the Spanish scenario, and it was characterized by its high purchasing power, professional and cultural level. For them their migration project was considered satisfactorily achieved, perhaps because the economic and educational background they brought with them protected them in some way from discrimination and economic hardship in the destination country (Dekocker *et al.*, 2021, p. 18). Moreover, most of them opted for Spain because of the possibility of obtaining dual nationality that clearly helped this group of Venezuelans to integrate better in Spain (Decocker, 2018, p.296). Their profile was as a subtle and legal immigration of working age, professionally qualified and with few difficulties for labour insertion and access to good housing, education and even private healthcare (Decocker, 2018, p.332).

This would change from 2014 onwards, when the Venezuelan dynamics completely transformed, and migration became a real necessity for a significant proportion of its population. This moment corresponds with Nicolás Maduro's rise to the presidency and with the deepening of the “Bolivarian Revolution”. As it has been detailed throughout this paper, violent demonstrations took place all over the country followed by the violation of people’s fundamental rights and a series of political turmoil events. These events, in the opinion of the available reports and studies, would trigger the largest mass exodus of people in the history of the country and would form one of the largest, if not the largest, migrant and refugee crises in Latin America. The motives, profiles and journey of Venezuelans changed over the years as the situation became increasingly critical (UNHCR, 2024).

Neither the official Venezuelan or Spanish statistics provide information on the possible causes of Venezuelan population outflows, therefore, we must rely on academic works such as the recent one of Páez and Phéran (2019) titled “Venezuelan emigration to Spain in times of the Bolivarian revolution (1998–2017)”. Based on the analysis conducted by the authors, it can be strongly affirmed that the outflow of population from Venezuela can be highly associated

with fears of insecurity expressed in high crime rates, together with the laws and measures implemented by the Bolivarian Revolution that have caused a negative impact on the freedoms and rights of citizen (i.e. press freedom) and the deterioration of their living conditions (p.249).

It can be extracted from this that the mass exodus of Venezuelan population would be a direct consequence of the continuous violation of social, economic, political and civil rights of its authoritarian government. Therefore, these are a series of interconnected reasons that have accumulated over the last twenty years with the implementation of the Venezuelan 21st century Socialism and that could explain the most recent outflows (Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.258). Due to the complex humanitarian emergency and massive human rights violations of Maduro's regime, migration was no longer an exclusive matter for the middle-upper classes, but for an irregular and mixed group that resorted to land routes as well.

Although the outflow of Venezuelans continued to be directed towards the United States and Spain, given the high economic and administrative costs most of those who left Venezuela since 2014 chose Latin American destinations, such as Colombia, Peru, Chile or Ecuador, promoting a new South-to-South migratory trend (Feline Freier & Castillo Jara, 2021), which was also driven by the fact that in the course of just three years (from 2014 to 2017) seven international airlines ceased to operate in Venezuela (Vargas Ribas, 2018). By the end of 2018, more than 2.4 million Venezuelans were in these countries; and by the end of 2022, the number had more than doubled to 4.9 million, accounting for 82% of the total number of Venezuelan migrants (UNHRC, 2024). The already established voluntary emigration from Venezuela is then joined by those seeking international protection abroad in the form of asylum. Most of this new "forced migration" were young people of working age, but there were also media professionals, intellectuals, businessmen and politicians who opposed the Venezuelan regime and were persecuted by it (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.340).

From then on, the Venezuelan emigration to Spain changed dramatically. Both flows shared the sense of being forced into exile by a political ideology following two decades of migratory transformation from a social reproduction strategy to a developing emergent poverty (Decocker *et al.*, 2021, p.333). This could be comparable to the feelings of the migrants from Europe and Spain who were exiled during the 20th century.

