



HOMELAND'S AGENDA ELECTORAL AUTOCRACY (THE VENEZUELAN CASE, 2016)

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Installation view. *Homeland's Agenda*, 2016. From the series *Electoral Autocracy*. Photo by Markus Wörgötter. Image courtesy of Galerie Martin Janda.

Paraphrasing Jean-Luc Nancy, we might affirm the distinction between the truth of violence and the violence of truth. The truth of violence is lived and can be mediated through moving images—blows to the head, emaciated bodies, gunfire, disease. The brute, idiotic truth of violence is that it never cares for others. The violence of truth, on the other hand, is eventual—it reopens common sense, cynical inertia, and untenable situations. It needs alliances to emerge, including artists, philosophers, journalists, informed publics in good faith, and honest media regimes. The violence of truth is, if not revolutionary, revelatory, and it disturbs the present order. But what does it mean to know the truth of a situation—for example, the current situation in Venezuela? The Project presented below, *Homeland's Agenda*, attempts to focus on this question with impelling urgency, but befitting the dire complexity of socio-politics, without offering easy answers.¹

The work assumes the general equivalence of media—public government broadcasting, propaganda, diverse Internet corporate news channels, pop music lyrics, video testimonials of varying polish—so that each successive clip does not necessarily dominate the others. The result is a distillation of content, as

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Image and Violence," in *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 15–26.

form frequently coerces its own interpretation. The transcript provides a similar democratization of content, revealing a complex situation that would otherwise be impossible to experience for audiences not initiated in the local context.

How one takes these stills from moving images depends on how one reacts to the proper names—Bolívar, Chavez, Maduro, Capriles—as well as on where one stands in relation to the present possibilities or limitations of state socialism, neoliberal economics, direct democracy, and the communes (stances all conditioned by one's ideological position within media ecologies of transparency or bias). Three major players are involved: socialist governance, which claims to represent the people but increasingly behaves as a repressive authoritarian kleptocracy; the global neoliberal economy, which tends to insist that neoliberalism is good medicine for states that do not fully consent to its *realpolitik* pressures, and which sets up the conditions for communal failures and rising inequalities; and, third, a demos that is both conceptually and geographically split, among a genuine and a fake left, faux-populist opposition from elites, people who oppose the government simply for reasons of survival, criminal gangs, and various rogues who serve popular, state, or private interests.

Homeland's Agenda underscores the key objects at play: essential goods, medicine, guns, the Internet, natural resources, drugs, prisons, televisions, currency. The situation revolves around these objects as much as it evolves from the macro ideological antagonisms described above. Within such times of crisis, perhaps these objects demonstrate a cracking open of the commodity fetish and its attendant culture. Within conditions of hyperinflation, one can no longer pretend that money is a miraculous object; it becomes simply paper that can be torn up like any other. More broadly, one can no longer ignore the fact that commodities mediate social relations, at the expense of other relations, or even of objects of genuine need. Once this becomes manifest, the smooth functioning of a global economy based on heedless consumption falters, revealing the normally disavowed perversity of, say, the availability of luxury goods in the midst of intense hunger and privation.

The source materials presented here span the period from 2011 to 2016 and bear witness to the development of a humanitarian crisis and to the ensuing civil protests on a national scale that, in 2017, prompted government repression through the police, military, and the media.

Arnaud Gerspacher, New York, June 2017

NOTES The authors are not responsible for the information and opinions expressed by the sources, nor do they claim any rights over the original source materials.

In the transcripts below, edition cuts are indicated with one slash (/).

These elisions have the purpose of shortening and facilitating the reading.

Translated by Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck and Sophia Erdahl.

1. Nicolás Maduro's first speech as acting president – March 5, 2013 – Public broadcasting



*Dear compatriots,
For those listening to us and watching us in all of the homeland's territory and our brothers in the world. Today the 5th of March, / we received the hardest and most tragic information that we can transmit to our people: At 4:25 this afternoon, today March 5th, the Commander-President Hugo Chávez Frías died.*

2. Human rights activist and YouTuber, Yasmin Garcia – May 21, 2016 – Personal manifesto



*Because things don't work, because we have something like a deeply rooted double morality. We have a very tough moral problem, very complex. The people in Venezuela are always looking for the bad inside the good and for the good inside the bad.
That's maybe why the Venezuelan people saw a savior, a hero, in a delinquent—how antagonistic are these things, no? A delinquent, a coup leader, a killer, they compared him with a hero.
That's why we are here, it's what they wanted to see, because everyone sees what they want to see.*

