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Remembering and Feeling the Nation: Circulations of Emotions of the Imagined Community in the Contemporary Venezuelan Diaspora

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REMEMBERING AND FEELING THE NATION: CIRCULATIONS OF EMOTIONS OF
THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY VENEZUELAN DIASPORA

by

NEIDEGAR MARTINEZ PARRA

Under the Direction of Susan Talburt, PhD

ABSTRACT

In the last five years Venezuela registered its first massive migration due to economic and sociopolitical circumstances. In this context, I explore visual discourses in which diasporic subjects imagine a modern nation through circulations of emotions and memories on Instagram. The *Chromatic Environment*, a piece by Carlos Cruz-Díez located at the Simón Bolívar International Airport, along with natural landscapes and circulations of commodities, become the evocative referents for Venezuelan diasporic subjects to claim their sense of belonging. A visual analysis of images reveals how Venezuelan migrants circulate their longing for recuperating and restoring icons, symbols, and consumption practices as they connect with their personal experiences and craft an ideal past and future. Emotions concerning time and space play a significant role in how diasporic subjects represent their relations to the nation at the moment of departure and when they settle in a new country.

INDEX WORDS: Venezuela, Diaspora, Migration, Representations, Memory, Nation, Emotions

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NEIDEGAR MARTINEZ PARRA

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Neisa and my father Edgar who worked hard during many years for my education. I am privileged to address my curiosity through writing this thesis and it would be not possible without the love and unconditional support of my partner, Alberto. His absolute understanding while I was navigating graduate school helped me during this journey.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Diaspora, *exile*, and *exodus* are terms interchangeably used to identify Venezuelan migration to different parts of the world due to the economic and political upheaval that has been beating the country over the last five years. Life is unsustainable for the vast majority of Venezuelans, with the middle and lower socioeconomic classes most affected. The minimum wage per month is equivalent to \$0.57, inflation is at 13,779 percent, and there are shortages of between 80 to 95 percent of all medications (Marillier & Squires, 2018). Unfortunately, this situation has motivated millions of Venezuelans to escape, mostly to Latin American countries.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela reached over 3 million in the first half of 2019. Based on the label “people in need” and “targeted population,” the UNHCR reports that Colombia has the highest number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela (over 1.5 million), followed by Peru (over 1.5 million), Ecuador (over 500,000), Brazil (over 200,000), Argentina (over 130,000), and Chile (over 100,000). The movement of Venezuelans has alarmed host countries due to insufficient resources to manage the high number of people that arrive every day. The Venezuelan government has refused to open a humanitarian channel or recognize the depth of the crisis that makes international agencies describe the Venezuelan Diaspora as a current humanitarian crisis and the largest exodus in the recent history of Latin America.

Venezuelan migration is significant to the rest of Latin America and also represents a historical shift within the country. Because of the economic conditions provided by oil profits in the middle of the 20th century, Venezuela was commonly described as a host country for immigrants from different parts of the world. However, the direction of migration movements has changed dramatically over the last five years. This is the first massive migration registered in

which Venezuelans are desperately using all means (air, land, water) to escape from the country. Recent works in journalism and communication (e.g., Cañizales, 2018; De la Vega, 2010) have been particularly interested in understanding who, how, and under what conditions people are leaving the country. This corpus of research represents a counter-response to the government's reluctance to speak publicly about this dramatic change in migrations. This nascent interest in Venezuelan migration led me to explore the emotional implications of the socioeconomic and political context and to concentrate on how diasporic subjects use social media to craft digital representations of the Venezuelan nation through emotions, belonging, and nostalgia. The endless political tension, the negative impact of the nation's economy, and the convoluted social problems have been mostly described as the forces that push Venezuelans to leave the country. However, few studies have sought to understand how such a context affects new diasporic subjects as they deal with their emotions and memories in the reformulation of the country's past, present, and future representations of the nation. Before getting into a discussion of the particular dynamics of representations of the Venezuelan diaspora and the circulations of emotions, I offer a background for understanding some political, economic, and social factors contributing to the Venezuelan exodus.

1.1 Contextualizing Contemporary Venezuelan Migration

Earlier reports of migration point out that people have been leaving the country since 1970, but the massive movements of Venezuelans toward other geographies became visible in the media between 2017 and 2018 (Cañizales, 2018). De la Vega and Niebrzydowski (2010) provide the economic and socio-politic context in which the initial and relatively low rate of Venezuelans migrated between 1980 and 2003. Oil revenues contributed to a rapid process of modernization that attracted international migration into Venezuela until 1980. In 1983, the

national economy collapsed, impacting political, social, and cultural areas; some immigrants returned to their homeland; others started settling in other countries; and Venezuelans within the country began to lose credibility within the traditional political parties. An economic and social upheaval between 1980 and 1990 characterized by high rates of poverty and social inequalities were favorable conditions so that Hugo Chávez arose as a leader of a coup in 1992, and subsequently, as a party leader in 1998. After receiving a political pardon for being the material author of the coup, Hugo Chávez was able to participate in the election of 1998, where he finally got elected President. Vindicating the rights of excluded groups and promoting a series of changes that rejected old practices of political parties, Hugo Chávez presented himself as an alternative to lead the country toward political and ideological changes. Chávez's leftist agenda would cause disagreements among opposition sectors, particularly the oil company and the national army. These opposition groups believed that Chávez's promises would menace meritocracy and contribute to politizing the oil company by keeping the management under the control of his official political party (De la Vega & Niebrzydowski, 2010).

The increasing tension between official and opposition sectors during 2002-2003 resulted in a generalized strike that involved the national oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anónima (PDVSA)*, and diverse productive industries, and a coup that lasted less than 48 hours. After those events, Chávez publicly fired 20,000 workers, and at least 4,000 of them migrated to Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Canada, and the United States (De la Vega & Niebrzydowski, 2010). Such circumstances would establish the initial migratory movement for ideological and political reasons. Tensions would get worse as socioeconomic conditions deteriorated, provoking migrations for material reasons.

In 2007, after Chávez was reelected, he announced his political agenda in which he planned to consolidate “21st Century Socialism,” close the National TV broadcasting Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) and re-structure the Constitution to get indefinite reelection. De la Vega (2010) concluded that once Hugo Chávez took over the administration of the country, the diaspora of qualified workers, people with advanced university degrees, spread to over 65 countries, becoming “la diáspora del conocimiento” (“the diaspora of knowledge”).

Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino (2018) mention that between the Chávez (1999-2013) and post-Chávez (2013-present) periods, the migratory flow was increasing in both directions. During the Chávez administration, Venezuela received people from Cuba, Iran, and China to support different programs in social and economic areas, including health, security, culture and athletic programs (Cuba); commercial interchange and technology (Iran); construction of houses, agrarian and mineral extraction (China). On the other hand, the post-Chávez period has been characterized by the increase of “migración de retorno” (descendants of immigrants returning home) and “migración de huída” (people who want to leave the country by any means). Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino (2018) argue that these two migrations were determined by “the Bolivarian Revolution” that promoted itself internationally as a process of change for collective benefits but ended up causing a major socio-politic, economic, and cultural crisis: corruption, hunger, deficits in health security, hyperinflation and drug trafficking.

After the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013, Vice President Nicolás Maduro inherited the presidency and was elected President in 2014. Since then, Venezuela has experienced a dramatic increase in its emigration flow due to the deteriorating political, social, and economic context. The country faced an economic recession and an institutional crisis that profoundly impacted the incomes and basic needs of many Venezuelans. According to non-official exchange rates, in

June 2019, inflation reached a scandalous rate, making the Venezuelan minimum wage equivalent to \$2.49 per month. In addition to this adverse economic circumstance, the so-called “socialism of the 21st century” ending up intensifying authoritarian practices by repressing any opposition against the official government. Thousands of people have died for protesting against these circumstances and the impossibility to access food, medicine, and health services.

Venezuelan researchers characterize this dramatic change as a “forced migration” (Mazuera-Arias, Albornoz-Arias, Superlano J., & Morffe Peraza, 2019) that has caused over 4 million people to leave the country. This shocking number changes every six months and international agencies estimate that 6 million migrants would leave by 2020. Now that Venezuelan migrants are settled in different countries, the particular way in which diasporic subjects feel and remember the nation gains research significance to study formations of Venezuelan national identity.

State and social violence, hyper-inflation that limits access to food and medicines, shortages of gas, blackouts, and cuts in water services are causing dehumanizing conditions that make it difficult for many Venezuelans to survive and stay in the country. These material threats to individual and collective survival are connected to an emotional atmosphere that responds to daily demands as the lack of primary resources breaks with ideals of stability, protection, welfare, and hope. In a collective response to this crisis, Venezuelans are activating digital social networks to communicate about where resources are, to be informed about national news other than the official news outlets, and to express and exchange feelings about these novel and difficult circumstances. Digital communities in the forms of blogs, websites, and social media have become an important alternative resource for Venezuelans in and outside the country not only to maintain social connections and speak freely about their specific circumstances but also

to circulate emotions such as nostalgia, sadness, grief, frustration, guilt, happiness, and hope for the loss country (Alvarado Miquilena & Ascención Pino, 2018; Parra Calderón, 2017; Sainz Borgos, 2019).

1.2 Visual Discourse and Circulations of Emotions of Migrants

Focusing on the analysis of emotions in the arduous process of departure, Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino (2018) study the visual discourse constructed by Venezuelans in public spaces using social media. They argue that the phenomenon of the Venezuelan diaspora came with an important emotional charge, as evidenced on Instagram and Facebook. The use of photos, what the authors call “Rituales Migratorios” (Migratory Rituals), emphasizes that Venezuelan cultural practices of, for example, taking a picture in the Simón Bolívar International Airport, popularly known as Maiquetía, allow a collective construction that re-signifies public space. In these “Rituales Migratorios,” Venezuelans have been picturing themselves in Maiquetía using, as a frame, the work made by the Venezuelan artist Carlos Cruz-Díez *Ambiente Cromático* (*Chromatic Environment*). Venezuelans have been using the *Chromatic Environment* since approximately 2013, one year after the release of “Caracas, Ciudad de Despedidas,” (“Caracas, City of Goodbyes”) a documentary prepared by college students in which they express their reasons for and feelings about leaving the country. This film was the first visual discourse documented in which Venezuelans used social media to talk about emotions involved in leaving the country. Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino (2018) emphasize that in images posted on Instagram between 2013 and 2018, Instagram users express their emotions regarding nostalgia for daily life, frustration, anger at having to leave the country, and hopes that the political, social, and economic conditions can be reversed.

Cruz-Díez's piece is displayed over the central and lateral hall of the airport. It was created between 1974-1978, a period of economic growth due to oil revenues that injected "modernism and progress" into the principal cities of the country. This piece was part of a series of works in the theory of additive color. He argues that color cannot be contained by form; rather, it is light and atmosphere, time, and space. In an interview about his method of work, he says, "Color in its essence is ambiguous and unstable. It is created at the moment. Color has no past or future. Color exists by itself; it doesn't need form. It happens in space" (Bianco, 2011, *para* 16). The set of colored strips, the ambient light, and the observer's movement interact to produce different perceptual experiences that create chromatic transformations. This theoretical assumption sets a preliminary approach to analyze how emotions are connected with memories. The rich and recent past shapes diverse ways in which diasporic subjects signify, based on their perception and experience on the *Chromatic Environment*, their relation to the nation and re-signify a public space as an emergent symbol of Venezuelan migrations.

Given the harsh conditions and the emotional demands of both migration and survival, Venezuelans are using Instagram, among other platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, to express longing for a past time and desires to rebuild the nation. My thesis inquires into how Instagram users are creating representations of the nation through the circulations of emotions and memories using the *Chromatic Environment* of Cruz-Díez, natural and urban landscapes, and products and commodities. I focus on Instagram because, among other characteristics, it allows me to explore how diasporic subjects play with different elements, including atmosphere ("visual vibe," that is the tone or mood of a place), temporality, and emotions, using pictures and writing about them.

My thesis embodies a corpus of research and visual data that helps to raise meanings and understandings regarding the Venezuelan nation and its cultural representations in contemporary times. Chapter 1 assembles the theoretical background of nations and nationalism and their socio-cultural formations, the role of emotions and memories in crafting identities in diasporic subjects, and how memories in relation to space evoke feelings of nostalgia toward the nation. The chapter contextualizes ways that Venezuelan diasporic subjects display a range of cultural and social meanings associated with the nation. Chapter 2 explores a set of three images of people stepping on Cruz-Díez's *Chromatic Environment*. These images signal the point of departure that involves meanings of the failure of modernity and a broken past. I historicize official and unofficial uses of the *Chromatic Environment*, as well as its gendered relations in contemporary times. Finally, Chapter 3 analyzes a set of five images in which diasporic subjects use urban and natural landscapes to circulate their longings for products and commodities from the past and express their sense of belonging to an idealized homeland.

2 CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Nation and its Socio-Cultural Formations

The study of nations has been a particularly prolific topic since the second half of the 20th century across disciplines including history, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and cultural and critical studies, among other fields. Scholarship about the nation presents perspectives that range from essentialist and naturalist (e.g., Shills, 1957; Van den Berghe, 1979) to more cultural and ideological (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bhaba, 1990; Billig, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1992) in order to study the relations of people within particular boundaries. Feminists have also participated in theorizing the nation by pointing out the importance of linking representations of nations with gendered meanings and ideologies produced by an androcentric gaze (e.g., McClintock, 1997; McDowell, 1999; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

As print's invention was significant centuries ago to articulate the making of nations, social media gets its relevance in contemporary times for the analysis of the representation of nations using images. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, provides one of the most elucidating contributions regarding the study of nations. He analyzed the impact of print's invention. He established that the basis for the formation of *national consciousness* and how a nation could be "imagined" [and felt] lies in the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology, and human linguistic diversity. Anderson (1983) defines a nation as an "imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (p. 6). The above definition allowed Anderson to trace the culturally constructed character of nations that integrate i a language that sustains ontological truths, the belief that society is naturally organized around the center and under high center, and finally the conception of temporality that equates the origin of the world with the origin of men.

Of particular significance in Anderson's reading for the study of the representation of the Venezuelan nation is how nationalism structures politics and relies on specific notions of time and space to imagine nations. For example, he exemplified how certain moves in writing European novels and newspapers in the 18th and 19th centuries created a sense of "homogeneity" and "simultaneity" using calendrical time and familiar spaces. Time and space would contribute to the emergence of a communal sense in every reader's mind even though those readers do not know each other. According to the author, nations' historical management of time has emphasized how nationalism retrieves events from the past to control the future by giving less significance to the present. The present is perceived as an empty time. Likewise, Anderson adds to his consideration of space the use of mapping as a tool that expands nationalism in Southeast Asia in the 20th century. He referenced how a Thai historian, Thongchai Winichakul, found a "convergence of print capitalism with the new conception of spatial reality and its impact on the vocabulary of Thai politics" (Anderson, 1983; p.173).

Anderson tries to convey in several instances the differentiation between the past and present. Specifically, he points out how nationalism spread over countries as a concept to address specific politics of inclusion and exclusion of people. In making this clarification, he pinpoints that the new forms of nations are related with capitalism and its use in media. Over centuries written expressions such as literature, history, novels, newspapers, and visual culture have crafted meanings of nations; now, the internet and social media have opened new means for subjects to represent the social and cultural meaning of nations. Time and space are two characteristics that users can manage on Instagram. Currently, some Venezuelans are living in different parts of the world and expressing nostalgia for past years. The collective sharing of

images on social media creates a sense of simultaneity by imagining and rebuilding the homeland after the massive Venezuelan exodus.

