

The concept of freedom of the press as a symbolic conflict in the journalism field: the case of Venezuela

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Abstract

The defense of the freedom of the press is a unanimous point among press professionals, but the definition of such concept is not a consensus in the field of journalism. The present study investigates to what extent the social position of the Venezuelan journalists acting in the field changes their definitions of press freedom and censorship. The corpus of the analysis consists of qualitative interviews with six journalists of the Venezuelan television. The chosen stations – Venevisión, VTV and Globovisión – are representative of the political and market-orientation distinctions among the main media companies of the country, which constitute a group of press outlets that are different among themselves and in regard to the constraints that their professionals are subjected to. The theoretical framework is based mainly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose concepts of field, symbolic conflicts, heteronomy and autonomy are useful to the analysis of the journalism field, of the restrictions to which it is submitted and of the strategies adopted by its members. The text reaches the conclusions that freedom of the press is a concept under dispute, and that the relative positions in the journalism field have a decisive influence in the definitions of freedom, press and censorship as presented by each interviewee. As the journalists defend the freedom of the press, they impose representations that sustain the strategies for maintaining or subverting the setting of their field that is more interesting to the outlets for which they work.

Keywords: Freedom of the Press, Censorship, Journalism Field, Symbolic Conflict, Venezuela.

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1. Introduction

The journalism field is permeated by contradictions and restrictions that can be evaluated in different ways. Yet, it seems that there are not many studies that seek to research how journalists interpret these conflicts.

The main goal of this study is to investigate the relation between the positioning of the professional of the journalism field and his or her definition of freedom of the press, through a qualitative research that was undertaken with six Venezuelan journalists. The second part of the work consists of the theoretical framework. It is composed mainly by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, due to its internal coherence and to the pertinence of its concepts.

The third part of the work is composed by an analysis of the distinct positions of the television stations in which the interviewees work. The fourth part presents the methodology that was adopted for selecting the interviewees, structuring the interviews and taking them to effect. And the final part developed by the article analyzes the interviews in connection with the previous discussions. The work is synthesized in the conclusions, which also point out to possible ramifications of the theme.

2. Symbolic struggles in the field of communication

A field is a relation of positions defined by the possession of different forms of capital. Bonnewitz, based on Bourdieu, defines the concept in the following way:

In analytic terms, a field can be defined as a network or a configuration among positions. These positions are objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations that they impose to the agents who occupy them – either agents or institutions – on account of their actual and potential location (*situs*) in the structure of distribution of the distinct species of power (or of capital), whose possession commands the access to the specific profits at stake in the field, and, at the same time on account of

their objective relations with the other positions (domination, subordination, homology, and so on) (2003).

The capital has characteristics that allow the use of its expression not only in economics. It is accumulated through investment and transferred by inheritance, and it produces profit to its owner according to what can be done with the most profitable operations (Bonnewitz, 2003).

Each field has its own particularities in regard to the relative importance and the existence of distinct forms of capital, but Bourdieu highlights four types as being the main ones: economic capital is marked by the possession of the means of production and goods. Cultural capital, on its turn, is the intellectual qualification of an individual, and has a triple characterization: as cultural goods in an objective state (books, records, paintings), as an institutional form (school, university), and as introjected personal qualities (such as charisma, or communicability). Social capital is the set of social relations of an individual, and symbolic capital, above all others, is the set of rituals connected to honor and to the recognition of the other forms of capital (Bonnewitz, 2003).

The strategies used by the agents of a field are considered in accordance with their repertoire of capital forms. Thus, a characteristic of the fields is the tension between those who possess more capital (among them, the specific capital of the field) and those who do not possess it. The former adopt strategies to maintain the rules of the game, whereas the latter adopt strategies to subvert it (Bourdieu, 1983).

From the standpoint of Bourdieu, in order to understand the problem of press freedom, one must be attentive to the theoretical formulations that the author drew about autonomous and heteronomous fields. According to Bourdieu, an autonomous field is defined in the following way:

A very autonomous field, namely mathematics, for instance, is one in which the producers only have their competitors as clients, who themselves would have been able to make the discovery which is presented to them [...]. In order to win autonomy one has to construct this kind of ivory tower at the interior of which one judges, criticizes,

even combats each other, but while knowing the reason. One confronts one another, yet with arms, scientific instruments, techniques, methods (Bourdieu, 1997).

Heteronomy is the concept used to define the interference of one field into another, thus harming its autonomy. The visibility allowed by journalism, for instance, changes the logics of other fields, but such visibility allowed by journalism, on its turn, is the fruit of the interference of the economic field inside the journalistic field, which determines the consolidation and the practice of journalistic values. Bourdieu highlights that the influence of one field on another is unnoticed by those who attempt to reflect based on isolated actions, even when these actions are undertaken by powerful agents (Bourdieu, 1997).

The re-conversion allows the purchase of distinct types of capital, and the field of cultural industry is quite sensitive to this process. Agents who occupy higher positions in the economic and political fields have an interest of being active in them, “due to the fact that the most valued social capitals that move in it are also the most valued ones in the social space” (Miranda, 2005).

Censorship is defined by Bourdieu as an adjustment-process between what the agent desires to say and what is allowed to be said in a specific field. There is a euphemism-effort seeking to relate the two factors, and this process can even lead to silence as the borderline of censorship. Each field is a structure of distribution, in which there is a specific type of capital, which can be university authority, or political power, physical force, journalistic credibility and so on. The speech-power of an agent is given by the institutional capital of authority that is conceded to him or her, either due to his or her personal traits (charisma), or through delegation (such as priests or teachers). One of the most efficient ways to control what is said in the field is to force undesirable agents to silence by taking them out of the speech-positions, and placing in these positions the agents who will only say what the field allows and requests them (Bourdieu, 1993a).