3. Hugo Chávez Frías's last public speech – December 8, 2012 – Public broadcasting



*[Singing]
Homeland, homeland
Dear homeland
Yours is my sky, yours is my sun
Homeland, yours is my life
Yours is my soul
Yours is my looove!
[Speech]
Your homeland. The homeland, today we have homeland and whatever happens, under any circumstance, we will keep on having homeland.*

4. Amanda Miguel's song lyric, El Me Mintió, 1981 – Video lyric



*He lied to me
He said that he loved me and it was not true
He lied to me
Didn't love me, never loved me
He let me adore him
He lied to me
He lied to me
It was a game and nothing more
It was only a cruel game of his vanity*

[Song playing in the background] *He lied to me. Didn't love me...
–Chávez lives!
Independence and socialist homeland.
Planting the Supreme-Commander.
Local territorial militia battalion commander.
Execute the operational complete readiness of your unit.
Meeting point at the intended coordinates for that end.
Execute.*



6. Human rights activist and YouTuber, Yasmin Garcia – May 21, 2016 – Personal manifesto

*I refuse to pay tribute to those
immoralists that nowadays govern my country.
I refuse to recognize them, these people who claim to love Chávez,
who claim to love Maduro, that this revolution is pretty, that they
believe in socialism, that they have any human quality.*



7. *Aló Presidente*, weekly program – February 23, 2012 – Public broadcasting

[A little kid opens his path across the public and security personnel to give Chavez a letter from his mom.
From his desk Chavez gives instructions]
*Leave him alone, leave him, he can walk.
Leave him, let him run here. Come here my little man, come here,
turn around, here turn around, leave him alone, leave him alone...*
[Chavez embraces the kid and shares his microphone]
*What's up? Your name is?
–Eliel
–Ahhh?
–Eliel
–Eliel, how old are you? Two?
Listen, you run hard, right? / and this paper, who sent it to me?
–My mom
–Your mom? Lets see, what does it say: Caracas, February 23, tatata...
“Greetings, Maribel” is that your mom, Maribel?
Yeah, uhm, very nice and you're already in school? Are you at school?
Have you eaten today? Did you, yes? Aha... wait!
Well then here, she has three children 15, 14 and the baby,
the baby who is here.
–And my brother.
–And your brother, right?
–He got killed.
[Chávez closes his eyes and pauses for three seconds]
–Well, he's alive out there; he's with us, okay?*





Your brother, your brother, aha, ehh, let's find out here, taratan...
 "I had to leave the pension home where I was..."
 Well, then I'm going to ask Erika, at once. Where is Erika?
 My minister Erika, go and talk to Maribel, go help Maribel.
 [Cheers from the public]

8. The little girl's message to the president – June 3, 2016 – Testimonial via social media



President Maduro,
 I'm tired...
 of this situation.
 I don't have water.
 I don't have food.
 I don't have medicine,
 and lastly...
 I don't have...
 I don't have shampoo!



9. Education Minister, Héctor Rodríguez – February 25, 2014 – Public broadcasting



It is NOT like, we are going to get people out of poverty
 into the middle class where they will aspire to be escualidos.
 [Name used by Chavistas to refer to the opposition]

10. Opposition rally closing with the national anthem – March 30, 2015 – Cameraman: Yskler Martinez



Glory to the brave people who shook off the yoke
 Respecting law, virtue and honor.
 Long live Venezuela! In peace and democracy!
 So as you already know, everybody has to leave now.
 Don't mess with the police, no rumors, everybody go home...

11. Armed civil militia: Colectivos escorted by the Army – September 1, 2016 – Testimonial via social media

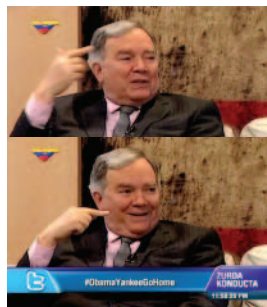


It is a war, you know...
 Look at all of those thugs, so many and armed to the teeth...

The bombs are generous in the sense that they spread themselves equally all around. Weapons fulfill a similar function, the snipers point at heads but there comes a time, in the case of a squalid (opposition) head, his head is no different than a chavista head, except in its content. The sound produced by a squalid head, is much less than—is like a pop, because the skull vault is hollow.

—It has no content...