To attend to the demands of a more nuanced analysis of nation and its gendered formations, (eg., McClintock, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997; and McDowell, 1997) suggests that a feminist perspective of nationalism should include the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories. Feminist perspectives offer possibilities to understand how gender conceptions are embedded in nations and their nationalisms. For example, in her work *Gender, Identity, and Place*, McDowell (1999) put on the table the necessity to explore the representation of nation-states. She claims that it is imperative to study how representations of nations “are linked to gendered meanings and ideologies, as well as to rules about the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups of women and men” (p. 170). Likewise, Yuval-Davis (1997) raises a set of suggestions regarding the examination of gender relations in nationalist projects. She claims that the study of gender relations and nations should consider: the biological (common origins or shared blood); cultural (language, religion, and other customs and traditions); citizenship (determines the boundaries of a nation) and homeland notions (the territorial/spatial location of “the nation” that often embodies the emotional attachment to the nation).

These feminist theorists offer epistemological suggestions to study how nations emerge through social dynamics that privilege certain groups, values, and beliefs. Correspondingly, the inclusion of gender, the reproduction of ideology through social institution and language, and media representation gather the core elements of the present study on the Venezuelan images and its representation of nation in social media. These preliminary perspectives have emphasized the study of nationalism as discourses that are built into particular and historical scenarios eliciting emotional attachments.

Regarding the emotional attachment embedded in the study of nations, it is relevant to mention Raymond Williams, whose pioneering work emphasizes the political character of emotion. In his crucial formulation of the concept of “structure of feelings,” Williams (1977) emphasizes that society and culture are constantly in the process of formation and cannot be considered as finished products. Williams’s approach focuses on subjects’ points of view within social circumstances to explain how social, political, and economic conditions get into subjects and arrange, without being deterministic, their languages, feelings, and imagination. According to Williams, a structure of feelings “is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period, and needing always to be returned, interactively, to such evidence” (pp. 132-133). The author indicates that the “conventions and forms” often expressed in art and literature are elements of “special relevance” that help to illuminate specific formations of a structure of feelings. Williams’s approach gains importance in the study of Venezuelan diaspora by offering a fulcrum for analysis of the current circumstances in which Venezuelan diasporic subjects imagine and relate to the nation through emotions and memories.

Bhaba (1990) and Verdery (1993) suggest that nations should be considered as a construct with multiple meanings. Bhaba (1990) is emphatic in referring to nations as a “cultural compulsion” of unity and “a symbolic force” (p. 1). Bhaba recognizes the argument that “nations are ‘coming into being’ as a system of cultural signification, as representation[s] of social life, rather than the discipline of social policy, emphasizes this instability of knowledge” (p. 8). According to Bhaba (1990), the study of nations should cover cultural representations of ambivalences of modern societies, for example, in narratives that signify a sense of nation-ness. He offers a provocative set of examples that invoke nation-ness:

The terror of the space or race of the other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of the class, the customs of taste, the power of political affiliation, the sense of social orders, the sensibility of sexuality, the blindness of bureaucracy, the straight insight of institutions, the quality of justice and the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the parole of people (Bhaba, 1990, p. 2)

The study of nations as cultural representation overlaps with categories such as national identity and political ideologies. Verdery (1993) addresses this complexity by suggesting approaches to studying nations. First, she says that nations should be considered as a symbol of the modern period and, as such, as having multiple meanings. Second, nations convey an ambiguous meaning that is capable of mobilizing national and international audiences, who think they understand the same thing by it. Last, nations as symbols evoke and use sentiments and dispositions that have been formed throughout decades of so-called nation-building. According to Verdery (1993), nationalism responds to “the political utilization of the symbol of a nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol’s use” (p. 38).

By offering an interesting view that might serve to understand nations as a daily performance of moral and political values, Billig (1995) focuses on the impact that simple and regular habits of everyday life have on the foundations of national identity. He uses the concept of *banal nationalism* to demonstrate the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced and performed: “the term banal nationalism is introduced to cover the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the west to be reproduced. It is argued that these habits are not removed from the everyday, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated, or flagged, in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism far from being an intermittent mood in established nations is the endemic condition” (p. 6). Of particular importance in Billig’s argument is his emphasis on the sense of *naturalness* or *common sense* in such values that are

built daily through political discourses and media. Billig's examples of *banal nationalism* focus on the unnoticed, small words used in newspapers and political speeches. For instance, clichés, deixis (a linguistic term that refers to an undetermined subject or object: "the people" "here," "there"), and rhetorical forms appealing to emotion using the idealized figure of "the patriot" and "the sacrifice for the nation." Billig argues that "the very conditions of democracy, as envisaged in the twentieth century, are those which are based upon the nation-state, and which routinely embody a mysticism of place and people. The very phrase, "sovereignty of the people," which Fukuyama used, contains this possibility within its comfortable sonority. The 'people' is not 'the people' of the whole world: it is the people of the particular democratic state" (p. 94).

Theoretical approaches to nations as cultural and ideological representations have emphasized the emergence of nations in modern periods through material and ideological products. The invention of print, the proliferation of books, and then the use of media to reproduce images (in writing and visual discourse), have allowed feelings, ethics, and values to circulate across a wide range of media. On one hand, specific groups of intellectuals and politicians have been creating, narrating, and performing nations to create a sense of national unification. On the other hand, subjects have been creating their particular referents through daily practices that circumscribe specific socio-political and economic conditions in which the nation is felt and remembered. Researching how subjects feel the nation brings significant implications when subjects leave their country and start imagining what their country could have been. These cultural representations of nations require academic attention in contemporary times, specifically, concerning diaspora and their emotional dimensions. When subjects who have internalized feelings for the nation through official means and daily life must leave the nation, what representations do they create? My analysis of Venezuelans' representations of the nation

on social media underscores the ambivalence of belonging and not-belonging as they express their emotions about a nation that they consider lost and broken.

2.2 Diasporas: Crafting Identities between Emotion and Memories

Studies of diaspora tend to concern themselves with economic, political, social, and even institutional circumstances and they do not always illuminate the diverse and multiple motives, including emotions, that drive immigrants, refugees, and exile groups to leave their homeland. Academics use diaspora as a unified term to describe specific people settled in a foreign country or countries and sometimes treat diaspora with the same sense of “compulsion unity” that Bhaba (1995) identified in his definition of nations. Hayes Edwards (2007) points out that diaspora is a translation, a foreign word from Jewish intellectuals that “denote[s] a number of different kinds of movements and situations of mobility among human populations” (p. 82). Hayes Edwards asserts that “there is never a ‘first’ single dispersion of a single people, but instead a complex historical overlay of a variety of kinds of population movement, narrated and imbued with value in different ways and different ends” (pp. 82-83). Hayes Edwards’s assertion is pertinent to focus on the diversity of Venezuelan diasporas and analyze the differences among social groups, such as exiles, immigrants, and refugees, when they imagine their community using social media. The increasing development of digital communications presents a new scenario for the study of diaspora in terms of how members engage in activities related to what Laguerre (2010) called “digital diaspora.” The author defines digital diaspora as:

An immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses IT connectivity to participate in digital networks of contact for a variety of political, economic, social, religious and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad (Laguerre, 2010; in Alonso and Oiarzabal, 2010, p. 50)

Looking at the Venezuelan diasporic formations that have been appearing over the world, researchers have turned their attention toward some versions of digital diasporas. This emergent modality, including blogs, web sites, and social media, allows Venezuelan migrants to share their experiences, narratives, and discourses regarding the impact of cultural change and feelings related to the migratory process. Some studies from the field of journalism and literature (e.g., Alvarado Miquilena & Ascención Pino, 2018; Rivas Rojas, 2014) have been tracking the narratives and visual representations of the nation since the massive Venezuelan migrations. Exiled journalists and writers appear as a dominant group leading the task of narrating and keeping their transnational emotional link with the nation.

For a contemporary view of exile narratives in Venezuelan literature, in a reflection article titled “Ficciones diaspóricas: Identidad y participación en los blogs de tres desterradas Venezolanas” (“Diasporic fictions: Identity and participation in blogs of three exiled Venezuelans”), Rivas Rojas (2014), analyzes texts from three exiled female Venezuelan writers (Mirtha Rivas, Leila Macor, and Liliana Lara) in which they construct “la experiencia del desarraigo” (experience of uprootedness) using online personal blogs. The author argues that the circulation of narratives of being uprooted illustrates quotidian records of discursive practices and reformulates a subjective experience of belonging to the nation even while outside its borders. According to Rivas Rojas, female writers who live abroad (Mexico, the U.S, Uruguay, and Israel) built their representations of the nation through “el afecto y la cotidianidad” (affects and everyday life). They built their sense of belonging to the Venezuelan nation through intimate spaces such as family memory, personal stories, jokes, gossip, and anecdotes. The three female writers counterbalance the androcentric tradition where the nation is an exclusively male fraternity and, thus, belonging should be accepted by force (Rivas Rojas, 2014). Fictions appear

in a constant dialogue between feelings of belonging and uprootedness. For example, feelings of guilt illustrate the contrast between abundance perceived in the host nation, and the scarcity lived in Venezuela. According to Rivas Rojas, the imaginary of Venezuela as a rich country in the past is still present in the writers' stories of the need to supply material things for family, whether books, CDs, or cat food. In this regard, Rivas Rojas's discussion tracked how the authors' daily routines of the past installed a present condition to construct their fictions of the nation from affects and memories.

Writers' narratives also reveal the cultural tension often found between English and Spanish languages, and even between Venezuelans and other Latin American Spanish speakers. These cultural tensions associated with languages and their meanings, according to Rivas Rojas (2014), impact the writers' sense of belonging negatively in the context of American and Uruguayan culture. For example, the positive qualities of being "sweet" and "spontaneous," in the Venezuelan context, are perceived as a symbol of insecurity within American culture and, as such, need to be adapted. On the other hand, negative qualities such as the idea of stealing small things would be a motive for embarrassment within the Uruguayan culture. Rivas Rojas states that the mark of accent and gestures on identity becomes a disadvantage and thus negative qualities of belonging when writers establish their social relations in host countries. Using rhetorical resources of language, writers signify affects associated with the typical national food, the Venezuelan accent, and intimate and local memories to recreate the nation from exile.

These diasporic narratives might intensify emotions that impact immigrant subjects by raising elements of national identity. Although journalists and literary writers have been discursively creating and recreating the nation, few researchers have focused on social media and how users are visually registering the migratory process and its emotional meanings. One of

these few research projects corresponds to Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino's (2018) preliminary analysis of content regarding the visual discourse constructed by Venezuelans in public spaces using Instagram and Facebook. "Migratory rituals" are the Venezuelan cultural practices of taking a picture in the Simón Bolívar International Airport to say goodbye to the country. According to the authors, the circulations of these images are collectively re-signifying this public space. The authors created the categories of emotions, crisis, and services to analyze a group of images in which people, artists, and entrepreneurs use Cruz-Díez's *Chromatic Environment* to express their feelings before the departure, signal the shortage of food, and advertise counseling services for prospective migrants.

Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino begin the analysis of emotions with an image posted by a Venezuelan artist, Eduardo Sanabria. This artist characterizes a couple who are mourning at the airport because they are leaving the country that, metaphorically speaking, does not fit in their luggage. The scholars state that this individual behavior reinforces the collective ritual in which emotions of nostalgia, frustration, and feelings of uprooting circulate on social media by using *Chromatic Environment*. Afterward, the scholars analyze the post of a girl with her family and her pet, interpreting it as a touching image of a family forced to leave and begin a new life in another country, underscoring rootedness and the rupture of their everyday life. Finally, an image related to emotions of anger, frustration, and hope depicts a user doing the "middle finger" expression and saying that Cruz-Díez's art is the most horrible thing. Between feelings of disappointment and hope, this user speaks from the position of someone who stays and says goodbye to loved ones. According to him, *Chromatic Environment* will recover its beauty when the country returns to what it used to be, so that loved ones return as well. Besides the analysis of emotions, the researchers examine the category of "crisis" that signals the

shortages of foods (e.g., when the food company Kellogg's left the country) and "services" that offer counseling and advisement on migratory processes. In this context, Cruz-Díez's *Chromatic Environment* has been used to circulate emotions, denounce economic crisis, and promote services attached to the demands of migratory processes. Even when these scholars argue that the images posted on Instagram and Facebook re-signify Cruz-Díez's piece, they do not analyze what this piece meant before and its implications in social and national memory.

I consider it important to mention that Cruz-Díez comes from a generation of artists who sought to create an art that was representative of the country as a modern nation in the second half of the 20th century. Tensions about what is "being Venezuelan" were debated mainly among those who wanted to depict the social reality and the institutional crisis at that time and those who wanted the country to be represented in the visual discourse of progress and modernity. Cruz-Díez's piece passed from being an inspired creation of the modern nation to being a symbolic representation of the migratory crisis over the last five years. After he died in August of 2019, his works have been circulating on national and international levels as a reminder of his pioneering universal work. As a matter of fact, in December of 2019, the participant of Venezuela in the international beauty contest Miss Universe wore a typical costume inspired by Cruz-Díez's piece called "La Diosa Venezolana del Futuro" ("The Venezuelan Goddess of the Future"), which I take up in Chapter 2. These current events raise questions in terms of gendered relations to the nation and how these relations craft the imagined future envisioned by diasporic subjects. The analysis of the *Chromatic Environments* in its different uses by official and unofficial actors contributes to the study of social and national memory from the visual perspective and the way in which emotions intensified by particular social circumstances acquire such national significance.

A different focus is taken in written expressions, in the exiled narratives and novel discussed above by Rivas Rojas (2014). This corpus considers the importance of nostalgia in building a version of an imagined past of a country; Rivas Rojas highlights how individual memory absorbs elements from social and cultural shared environments that readers end up echoing. When subjects have experienced severe and even traumatic social circumstances, emotions play an important role in remembering the past. For example, in a recent interview, the Venezuelan journalist Karina Sainz Borgo talks about her novel *It Would Be Night in Caracas*. Personally feeling survivor's guilt, anger, rage, and loneliness, the author created a fiction to tell readers the story of a character who transits in a constant back-and-forth in time, experiencing significant memories and emotions of a country that ironically does not exist anymore or perhaps never existed. She says of her move through time, emotions, and memory:

They allowed me to explain to the reader in which way a modern country disappeared in a very short period of time. Twenty years is not that much. But it also allowed me to tell the reader that this was a society with so [such] strong social difference between people, and it's important to know that because the oil we had and the richness of the oil was not correctly redistributed between this [these] people, this person (*para* 8).

Scholars have largely neglected the issue of emotion and its links with memories in addressing Venezuelan migration from visual perspectives. Emotions gain research significance because they circulate through social media making an impact in contemporary times for Venezuelans as they imagine their country. A context of scarcity, financial instability, lack of access to basic services, and hopeless feelings creates emotional demands that affect social and collective memories of the past and an imagined version of the nation. Now that Venezuelans are experiencing new places, languages, cultures, and longings for the place left behind, nostalgia becomes a way to revisit the past of the country in which subjects create their representation of the nation.