Depending on the positions that the press outlets, and, consequently, their journalists occupy in the field, there are many forms through which undesirable agents are forced to silence, while other agents are selected in order to meet the expectations of the field.

The main forms are: the expectations of the public, permanent vigilance, structural censorship, material domination, symbolic domination and self-censorship.

Each journalistic product has an audience expecting to see a discourse that is congruent with its own *habitus*. Here is a first assumption of journalistic reporting, which must correspond to the expectations of the public. As a consequence, the media outlets at the peak of the cultural industry usually have a pro-government tone. Such position is the most comfortable one, because by presenting the official declarations, one conveys the impression that the political coverage is made while it is also possible to hide the contradictions and polemics that could divide the audience into segments (Bourdieu, 1997).

A second form of limiting the possibilities of journalistic production is linked to competition. The search for the 'breaking news' creates a paradoxical effect: the permanent vigilance among journalists restricts the plurality of the productions (Bourdieu, 1997).

The third limitation has a very wide reach. Bourdieu calls structural censorship the consequences that the lack of time in television has over the interviewees, changing the way how ideas are constructed and even leading up to silence (Bourdieu, 1997). However, the administrative problems of any company, such as the expenses with personnel and equipment, the travels, and expenses with processes also affect the journalistic companies and have an influence in their productions. The fragility of a newsroom can be measured, for instance, through the number of press releases that it uses in order to cover a particular space. The 'International' or 'World' section is usually limited to the coverage of the main facts of a dozen countries or of some summits – the favorite events of the agenda-journalists. The cuts in the expenses with displacements, equipments and journalists are also a form of structural censorship.

Bourdieu points out to two main forms through which the political field dominates the journalistic field: material domination and symbolic domination. But here, it is also possible to expand the analysis and see how these two phenomena take place in the relation of the journalistic field with other fields.

Material domination is the power of pressure that a government, company or entity can exert on a communication outlet, “especially through the allocation of resources for advertising, subventions, fiscal incentives, credit and so on” (Bourdieu, 1997).

Symbolic domination is the use that politicians, scientists and others make of the legitimacy that is conferred upon them in their specific fields to combat the journalistic field. The news producer always depends on the people with the specific capitals of different fields, and some of these sources are irreplaceable, which creates a dependency-relation between journalists and them. One form of censorship not easily noticeable is the systematic boycott by a government, entity, soccer club, company and others to the reporters of a specific field.

All these forms of censorship are worsened by the fact that the journalists’ market is saturated, in other words, there is a very strong market reserve that forces the journalist – especially the younger journalists – to think twice before disobeying an order (Bourdieu, 1997). Self-censorship has a role of diminishing the conflicts of a newsroom, as it is the previously exerted form of censorship – a more introjected form that ends up including itself in the *habitus* of the more experienced teams. Training processes are occasions in which the selection of potentially useful agents takes place in a more explicit way, and where their *habitus* can be adjusted through the promise that some will be employed, by evaluating their behavior and discarding those who do not fit the spokesperson-profile that the field expects to see.

The field-concept allows a macro analysis of the relations between the social agents, whereas the *habitus* allows an analysis of the relation between the individual and the structure. It is through this concept that Bourdieu explains the adhesion of an agent to the field, yet always refraining from adopting a strict deterministic view, which takes away any autonomy by the individual:

A system of durable and transposable dispositions, which integrate all the past experiences and acts at all moments as a matrix of perceptions, of judgments and actions – and makes possible the execution of infinitely differentiated tasks, thanks to the analogous transfers of systems [...] (Bourdieu, 1983b).

The individuals are born without a *habitus*. It is through the family and through the life experiences of the first years that the reality shapes the psychological structures that will have an influence on the new representations and practices, which on their turn will be integrated to the *habitus* and propel the cycle. In other words, the primary *habitus* influences the amassing of new dispositions. Thus, the initial education of an individual plays a fundamental role, but it is not immutable, because the development of the *habitus* is continuous (Bonnewitz, 2003). It is worth recalling once again that all these forms of censorship are not products of individual decisions, but of the disposition of the journalistic field, which structures these decisions. In the same way as censorship is a product of the journalistic field, which is very heteronymous, the freedom of the means of communication and journalists increases if the journalistic field matches certain configurations.

‘Freedom of the press’ is the commonly used expression as a reference to the autonomy of the journalistic field. Freedom would be the synonymous word for autonomy, and Press for the journalistic field. According to Bourdieu, a field is autonomous when it works according to its own values and not as a response to interventions of other fields. That is, the autonomy or freedom of the journalism field depends on the possibility of acting in it in accordance with its specific logic as a field, which is culturally established among the journalists through the “restrictions and cross-sectional controls that they impose on one another, and whose observance (named at times as deontology) supports the reputations of professional renown” (Bourdieu, 1997).

Bourdieu does not handle the question of autonomy in an absolute way, by tracing a line between what is autonomous and heteronymous. What varies is the level of autonomy in accordance with the dynamic of the field. It is out of the purpose – especially for the field of journalism – to think about a total autonomy, i.e. a freedom of the press that exists only if it is total, or one that does not exist in any other terms. Both in the sphere of the journalism company and of the journalism-professional, some aspects have a variable degree of autonomy. Yet, in spite of the fact that heteronomy is natural to the journalistic field, it is always seen as a problem to be minimized.