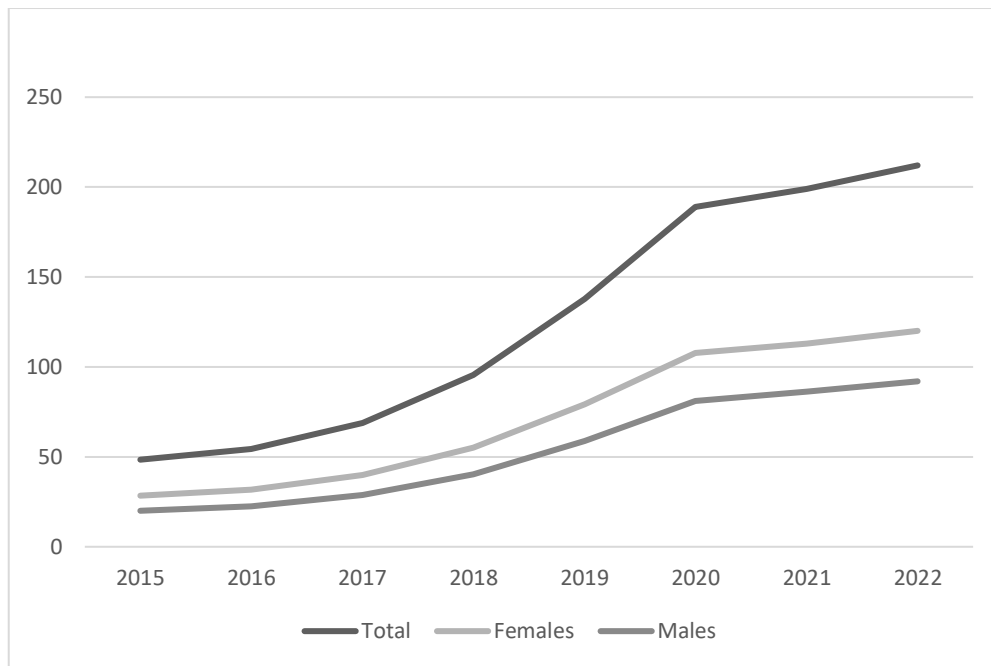
Based on the statistics of the Asylum and Refuge Office of the Ministry of Internal Relations, asylum applications in Spain began to increase from 2014 (with 124 people) until reaching 10,629 applications in 2017, displacing countries in Latin America that had a tradition of requesting international protection, such as Colombia or Cuba, and ranking first above Syrians and Ukrainians (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p. 341). Nonetheless, according to a 2018 Human Rights Watch Report, a very low percentage of the total of applicants have been granted with refugee status given that some judges and other authorities are sceptical of the reasons that could justify a well-founded fear for Venezuelans to be outside their homeland, when there is no active armed civil conflict (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019). It is sad to admit that even if Venezuela received an 86.2 out of the possible 120 points on the 2017 'Fragile State' Index, formerly known as the 'Failed State' Index, and came in first place among nineteen Latin American countries (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.338), Venezuelans were not recognised as refugees in some destination countries and ended up living abroad under irregular situations (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019).

Providing an analysis of the Venezuelan migratory phenomenon evolution in recent years in Spain, the annual data provided by the Spanish Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)

reveals the progressive development from 48,421 total Venezuelan immigrants²³ in 2015 (INE, 2015); to 54,401 in 2016 (INE, 2016); 68,866 in 2017 (INE, 2017); 95,633 in 2018 (INE, 2018); 137,774 in 2019 (INE, 2019); 189,110 in 2020 (INE, 2020), 199,078 in 2021 (INE, 2021) and to 212,064 in 2022 (INE, 2022). From this, it can be deduced that there has been an upward trend with a small stagnation in the growth pattern from 2020 onwards (see Figure 1), something that could easily be explained by the increase in mobility restrictions brought by the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, a higher proportion of Venezuelan women compared with men can also be observed.

Figure 1.

Evolution of Venezuelan population in Spain (2015–2022)



Note. Source <http://www.ine.es/> (Own elaboration)

From an estimated total of 7.7 million people leaving Venezuela in 2023, it is expected to reach almost 8.4 million by 2025 (UNHRC, 2024), therefore, Spain will continue to receive even more Venezuelan population over time, even if Colombia has been the preferred destination since 2017 (Freitez, 2019). It should be noted that, in Spain, Colombians were the second Latin American biggest community in 2022, just behind Venezuelans (Fernández, 2024). As a curiosity, it is worth mentioning that a few years before, in 2016, migrants in Spain were mainly from Romania and Morocco, followed by the United Kingdom, Italy and China (Nieto Morales *et al.*, 2016).

Right now, Madrid is the main gateway for Latin American migration to Spain (EURONEWS, 2023). Furthermore, according to official INE data, the number of Venezuelans immigrants in Madrid is more than twice as high as in other cities such as Barcelona, where Maghrebi immigration would predominate (INE, 2022).

²³ This refers to the variable “country of birth”, regardless of whether the nationality is Spanish or foreign, or which type of migration they conform.

According to 2018 data, just Madrid and the Canary Islands accounted for half of the registered Venezuelans in Spanish territory (Decoquer, 2018, p. 305). Currently, the main areas where Venezuelans reside in Spain are mainly Madrid, Catalonia, the Canary Islands, Galicia and the Valencian Community (INE, 2022). It is relevant to note that the official data provided by the INE is calculated based on the population figures from the Annual Revisions of Municipal Registers (*Padrón*), which are declared official by the Spanish Government. It counts both regular and irregular immigration since it is not a requirement to have a residence permit to be registered and, therefore, their data can be a good approximation of the migration balance (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019). Observing the most recent available statistics of the Municipal Register of Madrid, we see that out of the 212,064 total of Venezuelans that were living in the Spanish territory in 2022, 67,710 were in Madrid, which would constitute nearly the 32% of the total, being 37,200 women and 30,510 men, both with an average age of 34 years (El Padrón, 2022).