2.3 The Passage of Nostalgia: Individual, Social, Cultural, and National Memory

Scholars connect nostalgia with different kinds of memory to explain how diasporas reconstruct their nation through remembering (e.g., Boym 2001, Darias Alfonso, 2015; Mejía, 2005). Memory appears in the literature as a contested and constitutive element of history. To understand the role of Instagram as a catalyst for the transition from social memory to national memory, I consider it relevant to mention the way in which these concepts appear in the literature.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym refers to social and national memory to signal two ways of longing for the past. She argues that nostalgia is a “symptom of our age...nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the distinctions into ‘local’ and ‘universal’ possible” (Boym, 2001, p. xvi). She identifies two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home and thinks of itself as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia “dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradiction of modernity” (p. xvi). In this sense, Boym (2001) proposes a perspective that opens two ways of longing for and remembering the past. National memory calls for conservation, preservation of identity, contemplations of the past and controlling the future by using the restoration of symbols; social memory is more creative (like bricoleurs) and related to individual memory by remembering details, fragments and using humor and irony to refer to the past time. Fixedness or openness to the relations of past to future would mark the contrast between restorative or reflective nostalgia and how subjects use them to reconfigure their version of the Venezuelan nation.

Academics use social memory as a specific concept and sometimes as a synonym of *collective memory*, a term proposed by Halbwachs (1950) to describe the social dimension of individual memory. The concept of social memory appeared in American scholarship to discuss differences and similarities between history and memory and conflicts about what should be remembered. Fields such as sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, and social psychology consider social memory as a pliable concept to suggest nuanced differences from *collective memory*. French (1990) says that while “some historians use the term ‘collective memory,’ emphasizing the internalization of group identities,” he prefers social memory because “it calls attention to the social context in which people shape their group identities and debate their conflicting perceptions of the past” (French, 1995, p. 9). The internalization of just one kind of identity versus identities shaped by social context would mark what to include and exclude in the process of remembering.

Debates between history and memory have crafted the way in which scholars revisit historical events. Although I do not pretend to recount events focused on historical analysis of causes and consequences, I historicize the Venezuelan socio-cultural contexts to interpret posted images from users. Social media, as part of a mediated apparatus, contain aspects of cultural memory that, according to Erll and Rigney (2009), shape “our understanding of the past”:

Memory involves both social process and performances transmitted through diverse media, and these media forms “play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past,” in “mediating” between us (as readers, viewers, and listeners) and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance (p. 3).

Social media offers the possibility to analyze how individuals represent and perform their understanding of their present, past, and future when they join the process of circulating their memories and emotions. For example, migrants have shown the tendency to recirculate cultural

and social referents to remember the past when they are moved by nostalgia (Mejía, 2005).

Undoubtedly an integrative perspective that recognizes the interaction of history with different kinds of memory is required to track this mediated process. In this regard, Cunningham and Fouéré (2018) assert:

Memory and history are both historically situated and discursively constituted, even as they may be shaped by different aims, cultural context, and institutional settings...Personal memory, cultural memory, and history do not exist within neatly defined boundaries. Thus personal memories can sometimes be subsumed into history and elements of cultural memory can exist in concert with historical narratives (p. 9).

Studies of the digital Cuban diaspora consider the role of memory and nostalgia in social media and their connection with migrations. To illustrate how nostalgia is produced in social media, Darias Alfonso (2015) discusses Soviet influences in the Cuban Revolution as an incentive for transnational bonding amongst Cuban migrants. He analyzes entries and users' interactions from the blog called *Muñequitos Rusos (Russian Cartoons)* that recovers part of the collective memories from 1970-1989. *Russian Cartoons* is a well-known series of TV shows for children transmitted in Cuba between 1960 and 1989, where content represented the cultural and ideological influences of the USSR. Created in 2005 by a female Cuban immigrant resident in Spain, the blog works as a site in which "mediated memories" are produced using nostalgia for childhood. Darias Alfonso (2015) argues that memories are initially consumed in the homeland and then assembled in the form of nostalgia by digital diasporas. The process of consumption and production generates tension between the homeland and the host country, affecting the way in which Cubans migrants define their identity and loyalty.

The economic and cultural relations that Cuba kept with the USSR provided economic stability and access to cultural and electronic commodities compared with the period of scarcity of food, cuts of electricity, and epidemic outbreaks that followed the fall of the USSR (Darias

Alfonso, 2015). The blog *Muñequitos Rusos* allowed Cuban migrants to revisit Cuba's past with a double purpose: remembering childhood/adolescence and imagining the possibility to become in a developed country. Sadness, pessimism, and positive and negative attitudes to the Soviet past of the Island emerge as frequent responses to the content of the blog.

Darias Alfonso's findings suggest an association between nostalgia for childhood and the nation as well as an equivalence of "homeland" and "Cuban Revolution" as components that show tension for Cuban migrants when they talk about their national identity. Therefore, childhood memories end up being politicized in the very process of remembering. Moreover, according to the blog's administrator, to evoke the content of *Russian Cartoons* helps her to navigate the process of adaptation to the host country. These findings suggest closer attention to the process in which personal memory, with its social-cultural referents, becomes politically re-signified and deeply connected to the nation.

The first massive Venezuelan migration raises questions about national identity and the processes in which subjects rebuild the lost nation. In this literature review, authors emphasize the importance of analyzing *nation* as a concept in a constant process of formation and as socially and culturally diverse. This approach plays a significant role in exploring how people from the Venezuelan diaspora represent and circulate their feelings and memories about the country on social media. The languages, feelings, and imagination that are circulating under the current social, political, and economic circumstances might help to explain how diasporic subjects variously shape their imagined nation. In the following sections, I present the specific research questions and the selected methodology and methods of the study to explore the circulation of feelings and memories on social media.

2.4 Research Questions

I analyze selected images and narratives on diasporic Venezuelan Instagram accounts to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How do these Instagram (IG) users represent the Venezuelan nation?
- (2) How do they represent their relation(s) to the nation?
- (3) How do gender representations relate to the nation?
- (4) How do diasporic subjects construct their relations of belonging?

These questions offer possibilities of theorizing the relation of time, emotions, and memory as Instagram users make connections with the country in the context of the migratory crisis.

2.5 Methodology

Diverse social actors, including subjects, government institutions, celebrities, entrepreneurs, and artists, have been using Instagram and other platforms to narrate, remember, and imagine the Venezuelan nation. Different approaches have been implemented in the study of representations of the nation, including visual analysis of films, paintings, news, magazines, and soap operas; and narrative analysis of novels, political discourses, and beauty pageants. Since fall 2018, I have been collecting images using Instagram accounts such as @venezolanos.x.porel mundo (Venezuelans around the world) and @diasporavenezolana (Venezuelan diaspora) as well as the hashtags, #paisdedespuestas (country of goodbyes) #cruzdíez and #maiquetía (location of the Simón Bolívar International Airport). I chose to look at these accounts because they often post and repost images and stories from Venezuelan migrants. Diasporic subjects are posting pictures representing different elements that elicit emotions and memories of the nation, including the *Chromatic Environment*, the national flag,

typical food, national heroes, and natural and urban landscapes. The curation criteria are based on Cruz-Díez's *Chromatic Environment*, natural and urban landscapes, and products and commodities.

Visual analysis engages a qualitative approach that acknowledges that researchers are agents in the interpretation of results. As I conduct my analysis, I position myself as part of a group of people who want to advance in their careers. In 2013, I came to the U.S with my partner as a part of an educational project. Although our reasons for leaving Venezuela were not initially oriented to migration, returning to the country became untenable once we were already living in the U.S. After February 2014, Venezuela fell into an accelerated decay in which inflation, shortages, and political tension intensified, causing large protests, as well as interruptions in schools, universities, and even terrestrial and aerial transportation. The pace of change in Venezuela is challenging to track and the current crisis accelerates the deterioration in many areas of sustainability for Venezuelans as the inflation index dramatically increases every single week. In the meantime, I have followed my loved ones and news of the country using social media and perceived how this circumstance increases the circulation of desires to recuperate a lost country using the visual discourse on the *Chromatic Environment*, natural and urban landscapes, and products and commodities. I feel the necessity to map commonalities and particularities that diasporic subjects experience. I think the way in which "homeland" is perceived from a distance leads me to question the current phenomenon of Venezuelan migrations from the perspective of memory and emotion and the particular relationship that diasporic subjects establish with past, present, and future. While I was living in Venezuela, I did not have much time to reflect on the migratory circumstances and its emotional impact in the process of remembering.

2.6 Visual Research Methods

Visual methods have been mainly used to study cultural practices and social relations, including compositional interpretations, content analysis, psychoanalysis, discursive analysis, audience studies, and semiotics. On one hand, the goal is to understand social processes, social identities, social change and conflict (Rose, 2001); on the other hand, it is to “explore the ambivalences, interstices and places of resistance in postmodern everyday life” (Mirzoeff, 1998, p. 8). Cultural and social process are embedded in the study of the Venezuelan diaspora as well as their relation to the nation in the current migratory process. Interpretive semiotics of visual images serves to approach how diasporic subjects arrange their personal compositions in relation to the nation.

Semiologists choose their images based on how conceptually interesting they are. Thus, semiology very often takes the form of detailed case studies of relatively few images, and the case study stands or falls on its analytical integrity and interest rather than on its applicability to a wide range of material (Rose, 2001). To describe how Instagram users created their own version of the nation and the images attached to it, I use Mitchell’s concepts of *denotative and connotative* meaning. According to Mitchell (2011), *denotative and connotative* concepts provide a framework to study a specific culture product. For example, the author mentions that each object carries a denotative meaning (the first television set exhibited in the 1940s; the purchase of the particular television set in the living room), as well as its connotative meaning (the stories of that particular television set). In addition, I include elements of compositional analysis, such as the use of angles, color, position, and brightness, to analyze how these elements convey meaning regarding emotion, time, and space.

As an example of the kind of analysis that I conduct in the chapters that follow, Figure 1 presents one of the referents that currently evokes memories and emotions in the Venezuelan context.



Figure 1. Do you remember this Venezuela?

Figure 1 shows a picture posted on Instagram in April 2019 that asks users: “Do you remember this Venezuela?” According to the online version of the newspaper *Elmundo.es*, the big ball of Pepsi and the big Nescafé cup ads were removed in 2010 because they did not meet the safety regulations from “Ordenanzas de Propaganda y Publicidad” (Rules of Propaganda and Advertisement) in case of an earthquake. In 2018, the newspaper *El Universal* presented in its editorial a picture (see Figure 2) of the same location without the iconic ads. Figure 1 shows some elements of composition that deserve special attention, such as brightness and angle. The

intensity of colors pops up as a characteristic that makes the ads clear and readable. Pepsi and Nescafé colonize the space in terms of size and they are hierarchically positioned in relation to Polar (a national beer brand) and Phillips (a Dutch electronics brand). The images' brightness also enhances the varieties of green over the Avila Mountain accompanying the urban landscape. In the first half of the 20th century, painters made “El Avila” the city’s icon to represent the modern nation, which displaced Venezuelans would long for 100 years later. The visual discourse created by nature (back) and urban (front) not only symbolizes the country’s recent modern past characterized by consumption practices but also offers evocative referents for Venezuelans to imagine the nation.



Figure 2. El Universal November 15, 2018

Figure 1 invites users to remember a past time that profoundly differs from figure 2. Users respond to the evocative signs of “progress and modernity” as a nation that needs to be recuperated. For example, comments included: “I suppose that those icons are well protected to return to their place once our country gets back to its freedom” (@luisa_j_betancourt); “Where

our currency has value and people did not eat from the garbage” (@montzuna2000); “Yesss, I hope I can see it and feel it again” (@ilanvillegas) (my translation).

These users felt the transformation of an industrialized space as the “progress and prosperity” experienced in the past. Likewise, users traced a timeline in which the current urban landscape marks the nation before and after the crisis. Moreover, these comments raise tensions of political ideologies, the crisis of materiality, and people longing for a version of the country that does not exist anymore and perhaps never existed. The narrative of the wealthy and prosperous nation, full of modern structures, is not rooted in the current crisis, as Coronil (1997) would argue. Narratives of abundance result from the ideological formations of the state to control oil profits and reproduce a national image of progress: “the arduous establishment of the state authority was achieved in intimate relation with the exploitation of petroleum” (p. 4). The state unified the nation by manufacturing dazzling projects to engender collective fantasies of progress. In chapter 3, I further discuss this urban scene and its implications in mirroring fantasies of progress, development, and modernity of an ideal past.

Figure 3 shows a white-skinned woman in labor giving birth to a baby in a room with no electricity and several symbols that represent the nation: landscapes, geographic places, modern construction, food brands, and media (RCTV, a television channel canceled in 2008). The author mentions the desire to restore the lost country and consumption practices from the past, signaling a form of restorative nostalgia. Food and media appear as the principal symbols that were interrupted by the scarcity of products and the cancellation of the TV channel. “Freedom” is characterized by the return of such practices of consumption.



Figure 3. Freedom @carlosthedraw

In the middle of darkness, I share hope and faith with this drawing, where Venezuela is in the labor of freedom. It will take time and we are going to watch the rebirth. All the pain, tears and suffering will pass. Thus, the birth of freedom will soon bring happiness, calm, and everything that God has prepared for us. (@carlosthedraw, 2019) (my translation).

This particular composition posted in March 2019 circulated on Instagram after the beginning of a series of blackouts that affected the whole country for seven consecutive days. Figure 3 grouped a series of essentialist, ideological, and cultural representations that positioned women in a particular relation to the nation. Specifically, a white woman is depicted to represent the figure who holds the responsibility to populate the nation and return the past to the country by nurturing the baby with cultural traditions and practices of consumption. The unsafe situation of pregnant women not only affects white women re-populating a white future, as Figure 3 represents, but black and women of color who do not appear in the image as equally affected by the crisis. The reconstruction of the nation circulates on Instagram with explicit reference to

gender and race that marks the specific roles of who is included and not in the imagined “freedom” of the nation.

Denotative, connotative, and compositional analysis of images and narratives allows me to explore how diasporic Venezuelan subjects construct a “visual vibe,” (that is, the mood of a place or location), temporality (in a retrospective and prospective way), and emotions, using pictures and narratives of two moments: the departure (at the airport) and then the arrival (when they are living abroad). According to Manovich (2015), one of the most significant elements in the construction of scenes in Instagram are representations of “the mood and the atmosphere” (p. 86) so that users create their styles and cultural identity. Different filters and modes of exposure are applied to modify images and set visual vibes to display representations of mood, time, and emotions related to the nation.

Visual methods offer a set of useful tools to understand the relations that diasporic subjects establish with the Venezuelan nation. The analysis of images reveals how Venezuelan migrants circulate their longing for recuperating and restoring icons, symbols, and consumption practices as they connect with their personal experiences and craft an ideal past and future. Likewise, the significance of this research is rooted in the first massive migration experienced for some Venezuelans. In this way, I explore its impact on national identity and the ways in which emotions interplay with diasporic individuals’ memories to re-signify them on a national and transnational terrain.