Even though the freedom of the press is continuously restricted by many types of censorship intrinsic to the configuration of the journalistic field, it is not a theme that arises sporadically in the press – in theory, the party most interested in defending itself from such limitations. For this reason, when such debate emerges, one must be mindful of the following question: what is the meaning of freedom, press and censorship for the distinct agents of the journalistic field? Or better yet, what meaning do the distinct agents of the journalistic field wish to give to freedom, press and censorship? The freedom of the press becomes a severe problem to be discussed by society in particular moments, and not in others, because there are symbolic conflicts that define what is freedom of the press and what is censorship.

For Bourdieu, the symbolic conflicts oppose agents who seek to impose a view of the world according to their own interests. Such conflicts take place at two levels: an objective level that refers to objective positions in the social space, and a subjective level that refers to the representations of the social world:

On the objective side, one can act for individual and collective representation actions, aimed at making certain realities seen and at validating them [...]. On the subjective side, one can act in the attempt to change the categories through which the social world is perceived and valued: the categories of perception, the systems of classification. That is, in essence, the words, the names that construct the social reality as much as express it are the engines par excellence of the political fight, of the fight for imposing the principle of the legitimate view and of the legitimate division... (Bonnewitz, 2003).

Making the press-freedom theme valid in certain moments is an aspect of the symbolic conflict. Another, subtler aspect is the fight for the definition of the words, for the construction of the social reality that the words freedom, press and censorship generate. Symbolic violence takes place when there is a lack of awareness about it. The lack of reflection on a certain number of axioms, which are taken as a matter of course, turns the definitions into the product of a symbolic domination (Bonnewitz, 2003).

The social sphere is a place of closure of meaning, given that the social position determines the access to the cultural decoders. The audiences do not have an infinite repertoire of interpretative discourses for the meanings proposed by the media. The

place of the individuals in the social structure tends to determine the nature of the discourses that are accessible to them. There are at least two limits to the interpretative autonomy of the public: the imposition of preferential meanings and the unequal social distribution of discursive resources (Schramm, 2005).

These groups of people who have a common *habitus* and common interests – of course, with their individual variations – form interpretative communities, that is, groups that produce meanings in a similar way. Literary studies have pointed that such communities determine the legitimate forms of interpretation (Schramm, 2005).

The lack of individual reflections, or even the precariousness of the theoretical views of ethics in the journalistic field are factors that, once present, delegate the class *ethos* and the interpretation of press freedom inside a journalistic field. The consequence of this is the emergence of groups that defend a freedom of press that is congruent with their strategies of preservation or subversion of the rules of the journalistic field. The diverging interpretative communities enter a symbolic conflict in order to pass on to the public their views on the theme.

3. Venevisión, VTV and Globovisión: distinct positions in the journalistic field

The recent scenario of Venezuelan television is less radical than earlier in the decade, as the TV stations with the highest audience (Venevisión and Televen) left aside their open ideological fight, in the expectation to recover the credibility that was lost in the attempts to overthrow the government in 2002 and to keep their broadcast signal (Televen's license was renewed in 2008).

Venevisión is the oldest private channel of Venezuela. It always had and still has a strong economic power, having become the leader of audience after its competitor for the market leadership since the 1950s, RCTV, lost its broadcast signal (Bisbal, 2002). Bourdieu affirms that it is difficult to estimate the symbolic weight of an outlet, but in the case of Venezuela's private TV stations, there has been an explicit phenomenon of

loss of credibility. After taking part in the 2002 coup, the objectivity-discourse was contradicted by the TV stations themselves, and the media-counterattack by the government (based on the previously mentioned strategies) divided the main private stations into two groups: those that have maintained a radical support to the opposition and were punished for this (RCTV and Globovisión – the latter, under the threat of losing the renewal of its license and unable to expand its signal due to administrative obstructions); and those that started a process of recovering their credibility with programs aimed at entertainment and a balanced yet superficial journalism (Venevisión and Televen).

In 2008, Venevisión had 1-hour news programs from Mondays to Fridays from 6:30 am to 7:30 am, from 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm, and from 11:30 pm to 1:30 am. There was not another type of information-program, such as interview shows, debates or documentaries. The channel receives public and private advertising funds. In Venezuela, it is usual to see the hosts of information programs taking part in advertisements of the private channels. Such situation is current in Venevisión, and much more frequently in Globovisión.

In the broadcast TV, the conspicuously political standing is present at the channels VTV (pro-government) and Globovisión (opposition). During the 2006 elections, the channel that dedicated more time to political information was VTV (46%), using 86% of this time to promote Hugo Chávez. Even before the elections, Globovisión was the second channel that most publicized political news (35%), using 65% of this time to promote the opposition candidate Manuel Rosales (Agrivalga & Canelón, 2008).

The public channels depend exclusively on public funds and all of them have a programming in line with the Socialist Bolivarian ideology. The most important channel of the state platform is VTV, both due to its symbolic weight as the main communications outlet of the government with its support basis, and to the audience, which even though is not comparable to that of the main private TV channels, is still larger than that of the other public channels. VTV is subordinated to the Ministry of Communication and Information, the same ministry that is responsible for the immense structure of propaganda of the State, including the channel itself.

VTV has a privileged access to official events, and the flexibility of its programs allows the follow up on several live happenings, along with programs of opinion, debate and interview. The transmission of live speeches, on the one hand, can be considered as another promotion-form; on the other hand, it allows the spectator to follow up, without temporal limitations or lack of contextualization, on the thinking of his or her government, its priorities and proposals. The coverage of the activities of the president is complete, including travels by correspondents along with the travels of the office holder.

Globovisión plays a diametrically opposed role to VTV, promoting the opposition and using its programs in order to criticize president Chávez and his supporters. As well as VTV, this channel is specialized in journalism. Next, as we shall see through the interviews with journalists of this channel, the pro-Chávez sources do not grant interviews to Globovisión, and other measures have been also taken against the channel. From the existing media outlets, the channel is one of the main targets of criticism by Chávez, who calls it “the Globovisión party”.