If the neoclassical theory could be applied to this group, there would be a larger amount of Venezuelan immigration in the Basque Country, as it has a higher GDP per capita than that of the Canary Islands or Galicia, according to *El Padrón* data of 2022²⁴. Yet, in the Basque Country there were only 6,568 Venezuelans, meanwhile, there were 19,175 and 14,290 in the Canary Islands and Galicia, respectively (El Padrón, 2022). This may be due to the fact that in that Spanish region they speak the Basque language (*Euskera*), and unlike with Galician, Venezuelans might be unfamiliar since they did not receive as much migration during the 1950s, therefore, there would not be descendants that could have previously inherited it. For this reason, it is reaffirmed that the historical-structural theory seems to be the most appropriate approach to this case study of Venezuelan migration in Spain.

In addition, apart from the fact that Venezuelans (mainly those that maintained the Spanish nationality) have returned to the places of departure of their ancestors, there are other variables that could explain why Venezuelans prefer some Spanish cities to others. For instance, Madrid and Barcelona have larger markets and, therefore, greater employment opportunities. Moreover, they are considered to be centres of scientific and technological development and innovation possibilities that could explain the large concentration of the total Venezuelan migrant population (Tomás Páez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p. 345).

Furthermore, it has arisen the conceptualisation of what has come to be known as the narrative of the Venezuelan diaspora, a relative new phenomenon that is even yet subject to unpredictable changes (García Arias & Restrepo Pineada, 2019). For those that remained in Venezuela until the institutional crisis of 2018, Spain became an attractive destination as its diaspora (the ones already settled) increased, creating more networks that reduced the levels of costs and risks for their settlement in the host country (Vargas Ribas, 2018, p.107). As a consequence, new family and social networks were established so that the next Venezuelans who chose to take the risk of migrating could have the opportunity to dream of a new life project in Spain, providing not only a sense of belonging and familiarity, but also promoting integration and mutual support among migrants (CIDOB, 2010). The presence of these communities would make the mobility transition smoother and would help newcomers feel like if they were at (as close as possible to) their home.

The concentration of immigrants in very specific geographical areas can also be explained by the existence of what migration literature calls “herd effect” (Muñoz de Bustillo

²⁴ The GDP per capita of the Basque Country in 2022 was 35,832; in Galicia it was 25,906; and in the Canary Islands it was 22,303 (El Padrón, 2022).

& Antón, 2010, p. 23). Professor of Economics Gil. S. Epstein explains that those networks and the information that they can provide to the population that is still in the country of origin have a significant impact in their migration decision-making process, as it has been proved that some migrants would go where they have observed other nationals go first, even though they would have preferred to go elsewhere (Epstein, 2008).

The reasons behind each migration project and strategy are completely diverse, and only some approximations can be provided by directly asking the migrants through population surveys. Being a relatively recent and complex phenomenon, there is a methodological barrier to consult this type of information. Providentially, new associations of Venezuelan migrants are springing up in Spain, as is the case of the NGO Red Reto. This organisation has launched the European Centre for Venezuelan Migration (CEMVE), which first initiative is to conduct a survey in 2024 to contribute to the dissemination of Venezuelan forced migration in Spain (Red Reto, n.d.). Since results are currently unavailable²⁵ it is imperative to rely on the scarce literature that exists on the subject.

According to a June 2019 report on the reasons why Venezuelans emigrate to other countries, including both Spain and other Latin American countries, there were psychosocial factors such as insecurity, violence, stress, hunger or desperation for not being able to receive the necessary medical treatment for their health problems (Albornoz-Arias *et al.*, 2019, p.25), as well as economic causes such as the desire to help financially those family members who remain in Venezuela and look for new and better employment opportunities (p.26). Therefore, the motivations are not restrained, and Venezuelan migrants take the decision to leave their home for a series of factors that, rather than being isolated, are interconnected on the basis of the context in which they live. Available statistics report that, in 2018, 83.6% of the total migrated in search of safer environments and 31.2% were simply forced to (Sánchez Uzcátegui & Bosch Fiol, 2021, p.82).

From the previous discussion on the changes of migratory patterns from 2015 onwards, the evolution the profiles of Venezuelan migrants and the upward trend of the number of inflows of those arriving in Spain in search of humanitarian aid and international protection, it can be deduced that emigration has become a generalised necessity for most Venezuelans between any socioeconomic stratum.

IV. The Spanish System of Integration and Exclusion

The Spanish migration policies operate at multiple levels: European, national and global. In addition, the regional and local administrations also take an important part of the process in particular areas such as guardianship or care of unaccompanied foreign minors, as well as they are competent for the implementation of integration policies (together with the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration) including those related to employment, housing, social services, health and education (European Commission, 2020). Despite this, the definition, planning, regulation and development of immigration policy is part of the exclusive competence of the Government (Spanish Constitution, Art.149, 1978).

²⁵ A review on CEMVE survey needs to be conducted in the future as they may provide enormous relevant information that could help to complete this part of the investigation.