3 CHAPTER 2

3.1 Imagining Modernity

Venezuelans' feelings for everyday routines and public spaces have become elements massively circulated on social media during the migratory crisis. In the last five years, Venezuelans have been sharing images depicting themselves at the central hall of the Simón Bolívar International Airport saying goodbye using Cruz-Díez's piece *Chromatic Environment*. Emotions and memories emerge from the moment of saying goodbye not only to family, friends, and loved ones but to daily routines and habits that craft an imagined community and reformulate their relations to nation-ness. By collectively sharing images at the International Airport, Venezuelan migrants have been circulating emotions and their representations of the broken past and an impossible future of the nation.

In the beginning, the collective practice of using the *Chromatic Environment* started by subjects framing their feet on the floor, signaling sadness, disappointment, and sorrow for having to leave the country. As soon as the crisis intensified, subjects framed their faces and whole bodies at the airport, in which leaving the country signified a source of relief, peace, and success. Sadness, grief, and sorrow do not appear anymore, but optimism and hope. The emotional bond embedded in the current Venezuelan socio-historical context guides my thinking to understand the convoluted relation between emotions and national identity through the *Chromatic Environment*. What does it tell us about the relation of diasporic subjects to the ideal of the Venezuelan nation? In the following pages, I historicize official and unofficial uses of the *Chromatic Environment* and analyze its uses to circulate emotions and gendered relations. Likewise, I examine the *Chromatic Environment*'s uses to represent the nation in the Miss Universe 2019 and how diasporic subjects react to it. These elements of analysis allow me to

reflect on particular relations of belonging to the country and specific ways subjects imagine the future and remember the past.

In May of 2012, seven months before presidential elections were celebrated for the period 2013-2019, a documentary, produced by a group of college students, was posted on YouTube. The short documentary, “Caracas, Ciudad de Despedidas” (“Caracas, City of Goodbyes”), directed by Ivana Chávez in 2011, gathers the thoughts and feelings of a group of seven students from Caracas, in which they discuss and interrogate their reasons for leaving the country. The film pictures people hugging in the Simón Bolívar International Airport, natural landscapes, and popular avenues in Caracas using nostalgic songs. Students’ narratives express ambivalent feelings that involve having to say good-bye to family and friends because the political climate and violence interfere with the search for professional development and personal security.

“Caracas, Ciudad de Despedidas,” illustrated the beginning of a period in which videos and images have been circulating the emotional cost of migration. Narratives from Venezuelan young people described below not only talk about a personal cosmology from the privileged sectors denouncing the precarious services of electricity and water, as well as violence on the streets, but also a way of grieving before departing. Anticipatory grief emerges through the idea that the country is lost and broken for people living within and outside the country.

No sé... Ya está todo podrido, pues. Los mismos policías ya ni sirven.
I don't know, everything is rotten, though. Police officers do not do their job (my translation) Min 2:14.

...todo el odio que uno expresa también refleja más o menos el amor que le tienes aquí... o sea a mí me tiene picado (molesto), pues yo me crié acá...Me acostumbré a vivir acá, a comerme mi empanada, mi arepa, y todas mis cosas.
The anger one expresses also reflects love for the place where I grew up. I feel mad...I got accustomed to living here, to eating my empanada, arepa --typical Venezuelan breakfast- and all... (my translation) Min 9:18.

¿Sí te vas, entonces como todo se va a arreglar?
If you leave, how is everything going to get fixed? (my translation) Min 11:09.

Yo creo que todo eso que le atribuimos a la situación se no está yendo de las manos. Yo creo que estamos exagerando mucho todo esto.
I think we might be wrong by attributing everything to the situation. I think we might be exaggerating all this (my translation) Min 13:59.

I was finishing my undergraduate studies when this video was released and I can remember the heated debates about the legitimacy of these claims and the possibility that there would be a massive flight of people in the next years. Government representatives and media circulated a discourse delegitimizing such claims because they were young people from middle-class sectors. People in the documentary conveyed initial feelings of sorrow, grief, and nostalgia for the loss of habits, routines, and security that prepared them to say goodbye. Sadness, fear, and disappointment filled narratives of this group of students having to leave their country, and with those narratives, their sense of belonging to a nation haunted by ideas of development, civilization, and modernity. “Caracas, Ciudad de Despedidas,” informs how narratives can be read as the starting point of circulations of grief regarding the country’s imagined modernity. Ochoa (2014) read part of Venezuelan cultural dynamics as “the anxiety about accomplishing modernity” in her preliminary sketch of the structure of feelings in Venezuela:

The tragic structure of feelings in Venezuela rests in the anxiety about accomplishing modernity that has haunted this land since its inception as a vice royalty. This struggle about modernity manifests itself not just in democracy and Revolution but also in discourses of beauty, development, petroleum, and medicine. (Ochoa, 2014; p. 244)

“The anxiety about accomplishing modernity,” I would add, is also present in the recent migration narratives not as an anticipatory feeling, but as consequence of the failure to achieve modernity. Ochoa conducted her research in 2003, a year saturated with socio-political tensions, economic uncertainty, and street protests that allowed her to map emotions such as anxiety and fear that drive the pursuit of modernity through practices of beautifying places, bodies, and

values. Ochoa's contribution illuminates some of the emotions and feelings circulating on social media as the visual discourse of the process of departure. Diasporic subjects aesthetically framed their last picture at the airport that connects them with the idea of a country as a modern possibility, but ultimately failed in providing them a present and future.

3.1.1 *Cruz-Díez and the Nation in the Past*

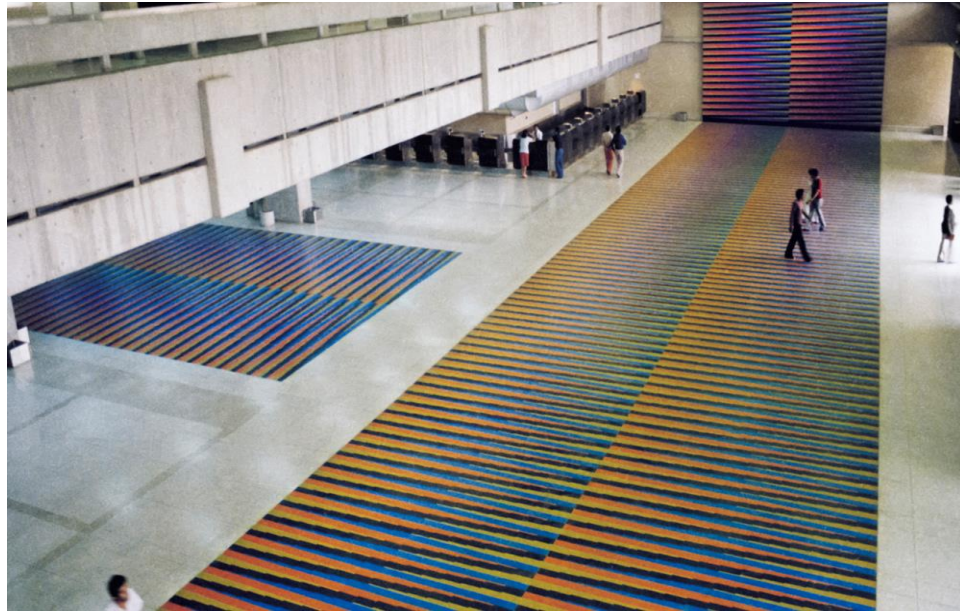


Figure 4. Carlos-Cruz Díez [*Chromatic Environment*], 1974 Simón Bolívar International Airport Maiquetía (Caracas), Architects: F. Montemayor, L. Sully (In Jiménez, 2008)

Cruz-Díez's theory of additive color contains several artworks including the *Chromatic Environment* (see Figure 4), that were part of the cultural materials that sought to spread a sense of the unification of the nation. People did not collectively attribute meaning to the art piece; the petro-state did so instead (Coronil, 1998). According to González (2006), the '50s, '60s, and '70s kinetic artists, including Carlos Cruz-Díez, frequently appeared in national and international exhibitions, museums, biennials, and principal streets of Venezuelan, American, and European

cities. The cosmopolitan, stylish, and modern proposal of Cruz-Díez's artwork emerged from a cohort of artists (Los disidentes) who wanted to represent the universal version of the nation using color, forms, and abstractions. This alternative genre distanced itself from the depiction of the naturalist landscapes representing the pre-modern nation since the beginning of the 20th century. Under the administration of former President Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979), the *Chromatic Environment* established a modern vibe, or mood, that welcomed tourists and immigrants to the country and was thought of as a projection towards the future. Cruz-Díez aligned with the new envisioned future and his work aimed to represent Venezuela as a country that was internationally recognized for embracing progress and modernity.

Between 1950 and 1970, artists, intellectuals, and politicians played a significant role in representing their modern aspirations. Oil profits created a lavish nation-state that spent a lot of money on modernizing the main cities of the country. As an industrialized nation was born, the first waves of people initially migrated from rural to urban areas seeking a "better life." This dramatic change of living conditions produced diverse expressions in literature and visual arts, which presented two different approximations of the Venezuelan nation. Intellectuals criticized visual artists for being part of elites interested in depicting aesthetics and beauties of a country submerged in profound social problems; critiques also signaled that the representation of the nation through painting and kinetic and geometric abstractions was reduced to a mere commodity. For example, intellectuals saw the upcoming modern times as a loss of the essence of the agrarian life, a significant source for the Venezuelan economy before the petroleum boom. According to Torres (2009), such critiques represented their nostalgic sense to resist the accelerated changes that modernity brought about. While poverty, deficiencies in public health, and the lack of infrastructure were the social conditions denounced in literature after the massive

rural exodus, visual artists sought to represent the nation through the purity of landscapes and the formal perfections of geometric and kinetic abstraction. According to Jiménez (2009), these were two different, opposing, and even complementary positions that over the first half of the twentieth century crafted two versions of the country: the naturalistic but precarious and the futuristic and cosmopolitan Venezuelan nation.

The significance of this brief historical account is how changes in the economic model caused a national migration and gave rise to the proliferation of representations of the nation based on the imagination of the past and future of the nation. Precisely, my research takes account of Anderson's (1983) stimulating proposal about the influence of print in shaping a sense of nation-ness. Part of my analysis aims to illuminate how this new era of technology offers diasporic subjects resources to reformulate their version of the nation after the first massive international migration.

3.1.2 Saying Goodbye to the Past and Future of the Nation

The process of leaving becomes the first brushstroke to start drawing emotions and memories of an imagined nation. As an act of intimacy, saying goodbye became a ritual highly circulated on social media and intensified by the migratory crisis. Evidence of this collective ritual appears when one looks at the visual records that diasporic subjects left on the *Chromatic Environment* at different times. I distinguish three different moments between 2014 and 2019, in which emotions for leaving the country circulated on Instagram. During the first moment, 2014-2016, love, grief, and sadness were emotions and feelings that initially accompanied images of Instagram users framing their feet on Cruz-Díez's chromatic floor. The *Chromatic Environment* floor rapidly became so popular that many Venezuelans felt emotionally compelled to communicate their departure, and with it, a sense of belonging to a community.

In 2017-2018, as the crisis intensified, leaving the country signified a source of relief, peace, and “success.” Diasporic subjects moved by emotions of happiness, optimism, and hope started to circulate pictures using a “fashionista” and “cosmopolitan” vibe. The images caused such a significant impact and reached such a high level of social relevance that many diasporic and social actors started to use the *Chromatic Environment* not only as a symbol of goodbye but also to advertise different kinds of services and commodities (Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino, 2018). In August 2019, shortly after Cruz-Díez died, users re-circulated their images at the moment of departure to say goodbye to the artist. The death of the artist, who created an icon for the modern aspirations of the nation, intensified circulations of sorrow and grief, which, I argue, continue not to let the modern aspiration die. Closing 2019, the Miss Venezuela Organization seized the moment to use the *Chromatic Environment* as an inspiration for the national costume “the Venezuelan Goddess of the Future” in the annual Miss Universe competition. Diasporic subjects appeal and react to the national costume communicating their longing and aspirations for the modern nation.

The *Chromatic Environment* mirrors both a past hurt by the current crisis and the impossibility of the future. Versions of an imagined past and future of the country can be understood by looking at the visual record that some Venezuelans left in social media as they attempted to establish their relations to the nation.

3.2 Loss: Love, Grief, and Pessimism

Figure 5 shows @nohemy_adler’s 2016 post in which she represents the wounded future and her ways to grieve it. She says: “Although I’m leaving today seeking a better future, I will always remember the good things that the country gave me. I will be missing you all! I will visit you all during the holidays! Good-bye Venezuela” (my translation). In a simple picture

arrangement, with no particular control over contrast, brightness, and colors, @nohemi_adler frames her feet from the top partially showing her body and representing the land that she is leaving. According to Manovich (2015), compositions that display only parts of the body talk about users' immersion in the experience, moment, and situation. In the '60s, this practice represented familiar and everyday routines and resisted the conventional norms of photography (in portraits) in the United States.

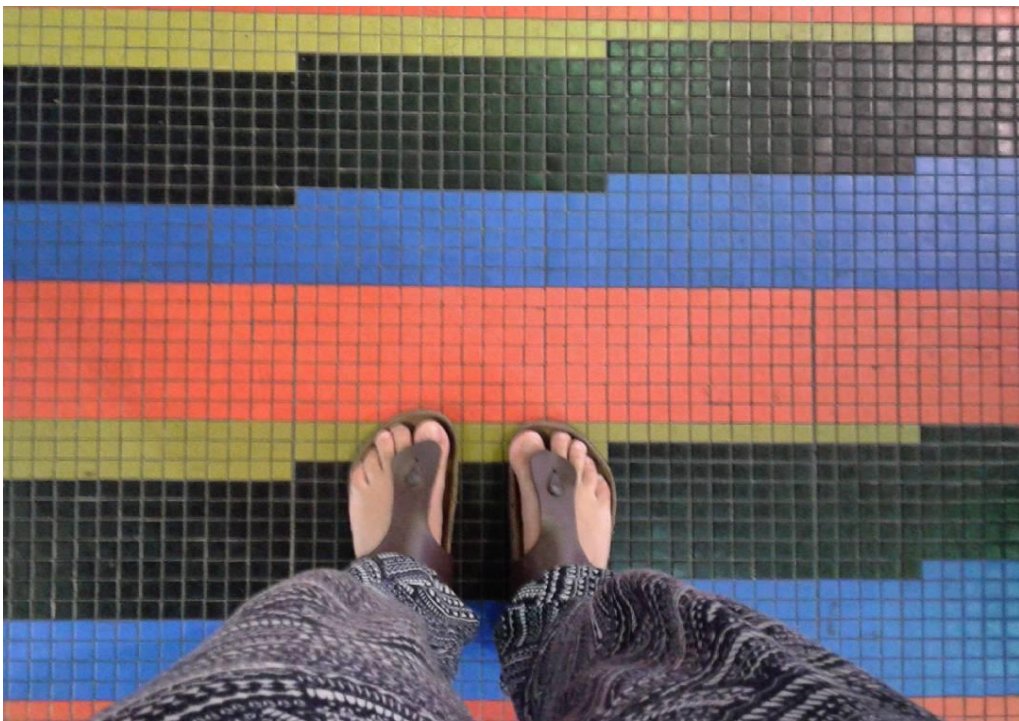


Figure 5. @nohemi_adler (September, 2016)

The “immersion on the moment” calls for emotionality in this composition.