—Precisely, it goes through fast, but you only know after the bullet passes.



13. Mothers stopped from reentering Venezuela with grocery bags at the Colombian border crossing
July 5, 2016 – Juan Carlos Estupiñán, *El Espectador*, Colombia

From our enemies deliver us Lord our God. In the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Jesus my Lord and Redeemer I repent of all the sins that I have committed until today...



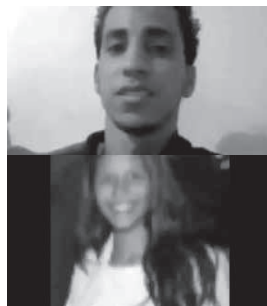
14. Journalism class with guest Prof. Tamoia Calzadilla, Madrid, Spain – May 9, 2014 – Noel Pernía's archive

The first day of the protests, Feb. 12, there were three dead, that day. The first two deaths of that day could be documented because nowadays everybody has (I don't know if here it is the same) everybody has a smartphone to record and upload to YouTube and the web. So then people were uploading what was going on: photos and videos, from their apartments. On top of that we had our own journalists and cameramen working that day, and we compared our images with those taken from the buildings and were able to identify the people firing at the youth at least on that day. When we studied the images, we found nothing less than that the people firing guns were from the secret police. The government's political arm had killed, at least one—Basil Da Costa, a 22-year-old student, he was the second to be assassinated.



15. *Junta Patriótica Estudiantil y Popular* – March 15, 2014 – Civic group manifesto via social media

*He is Bassil, he is Robert, she is Geraldin, he is Juan, he is Jimmy, he is José Alejandro, none of them asked to be heroes, nor martyrs, but one day they went out to protest for their country and got killed for it, that's why Venezuela doesn't forget them / We will keep on fighting and we'll stay in the street until our just claims are met. It's not possible that since February when the demonstrations started, there have been over 1,476 detentions, most of them students, there are 33 denounced cases of torture, including electroshock, brutal beatings, rapes, and 21 assassinations. The *Junta Patriótica Estudiantil y Popular* stands up for every student...*



16. Street protest scene – October 27, 2016 – Witness testimony via social media



Look at him, look at him. Look at him!
–Hey, hey! You are going to kill him!
–Hey, hey! You shouldn't do that.
They hurt him, they hurt him!
In the eye! In the eye, in the eye! In the eye!

17. Wounded opposition activist – Oct. 27, 2016 – Political activist manifesto via social media



–What message do you give to the Venezuelan people?
–Don't stop, keep up the fight. It's better to die standing, than to stay kneeling under this dictatorship. This is going to end soon, our highest leader Capriles has made the call. Our party is fighting; the people are in the street. Stay on the street! Don't think that I have fallen; now I'm in bed but tomorrow I will keep on fighting.
–Well, God bless you, let's keep up the fight, for all the wounded and for all the prisoners, let's go to the street.

18. Young street protestors interviewed by government media – October 29, 2016 – Public broadcasting



–What happened? Why, what happened to your face?
–Neither the government nor the opposition is worth a shit!
That's what happens. No one who has arrived...
–They shit their pants!
–No one has arrived here, who loves this country, you know?
No one loves the country, because if this were a good opposition, this shit would have ended a while ago. Neither of them function, and it ends up depending on one's self if this shit changes or not. And the people are suckers, they keep on eating shit, shit, and shit and people don't get tired. When they get tired, the shit will hit the fan, we'll see on TV when shit hits the fan! Because we got tired of eating shit! On the contrary, we are going to stay the same. Uneducated people don't come out...
–Now, are you telling me that you are frustrated because they are not mobilizing us today toward the presidential palace?
–Exactly, today was the day!
–If this doesn't end with blood, it's a lie that those guys are going to let go of power.
–Why do you say so?
–Because you shouldn't cover your eyes from essential things. If this doesn't end with blood, this is not going to end. A war is needed? People say that war is bad; in Syria they have bombings every day but in comparison, 30% more people a day die here. Are you telling me about the amount of innocent people dying here? Let's have a war in this shitty country instead..!

The international community has the perception and this I want to say with all responsibility, that to have peace in Venezuela, there can't be a massive protest because neither Maduro's dictatorial regime nor the democratic coalition has enough control over the masses for this long protest to be effective and peaceful; they are afraid...