The Government promotes the principle of equality between Spaniards and foreigners by ensuring that foreign nationals shall enjoy the same public freedoms guaranteed in Title I of the Constitution as Spaniards, with the exception of the right to suffrage (Spanish Constitution, Art. 13, 1978). Moreover, the same article also recognises the right to asylum and subsidiary protection, which is regulated in Law 12/2009, that establishes the conditions under which an individual can benefit from such international protection in Spain (Spanish Constitution, Art. 13, 1978). According to Article 3 of Law 12/2009, “the refugee status is granted to any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, membership of a particular social group, gender, sexual orientation or sexual identity, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country [...]”. Furthermore, in Article 4 of Law 12/2009 the right to subsidiary protection is granted to foreign nationals and stateless persons who do not qualify for asylum or refugee status, but for whom there are substantial grounds for believing that if they were to return to their country of origin/habitual residence they would face the risk of experiencing any of these serious harms:

- (a) the death sentence or the risk of his or her physical execution,
- (b) torture and inhuman or degrading treatment,
- (c) serious threats to the life or integrity of civilians caused by indiscriminate violence in situations of international or inter-State conflict,
- (d) serious threats to the life or integrity of civilians caused by indiscriminate violence in situations of international or inter-State conflict.

From this, it can be deduced that Spanish national legislation has directly adopted the concepts and definitions of international human rights law, such as the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1954 Convention relating to Stateless people. As a natural consequence, the Spanish Government has considered migration a structural, global and multidimensional phenomenon regarding the drafting of its national policies. Spain has been incorporating regulations and directives²⁶ from the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) too. Recently, in 2024, Brussels approved the Pact on Migration and Asylum²⁷, a legislative pack that aims to improve cooperation between member states and the EU's response to migration crises by establishing common standards for asylum and the protection of migrants.

As previously assessed, initially the general profile of the population from Venezuela in Spain were high qualified professionals with postgraduate degrees that belonged to the middle and upper classes of Venezuelan society and who were motivated by the social reproduction strategy, seeking for new opportunities in Spain to develop their careers, a trend that was labelled as “Brain Drain”, which constituted a form of regular and orderly migration (Coyle, 2022; García Arias & Restrepo Pineada, 2019, p.14). On the other hand, over the last years there has been a change from an almost invisible or unnoticeable migration to a massive migration trend under humanitarian reasons that have recently emerged in Spain with increasing number of Venezuelans applying for asylum and refugee status (Vargas Ribas, 2022).

In spite of this, the number of applications that are rejected in Spain has also been increasing in the last years. According to the report ‘Asylum in Figures 2022’, in Spain the nationality of the largest number of applicants for international protection in Spain was Venezuela, with a total of 45,760 applications of which 10,431 obtained an unfavourable resolution (Ministerio del Interior–Oficina de Asilo y Refugio, 2023). According to this report,

²⁶ Such as Directive 2011/95/EU, Directive 2013/32/EU or Regulation 604/2013, among others.

²⁷ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/eu-migration-policy/eu-migration-asylum-reform-pact/>

there were more women than men applicants, and the average age of both genders was between 18 and 35 years old (Ministerio del Interior–Oficina de Asilo y Refugio, 2023).

Venezuelans seeking asylum in Spain encounter difficulties in having their evaluations approved on a case-by-case basis; but at least, since 2019, most of them have been granted residency permits on humanitarian grounds, even though they could be eligible for refugee status (Asylum Information Database–European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2024). Decision 352/2021 of the Spanish Supreme Court²⁸ established that “no specific persecution or significant harm caused by the situation in Venezuela justified the recognition of international protection”. Rather, the Court found that the severe economic circumstances (including food shortages and high unemployment rates) justified granting a residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

According to the updated information of the Asylum Information Database from 2023, a total of 40,674 Venezuelans in Spain obtained the residence permit on humanitarian grounds. As an advantage, this permit granted by exceptional circumstances (i.e. ill people without access to indispensable medical treatment in their country or members of the political opponents who suffers from discrimination on the basis of ideology) provides legal protection, access to basic services like health and education, and opportunities for integration and employment for one year (and open to prorogations), even if it is not a form of asylum strictly speaking (Ministerio del Interior, n.d.; UNHCR, n.d.). After that year, they can apply for long-term residence with a work permit and, once they are holders of long-term residence permits, their family members have the possibility to come to Spain with them if they are granted with residence permits for family reunification (Ministerio del Interior, n.d.). Regarding this temporally residence permits, there are also some concerns about the need for more flexible mechanisms to address the ongoing flows of migrants with effectiveness.

In Spain, for those migrants from Venezuela that only have Venezuelan nationality (and are not the descendants of Spanish ancestors) it is possible to enter first into Spanish territory as visa-free tourists for 90 days, since for some Latin American countries including Venezuela, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Mexico there is a visa exemption privilege (Gil Araujo, 2010). Then, to stay longer, they would need to obtain a student visa or a residence permit such as the aforementioned permit on humanitarian grounds. At the same time, the bureaucratic process for them to obtain a regular status can take months, or even a year, which makes it difficult for applicant to have access to formal employment in the first six months and most of migrants end up in irregular situations, irremediably contributing to the rise of submerged economy in Spain (EURONEWS, 2023).