@nohemy_adler’s feet embedded and rooted at the moment of departure connote her sense of belonging to the representation of the modern nation. Moreover, the emotionality in her narrative communicates feelings of love and grief (sadness and an anticipatory nostalgia). Although she steps on the chromatic floor (as a symbol of rootedness and love), the partial presence of her

body (focused on her limbs) also connotes her readiness to walk and leave the homeland. The user mediates her sense of displacement and uprootedness by articulating good memories of Venezuela. It is not about the typical portrait in which a whole body appears but the connotation of her feet being displaced and prepared to leave. I argue that Venezuelans diasporic subjects reproduce the visual discourse of goodbyes to convey sadness and grief for the loss of familiar, everyday routines (in private and intimate spaces), and the future that the chromatic floor once represented in the past (in public space).

As I mentioned before, the user's narrative of recalling "the good things" at the same time that she steps on the chromatic floor represents the desire to preserve her sense of belonging to the imagined community. Sadness and an anticipatory nostalgia for family and loved ones fuse into the loss of the country. Goodbye to the family is transformed into a goodbye to the country and attached to Venezuelan national identity, legitimizing, at the same time, her rootedness and love for the nation. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed establishes relations between love and grief in the formation of the national ideal: "Love has an intimate relation with grief not only through how the subject responds to the lost object but also by what losses get admitted as losses in the first place..." (Ahmed, 2015; p.130). Ahmed argues that national failure narratives maximize this sense of "stickiness" of love when the lost object is the nation. "Stickiness" is the effect generated through naming emotions and objects of feelings as signs get saturated with emotion. In this regard, she specifically says that "this model of 'sticky sign' shows how language [and images] works as a form of power in which emotions align some bodies with others..." (Ahmed, 2015; p.195). The chromatic floor connoted meanings of progress, cosmopolitanism, aesthetics, and international recognition that might echo the user's narrative of "I will always remember the good things," even when there is no specificity to such

“good things.” National ideals and the *Chromatic Environment* merge at departure and signify the breakup of that promising future and a way of belonging to that imagined past. It is not only the circulations of emotions around a “Migratory Ritual,” described by Alvarado Miquilena and Ascención Pino (2018), but the impact of such emotions on the national ideal and group identities.

Aesthetics plays a significant role in creating memories and narratives that shape group identities and national ideals. Because the *Chromatic Environment* proposed a modern vibe that envisioned the future, it is useful to analyze its emotional impact on some Venezuelans at the moment of their departure. The chromatic floor was the last cultural image that subjects saw before departure, triggering a sense of failure in providing them the promised future. A well-known memory phenomenon by social psychologists called the “recency effect” says that the last information is “better remembered” and plays a significant role in the formation of judgment. In this case, it is not information that the user coded in her visual narrative, but sadness embedded in it. I would say that emotions get saturated on the *Chromatic Environment* and then move with the subjects at the moment of departure. In this process, the *Chromatic Environment* (the last sign that echoes the nation) acquired such emotional significance that the aspirations of development and progress just faded in the migratory transition. Subjects’ narratives and their images work as unintentional snapshots of the past and an imagined impossible future.

I argue that taking pictures focused on subjects’ feet became part of the Venezuelan routine broadly circulated on Instagram because it appeals to a forced displacement and the imaginary of Venezuela’s failed modernity. Indeed, we can see in the following images how subjects manage the visual discourse of departure in different ways, and of course, circulate varieties of emotions depicting the failure of the nation.

Between 2017 and 2019, the volume of people leaving the country increased every day. The International Airport started to get packed and the chromatic floor began to lose its colorful and tiny tiles. It is not clear if the lack of maintenance caused deterioration or subjects just took the tiles as a “departure souvenir,” which were both versions circulated on social media. An intense and long-lasting period of political and social conflicts was registered between 2017 and 2019: six months of street protests in 2017, political tensions that resulted in the self-proclaimed-president Juan Guaidó on January 5th and then the mobilization of international aid in February 2019.

Figure 6 offers an example of a modified image signaling emotions such as resignation, betrayal, and pessimism, which circulated throughout the intense period of 2019. The broken modernity is represented through the simulation and accentuation of the deteriorated chromatic floor and engraved with Maduro’s face. @jesusjam uses a wide angle in which it is possible to see two people with their luggage walking in the airport hall. In this particular manipulated image, @jesusjam, a visual artist, uses the phrase “La única salida” (“The only exit”) and Maduro’s face to denounce the destruction of the chromatic floor and the forced migration that pushed Venezuelans to leave the country. Resignation is represented in the image of the two people having to take “the only exit.” There is no specification of the two people’s particular subjectivities regarding the departure; they are just walking through Maduro’s face towards the exit. The perspective from above allows us to see all of Maduro’s face engraved on the deteriorated floor. It also denotes authority, superiority, and a distanced view looking from above to point to Nicolás Maduro as the cause of the problem. The diasporic subject is trying to convey a particular feeling of treason, and signaling President Nicolás Maduro’s responsibility for the destruction of the imagined modernity and the government’s failure. The visual discourse of

failure, using the broken floor, also circulates accusations about Venezuela's lost territory (at the Guyana-Venezuela border) as the official government's responsibility. The chromatic floor becomes a contested tool for political ideologies and a symbol of opposition groups when the user represents President Nicolás Maduro as the cause of the national failure.

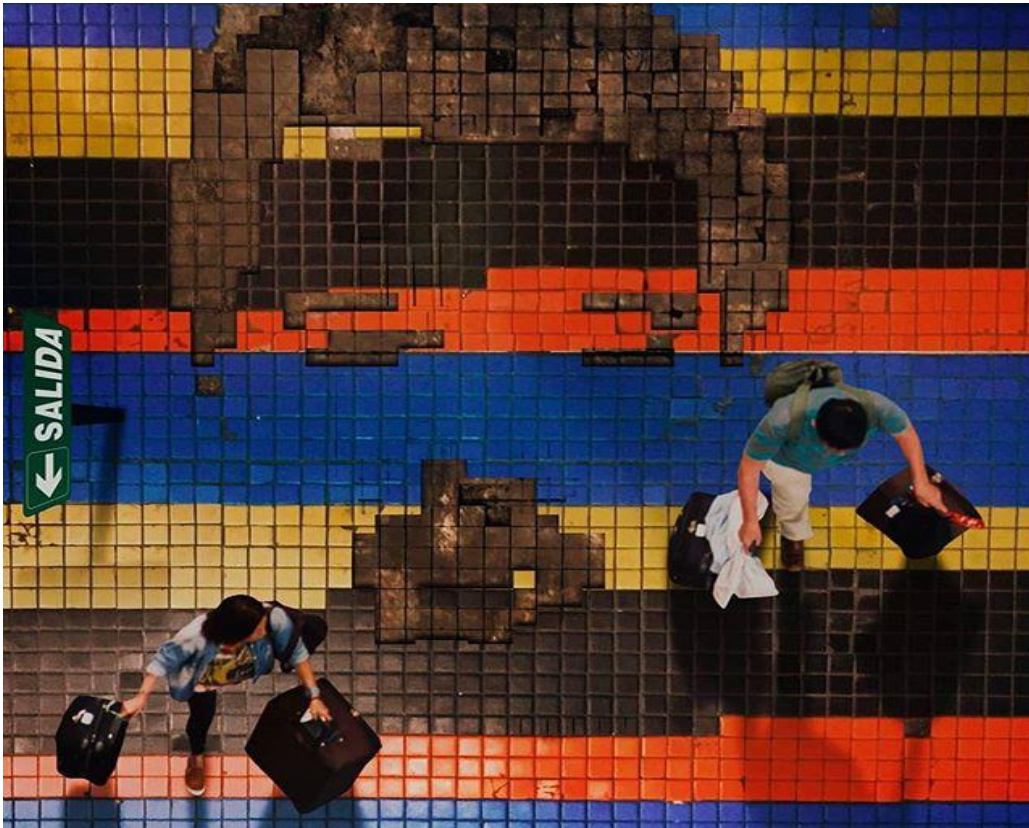


Figure 6. The only exit @jesusjam (January 2019)

“The only exit” claims the impossibility of the nation to return the subject’s love and pessimism that the circumstances will change. The image of people leaving the country and the president as the national culprit represent the nation’s failure: the ideological other and the barbarian who caused destruction. Ahmed (2015) discussed how failure is understood in connection with the emotion of hope. She says, “if the failure of returns extends one’s

investment, the national love also requires an ‘explanation’ for this failure; otherwise, hope would convert into despair or ‘giving up’ on the loved object” (p.131). In my reading, the love for the nation is precisely so well invested by opposition groups that they might leave the country having the idea of what could have been without “giving up” their love for the nation.

3.3 Hope: Optimism and the Future Homecoming

Hope circulates in relation to the failure of the nation and the idea of a broken country. Figure 7 presents a different narrative from Figures 5 and 6. @gabipapusa framed only her feet on a broken portion of the chromatic floor. The color stripes are intensified in saturation and brightness, highlighting a distinction between the floor and the broken part. With an empathic tone of hope, she raised a set of questions to her audience, “Is it a thought? A desire? An

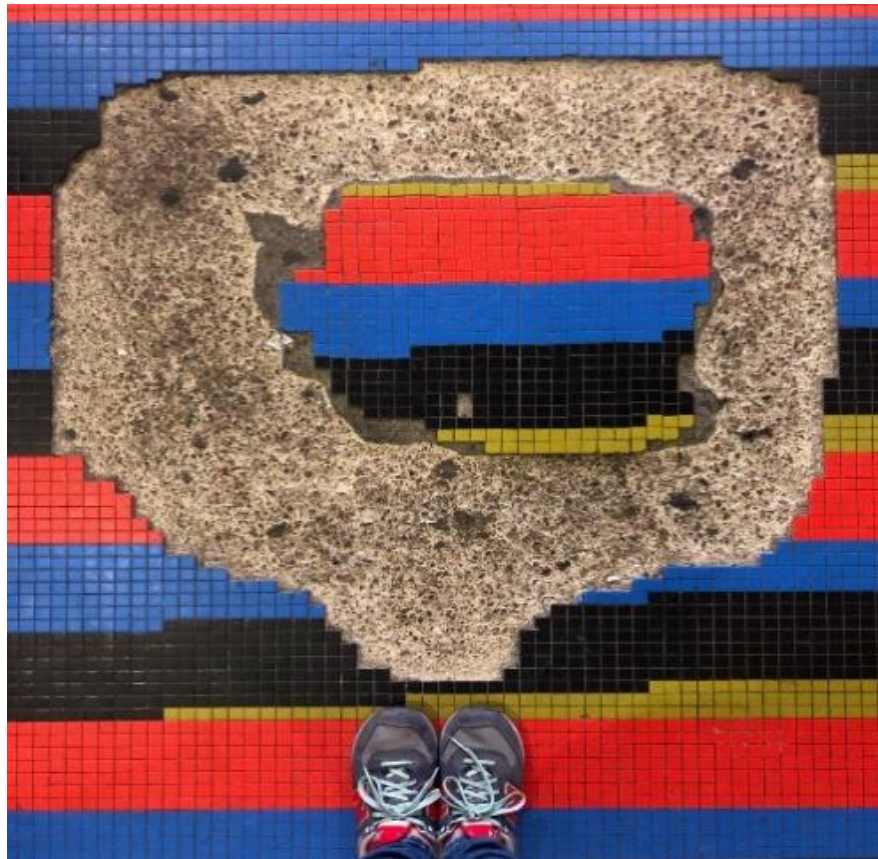


Figure 7. @gabipapusa (March 2019)

illusion? For us, it is our North and our plan. Let's go, hugging our family and then we come back. To reconstruct, to keep going" (my translation).

The expression "our North" is used to denote progress, advancement, growth, and continuity. In the user's post, the North connotes a goal that is referenced as the broken part of the chromatic floor and, ultimately, the reason to return home to rebuild the nation. The audience in @gabipapusa's post keeps the questions open without answering them and instead prefers to wish the best of luck to her. The user included in her visual statement the plural pronoun "we," which points to a future return and echoes feelings about an imagined community. She also tries to convey the idea of reversing destruction into reconstruction and alleviating the pain of a definite departure by advocating for the optimism of a future homecoming. @gabipapusa's post also indicates endurance despite adversity and interprets the opportunity of a sad circumstance to rebuild what was destroyed. This way to say goodbye connotes a different scenario from figures 5 and 6. Optimistic vibes are present to keep the love and the ideal of the reconstruction as "our North" so that the nation continues alive.

Based on the emotions of love, grief, sadness, and optimism, these three users establish different connections with the past of the nation through the *Chromatic Environment*. The idea of belonging to the imagined nation's past gets convoluted with sadness and grief caused by the deterioration of routines, habits, and aspirations that caused these subjects to migrate. The *Chromatic Environment* represented the cosmopolitan desire for modernity and becomes today's signifier for the loss for the Venezuelan diaspora.

Over time, the *Chromatic Environment* has been put to a variety of contested uses by the government, institutions, and social groups. The ideals and fantasies focused on the idealized future of the nation serve to explore gendered relations to the nation that diasporic subjects

establish on the chromatic floor before their departure. Furthermore, I speculate about the use of additive color as national representation in the Miss Universe 2019 and the contested reactions from diasporic subjects to this national representation. The visual discourse and narratives of these users allow me to ask how diasporic subjects are representing and framing the nation in a gendered way.

3.4 The *Chromatic Environment*: Gender Representations and the Nation

The three posts analyzed in this chapter contain narratives and visual arrangements that point out how subjects represent their relation with the nation. For example, the two women suggest more personal and intimate narratives associated with their departure and particular use of the space in comparison with the male post. The uses of angles in the female compositions look more centered on themselves and use less space in the framing, revealing a more intimate and closer focus; new experiences are welcome and the future is envisioned with an optimistic narrative. An optimistic tone can be seen in the creative interpretation of the chromatic floor not as a broken part but as an opportunity to construct it again. Good memories and optimism toward the future provide the bedrock to express their intimate love to family and friends transformed into love for the nation. In contrast, the male representation of the nation manifests betrayal, resignation, frustration, narrowness (“the only” exit), and confrontation against figures in political power. The angle used to represent Maduro’s whole face from a perspective above covers more space than the females’. The male’s post (Figure 6) distances himself from an intimate perspective to manage political confrontations in the public space instead. These elements help the diasporic male subject to convey, with an emphatic authority, the idea that the nation’s leader failed in his duties.

Diasporic subjects used the *Chromatic Environment* to represent a gendered relation to the nation. Figure 6 shows a male representation more oriented to a claim for “space,” while women represent their attempts to recuperate tradition and reconstruct and repair what was broken. Hence, different emotions circulate on Instagram when gender is analyzed. On the females’ side, to belong to the nation is the manifestation of love and grief for having to leave their affective relationships, such as family and friends. Personal memories emerge to intensify the loss and the future reconstruction of the country. On the male’s side, disappointment and frustration narrow possibilities to overcome the crisis and lead him to accuse the political actors who are responsible for the destruction.