As shown, Venevisión, VTV and Globovisión have distinct editorial views and their professionals occupy different spaces in the field of communications in Venezuela, as each one of these outlets suffer the censorship related to its own positions. In the following section, we shall present and analyze the interviews with the journalists of these three channels, through which we will attempt to understand the relation between their reasonings in defense of the freedom of the press and their conditions as agents of the journalistic field.

4. Method of the Interview

The interviews were made in the modality of “in depth” of the “semi-open” type (Duarte, 2006). They had the main goal of comprehending, through direct and indirect questions, what the interviewees understand by freedom of the press as they conceptualize and defend it.

The interviewees were selected according to two criteria. The first of them is the company where they work. The study does not intend to draw some type of map of the media field in Venezuela, or of the contending conceptions of press freedom. The goal is to counter agents of distinct positions without the ambition of being exhaustive in the definition of the corpus of analysis to the point of claiming its representativeness in the field. The interviews were restricted to the television circle due to the advantage of establishing relations among the agents of one same medium, and due to the leading role played by companies of this sector in the political conflicts of the country. For this reason, the analysis of the Venezuelan media field was focused on the TV channels, and, in particular, on the positions of Venevisión, VTV and Globovisión, which are the companies of the interviewees. The option for these companies was due to their above-mentioned differences.

The second criterion for selecting the interviewees was the time that they have been working in the market; and, in the company, there was the option for one more experienced professional and another younger one; with different educational backgrounds and occupying different positions. The position they occupy makes a key difference, as it commits them to the values of the company and connects them to the public in distinct ways, along with representing hierarchic and labor variations. Lastly, in spite of not sufficiently knowing the past of the interviewees through their interviews, we sought to have an idea of important variations of their *habitus* in order to compare agents with a similar experience and different companies, and agents of the same company and experiences that are more different.

The interviewees, whose names will not be revealed, are referred to through the acronyms of the companies where they work – VEN (Venevisión), VTV (Venezolana de Televisión) and GLO (Globovisión) – and numbers 1 (for the younger journalist) or 2 (for the senior journalist). Thus, the younger interviewee of Globovisión, for instance, will be mentioned as ‘GLO 1’, whereas the senior journalist will be mentioned as ‘GLO 2’. Professionals of both sexes have been interviewed.

The interviews took place in August and September 2008, and each journalist was interviewed at the channel where he or she worked in Caracas. The following themes have been approached:

- Personal itinerary; we questioned the interviewee's education, where he or she has lived, why he or she chose journalism, the professional trajectory, how he or she entered the company, the positions occupied at the channel and professional perspectives;
- View of the channel and of the Venezuelan media: through this topic, we sought to know how the interviewee evaluates his or her own position in the field, and what he or she understands that should be the journalism field. We questioned which was the audience of the channel where he or she worked (size, social class, and political ideology), its editorial policy and sources of funding; which are the possibilities of hiring professionals by media with opposite ideologies to the current ones, how should be the training of journalists and the functions of the public and private media;
- Questions on journalism: we attempted to identify how the interviewee conceptualizes the professional path, and based on the censorship forms enumerated by Bourdieu, which practices the interviewee considers as interferences from other areas, and which he or she sees as belonging to the field. We questioned what is journalism; whether the expectations of the public must be met; which relation one has with the competitors; how must be relation between the newsroom and the commercial department, how the relations between the official sources are, how the editorial policy of the company is passed on, and what is the level of stability in the job;
- Opinions on press freedom: the final part of the interview is explicitly dedicated to the issue of press freedom. The reasonings used in this stage can be contrasted to the previous one, in which one could or not relate the questions to the freedom-theme. We questioned the definition of freedom of the press, if the interviewee considered him- or herself free, if there is press freedom in Venezuela and if both the public and private means of communication allowed their journalists to act freely.

5. The position in the journalistic field and the conceptualization of freedom of the press

First of all, the interviewees were not explicitly asked about the issue of freedom of the press. But before they were asked about their professional itineraries, they were asked about different aspects of their own companies and of the media field in Venezuela in a general way, in order to find out to which point the journalists identify themselves and admit the structural limitations to which they are subjected.

The interviewees of Venevisión, VEN 1 and VEN2, see it as an entertainment channel and a leader in terms of audience that has a broad public in all aspects, both in size and in political ideology or social class. But working at an ‘omnibus medium’ does not seem to be something negative to them, as they sustain that the plurality of the audience also grants to the contents of information this same character, which makes the journalism of the station qualitatively superior to other pro-government or pro-opposition broadcast channels.

VEN 1 highlights that she can exercise her functions according to strictly journalistic criteria, whereas in other private and public channels, this does not take place. She mentions the case of RCTV, affirming that journalists of this channel complain of a “trend that we must only transmit negative, catastrophic things”, whereas the news programs of Venevisión must reflect both positive and negative things. VEN 1 reveals that “now” such freedom is possible in this channel, which leads to the assumption such autonomy for exercising a quality-journalism was not present before. VEN 2 qualifies the news segment of Venevisión as “impartial”, as it daily demonstrates its neutrality by consulting sources of the government, of the opposition and other sectors. He also reveals that this editorial policy “has been in effect in the recent times”, and that “for enough time there has been a notorious and important balance in the information”.

Differently from VTV and Globovisión, Venevisión receives both public and private advertising. In perspective, the situation of the journalists of this channel, in spite of the limitations imposed by the commercial logic of the company, is better than in the recent past, when the journalistic criteria were followed in a less strict way. This situation was

due to economic restrictions, but also to the fact that the political element was more present. The interviewees do not take up the position that they had in the past and defend the current one, showing themselves as agents interested in the maintenance of the current state of the field.