More and more Venezuelans with little resources are arriving in Spain and due to the lack of initial opportunities some resort to crime (i.e. drug dealing) or sex work because they want to help their families that stayed in Venezuela through remittances (García Arias & Restrepo Pineada, 2019, p.14). This is the case of Sandra, who was a journalist of Radio Caracas TV until Hugo Chávez closed it down in 2007, and who is a mother now working in a night club in Madrid out of economic necessity (El Mundo, 2024). Many Latin Americans doing low-paid jobs in Spain were doctors or engineers in their countries of origin, especially women (EFE, 2021).

²⁸ The Spanish Supreme Court is the head of the system of appeals in the whole territory of the country and is therefore the highest authority responsible for the interpretation of case law in Spain. In that sense, its doctrine is understood as a fundamental part of jurisprudence (source of law) that might influence the decisions of other Spanish courts.

This second flow of Venezuelan migrants under humanitarian reasons still experience difficulties in legalising their status, validating their qualifications/studies and to accessing the labour market and housing, which keeps increasing the challenges of integration in the Spanish society (Decoquer, 2018, p.332). As a result, a large number of them reside in shared apartments with more than four people (Muñoz de Bustillo & Antón, 2010, p.26) and are working in (sometimes multiple) lower-skilled and underpaid jobs like construction, agriculture, or in the domestic service, in which the conditions and wages are more difficult to regulate (BBC, 2022).

Domestic employment has reached the number of 477,900 workers in Spain, and 62.5% are estimated to be female migrants²⁹ that have been traditionally invisibilised and hired under precarious working conditions with difficult access to basic social rights (Martínez-Buján, 2022, p.74). And those are only a portion of vulnerable migrants, most of them in an irregular situation, who have been lucky enough not to be begging for money in the streets or the underground (Coyle, 2022), since many asylum or refugee applicants face even more difficulties, as they cannot work until six months after their application, and those who could hire them fear that they will obtain an unfavorable resolution and prefer not to risk hiring them (EFE, 2021).

In the wake of the pandemic, new sectors have emerged for the most vulnerable Venezuelans migrants: the delivery riders. Although there are not official numbers, there is an estimation of more than 200,000 riders in Spain, most of whom are Venezuelan. Glovo, Uber Eats or Deliveroo are the main platforms in which, until the regulation of 2021, migrants informally worked as self-employed (EFE, 2021). In order to ensure that riders are employed by the platforms rather than operating as independent contractors, Spain introduced the “Rider Law” in 2021 in order to govern the food delivery industry. Some riders have opposed this law, especially those who have been operating without permits and are concerned that the new rules will exclude them from the labour market (Voz de America, 2021).

Furthermore, as established by Organic Law 4/2000, of 11 January, on the Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners in Spain and Their Social Integration, migrants must comply with Spanish immigration authorities and respect all laws as if they were nationals. Migrants must know and respect the Spanish legal system and that is the reason why they are entitled to an effective judicial protection, and they enjoy immigration legal consultancy services for asylum seekers free of charge (European Commission, 2020). In the event of failure to obtain a valid residence permit or if working without a prior administrative authorisation, migrants would be committing a serious offence according to Article 53 of Law 4/2000 and will have to pay a fine of 501 to 10,000 euros. In case of more serious misconduct, which could harm the national interest, Article 57 of this Law also provides that the expulsion from Spanish territory may be applied instead of a fine, in accordance with the principle of proportionality.

Despite of the assessed employment precarity, the majority of Venezuelans are not willing to return to their country of origin as the situation remains complicated and of great concern to the present time. These new flows of immigrants look for minimum living conditions that they cannot find at home. In Spain, at least, they are earning more money and have access to food and full medical care (Vargas Rivas, 2022, p.111). In addition, Latin American immigrants have the preferential treatment in some policies, as they are only required to two years of continuous and regular residence in the country in order to obtain the Spanish

²⁹ Out of all the domestic workforce that are migrants, there has been a preference for those females of Latin American origin, accounting for the 64.3%, while only the 24.9% were of European origin (p.85)

nationality³⁰ and thus be able to enjoy the same rights as Spaniards by birth and fully benefit from the welfare state³¹ (Gil Araujo, 2010; European Commission, 2020).

In recent years, the discussion in immigrant-receiving countries like Spain has focused on a relatively new term: ‘sustainable immigration’, understood as “that immigration which states can guarantee without upsetting social, economic and cultural balances” (Hernández & Le Bret, 2012). In line with the 2030 Agenda, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (hereinafter GCM³²) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 (A/RES/73/195) aimed at reducing the incidence of irregular migration and its negative effects and at promoting sustainable migration through the establishment of new legal pathways, fostering cooperation among countries (UN, 2018). In the Progress Report 2018–2022 it is possible to assess the way in which Spain has implemented the 23 GCM objectives, reinforcing the fact that there has been maintained the visibility of the Venezuelan migrants and refugee crisis by, for instance, collaborating in organising the International Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, in which more than 2.5 billion euros in donations and loans were pledged (United Nations Network on Migration, 2022).