Cruz-Díez’s theory of additive color, which sustains several artistic pieces, is focused on experiencing the continued changes that emerge through movement. His understanding of color calls for experiences, not facts. Constant fluctuations and no temporality are attached to circumstances and space where it happens without calling for rigidity or certainty. Interestingly, Cruz-Díez was internationally acknowledged because his theoretical understanding of color become a counter-response against the tradition of naturalism and formalism of the second half of the 20th century. The *Chromatic Environment* does not include gendered meanings itself, but it contains interesting perceptual principles that invite diasporic subject to construct their own ways of leaving. Cruz-Díez says, “the viewer may discover his own capacity to create and destroy color through his own means of perception, and also to discover his own emotional resonance” (Cruz-Díez in Jiménez, 2000; p.231). The *Chromatic Environment* mirrors a modern and aesthetic future, which means making the nation visible in a global world. In this attempt, social actors might establish their gendered relations with the nation through the emotion elicited by their last steps on it.

Exploring how a cultural artifact changes over time and its uses by different social actors, I have tried to examine the subtle connections in Cruz-Díez's additive color as a representation of the nation and its gendered meanings. The *Chromatic Environment* has created a visible and global trend so that institutional actors such as Miss Venezuela seize the moment to perform the imagined nation in international beauty contests.



Figure 8. The Venezuelan Goddess of the Future

Closing 2019, news on social media let me know that the representative Miss Venezuela would wear a national costume inspired by Cruz-Díez's theory of additive color (Figure 8) for the international Miss Universe contest, celebrated in Atlanta, Georgia. I was surprised to find that additive color would be used in a fashionable way and convey the passion for a "modern ideal." A context of increasing numbers of people fleeing the country, the institutional crisis setting up more economic uncertainty, and the death of Cruz-Díez in 2019 created social,

political, and economic conditions that emerged to re-arrange and circulate language, feelings, and imaginations of the nation. These events help me raise some speculations about the gendered use of additive color as a national representation of the country.

Usually, the Miss Universe competition invites designers around the world to represent their country using their “culture and tradition.” The Miss Venezuela, Thalia Olvino, wore a national costume designed in Paris, France, by Oscar Carvallo, who named it “The Venezuelan Goddess of the Future.” He made public on Instagram the official presentation of the Miss wearing the national costume and explained to his audience what the costume represents:

The future is now! Kinetic life. Art to wear. This Avant-garde futuristic look made for [@thaliaolvino](#) for the [@missuniverse](#) as the national costume of Venezuela represents the future of our country, an ideal world 🌍 to be. The power of women. The kinetic warrior. The positive evolution of Venezuela. It is part of the collection we presented in Paris for Haute Couture in collaboration with master Carlos Cruz ([@oscarcarvalloparis](#), 2019).

In his description, Carvallo mentions elements that reference the theoretical bases of additive color: “kinetic life” and “the kinetic warrior.” In fact, in his Instagram account, he reveals that part of the strategy of using this principle was to engage the audience with the colored effect that Thalia would originate in her runway walk. The accessories, such as jewelry, the cape, and the crown, highlight the impact of color change. Phrases such as “the power of women,” “the kinetic warrior,” and “the positive evolution of Venezuela” make explicit the desire for the future of the nation and the role of women in it. Thalia embodies these contemporary aspirations of modernity and inscribes the representation of the future of the nation in the figure of a female heroine, a cliché used in Venezuela to denote women’s hard work in public and domestic spaces in an extreme and difficult contemporary context.

The aesthetic values of the chromatic costume connote beauty and modernity, which come to represent an “optimistic future” in the face of the socio-political crisis that resulted in a

massive migration. Certainly, such contextual detail was not explicit in Carvallo's description. The narrative of a "positive evolution" talks against an evolution running backward or being negative. The cultural alliance between beauty and modernity articulates constructive elements that allow the national costume to get into the global discourse of "women's sacrifice for the nation" as "heroine" and "warrior." These categories, under the current Venezuelan context, emphasize and reproduce the role of Venezuelan women as the head and caregiver of the family. Venezuelans are escaping from a context that is frankly unstable in terms of access to basic needs and medical care, in particular for women of color from lower classes. In my reading, these labels show a romanticized version of Venezuelan women's role as nurturers and caretakers rather than a vindication of their "power" in areas other than domestic care. It is important to note that my reading does not involve participants' personal motivations, hard work, and discipline embedded in this competition. My reading involves a point of contestation in the representation of women's role in the future of the nation. "The Goddess of the Future" and its "representation of Venezuelan optimism" express the desire for a "positive" change. In my gaze, the narrative of women's empowerment was present in the whole Miss Universe contest and in the majority of national costumes, denoting a global trend in the representation of contemporary women's roles.

The Miss Venezuela Organization circulates this utopic aspiration of the imagined country by stimulating national memory, bringing symbolic elements of the past to call for feelings of hope and optimism. The lost modernity "aesthetically" depicted in the departure and diasporic subjects' nostalgic reactions to the national costume elicit memories of that past and serve as a representation of the broken nation. Ochoa (2014) documented a Venezuelan cultural concern to reach modernity and understood it as a way in which people marginalized by the

Venezuelan political imaginary mediate power and existence. The failure to achieve the desired modernity is already established as an imagined lost country and diasporic subjects become theoretically “the other.” Reactions from diasporic subjects to the national costume and their relation with the future suggest ways they mediate their relations of belonging and existence.

Beautiful. Undoubtedly it is innovative. The Venezuela that we want, successful and filled with light and progress. @janetteqb (my translation).

I love this piece showing part of our art and the Venezuelan talent over the world. @astridmastleecastrocastro (my translation)

Inspired by The Venezuelan modernity that for so many years envisioned the future with success. @eduardo_ibarra (my translation).

Beautiful creation, but it does not represent Venezuela at all or the current moment. There is no modernity, progress, anything. @mrangeloo (my translation).

Honestly, it has no context. The costume is unrelated to our country. I remind you all that the category is a national costume, not a futurist. Don't you believe that Venezuela has a beautiful culture and nature, and folkloric dance which could be taken inspiration from, instead of this galactic woman? @luisfuenmayor22 (my translation).

More than two thousand comments on Miss Venezuela’s post wearing the national costume were left on both @oscarcarvalloparis and @thaliaolvino's Instagram feeds. Many of these reactions raised heated debates of representation. Some of them do not see the relation of the costume with the Venezuelan nation. Some users’ comments attribute the chosen costume as the cause the representative of Venezuela failed to pass to the semi-final round. Meanwhile, diasporic subjects (living in Mexico, Peru, and the United States) subscribe to a narrative of national identity in which the national costume represents the longing for “success, light, and progress” as the quality of “the future.” The use of talent and the international recognition of the artist’s work are issues that might concern diasporic subjects precisely because they are living outside the nation. The

sense of belonging and national identity reflects a nostalgic retrieving of unaccomplished desires and yearnings for the future. Because Cruz-Díez's pieces become a way to speak about the "beautification of the future," it could be said that officials, the government, and privileged groups of diasporic subjects use Cruz-Díez's piece to construct a visible and imagined community abroad, which I argue has a specific relation with gender and class. Vulnerable sectors do not seem to be visually part of this imagined community, having a substantial impact on how crisis and social trauma are remembered.

Of course, narratives do not lead in just one direction in relation to the ideal of the past but also establish a contrast between present and future. Feelings of pessimism and disappointment talk again about failing to reach that modernity. In a male diasporic gaze, Cruz-Díez is used to contest the representation of a modern future that is articulated far away from "tradition and culture." In contrast, a female diasporic gaze still insists on the possibility to accomplish that ideal. Diasporic subject, @luisfuenmayor, states that the costume is unrelated to the nation and "the galactic woman" should have worn clothes more related to cultural traditions. He shares specific notions of gender to signify the nation putting women in roles that embody nature and tradition as a better representation of the nation. The relation between modernity and fashion not only constructs and presents a body but helps to build an ideal of the nation and a visible identity (Hershfield, 2008). Moreover, this author understands the connection between modernity and fashion as a "visual symbol" and "a rich site through which to explore cultural understandings of social transformation" (p.49). The fact that the organization of Miss Venezuela honored Cruz-Díez in the current context signifies to diasporic subjects a way to contest the imagined nation and establish their gendered relation with it.

Diasporic subjects use Cruz-Díez's piece to catalyze fantasies of a positive future at the same time they retrieve the past as the loss of modernity. This group of subjects ideologically aligned with values of progress and civilization circulates their emotions of love, grief, and hope to establish their relation of belonging to the imagined Venezuelan community as well as the global world. The legitimate needs to have access to food, medicine, and basic services end up being represented as luxuries or commodities related to a view of progress and civilization. Collette Capriles, a Venezuelan scholar of political philosophy and social science, published an essay on the website Cinco8.com in which she argued that the Venezuelan diaspora is configured as "la guardiana de la modernidad perdida" (the guardian of the lost modernity).

Capriles (2020) articulates her understanding of "the Venezuelan diaspora" through a specific construction of class that conditions values, aesthetics, and a way to remember the nation. This understanding might be politically convenient to configure "unity," leaving sectors at the margins of the imagined community. There is an ontological difference in representing one's experience in personal feeds on Instagram and being depicted in newspapers, magazines, and journals. Further studies in the visual discourse of Venezuelan diaspora[s] might illuminate additional complexities about nation-ness, circulations of emotions, and sentiments of belonging.

In the past, the *Chromatic Environment* was a cultural artifact for the ideological reproduction of values of modernity, civilization, and development that was used to signal the nation's path toward "progress," "modernity," and "the future" (a particular view from the center-left and right-wing parties in power). Previously signifying progress and development that lured many immigrants to Venezuela, today the chromatic floor is used to connote the idea of

loss and the broken nation that pushed many Venezuelan to leave the country. The emotions that emerged in departures and goodbyes under the Venezuelan migratory crisis intensify feelings of sadness, grief, love, resignation, betrayal, and pessimism that echo the loss of an imagined modern nation. Saying goodbye using Cruz-Díez becomes a mediator that connects emotions of specific group of subjects with their sense of belonging to imagine (impossible) modern national ideal.

Venezuelans are living as immigrants in other countries and some symbols from the past are arising to recuperate emotional relevance to imagine the nation. In addition to the *Chromatic Environment*, the categories of natural landscape, products, and commodities allow users, who are living as immigrants, to connect their sense of belonging to a recent national past. In the next chapter, I turn to questions of the ways visual discourse and personal narratives connect the uses of landscape, products, and commodities to shape memories of and longing for an imagined community.

4 CHAPTER 3

Venezuelans continue to circulate a sense of belonging as they imagine the nation. Images on social media show not only the chromatic floor of Cruz-Díez but also the naturalism and urbanism of city landscapes and nostalgia for consumption that allow diasporic subjects to be emotionally connected with the homeland and idealize the past. The singular connection of Venezuelans to landscapes and specific food brands and commodities reveals particular ways to feel the nation. The socio-political violence on the streets and the scarcity of food and medicines establish conditions in which diasporic subjects end up imagining the nation through its landscapes and their yearnings for products and commodities from past decades. Given that millions of migrants left due to unfavorable circumstances, this chapter seeks to understand diasporic subjects' relations with the present, past, and future and the ways in which a sense of belonging gains significance in such temporal relations.

Because time is one of the important considerations in my discussion, I track some historical events that made artists emerge with pieces considered by officials as representations of the country, to then examine unofficial images created by diasporic subjects in contemporary days. To understand the processes of crafting imaginaries of the nation, I consider links between official representations of the nation from artists and unofficial representations of the nation by diasporic subjects. When academic discussions talk about evidence to sustain the past of the nation and a national identity, there is a tendency to depend on the legitimate form of painting, sculptures, and architecture to refer to past times and create an official sense to feel and remember the nation. For example, according to Jiménez (2000), the lack of Venezuela's "strong" pre-Columbian monuments, as well as its rejection of the colonial past, might be one of the reasons that explains Venezuelan artists' orientation to a particular understanding of time and

space. The Venezuelan relation with time might mirror a fixation on the future and their fascination with novelty and modernity as signifiers of progress. Currently, there are millions of Venezuelans residing outside the nation and circulating images that connect them with their sense of belonging. I thus ask: What is the particular relation that diasporic subjects establish with time and space? Is the sense of belonging intensified by the particular signification of space and time? What visual elements do Venezuelans circulate to express emotions as a part of their relation with the nation?

In this chapter, I offer a brief historical account of the Venezuelan landscape art movements and the changes they experienced to signify the nation during the 20th century. This introduction establishes a starting point to travel from past to present imaginations of the nation and understand some parallelisms and antagonisms that have occurred in contemporary times. Finally, I analyze the visual discourse of five images of natural and urban landscapes used by diasporic subjects to circulate emotions about the imagined nation and the gendered relations they establish. I use the category of urban landscapes to include an analysis of products and commodities because they usually circulate together and convey the Venezuelan tendency to visualize the nation as an ideal past.

4.1 The Future of the Past

The use of landscapes as a metaphor of the nation is not specific to contemporary times. Writings and visual discourses about the nation began after the arrival of print in Venezuela in 1808, followed by the declaration of independence that took place between 1810 and 1830. According to Zambrano (2006), intellectuals and artists have been using both writings and visual discourses to draw “el perfil cívico” (sense of citizenship) of the nation in ways that would define identities that can exist in public and private spaces. Zambrano examines Venezuelan

poetry of the 19th century and identifies three identitarian ways in which landscapes and the nation are fused. Some of these verbal portraits of national landscapes correspond with the representation of a “paraíso edénico” (an Edenic paradise) and how the viewer’s senses absorbed it; the pessimism found in natural disasters; and the reverence for lakes and their symbolic idea of natural abundance. According to Zambrano (2006), these different and interiorized images of landscapes become an ideological and political position that describes not only an emotional sense of belonging but also gratitude for a “heritage” received. The initial brushstrokes to create a national identity were filled with essentialist and purist notions that male writers linked with natural landscapes. Cultural and political elements that circulated through writers’ emotional appeals shaped specific values and ideologies at the end of the 19th century.



Figure 9. Martín Tovar y Tovar. Batalla de Carabobo, 1887

The practice of landscape would continue by using visual figuration in paintings (see Figure 9). The Institute of Fine Arts was created in 1870, and a system of scholarships was commissioned and funded by the government of Antonio Guzmán Blanco so that selected artists could study abroad (Carvajal, 1996). The government established restrictions so that granted students specifically learned the themes and techniques of French realist painting. Martín Tovar

y Tovar, Cristóbal Rojas, and Arturo Michelena crafted a national past using impressionist styles to depict heroes and civil wars under an exuberant vibe of natural landscapes. This tradition would not last long and started to suffer transformation due to the upcoming modern project that began in the 20th century.

The initial reaction and opposition to the conservative styles taught in the Academy of Fines Arts took place in 1912 when a group of students formed “El Círculo de Bellas Artes” (The Circle of Fine Arts). They walked away from the tradition of depicting national heroes and battles. This group would center their attention on figuring landscapes as more artistic and local expressions rather than the tradition of painting heroes and civil wars that circulated at that time. Armando Reverón became the most significant painter of his era because he was not seduced by the modernist spirits that circulated in the Academy; instead, he decided to paint his impressionist style to depict the failure of that modern era.