20. National Bolivarian Militia promo – April 13, 2016 – Cayaurima TV, government sponsored

*For a long time, we Venezuelans have been preparing, men and women, with rifles at hand for the defense of the homeland. Here I am to defend Bolívar's land, Sucre's land, here we are, the women.
[Lyrics] In freedom; I can feel love bursting...*



21. Bolivarian Liberation Forces – June 5, 2014 – Clandestine group manifesto via social media

Yesterday they were the federalists and centralists, liberals and conservatives, legalists and continuers, adecos and copeyanos. Today they are the savage capitalists and red-bourgeois. More elections to choose who will decide, in your name, over the use of public resources and the country's future. More Oil Futures sales in conditions that only the red government hierarchies know of. More handovers of oil deposits, natural gas, gold, diamonds, iron, aluminium, coal, calixa, coltan, nickel, quartz, kaolin, tungsten, etc.; to multinationals disguised as partially national enterprises and concessions that compromise national sovereignty. More military men conceiving of their careers as a long sacrifice to be rewarded later with promotion into positions of control...

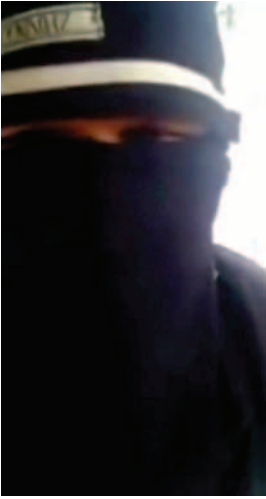


22. Gang threat to the president – August 28, 2016 – Testimonial via social media

*Listen, Nicolás Maduro, we are calling you out, it's the bullet train. We give you 72 hours, for you to leave power and stop fucking around with the Venezuelan people, because this could end with your life. 72 hours Nicolás Maduro. Talk to him Rat-hair..!
–Look minor, we are talking to you plainly, listen to what I'm saying: Do you believe that we'll wait until September 1st, for the referendum? You motherfucker! You have 72 hours to leave power, or do you think Venezuela is not going damn hungry! You damned guy! Son of a bitch, what is wrong with you? Do you want to see faces in The Paradise? [Caracas neighborhood] Or do you think the cops protecting your family in The Paradise are enough? We're being straight with you, we're not showing guns out of respect for the social media because kids can see this, too, but we hope that you get it and that it opens your brain, you damn donkey.*



Downloaded from <http://direct.mit.edu/animat> by guest on 25 May 2025



–You know what? It's the ghetto people, all these fathers and mothers of families who are leaking oil because of you, cocksucker, if you got no balls to run a presidency, hand over the beta [slang for government]. I hope you get this message, we are not kidding, and don't you blame third parties, this is the ghetto, you cocksucker.

–You've been told now; we don't want you in the country any longer, you have to abandon it because you make our families sick, what's going on? No one messes with the family.

–Hand over the beta, cocksucker! You don't want to hand it over? All the same you are going to get kicked out of the beta, cocksucker! Finally, you've got the ghetto going hungry, the Venezuelan people.

–You have been told, that's clear.

–Cocksucker, we told you already.

Don't think the opposition backs this, at all...

23. Prisoners at the San Fernando Jail, practicing knife fight – April 10, 2016
Inmate video-aficionado



[Heavy Metal rock music in the background]

24. Inmates perform a funeral ritual for 'El Conejo' at San Antonio Prison – January 25, 2016
Witness testimony via social media

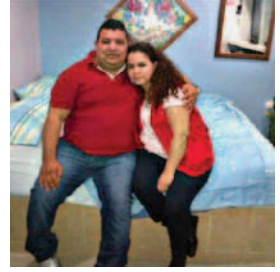


–Pun, pun, pun

–Prrrrrrrrran

–Prrrrrrrrrrrrran

[The PRAN is a convict and gang leader—the term stands for Prisoner Repeat Offender Natural Assassin. They run weapons, drugs, and kidnapping operations from inside prisons and trade authority with members of government]



26. Tocuyito jail inmates' video to the president – May 17, 2011 – Public broadcasting

*You can find anything, any kind of bug, anything brother...
This is totally something for our president of the republic,
Dr. Hugo Chávez to look into and make known to the justice minister
Tareck El Aissami that he has to help these people.*



27. Message from PRAN and convicts at PGV jail to Penitentiary Minister Iris Varela – October 11, 2016 – Testimonies via social media