Regarding their integration, Latin American migrants have been the preferred migration of the 21st century by Spanish society (García Ballesteros *et al.*, 2009), as there has always been a cultural and linguistic approach distinct to other groups of migrants under the concept of “*Hispanidad*”. Some studies reveal that both migrants from Eastern Europe and Latin America feel less excluded in the Spanish society as compared to African migrants, who express feeling more discrimination (García-Cid *et al.*, 2020, p.8).

Nevertheless, according to a study of Venezuelan women's socio-occupational integration in Spain of 2019, they report having been victims of double discrimination: one due to gender and the other because of race, accent, skin colour, etc., demonstrating that racism (and sexism) is still a real problem in current Spanish society and its labour market (Rodicio-García & Sacerda-Gorgoso, 2019, p. 18). For instance, many of them state that their previous work experiences are often not valued, as if working in other countries does not have the same value as working in Spain, which shows clear social prejudices we, Spaniards, would try to deny (Rodicio-García & Sacerda-Gorgoso, 2019, p.19).

There are considerations such as ethnicity, legal status, socioeconomic capacity that exacerbate the exclusion of migrant communities. And even if Spaniards are generally more tolerant than other European countries, the hostility towards immigrants in Spain has been increasing over time due to a feeling of competition for limited resources (i.e. housing or employment) that have magnified anti-immigrant sentiments (Checa Olmos & Arjona Garrido, 2012).

One of the CCM objectives has been the elimination of all forms and discriminations towards migrants and to combat hate speeches and xenophobia. According to the IOM (2019), xenophobia can be described as “attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity”, even though there is no universally accepted definition for it at the international level (p.235).

³⁰ Article 21 of the Spanish Civil Code regulates the acquisition of the Spanish nationality by residence.

³¹ Widely known as *Estado de Bienestar* in Spain.

³² See <https://www.un.org/es/migration2022/global-compact-for-migration>

Years ago, immigration did not occupy a relevant place in the social debate in Spain (Torres Pérez, 2014, p.219). Just last year, in 2023, the Council of Ministers approved, first nationwide Integration Strategy against Racism and Xenophobia (2023–2027), designed together with immigrant’s associations, to ensure the inclusion of all foreigners residing in the country. This would evidence the current Government’s commitment to promote an inclusive civil society with all immigrants as one main challenges for the upcoming years, placing this matter now on the main line of the governmental action plan (European Commission, 2024).

Furthermore, one year before, in 2022, the adoption of the Integral Law for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination (Law 15/2022) was a milestone in the field of anti-discrimination legislatives policies in the country for the prevention and eradication of all forms of discrimination in Spain (European Commission, 2024). Notwithstanding, mass migration and multiculturalism and superdiversity (with more than 100 different nationalities) still can cause possible social conflicts between native-born citizens and migrants and challenges for Spanish politics if not well managed, leading to the marginalisation of immigrants (Issel-Dombert, 2021).

As it has been assessed, marginalisation takes the form of prejudice, lower incomes and unskilled jobs, as in the case of Venezuelan migrants. Even if Spanish public opinion remains largely satisfied with Latin American migration in general, there is a growing acceptance of the discourse of "national preference" in access to employment (Torres Pérez, 2014, p.220). In contrast to the popular saying that we all have heard about migrants coming to countries like Spain to steal jobs from their nationals, as the market segmentation theory explains, migration is usually a significant part of the secondary sector of developed countries (i.e. house service, delivery riders, construction, agriculture...), and they are necessary to sustain the country since those markets with labour vacuums rely inevitably on immigrant workforce. Additionally, since migrants also contribute more to taxes than they benefit from social services, it has been acknowledged by the Spanish Minister of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration Elsa Saiz that currently Spain needs between 200,000 and 250,000 immigrants a year to maintain the Spanish Welfare State and to support the pensions for elder population (Europa Press, 2024). From this, it can be deduced that there are economic reasons (apart from ethical or moral grounds) to encourage migration. Despite this, migrants still face social confrontations, facing racism and being perceived as threats by the nationals in the receiving countries, especially if they are poor which make them suffer a double rejection by their condition³³(Čiarnienė and Kumpikaitė, 2008; Osorio Álvarez & Phélan Casanova, 2019, p.261).