The VTV-interviewees see the positions of the channel in a natural way. VTV 1 believes that the public of the channel, “seen through the recent presidential elections of 2006, must consist of an estimated 7 million persons”. The logic of the journalist is simple, linking the channel’s audience to the number of votes of Hugo Chávez. VTV 2, on his turn, believes that the audience of the channel is “much larger than it seems”. He defends that most of the public consists of pro-Chávez supporters in “a multi-class movement [...], in spite of the fact that most of them belong to the middle class and to the popular sectors”. Yet, VTV 2 believes that the channel has “a numerous anti-Chávez public, and a more or less neutral public [...] that watches VTV in order to be informed”.

Both agree when asked about the role the channel intends to fulfill: being an information outlet that approaches reality from the pro-government standpoint in an attempt to counteract the private outlets. VTV 1 defends that VTV “reflects a reality that oftentimes does not exist for the other outlets”, thus playing the role of a “counterweight” to the private channels, which, for him, amount to around 70% of the number of vehicles. For VTV 2, the channel is “increasingly more informative, that is, with programs of information and opinion”. Such programs would result in the heterogeneous public of VTV, as even for an entrepreneur of the opposition, “it is very important to know what the government is doing and what the legislation establishes”.

VTV 1 and VTV 2 admit that they are ideologically aligned with the government and agree with the attitude of VTV, justifying it through the deficiencies in the information of the other channels. The journalists admit the heteronomy that exists in the Venezuelan media field (not in these terms, but in an indirect way), and, in particular, the adequacy of VTV’s journalism to the current political context. The channel is a strategic instrument of the government in the media battle experienced by Venezuela, and the interviewees agree with the role that is allotted to them by the Ministry of

Communications, of acting bearing in mind – with precedence over the principles of journalism – the objective of supporting the Bolivarian Revolution.

The Globovisión-public is defined by GLO 1 as “A, B and C classes, because the members of the poorer classes maybe do not watch Globovisión, as it is pay television. The journalist also states: “it is clear that those who watch Globovisión are of the opposition, but so do pro-government viewers, because they need to know what is going on”. But even if the popular sectors are not the channel’s public, she highlights that “they always think that we (reporters) can try to help them, to take the microphone so that they may speak about what they need”.

Considering the public of the channel, GLO 2 laments that the government has not allowed the station to expand its signal – a request that has been made “for almost six years”. But the journalist affirms that the channel is watched “by the entire country, independently of ideology and political position, because for the people, the government is a reference”.

As much as the VTV journalists link the audience of the station to a pro-Chávez majority and to an opposition-public in search of a reference, the interviewees of Globovisión believe that the public of the channel is seeking a source of critical information in relation to the government, but it also reaches the individuals with a sympathy for the revolutionary process that they attempt to identify, and thus it is seen as a counterpoint to the governmental positions. The interviewees believe that their publics are fully aware of the ideological orientation of their programs and, indeed, VTV and Globovisión do not hide their political views.

In spite of the fact that GLO 1 and GLO 2 indirectly admit the political position of the station when they affirm that their public is connected to the opposition, or when they state that the channel is a reference (i.e. an opposition-reference) for Chávez-supporters, these journalists took up distinct positions when they were asked about the objectives of Globovisión. GLO 1 replied that the channel “tries to impart all the news” without giving much importance to the *fait divers* and with a strong political coverage, pondering that this “depends on the moment”.

GLO 2 also avoids mentioning the oppositional standing of the channel, by stating that Globovisión has the sole objective of “informing”. When asked about the difference in relation to other stations that also intend to inform, then GLO 2 highlighted the critical position of the channel and defended that Globovisión, “differently of channels such as Venevisión and Televen, which are private channels, does not have any commitments with the government”. She added that “Venevisión and Televen have definitely given up their critical positions in relation to the government”. The journalist also criticized VTV, saying that “it should be the State channel, but is the propaganda-channel of the government”. GLO 2 enumerated governmental measures that attempted to jeopardize the activities of Globovisión: “in spite of the whole tributary, administrative and juridical trap that they want to impose on [Globovisión], it goes on informing”. She also complained about the equipment confiscated by the State, about the aggressions suffered by the reporters on the streets and about the boycott by the official sources.

Contrary to Venevisión, which, after RCTV lost its broadcast signal, increased its own audience and dropped the political confrontation, Globovisión has not been able to expand its public – due to administrative hindrances that obstruct it from transmitting with broadcast signal in other regions – and is now alone in the TV combat against the government (without considering RCTV itself, as pay TV). The Globovisión-interviewees are interested in changing the relations in the Venezuelan media field, because, on top of all the above-mentioned problems, the RCTV-case represents a threat that the potential situation can become even worse in the case of a total loss of broadcast signal.

The field of work presents another element for comparing the professionals who face better or worse chances. It may be noticed that there is a natural process of professional training at the public outlets and the further hiring of some of these professionals by the private sector. This is reinforced by the facts that internship is a mandatory practice in the schools of communication, and that the professional placement of the young occurs in all types of media. On the other hand, especially after the incidents of 2002, the government has hired professionals who are in line with certain ideological criteria, which makes more difficult the transition from a private to a public outlet. VEN 1, VTV 1 and GLO 2 mentioned examples of professionals who have left public outlets to join

private outlets, but none of the six interviewees mentioned the opposite path. Such situation highlights two important questions: the ideologically-oriented hiring of journalists by the State-outlets and the decreased number of work-alternatives for professionals who survive through outlets that are opposed to the government.