*Please help us..! We are hungry! You have family and kids too...
–We are dying...
–Please come to our aid... Please, Mrs. Minister, don't abandon us.
–Already eight people have died from tuberculosis.
–We have no food, no medicine, take us to a hospital...
–There are so many sick people, don't take our supplies away.
–Well, Mrs. Minister, here as you have heard from our companions,
some have died of tuberculosis, others have different diseases.
I'm HIV positive. I need a medicine called Retroviral. I haven't taken it
for a week. The truth is that we are really in trouble Mrs. Minister,
we need supplies, eight of us have already died. Actually every time
someone dies, it's a great shame to watch them die without being able to do anything, without having
anything at hand, we can't do anything, can't help them. We need daily food. Do you think it's
possible for us to have a daily meal?
–We need support from our relatives, too, Mrs. Minister.
–We don't eat a meal every day. Please, help us!!*



28. Delcy Rodríguez at the Organization of American States – June 23, 2016 – Public broadcasting

*/ of the situation and complexities that the country lives.
There is no humanitarian crisis, there is not.
I affirm this with total responsibility!*



29. Hunger strike in Mérida State Physician's Guild – May 23, 2016 – Citizen journalism via social media



Well my people, already thirty hours into this fight, a fight that just begins. We are more excited than ever, thanks to the support of the people of Mérida and all of Venezuela. We love you and we hope you open your eyes. Hopefully this will circulate both nationally and internationally. Wake up, Physician's Guild, we are not only seven, we are everyone, my people. Here we are fighting for Venezuela's health, for the health and well being of all of us and our hospital. Hurrah Venezuela, you are loved!

30. Video aficionado collage – April 28, 2016 – Testimonial via social media



[Footage from a moving car shows a grocery shopping waiting line]
[Salsa music in the background]



[Supermarket carts, scene with empty shelves]



*This country is finished; we need a new president, a president who loves Venezuela, because he doesn't love Venezuela, he does not even love himself. Because someone who can't see the state of the country, denies that people are lining up, that we are starving, he says that in Venezuela there is no poverty!
We are poorer than when they arrived and we are starving..!*



[Written sign on supermarket shelf]
Only 4 flour packets per person. Thank you.

–What do you attribute the shortage in Venezuela to?
–Economic sabotage, external and internal. There is no shortage. There is a lack of distribution because the people have their food. At home the people have their food, it's guaranteed.
–But who is interested in attacking Venezuela?
–My God, are you really asking me that? Who do you think is interested in destroying the idea of Bolívar, the idea of Chávez, the idea of independence, the idea of socialism? Who do you think it is? More or less, who might occur to you?



32. People protesting for food, Fuerzas Armadas Ave. Caracas – April 21, 2016

VIVOplay digital TV platform



–Is it the opposition in here? No! It's the same government doing this to us.
–There are no politics here, there is hunger here.

There are no politics here, there is hunger here, here there is need, and need drives human beings to their worst...



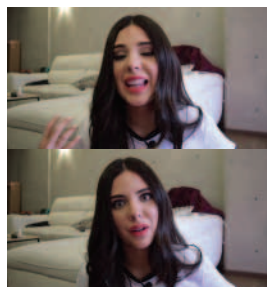
33. Looting food storage – July 25, 2016 – Witness testimonial via social media

[Woman screaming]
[Dramatic music added sound in the background]



34. YouTuber Sheryl Rubio from Mexico – July 10, 2016 – Testimonial via social media

*Just like that, oh my God.
My mom asks me to send her hair dye.
“Honey, send me deodorant, send me soap, I don't have any, send me some toilet paper. I haven't found any for some time.”
And excuse my language: what the fuck is that?*



35. Petare neighbor, Caracas – October 14, 2016 – Interviewed by Clandestine news website DolarToday



*Look, if I didn't have kids... I'll be straightforward:
If I didn't have grandchildren; I would become a motorized bomb.
I would go where Maduro is and would explode him.
I truly want him disappeared from the map.*

36. In Contact with Maduro – November 24, 2015 – Public broadcasting



*A video, the video of Homeland's Agenda. Attention!
Who has Twitter here?
[Seating public answering exited] Meee..!
–Who has 'Face-boot'?
–Meee..!
–Who has Instagram?
–Meee..!
–Who has telegram?
–Who is hungry-gram? Look, everyone's hungry-gram?
–Yees..!
–A little sandwich please... a little chicken leg, right?
some juice, a coffee...*



37. People protesting for food, Fuerzas Armadas Ave. Caracas – June 2, 2016 – VIVOplay digital TV platform



*Do you know what pisses me off!?
When a son tells a father, I'm hungry!
and [Maduro] goes on television saying that
there is food here, everything is fine..!*

38. Duri Bakery, Main Ave. La Urbina, Caracas – June 9, 2016 – Testimonial via social media



*[Security cameras register a rampage looting money, food,
and other goods, like cigarettes]*

[Journalist voice] *As you can see in the images, they are kind of fighting over an onion.*

–Look at how we are killing each other, we were chavistas.