According to several studies on the existing relations between migrant’s integration in society and their media portrayal, migrants are represented in two main categories (“good” or “bad”), fuelling a higher probability of violence being exercised against migrants who are portrayed in media with a pejorative discourse (i.e. linked to criminal ties). Typically, individual success stories of migrants are not given as much media coverage, dehumanising whole groups of people who share a nationality but, in fact, are highly dissimilar from one another and shaping public opinion to foster that feeling of considering migrants as a threat (Issel-Dombert, 2021, p.8-9). The media and social networks, a new aspect that has been insufficiently studied, have a broad responsibility as constructors of the narratives of new social realities like the recent phenomenon of mass migration in Spain, since they can influence both migration dynamics and migrant’s integration in the host society (Issel-Dombert, 2021, p.25).

³³ This is known as *aporofobia*, and is a term used to describe the “rejection, aversion and fear for the poor, for the underprivileged who, at least in appearance, can give nothing good in return”. It has a clear component of classist prejudice (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.).

In a society that seeks to have respectful citizens, who are open to different cultures and diversity of peoples, it is necessary to foster values such as equality and plurality as the basis of the Spanish democratic project of the forthcoming decades. If well managed, the growing number of Venezuelan migrants in Spain could represent a development opportunity, both for themselves (who escape the oppression of their country and here are able to enjoy access to public services and employment) and for the host country itself. Over time, migrants can increase the economic productivity of Spain, especially if they are allowed to work in an occupation commensurate with their qualifications and experience in the formal sector (UNHCR, 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

The initial purpose of this study has been to analyse relations between Spain and Venezuela on the basis of the Venezuelan migration phenomenon that our country has experienced in recent years. At the beginning of this arduous research, a series of specific objectives were set, such as understanding the real implications of the crisis in Venezuela, investigating the socio-demographic characteristics of Venezuelan immigration within Spanish territory or evaluating the effectiveness of the Spanish migration and integration policy system.

Firstly, the political, economic, and social environment of Venezuela has been found to be in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (1994) definition of "complex emergencies," particularly with regards to a "humanitarian crisis" since 2015. Despite of this, the origins that triggered the crisis would date further back in time. Since oil was discovered in Venezuela, which once was one of Latin America's most prosperous nations, the country followed decades of poor governance and mismanagement of revenues, thus revealing that the myth of the "Political Resource Curse" can be truth or, at least, applicable to this case. After diverse regimes, corruption spread throughout the whole institutional system like an irremediable cancer causing the impoverishment of the population and the political and economic ruin that is currently present in Venezuela. It has been noted that hyperinflation especially heightened during Nicolás Maduro's term in office but was already brewing even since before the beginning of Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution". After 'useless' and bloody civil protests, international migration has been the main consequence of this series of disastrous events that has caused the exodus of millions of Venezuelans abroad.

Whereas migration is not a new phenomenon, Spain has experimented an impressive socio-demographic metamorphosis during the course of the last ten years in which the monoculturalism of the peninsula became past history to now embrace a new globalist era of multi-diversity that has also put forward its own great social, economic and political challenges for the Spanish society. It is discernible from the foregoing analysis that Spain has established a legal framework in place to safeguard human rights and the protection of asylum seekers within its territory, grounded in principles of non-refoulement, equality, and non-discrimination while preserving national interests.

As we have been able to see, Spain has been the preferred destination in Europe for Venezuelans looking to re-establish their lives in their former coloniser. There were several variables that explain this phenomenon and among them, it deserves a special consideration the Spanish colonial and historical past, which has shaped the current migration landscape (i.e. Galicia and the Canary Islands as main destinations) as well as the creation of policies, such as those for naturalisation, that favour some groups, such as Venezuelans and other Spanish-speaking countries, over others. This would partly explain the attraction of Spain as a host country, reaffirming the hypothesis formulated before conducting the research that the colonial past and exchange of migratory flows (especially those during the Spanish postwar period) are responsible for the facilitation of less restrictive requirements to obtain the Spanish citizenship and to ensure more flexible policies to guarantee their settlement into the Spanish society.

It is not a coincidence that, since Spain developed economically this last quarter century, it has become a country that receives a significant amount of immigration, especially from Latin American nations, due to the development and employment opportunities it can offer, and their homelands usually cannot.

However, we have also observed that, at first, the Venezuelan nationality was not one of the most relevant, and, in fact, was almost unnoticeable until the most recent and economic political crisis that multiplied the number of asylum applications. From this we can distinguish two main profiles of Venezuelan migrants in Spain: those first ‘economic migrants’ who implemented the social reproduction strategy (Decoquer, 2018), and a second group of larger ‘migrants on humanitarian grounds’, from which we can draw special attention to the dramatic decline in their living conditions and how they have faced greater difficulties to integrate such as marginalisation and double discrimination due to their vulnerable conditions. Both groups share something: they are not willing to return to their country of origin on no account, since they can hardly get access to basic services or food or medicines (UNHRC, 2024).

Despite the limited information available on the profiles and current conditions of Venezuelan migrants in Spain, it has been possible to conclude that the most vulnerable groups are engaged in productive activities under precarious situations, regardless of potential prior studies or formal experiences in Venezuela. It is expected that the 2024 European Centre for Venezuelan Migration (CEMVE) survey could offer additional light on the realities of Venezuelans living in Spain for future research on the topic.