Next, we analyze the opinions of the interviewees on questions that touch the issue of training in the journalistic field: what is journalism, how should be the relationship between journalists and the commercial department of a company, and what is the importance of an academic training in communication.

VEN 1 defines journalism as a “social responsibility”, and considers “what is interesting for people and what is more useful for them” as the first criterion to inform well. Such definition is in line with the editorial tendency of an “*omnibus* medium”, which seeks to reach the largest possible number of persons. VEN 1 also says that “people trust journalists”, and that for this reason, one must capture reality “without political tendencies, without political interests”, thereby criticizing once again the attitude of the politically engaged channels. But the interviewee is not equally critical as she analyzed the commercial engagement of the journalists. VEN 1 has worked as copywriter of advertisements by the costumers of the channel, and, in Venezuela, it is common practice to have journalists writing for advertisement pieces, as takes place in Venevisión. The journalist defends that the ads and the information-contents of the channel are “totally free of strings” and that if some advertiser incurs in the illicit act of not paying taxes, she would go after the news and it would soon be in the air. There would be no conflict between the journalistic work and the copywriting of ads, or the linkage of the journalist’s image to advertisement spaces.

VEN 2 defines journalism as “the art of informing, of developing a country” in a “more objective way, in a more impartial way, yet in a partial way at the moment of defending rights, of defending democratic positions, of defending the right to life”, providing “tools so that the people may also adopt a critical attitude towards these things, and towards life”. VEN 2 also highlights the importance of higher education and the subsequent constant improvement of the journalist. He laments that the journalism students “do not conform to getting a degree and wish to work for television”, and so

“each day the information has less strength and make less use of a better language, based on a good knowledge of what one is doing”. VEN 2 has a degree in broadcasting, social communication and law, and took postgraduate studies in Forensics.

VEN 2 establishes a linkage between the program’s schedule and advertising, in the sense that there is a strategy that secures certain audience levels, which “will serve who is in charge of selling in a channel”. The journalist identifies the most fundamental heteronomy relation between programming and advertising, whereas VEN 1 defends that there is no type of relation between the two in a station – which, recalling, is the closer station to the pole of the cultural industry in the Venezuelan television market.

The VTV interviewees agreed with VEN 2 by affirming that journalism consists, considering the limitations of the human being, of transmitting the information in the most objective way. Such view is opposed to journalism as practices at VTV, whose ideological tendency goes much beyond the subjective limitations of the human being. The definition of journalism of the VTV-interviewees does not consider what is done at the station.

Regarding journalism-education, both believe that it is not fundamental, and both criticize the quality of the academic training in communications in Venezuela. VTV 1 thinks that the university helps its students familiarize themselves with the distinct media types and technical aspects of the profession, but criticizes the oppositional political orientation of teaching and of the school of journalists – an institution that he labels as “another branch of a party”. VTV 2 is emphatic in defending that journalism “is a carrier in which it is easier to learn by oneself, [...] but the most difficult thing is not to get a journalism degree; instead, the difficult thing is to make a good work in journalism”. He adds that one cannot see a surgery if one is not a doctor, but one can read a newspaper without being a journalist, and watching how the others do is how one learns”. VTV 2 does not have a degree in communication, but is one of the most distinguished journalists of the country, having directed important communication companies before the emergence of Chavism in Venezuela, and his own trajectory seems to have an influence on him as he spoke about vocational education.

The Globovisión journalists define journalism in a similar way, as the search for the important information to society, and as having a positive impact on its life. As in other moments of the interview, GLO 1 keeps this vague definition, thus showing a weakly reflexive view of her profession. GLO 2, similarly to VTV 1 and VTV 2, makes a statement that is in disagreement with the Globovisión practice by affirming that “the journalist, as such, has a responsibility of knowing that balanced information always presents the two sides of a coin”, and she also defended that one must not direct the opinion of people, “but must provide elements so that the spectator can form his or her opinion”.

Regarding the relation between advertising and journalism, both affirmed that they make advertisement pieces, but this does not interfere in the information contents of the station. GLO 1 admits that “the relation exists”, and that “it is evident that there is an interest” (by the announcers), but she “thinks” that this would not prevent the publicizing of a news about the announcer. GLO 2 affirms that “advertisements in the communication outlets have always been a means of pressure and commitment with the government”, but that this “does not work” at Globovisión. She also said that she works for ads, but there is no additional relation with the costumers of the channel, whereas in other stations there is indeed a meddling by the commercial department in the editorial line, probably as a reference to Venevisión and Televen – the channels that the journalist had previously mentioned. In short, public and private advertising could be serving as forms of pressure in the other stations, but in Globovisión, where the ads presented by house-journalists are more common than in any other station, there would be no such pressure-relation.

In a general way, one can notice a reflexive precariousness of the interviewees as they conceptualized journalism. In spite of the fact that none of them made the open claim of impartiality, their definitions expressed the attempt to reach it through the transmission of information as objectively and truly as possible. These professionals had little or nothing to say about the construction of truthfulness in journalistic reporting; likewise, they said little or nothing about the framing of reality, about the ideological pluralism with which one may approach one theme and about the specific values of the field: in short, about aspects that are basic for establishing how the journalistic field should

work, and for allowing their professionals – even as they face structural difficulties that do not motivate a moral behavior in the profession – to defend themselves more adequately from the censorship that is imposed on them.

Speaking about the relationship of the newsrooms and commercial departments of their stations (in the cases of Venevisión and Globovisión), the journalists restrict the question to the news that directly refer to the announcers. These professionals believe (or wish to make believe) that since they have never been oriented to refrain from transmitting information connected to the costumers of the channel, the journalism of their companies does not suffer any influence by them. The interviewees ignore, among other points, that topics such as taxes, public budget, monetary policy, private property, monopoly, socialism and many others imply in dealing with the interests both of the government and of the large companies with resources to pay for ads in their channels.