Maduro load your batteries! Look, this old man taught us how to have a homeland, don't let this shit fall apart!

Now we Venezuelans are killing each other for a scrap of food!

What's going on?



40. Looting beer transport truck. Luis Eduardo Puerta – February 1, 2016

Citizen journalism via social media

–People continue stealing things, stealing because what else would you call it? They are stealing the merchandise.

–Look at him!

–Here you have this one making a killing.

–There he is, look at him...

–There goes the police, to check, I suppose that he will get his benefit at some point.

–Look at this! They're going to jump on the car!

–There is a traffic officer, he does nothing. The police have no control over the situation here.

–But can you imagine, they all couldn't barricade to stop it.

–No, Noo...

–Well, look at the chaos created from looting a beer transport truck.

–Hey, look all the cars are full..!

–Yes, all of them



41. Diosdado Cabello TV program – June 15, 2016 – Public broadcasting

The right says, "no, the people are protesting in hunger."

There was hunger here during the Fourth Republic man!

There was hunger here during the Fourth Republic!

Now this is a situation that our people understand, perfectly.

Let's see...



42. Venezuelan mother interviewed while stopped from reentering at the Colombo-Venezuelan border crossing

July 5, 2016 – Juan Carlos Estupiñan, *El Espectador*, Colombia

We came to the international bridge to cross the border,

because we don't have food in our homes,

our children are going hungry, there is a lot of need.



43. YouTuber LA DIVAZA – July 23, 2016 – Testimonial via social media



Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela you have to stand in a super long line and wake up super early, to get meat, chicken, milk, eggs, personal hygiene products, and you don't know if you are going to get them. /

Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela people die daily because medications don't exist. /

Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela, you are kidnapped.

Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela, you are robbed.

Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela, they kill you for your cell phone. /

Yes, I can tell you that here in Venezuela, we have the world's highest inflation rate.

From Venezuela, yes, I can tell you that the biggest bill does not serve to buy shit and it's easier to wipe my ass with it than with a roll of toilet paper because it's cheaper.

Poor Bolívar if he found out about this, how we have left this country now.

44. Looting at DAKA, electronics store, Valencia – Nov. 9, 2013 – Testimonial via social media



Nooo, man, no..!

–That's wrong, that's stealing! Girl, that's criminal!

–Ahhy, that can't be!

–Look how far we've fallen.

–Don't do it, no!

–Are you going to steal it?

–That's stealing /

You will see how I'm going to break it, I'm going to break it!

45. Lynching in Caracas – June 5, 2016 – Sinfiltros digital TV platform



We witnessed a man being cornered and brutally beaten in an affluent neighborhood. The absence of authority leads Venezuelans to take justice into their own hands.

Burn the cocksucker, light him up!
–Let's give it to him!
–Don't allow lynching, don't allow lynching...
–Run him over with your motorcycle...
–Bad luck, okay?
–Get gasoline!
–Get the gasoline!
–To jail and get raped!
–Gasoline..!



47. Bolivarian National Intelligence Service promo – Aug. 25, 2016 – Via social media

[Chávez voiceover]
*National independence and with it,
the gates are open for the construction of the socialist homeland.*



48. Leaving the Country, *Salir del País #Beta* – Sept. 24, 2016
PowerPoint presentation via social media

Leaving the Country [Venezuela]
Leave Crossing the Border
Exit – Coro State – Sea – Raft People [Balseros] – Curaçao
Leaving the Country.
Travel time: 8 Miles
Transportation Type: Fishing boat, not fit for this kind of trip
Cost: Between 1,000 and 5,000 USD
Real Picture from August 7, 2016; twenty illegal Venezuelans caught.
Risk level: Very Dangerous
Consequences: Death – Marine accident
Theft – Detention – Imprisonment – Deportation



49. Author's disclaimer – Nov. 2016 – Via video screening, streaming and printed media

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