Moreover, according to data consulted in official bodies such as the INE, Venezuelan migration in Spain is relative feminised and of working age, which can significantly impact the Spanish populational dynamics because Venezuelan migrants are on a productive and reproductive age which can represent a demographic opportunity, or can even be considered a necessity, to cope with the ageing of the Spanish population and, as the Minister Elsa Saiz recently said, to support pensions.

Furthermore, another ‘pull’ variable that attracts Venezuelan immigration to Spain is our inclusive policies for foreigners (i.e. Law 4/2000, Law 12/2009 or Law 15/2022) and our welfare and social rights system, from which migrants expect to benefit either as workers or as subjects of international or subsidiary protection. This, along with specific strategies to combat discrimination (i.e. Strategy 2023-2027) and reception networks, associations, NGOs like Red Reto or the media play a fundamental role in fostering their integration and inclusion within the Spanish society. However, there is still a lot of progress to be made, especially in the face the rise of nationalism in Europe, and hence in Spain.

As it was mentioned at the *introduction* and *theoretical framework* of this dissertation paper, the context under examination demanded the application of the socio-historical theory because we have been able to see how present Spain has been during the democratic and humanitarian struggle in Venezuela (i.e. Zapatero's participation as a negotiator in the Dominican Republic's Dialogues; Spain as observer of the Lima Group; or as donors of funds within the framework of the European Union).

But, as we know, it is not possible to deal with the human phenomenon of migrations without taking into account all the perspectives. It finally turns out that the insights from the international migration theories that were previously dismissed (neoclassical and market segmentation) can also be partially applicable to the Venezuelan context by considering that migrants are not homogenous groups, and every individual decision may differ from another. As a conclusion, it can be drawn that there are not incorrect approaches for a phenomenon that is so abstract, subjective and difficult to decode, and therefore, I can affirm that the most correct decision would be to take an integrated approach.

It is likely to be the combination of cultural and historical factors together with the economic differences between the two nations, Spain and Venezuelan, as well as the increasing demand for migrant workforce in economic sectors which are not attractive for Spaniards, the main grounds that have led to the massive increase over the last years of migration, particularly Venezuelan, in our territory. Something that can be stated without hesitation from this research is that the recent economic and political situation in Venezuela has been the main driver to push such a big wave of forced migration.

In the last place, I would like to contribute this work with some recommendations and projections for the future. First, in reference to the delicate situation Venezuela is undergoing, the 2024 presidential elections are going to represent a turning point for the whole international community. The country is right now at a crucial national moment; it can either mean a third six-year period of '21st century socialism' and populism or it can be the promised necessary change of the opposition to, once and for all, transform Venezuela to regain its initial big potential. A different route from Maduro's authoritarian regime is possible, if a real democracy based on justice, freedom and respect for human rights, especially those civil and political rights, wins this July. Electoral irregularities are expected to occur again as usual, although some people even suggest considering next month's elections as a stepping-stone towards fully competitive presidential elections in 2030 (International Crisis Group, 2022). There is still hope for the Venezuelan diaspora to be reunified. And if policies that encourage the return of exiles are applied, then it would mean that the migration and asylum platforms of the receiving countries of the region such as Colombia, which have been overflowing, as well as the Spanish would alleviate.

On the other hand, Spain is in a relevant moment in its history too. It has the opportunity to improve its management of the so-called *migration crisis* by simplifying certain procedures, making some requirements for obtaining migrants permits more flexible and recognizing the most vulnerable Venezuelan migrants as possible refugees; and also, by gaining greater control over the salaries and possible exploitation of migrant workers. It is crucial to contemplate long-term objectives in order to be prepared for the changing and uncertain circumstances that the future holds, and thus preventing possible scenarios of marginalisation or social confrontation. To achieve this, the media and social networks play, without any doubt, a vital role in the construction of Spanish public opinion. For all this, I firmly believe that the civil society constitutes a fundamental actor for influencing social processes and, in consequence, we should be more aware of the different types of hardship situations that migrants in our territory face by empathising more with them, especially with the Venezuelan population that is fleeing a crisis and escaping from an authoritarian regime just like Spaniards did not so long ago, and we as well must not forget that.

To conclude with, this study has reflected on the complex dynamics of Venezuelan migration to Spain, driven by Venezuela's economic and political crisis. It highlighted the significant socio-demographic transformations in Spain and connected the previous Spanish mobility towards Latin American with the present influx of migrants Spain is currently receiving. The analysis underscores the importance of historical and cultural ties between Spain and Venezuela, as well as Spain's inclusive policies and welfare system, which have been proven to attract migration. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for an integrated approach to better understand any migratory process, considering both cultural-historical and economic factors. Finally, the study offers recommendations and projections for the future, including the potential for a democratic transformation in Venezuela and the importance of sustainable labour conditions and social integration of immigrants in Spain.

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