The following lines will analyze the excerpts of the interviews that sought to grasp the conceptualizations on press freedom by the interviewees, especially as they were asked to define freedom of the press, if there is such freedom in Venezuela, and if there is freedom of the press in the public and private media.

VEN 1 affirms that freedom of the press is “to respect the right of the people to express themselves freely, without censorship, without withholding the news, without the withdrawal of a news piece due to someone’s convenience”, thus summarizing her concept into “the capacity to express oneself freely, without any type of censorship, through the media”. The definition of the journalist is vague and considers only the more brutish forms of censorship, i.e. the forms openly exerted by dictatorial governments or inside communication companies.

The interviewee defends that “the freedom of the press, for the Venezuelans, is not affected”, and, similarly to other moments of the interview, she criticized the means of communication of the opposition, affirming that “they are saying that there is no freedom of the press, but they are using the freedom of the press”. She adds that “there may be dangers when journalists become contaminated with politics, when journalists become in favor of one or another sector, and to not understand that we work for the two sectors”. When asked if in the public and private media, the freedom of the press is

restrained, she affirmed that “in the media that became radicalized, press freedom is limited”, and that “the journalist must have, according to his or her criteria, the capacity to select by oneself what one considers to be important”. As analyzed above, the position of the Venevisión journalists is more comfortable in relation to the political battle that is taking place in Venezuela, yet the worst one, bearing in mind the censorship linked to the commercial nature of the channel, and the definition of press freedom of VEN 1, as much as the definition of journalism as something based precisely on balanced information.

For VEN 2, “freedom of the press is fundamentally linked to the means, to the freedom that a medium has for upholding its editorial policy, for deciding what will be transmitted or not, for establishing its press freedom”. He defends that the media must be free for “establishing its freedom”, disconsidering any relation of submission of the companies to the society or to the professional norms. Thus, VEN 1 and VEN 2 do not consider the structural factors to which they are subjected, such as scarceness of time, as they defined press freedom. VEN 2 believes that there is press freedom in Venezuela, but he condemns “the closing of channels”.

The journalists of Venezuela’s commercially successful station conceptualized freedom of the press based on entrepreneurial autonomy, and VTV 1, journalist of a public station radically favorable to the government, defines freedom of the press with one single word: “Venezuela”. There could have been a more evident contrast of how the debate on press freedom is permeated by conditionings imposed by the heteronomy of the journalistic field. VTV 1 concludes his answer explaining why the country would be the biggest example of freedom of the press, but his line of reasoning does not attempt to exhaust the question. The goal is to convince that there is freedom in the country. When speaking about the TV schedule, VTV 1 explains that it “gets down to the point of insulting, of offending, and nothing happens”. He adds that “the most paradoxical of it all is that the same people who play a leading role in these excesses say that there is no freedom”.

The journalist also affirms that only a few days before the interview, he was covering an act of the opposition and “the fact that there were no questions was not even missed;

taping the act itself was already enough, there was no one there”. The statement makes evident that the only objective of a VTV-journalist in covering an act by the opposition is to demonstrate the weak adhesion to the event – a practice that is also usual for Globovisión. But VTV 1 still criticizes the adherence of other media outlets to party politics: “the means of communication have converted themselves into this tool of the opposition due to the absence of political parties”.

When asked about the freedom of the public and private media, the journalist justified the attitude of VTV as a defense against the attacks of the opposition-media. He implicitly admits that due to the political polarization, the professionals of the station fall short of observing certain journalistic criteria, by affirming: “when they abandon this line, we also – thank God – will cease to be their counterweight, and I believe that it will then be the dawn of a new stage”.

VTV 2 summarizes freedom of the press as “the right to say, in the public and private circles, what one believes to be true; the opinion that someone may say [...] within a legal scope of not offending the people”. He then ponders that “such offenses of slandering, of calumny, should be erased from the penal codes as they do not make much sense, especially when it comes to public figures”. He defends the freedom of the press that exists in Venezuela, stating that not even the opposition would be capable of quoting some news that has not been aired due to censorship. As VTV 2 evaluates the Venezuelan situation, he takes into consideration only the direct censorship of contents, as well as VEN 1 has done.

The VTV interviewees construe definitions of freedom that grant legitimacy to the communicational measures adopted by the government, by considering the freedom of the opponents as total due to the fact that they can speak what they wish, and by considering as correct the attitude of the public media in defense of the government, thus balancing the media conflict and making the field as a whole more plural – in spite of the fact that, considering only the State media, there is not an optimum level of plurality. VTV 1 and VTV 2 do not include indirect measures, such as tributary or penal measures, among the potential forms of censorship.

As was already mentioned by this text, Globovisión is in a dangerous situation, due to its radically opposed editorial policy, because the Chávez government will be in office until 2013. The government has applied several sanctions to the station, such as shutting the official sources, imposing barriers to an expansion of its signal and inciting the population to repudiate the channel. While the interviewees of Venevisión and VTV basically defined the concept of freedom of the press as the freedom to say anything, the view of the Globovisión journalists tends to “remind” them of many forms of censorship that make their freedom-definitions become wider.

GLO 1 affirms that the freedom of the press in Venezuela is subdued by certain conditions. She states that “we can certainly say anything about the president”, but mentions the blocking of the official sources, the verbal and physical aggressions and the ideological bias of the State publicity as assaults on press freedom. When asked about a concept of freedom of the press, she affirms that it is “conditioned freedom”. She defines press freedom from her own standpoint, in the same way as VTV 1 replied that press freedom is “Venezuela”.