Between 1920 and 1936, artists created The “Círculo de Caracas” inspired by Mexican Murals. They insisted on painting scenes of the Caracas valley but adding more stylist shapes and more bold colors (see Figure 10). These artists were moved by the Mexican revolutionary feelings and anti-American vibe that circulated across Latin America in those years. In this time, the reproduction of the valley of Caracas, the city of the central government, started to be compulsively depicted. Artists wanted to leave a record of the progressive changes that the city experienced with the death of the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez. Artists felt the necessity to represent the social changes that came with the end of the dictatorship (1908-1927) and the new realities of the economic oil model. Carvajal argues that Venezuela’s efforts to modernize in the 20th century were shaped by the cultural politics instituted by different governmental regimes in the second half of the 19th and first half of 20th centuries. Venezuelan art has been characterized

by the struggle with cultural influences from abroad. Therefore, this historical account reflects the continuous goal of Venezuelan artists to define their stylistic, critical, and personal position in representing local realities and their aspirations to belong to the global world.

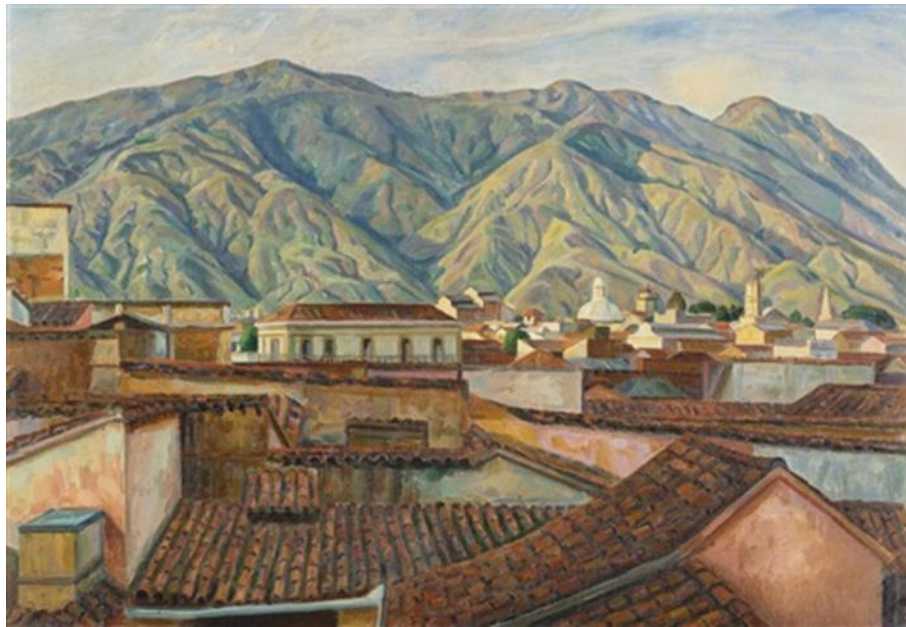


Figure 10. Manuel Cabré, Tejados de la Vieja Caracas, 1933 (Roof of Old Caracas) Oil on Canvas

Representations of the Venezuelan nation do not escape political and aesthetic reproduction. Intellectuals and artists have been emphasizing the role of natural and urban landscapes to enhance a national sense of belonging. The migratory situation settle specific condition to Venezuelan diasporic subjects to circulate their unofficial version of the imagined nation. Emotions regarding homeland and the recent historical past appear on Instagram among Venezuelans who are living in different parts of the world. I analyze how subjects perceive the landscape of the nation now that they have recently become immigrants. I focus on how urban landscapes gain relevance as subjects idealize the past. The visual register allows me to explore

Venezuelans' attempts to signify their relation with the nation using natural and urban elements of the landscape.

4.2 The Land that I Left, the Land that I Dream

The imaginations of Venezuelans and their transformation over the last decades using landscapes are no longer about physical presence. Instead, depictions of Venezuelan landscapes are idealized and historicized spaces, displaced among utopias, values, affects, and memory. It is a hybridization of images that allows science and art, order and imagination, history and reality to coexist (Auerbach, 1996). Auerbach's clarification of the treatment of landscape at the end of the 20th century is relevant to analyze the following image that belongs to a diasporic subject living in Colombia. The user, a white skinned-woman, posted her picture in July 2017 and circulated it as her nostalgic goodbye to the country.



Figure 11. @boterita2808

Figure 11 shows Mérida's chain of mountains, located in the west of Venezuela, and the user is positioned as the central focus of this picture. The left side of this composition seems to

be particularly illuminated by the sun's light. The brightness and color saturation are enhanced, making the color bolder and lighter and intensifying the green on the mountains on her left side. The subject's upper body is leaning on a monolith that divides the highway and the sizeable mountain, generating an effect of closeness between her and nature. The light projected onto the exuberant green mountain and the blue sky represent a passive scene (focused on contemplation), and the user's face denotes a meditative state, perhaps mixed with feelings of peace, sadness, and nostalgia. The subject represents her moment of connection with nature's exuberance using a popular song's verse: "I will go with your landscapes and dreams through God's ways and memories of your sunset will make my way shorter" (my translation). She wrote: "The best #tbt ever, VENEZUELA, a country with a woman's name. I've never doubted how marvelous and great you are." The user retrieved this moment as #tbt (ThrowbackThursdays). People use this hashtag to share old pictures and remind themselves of special moments.

Figure 11 reveals important characteristics about the relations of diasporic subjects' emotions with time and space, which allow them to connect with the nation. The user's feeling of serenity combined with sadness plays a significant role in this relation and intensifies the nostalgic visual discourse using landscape. For example, the focus on the depth of the mountain chain and the subject's body orientation connotes a sense of time. The conflict between the two orientations, viewer (looking at the horizon) and user (looking at her left side), connotes the rejection of the future, feelings of uncertainty, and attachment to the past. Projecting the present to the future was a tendency that many Venezuelan artists used to figure time on landscapes in the past. The use of depth in photography or painting helps to communicate a sense of time, similar to a linear trajectory that draws an imaginary horizon. Figure 11 seems to be a representation of a circumstance in which she goes somewhere and pulls over on the highway to

look at the last view and say goodbye. In this post, the user represents and conveys feelings of nostalgia for the homeland she has already left. Since the user retrieves this image as “#tbt” when she is already living abroad, the place left behind becomes a historized space that she keeps to remind herself of the nation. Diasporic subjects signify the change of geographical space now that they are living outside the nation. As the subject’s representation of the land is immersed in the natural density of mountains, the visual discourse of “natural beauty and exuberance” and its gendered description of “Venezuela as a woman’s name” signify that place called homeland. It seems that when subjects are living outside Venezuela, the nation is imagined as a constant leaving and returning. The visual representation of this back-and-forth process through landscapes gives diasporic subjects a sense of preservation of national identity. The “natural beauty” and “exuberance” draw a landscape that cannot easily disappear or be destroyed. The idea of nature preserving a sense of belonging can be read as a gendered metaphor in the same way as the reproductive role of women in preserving humanity and culture.

Nature is linked to the category of women and their biologically reproductive as well as their cultural and social reproductive role. Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that “practices of social reproduction are not just processes of cloning, but processes of social interaction in which motivation and desire play their part. As a result, cultural models become resonant with subjective experience. They become the ways individuals experience themselves, their collectivities and the world” (p. 42). In this regard, @boterita2808 visually and discursively reproduces this gendered pattern that helps her to represent the natural landscape in connection to her homeland and identity; in Yuval-Davis’s words, she is playing her role as a “symbolic border guard” and “as embodiments of the collective.”

In a similar atmosphere, Figure 12 shows a white-skinned female sitting on the ground in a forest receiving the sun's rays from her right side, which is denoting the beginning of a day. The user, @mileykabarmettler, posted this image on February 17, 2019, and wrote: "From whatever place we are, we should envision Venezuelan freedom and celebrate our encounter. We are giving our best to make it grow and glow as it deserves. Today our hope is even more alive than ever. Nothing stops us. God does put his blessing on us, and our love does connect us" (my translation).

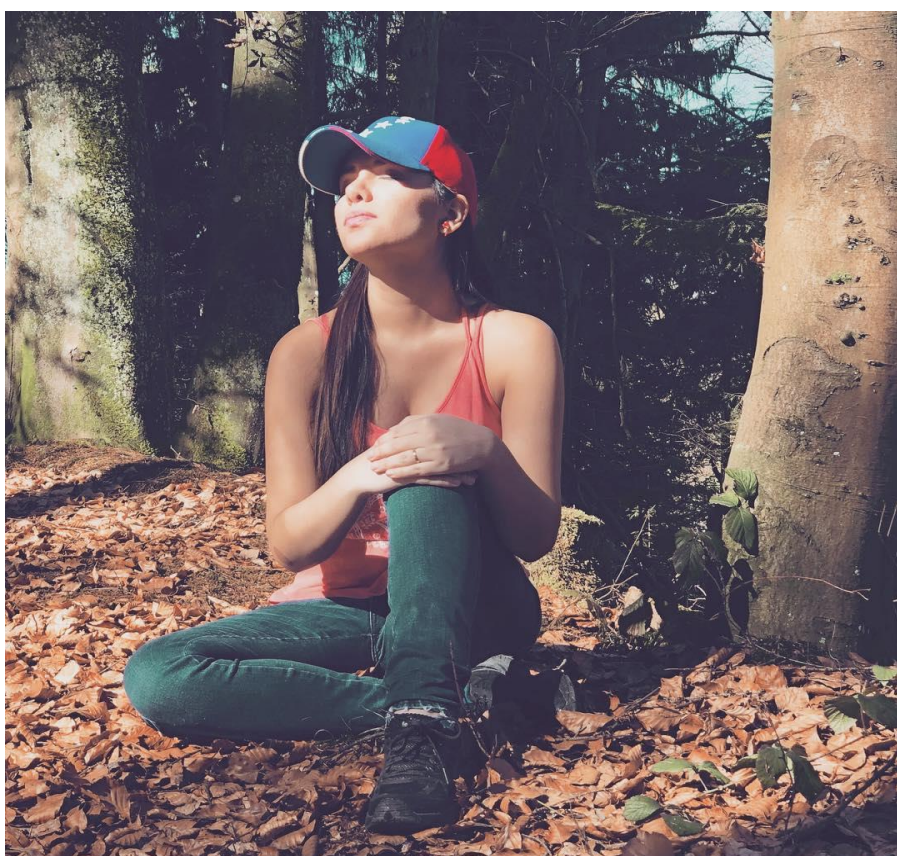


Figure 12. @mileykabarmettler

This post circulated during the celebration of a concert to collect funds for humanitarian aid that "would help" millions of Venezuelans living as refugees (a corruption scandal emerged one year after). @mileykabarmettler represents her nation-ness and patriotic sense by wearing a cap with

the colors of the national flag. She appears sitting on the ground, with her eyes closed, and posing her hands on her knee in close relation with her national envisioning.

The focus of the image is centered on the subject and some trees around her. It is not the usual panoramic view of landscape but a closeup up of the subject immersed in the forest. Her whole body appears in the frontal perspective addressing the viewer to look at her. Color saturation and brightness are settled on their lower values to create a sepia atmosphere and an emotional state of calmness and pensiveness, not to say goodbye as the user in Figure 11, but as a representation of desiring and hoping.

The subject's orientation toward her right side, closer to morning hours, also connotes this sense of longing for the future. She dreams of her homeland while sitting in another geographic place and waiting for something to happen to her country in the future. According to her narrative, unity, love, and freedom are on their way, moving forward while she is daydreaming. The bodily orientation and use of color and brightness generate a sense of stillness and hopefulness.

In the same way that Figure 11 depicts a closeness to nature, the subject in Figure 12 is also immersed in a vibe of stillness while she is longing for the homeland's future. However, she is not immersed precisely as an observer but as a dreamer of an imagined homeland. The natural space helps the user to establish a connection to her national ideals of unity, love, and freedom, signifying herself as a peacemaker. Moreover, when she appears with patriotic clothes, she is visually representing a specific aesthetic as a white-skinned female, a pacifier who shapes a vision of future ideals of the nation and the role of women in it. Yuval Davis (1997) examines the gendered view of the future in her book *Gender and Nations*. She pays attention to "unity" as a common destiny that is oriented to the future rather than the past. She argues that the

concentration on the imagined future is illustrated in the way in which modern social institutions such as schooling and the media ideologically reproduce nations through discourses that centralize and idealize union, harmony, and peace usually performed by women.

In contrast with Figures 11 and 12, Figure 13 shows a different landscape in terms of tone and scene. The user @diasporavenezolana posted this image in February 2020 in which a male white-skinned subject appears looking at the horizon of the ocean in Lima, Peru. This scene represents a cloudy atmosphere in which the lack of light intensifies the gray color, making the composition appear cold and sad.



Figure 13. @diasporavenezolana (Lima, Peru) #diasporavenezolana

The male's upper body is facing his back to the viewer. It occupies part of the composition, enhancing the perspective of depth and establishing a distance between him and the coast. The male pose indicates little interest in showing himself; instead, it seems that somebody else took the picture while he was in his moment. The compositional elements, including the solitary beach along with a cloudy atmosphere, denote an acute sense of sadness and emptiness. It is not possible to see the male facial signs that might suggest more clues about his emotional

expression; however, the subject's position with his back to the viewer represents a lonely feeling. This feeling of detachment has been a common element that the three images discussed in this section share. Venezuelan painters from the last century used to idealize the Venezuelan landscape without adding people related to it. In other words, the painters' subject was the landscape by itself. Contemporary diasporic subjects appear as the subjects of the compositions, but always in relation to the landscape while their emotions mediate their connection in time and space with the homeland.

A narrative describes his feelings of loss, sorrow, and guilt when he recalls the nation. The Instagram account @diasporavenezolana usually shares the perspective of diasporic subjects by documenting experiences of Venezuelan immigrants in different parts of the world. The narration seems to be more intentional in putting into words feelings of guilt, sorrow, and sadness suggested by the compositional elements of the image. Diasporic feelings are narrated by a male diasporic subject as well, Ivan Zambrano, who is recounting his friend's migration journey. The following narrative fragments offer important elements that allow me to explore how these two diasporic male subjects (the narrator and the main character of the story) in a gesture of male camaraderie and friendship construct how sorrow, guilt, and sadness resignify the nation in time and space.

Hoy me escribió: –Estoy mal. –¿Razones personales o nacionales? –Razones nacionales que ya son personales. Todos los cliché son ciertos. Físicamente estoy aquí, emocionalmente no he salido de allá. Estando afuera te das cuenta de que el mundo continúa mientras tu país sigue estancado. Nadie logra entenderte, solo te reconoces en el luto interno de otro venezolano cuando te lo encuentras.

He wrote to me today: –I am not feeling good. –National reasons or personal reasons? –National reasons that have become personal. All clichés are right. Physically, I am here. But in an emotional sense, I have not left there. You realize while living abroad that the world is still running while your country is stagnant. Nobody can understand you. You only recognize yourself in the grief of another Venezuelan when you found him. (my translation).

Él vive un domingo eterno desde que partió. Sabe que no le basta con poder salir a la calle a las tres de la mañana, encontrar tres tipos de leche en el mercado o mandar 100 dólares cada mes a su familia.

He lives in an endless Sunday since he left. He knows that it is not enough to be able to go out at three in the morning, find three different brands of milk at the market, or send 100 dollars to his family every month. (my translation).