When asked about freedom in the public and private media, she affirms that in the private outlets there is freedom, as she has never received an instruction to withhold information, whereas in the public media, she feels that the situation is different. It is precisely the same situation exposed by the VTV journalists, with an inverse ideological direction. The professionals of these stations are either ideologically favorable or submissive to them. An evidence of this reality is that none of the channels explicitly communicates its editorial policy (as stated by the journalists), and in spite of this, there is a very weak plurality of ideology in the contents both of VTV and Globovisión. At no moment did any of the interviewees even mention the expression ‘self-censure’, which is intimately related to all the pressures that the heteronomy of the field exerts on the journalistic values. Likewise, none of them mentioned the ideologically-oriented hiring of professionals or the permanence of these professionals in the stations under this condition.

GLO 2 believes that freedom of the press is “the possibility that one means of communication has of informing without any type of pressure either by the announcers

or by the government”, defending “the ideal framework of self-regulation, which must exist in all the means of communication, although things are not thus, and although it is not like this in all outlets”. GLO 2 also reminds that in 2002, Venezuela has undergone “a process in which the social means of communication, at a point, did lose their direction and converted themselves into political actors”, and the experience “is a lesson for all of us workers of the social-communication media”.

The Globovisión interviewees are the only who take into consideration in their press-freedom concepts the indirect forms through which the State may exert pressure on the means of communication, as their channel is the target of these types of measures. However, GLO 1 and GLO 2 believe that Globovisión exerts press freedom, as the editors have never oriented their reporters to suppress troublesome information. The lack of plurality of the station was allegedly caused by the boycott of the pro-government sources. Once again, the interviewees do not find any fault, or find little fault in their companies, leaving unconsidered the modalities of censorship to which they are exposed, while they highlight the faults of the other channels.

The journalists defend press freedom in terms that do not jeopardize their own stations, while they attack the outlets with distinct positions. The use of symbolic violence by economic and political groups in order to adapt the concept of press freedom to their interests finds a correspondence between the journalists and their companies. Those who speak are those who control the speech-positions of the journalistic field; they are those who hire, promote and fire the professionals. The considerations of the professionals of the Venezuelan journalistic market are much more influential in their defense of freedom of the press than the variations linked to their own life-stories – the variations in their *habitus* have also had an influence so that they could reach their current position, and it is difficult to separate the two elements. In any case, it is interesting to observe that there have been no identifiable standards of replies separating the more experienced interviewees from the younger ones, while there are clear trends of coherence among the professionals who work in one same company, in their definition of what would be the specific logic of journalism, in their concept of freedom of the press, and in their defense of freedom of the press.

6. Conclusions

Freedom of the press is a theme in evidence in Venezuela. Journalists, researchers, politicians, entrepreneurs and the population as a whole have constantly debated it along the recent years. However, in several moments, it is possible to notice a reflexive precariousness by the journalists around basic questions that should be the starting point on the level of press freedom in the country. The same professionals who defend the conviction that the journalism field in Venezuela is more autonomous or heteronomous (not in these terms) are not able (or do not wish) to reach a satisfactory definition of the autonomous exercise of journalism, and can only identify some of the forms of censorship that could harm it.

It is not possible to affirm whether such exercise of symbolic violence around these definitions is consciously practiced by the interviewees, or if it is a product of the lack of reflection and of the class *ethos*. The most likely is that it is a sum of the two factors. As Bourdieu defends, morality does not exist in practical life if it does not find recompenses able to serve as incentives, and it is appropriate to remark here that the defense of morality also takes place in accordance with the existing incentives for adopting it. The question of the freedom of the press is restricted to an ethical debate that does not evolve. We notice the intransigence of actors who are more interested in changing the concept of freedom in order to be included by it, than in evaluating their own views in order to better exert the freedom of the press.

Maybe it is not possible in the journalistic field, which is naturally heteronomous, to establish autonomous values emanating from the relations among the journalists – who are involved in symbolic conflicts with a heteronomous motivation⁴. The interviews demonstrate that these agents do not form satisfactory deontological conceptions, as they do not have the knowledge or the willingness to form the ivory tower capable of

⁴Bourdieu defends that the reputations of professional honor are based on mutual restrictions and controls that the journalists impose on one another, but he neither affirms that such sanctions stem from autonomous values, nor that these sanctions are an incentive to them.

reflecting on the model of autonomous journalism to be defended, even if one is aware of the impossibility of thoroughly practicing it. The result of this is that the professional reputations are to a larger or smaller extent structured by values regarding the journalism field. There are no consensus values through which one can evaluate freedom of the press in Venezuela, for instance.

The realm of communication, in the scientific field, is an instance whose structure does not contaminate the study on the freedom of the press. It is a task of higher education to transmit the necessary contents to the journalists of the future, so that their representations of journalism, freedom, censorship and press will not be unconsciously construed when they become submitted to the pressures of the market and form a class *ethos* in which they take for granted the structural censorships to which they are subjected. It is worth to remind that the *habitus* is the structuring framework; in other words, once certain values are introjected, they start to have an influence on the adhesion to new values. Thus, higher education has the important advantage of being a period previous to the professional practice.

The relation between the positioning of journalists in the Venezuelan journalistic field and their statements in the defense of freedom of the press exists; and, to be more specific, the strategies of subversion or maintenance of the structure of the field as desired by the companies of the interviewees are accepted by them. We verified a scene in which the political and economic fields strongly act on the journalistic field, submitting the fragile values of the craft to heteronomous logics. Each one of the three researched outlets imposes clear limitations on the practice of journalism, yet none of the interviewed professionals had a critical view in relation to the constraints that he or she is experiencing, while pointing at the faults of third parties in the Venezuelan journalism.

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