This narrative intensifies feelings of detachment, loss, and nostalgia for the country left behind. “The national and personal” reasons for not feeling well get conflated and signify the nation from the time of progress to the time of stagnation. The diasporic subject says: “you realize while living abroad that the world is still running while your country is stagnant.” A stationary sensation emerges to freeze the nation’s time, and it is felt as if the nation is not advancing or progressing. The failure of the nation in relation to the progress of “the world” appears again in diasporic narratives to talk not only about progress but also access to basic products and commodities. The narrator introduces his synthesis of this story: “he lives in an endless Sunday since he left. He knows that it is not enough to be able to go out at three in the morning, find three different brands of milk at the market, or send 100 dollars to his family every month.” The two diasporic subjects in the narrative feel and understand the access to basic needs in other countries as a source of guilt and sorrow. The subjects’ representations of the Venezuelan nation appears as a failed project regarding its aspiration towards modernity and its ability to provide the right conditions to its citizens.

Figures 11, 12, and 13 circulate emotions that signal gendered relations to time and space. Male and female subjects visually and discursively circulate nostalgia in different ways. From the male perspective, the focus is more on the pain caused by seeing the nation from outside. Feelings of sorrow, guilt, and sadness cause the diasporic subject

to feel the present of the nation as a stagnant mode and also help to convey concerns about his role as breadwinner. From the perspective of the two women, the natural landscape allows them to connect to representations of the nation's nature to preserve identity, future, and belonging.

Having navigated a variety of ways in which Venezuelan diasporic subjects circulate their emotions and senses of belonging, I turn my analysis to explore yearnings for products and commodities intensified by the problematic circumstance that Venezuelans have lived through during the last five years.

4.3 Imagine Happiness under an Abundant Past

Contemporary diasporic Venezuelan artists have been actively generating content focused on immigrant longing for the past decades. Iconic representations of urban landscapes, including some natural elements and giant advertisements, are circulating as the figurative representation of a recent national past. In his essay, *Postales de una Ciudad Perdida y Recobrada (Postcards of a Lost and Restored City)*, Osío (2020) writes about the ambivalence embedded in the images of natural and urban landscapes. He asserts that the proliferation of images on social media, which show the “best face of our cities,” is a gesture that signifies a sense of “rootedness, reconciliation, and resistance.” Beauty and destruction, living inside or outside the country, mark a convoluted position in which the new postcards on social media talk about idealized memories and the broken present. I examine parts of these complexities as I underscore a nostalgic tendency to revisit the past by using products and commodities that do not circulate anymore and help diasporic subjects to recall their imagined nation.

The city of Caracas has been one of the places for Venezuelan diasporic subjects to idealize the recent national past. As readers noted in the previous chapter, the significant changes

of modernization of the past were accomplished in Caracas, among other core cities. Currently, it is the center of contested discussions about migration. The circulations of loss, grief, sorrow, and sadness on Instagram have configured a nostalgic wave that transforms an intimate process into a collective sharing of daily habits of consumption from the past constituting a social memory.

Esta foto es de la época en donde eramos felices y no lo sabíamos



Figure 14. “This picture is from when we were happy and we didn’t know it.”

The image of the city with the two iconic advertisements of Nescafé and Pepsi is an example of the configuration of social memory on Instagram. The image of the urban landscape with the two icons has been circulating with different compositional versions posted by different Venezuelan Instagram accounts around the world, such as @venezolanosporel mundo (Venezuelans around the world), @venecuador (Venezuelan in Ecuador), @devzlaparaelmundo (from Venezuela to the world) since April 2019. Instagram users have been inviting their followers to remember the past and mirror the ideal nation. Figure 14 shows a different version

from Figure 1, the urban landscape mentioned in my methods section in Chapter 1. Figure 14 shows a cloudy atmosphere that produces a contrast effect between the only two bright elements of the scene: the Nescafé and the Pepsi icons. They are positioned on the top of the highest buildings, making them visible as the central focus of the composition. The icons and buildings populate the first plane of the composition, while the Avila mountain seems to be fading in the back.

The fading color of the buildings, the cloudiness of the sky, and the exuberant mountain lost in the blurry atmosphere give the image a sense of ambivalence between happiness and sorrow. Moreover, the image shows the emphasis of the two evocative elements that were part of the city's skyline ten years ago. The accelerated process of change that the country has experienced, in terms of the economy and the massive displacements of people, transforms the urban landscape into an emotional referent of the imagined nation.

The visual composition of the two icons is not the only evocative element of emotion, but also its title: "This picture is from when we were happy and we didn't know it." This title addresses feelings of happiness, although it was not recognized at that time. Instead, happiness is sensed at present and associated with the past. It connotes good times in terms of access to products. Pepsi and Nescafé, two transnational brand drinks, convey the resignification of the past as an idealized time. I argue that this idealization has its roots in the economic circumstances and transformed consumption habits of Venezuelans. Difficult circumstances led millions of people to leave the country in search of places that provide basic resources for subsistence, although Pepsi and Nescafé are not precisely nutritious food but products that were available in the past. Transnational referents of the past have circulated with emotional relevance after migration happened precisely to convey the desire of restoring the recent past. As I

mentioned in chapter 1, the official government removed these icons in 2010. These icons had not popped up until millions of people began to live abroad and yearn for the recent national past. Venezuelans living abroad are emotionally resignifying the past and including transnational icons that show a desirable view of the city and the country. But they might be neglecting historical and local circumstances in which narratives of unrecognized happiness of the past are constructed for some social groups at present.



Figure 15. @FMPinilla.

In a different version of this urban landscape, @FMPinilla, a diasporic subject and artist living in the United States, shows part of a digital illustration (see Figure 15) using the composition of the city and its Nescafé and Pepsi icons but with more national brands on it. He signifies his piece by adding the following narrative:

Aquellos fines de años de nuestra infancia no mueren porque viven en nuestros corazones y recordarlos no signifca vivir en el pasado, son nuestra esencia y lo que nos motiva a encarar el presente con valor.

Those new year celebrations from our childhood memories do not die. They live in our hearts and remind them it doesn't mean that we are living in the past. They are our essence and our drive to face the present with courage (my translation).

@Fmpinilla circulates his nostalgic view of what probably signified his childhood. These cartoon memories help him to essentialize the Venezuelan nations-ness linked with commodities and specific gendered relations.

Figure 15 mostly represents the imagined nation of the past. National brands fill the front plane of the composition emphasizing local and national referents of food, culture, and commodities. However, above the ground, buildings hierarchically raise the transnational brands of Pepsi and Nescafé, always showing their dominant position regarding the national brand of Polar (beer company) and Savoy (chocolate manufacturer). The national brands that appear in this image mostly correspond to evocative referents of children's products and commodities of the decades of the '70s and '80s. The front plane of Figure 15 presents some marketing logos of chocolate drinks and candies (Toody, Taco, and Savoy), drinks based on rice (boy on the skateboard), snacks (boy running in yellow clothes and boy taking a drink from the woman's tray). Cultural referents include the Children's Museum (boy in blue with curly-long hair) and (M)eridianito (a children's newspaper). These brand referents connote the Venezuelan-ness centered on a restorative nostalgia by remembering snacks, drinks, and food. The user's narrative might emphasize his message with a reflective tone as he says: "They [past years] live in our hearts and remind them it doesn't mean that we are living in the past." However, it is not clear in his narrative and image how this representation from the past helps "to face the present with courage." The user shows his rejection of the idea that living in the past is not the right form to

live, but it helps to preserve “the Venezuelan essence” focused on the daily practice of consumption of past years.

The emotionality in this visual discourse can be seen in the fireworks and Christmas trees that represent celebrations and a sense of bliss that was felt during those years. The image visually conveys a sense of euphoria for the recent national past under a thematic atmosphere of new year celebrations. The circulation of emotions is not about just happiness but extreme happiness caused by the abundance of products consumed in past years. The surplus presence of products and commodities amuses children in the illustration and justifies linking the feeling of happiness to that time.

In terms of gendered relations, the nation is configured using fictional but symbolic caricatures to represent children and adults. The color saturation used to depict the skin color of these illustrations seems to be primarily white-oriented. The characters appear in specific roles, suggesting essentialist and gendered relations with the imagined nation. A variety of masculine attributes is more significant in comparison with feminine attributes. For example, the caricature of boys appears to perform actions. They appear performing roles as a baseball and football player, skater, and musician. On the other hand, feminine attributes appear at the very edges of the composition, occupying less space than males. The two females in the caricature are associated with two food brands that sell corn dough (Harin Pan) and vegetable oil (Diana). The big image of a woman on the right side appears as the mom and caregiver of children nurturing and feeding them with drinks and “hallacas” (the traditional meal during December celebrations). The second one, the fat girl, appears in the very back. The only two female attributes suggest no movement and passivity and service to others. The image represents the gender role binaries passive/active and collective/individual played by females and males.

Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that women usually appear in the collective imagination associated with children, family, and the future. In the case of the adult male musician, although he is singing, nobody seems to be listening to him or dancing. The representation of the male adult appears in relation to himself in an individualistic mode, like the rest of the male boys. This over-representation of males in Figure 15 signifies dominance in public areas, male autonomy, independence, and even the capacity to laugh or enjoy.

Figure 15 conveys not only the longing for the prosperity of past years based on the surplus of products and commodities that shaped childhood of the times but also gender, racial, and class-based configurations that signal who can play and enjoy. Emotions circulate on social media to offer new ways to reproduce collective meanings of the imagined nation. Images do not only circulate with the romantic vibe of a new version of “postcards” focused on the ambivalence among the sense of “rootness, reconciliation, and resistance” as argued by Osío (2020). These different versions representing the nation mirror desires of abundance and access to products and commodities that some Venezuelans experienced in the past.

The visual discourse using natural and urban landscapes circulates emotions of sadness, sorrow, guilt, and euphoric happiness emphasizing desires to restore some symbols from the past. Along with the visual discourse of living abroad, narratives of natural beauty, unity, freedom, and the sense of feeling the nation stagnant in time allow these diasporic subjects to connect with their sense of belonging. The complicated economic and sociopolitical context pushes many Venezuelans to seek not only another place to live but also to imagine the nation constructed through reminders of past and desires for the future.

5 CONCLUSIONS

During the 20th century, official representations of the nation have circulated under the gaze of three different Venezuelan arts movements. These official representations have served as a visual framing for Venezuelan diasporic subjects to circulate their emotions and memories of the nation. Emotions concerning time and space play a significant role in how diasporic subjects represent their relations to the nation at the moment of departure and when they are finally settling in a new country. The *Chromatic Environment*, natural landscapes, and circulations of commodities using urban landscapes become the evocative referents on Instagram for Venezuelan diasporic subjects to claim the “comfort of social belonging” (Bhaba, 1990; p. 9) of the imagined Venezuelan community. In this context, Bhaba’s words can be read as the pursuing of Venezuelan diasporic subjects looking for an emotional element that makes them connect with their sense of belonging now that they are living abroad. Likewise, diasporic subjects circulate emotions through these referents to configure what kind of relations subjects establish with the nation in terms of class, gender, and race.

In the visual discourse of goodbyes, diasporic subjects circulate sadness, grief, love, resignation, betrayal, and pessimism that echo the loss of an imagined modern nation. Saying goodbye by using the *Chromatic Environment* becomes a mediator to represent people’s emotions. These emotions are connected to the sense of belonging of specific group identities to imagine an impossible and modern national ideal. In establishing gendered relations, the subjects arrange different compositions and circulate different emotions and meanings.

Female representations of the nation emphasize fondness for more intimate links using significantly less angle, space, and focus than males. Female narratives address feelings of love and hope for the nation, highlighting an optimistic envisioning of the future. In contrast, male

diasporic subjects use the *Chromatic Environment* with more space and wide angles, creating a panoramic view of the chromatic floor. Male compositions convey pessimism and betrayal to establish a visual critique of the incompetence of President Nicolás Maduro in leading the country. The president is depicted as responsible for the massive migration, the broken chromatic floor, and the loss of the modern country's aspirations.

Migratory movement changes the way in which subjects perceive and feel the nation. Nostalgia for a recent past, memories of the homeland, and consumption practices configure the imagined Venezuelan nation now that diasporic subjects live abroad. Subjects use the natural and urban landscape to connect with the homeland they left behind. The visual discourse of living abroad circulates emotions of sadness, sorrow, guilt, and euphoric happiness, showing a tendency to restore memories and symbols from the past. Women and men tend to circulate emotions in two different pathways representing their gendered relations with the Venezuelan nation. Women use natural landscapes to circulate the narrative of natural beauty and daydream about the future as a "united" nation. Roles as cultural reproducers and peacemakers address the imagined future of the nation. On the other hand, men seem saturated by the feeling of guilt and loneliness, making them perceive the homeland trapped in time and concern about the breadwinner role. Venezuelans have been leaving the country to escape from scarcity and their perceptions of backwardness and national stagnation, making them feel a present that does not fit with ideals of progress, development, and modernity anymore. The contrast between the place left behind and the new one elicits a specific perception of time, making male diasporic subjects circulate feelings of sorrow for the perceived stagnation of the country.

The study of circulations of emotions and memories using visual analysis signifies an attempt to understand how this collective process on social media gains significance for

diasporic subjects to claim or interrogate their sense of belonging to an imagined community. The elicited nostalgia of past years awakens emotions for official art pieces from the past, such as the *Chromatic Environment* and the urban landscape showing the skyline with the Pepsi and Nescafé. These icons provide diasporic subjects the means to remember and reinforce the country's nationalist modern aspirations that ultimately failed in providing them a present and a future. In this sense, the failed state elicits specific imaginations in diasporic users who end up romanticizing the past and future of the country, keeping the same idealizations from the past.

Moreover, the visual analysis of emotions reveals that Instagram, a contemporary and technological platform, offers possibilities for users to circulate temporal and spatial relations with the nation by retrieving significant personal moments from the past and keeping them in constant circulation. Feeling the Venezuelan nation is part of these significant personal moments in which diasporic subjects represent their emotional attachment by figuring their national imaginary through urban and natural landscapes. The circulations of temporal and spatial relations on Instagram gain significance precisely after the massive migration, providing users a collective digital space to imagine the nation and to reproduce nationalist ideals.

Gender emerged as a salient element of the visual discourse to convey gendered roles that shape the Venezuelan community's ideals. Specifically, masculinized and feminized attributes such as beauty and motherhood-maternity have been important topics in Venezuelan visual discourse. The gendered roles embedded in the circulations of emotions contribute to the pervasive reproduction of nationalism and particular politics that reproduce desirable attributes that visualize and include only certain groups of people.

Realities of Venezuelan immigrants cannot be entirely described through images or news. However, visual analysis can provide clues to understand how human relations are represented to

imagine the Venezuelan community on Instagram. The wave of Venezuelan migrations has intensified the circulation of emotions and memories on Instagram in which it is possible to manage visual aspects including mood, focus, angle, and spatial and temporal relations with the nation so diasporic subjects recreate an imagined and modern community. Although the categories of race and class were not thoroughly discussed throughout the chapters, the visual analysis suggests a tendency to use specific aesthetics linked to whiteness or light skin and class in the visual discourse. An intersectional analysis of the relations of subjects with the nations might open future discussion about what groups of folks are getting more visual attention and who are not, in the process reconstructions of the nation.

Developing my argument, I navigated through some historical events and some historical interpretations. I also historicize the current circulations of emotion and memories to construct the context in which diasporic subjects imagine a modern and impossible community. Constructing these historical accounts, perhaps, is how I reflect on my own nostalgia. I was not part of this ritual to visually document my departure and my arrival abroad. However, after almost six years, I felt the need to construct my own space to understand how present circumstances and memories combine to make the country feel different from a distance.

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