

## THE DARK VISION OF VENEZUELAN SOCIETY: THE IDEA OF THE GENDARME NEEDED IN VALLENILLA LANZ

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### Summary

This article examines the work of Laureano Vallenilla Lanz and his concept of the “Necessary Gendarme,” which justifies the need for strong leadership to pacify anarchic societies. It analyzes how this idea has influenced Venezuelan political culture and its persistence in the collective imagination, contrasting it with the country’s democratic experiences.

**Keywords:** Necessary gendarme, Vallenilla Lanz, political culture, authoritarianism, democracy.

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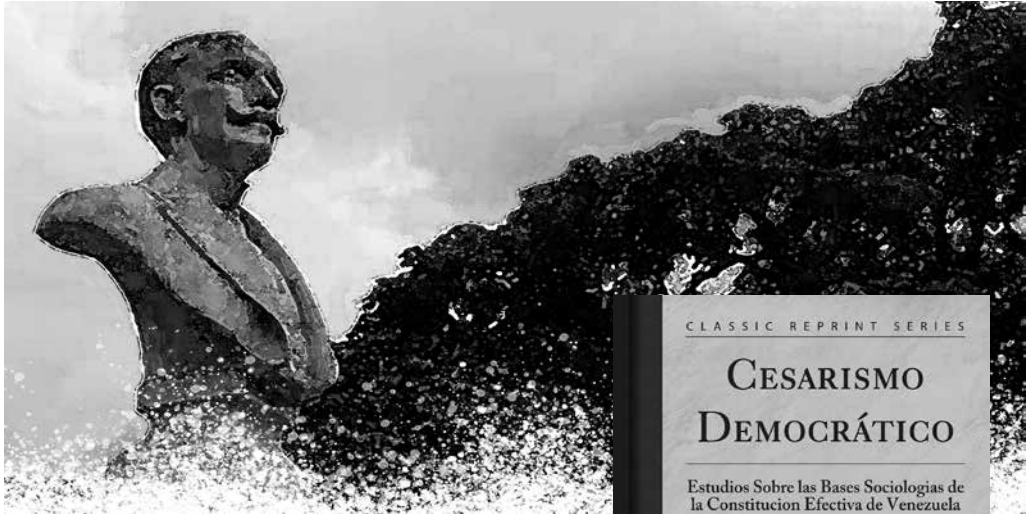




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## Introduction

The work of Laureano Vallenilla Lanz<sup>1</sup>, *Democratic Caesarism*, is undoubtedly one of the most important works of the twentieth century. It showed the need of the strong man to pacify anarchic societies. His reading of Venezuelan independence is revolutionary, understood as a civil war among Venezuelans themselves.

It is a text of political and historical character, there is no doubt that through it one can trace some features of the Venezuelan identity and its political culture around certain situations. Both his apologists and detractors agree on the importance of his work.

There are many texts that have analyzed the author's work, the one by Elena Plaza stands out in her work: "La tragedia de una amarga convicción. History and politics in the thought of Laureano Vallenilla Lanz", which analyzes his ideas very well (Plaza, 1996). But it is always necessary to reread to understand a transcendental and highly polemic text.

Recently, 2019 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of his text, when Venezuelan society finds itself once again in a distressing situation, with an openly authoritarian government, some may turn to the book *Cesarismo Democrático* to understand part of the historical behavior of Venezuelans.

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<sup>1</sup> Born in 1870 and died in 1936, he was a well-known Venezuelan writer, journalist, sociologist and historian, becoming recognized as one of the main positivist thinkers in Venezuela.

Vallenilla Lanz was a writer, journalist, sociologist and historian, one of the main representatives of Venezuelan positivist thought. He tried to justify the Gómez dictatorship, which is why he largely formulated the principle of the *Necessary Gendarme*. But it is still a rigorous analysis of the sociological bases of the Venezuelan. For many, the political culture of Venezuela is openly democratic, especially after the beginnings of the Puntofijo democracy (Carrera, 2002), but others agree that there is always a longing for a strong leader to solve problems.

It is not a question of being for or against such an approach; undoubtedly a modern society seeks its progress and stability on the basis of its institutions. But institutional weakness has been a constant since the Republican beginnings, with Gómez a State with a real capacity for governance was just in the process of being consolidated. Nevertheless, personalism and authoritarianism were always present even in the consolidation of the democratic state.

In this sense, the objective of this work is to analyze the idea of the *Necessary Gendarme* in Vallenilla Lanz, whose approaches must be adequately discerned. The analytical-synthetic method, hermeneutics and heuristics were used for the interpretation of his text. Not by giving an obscure reading of the society of his time, some of his ideas cease to be valid.

Venezuelan society has certainly been little given to compliance with the law, and they have preferred to follow leaders with messianic traits. The democracy resulting from the Pact of Puntofijo tried to overcome these historical problems, to give greater civil liberties to build a nation in accordance with the democratic systems of the twentieth century.

Despite relative stability, this was not possible, and the threats to democracy at the time were underestimated. Thus, "The more democracy is taken for granted, the more opportunities there are to subvert it without overthrowing it. In particular, executive expansion- when a strong governmental leader is wresting chunks from democracy while paying lip service to it- has every appearance of being the greatest threat to democracy in the twenty-first century" (Runciman, 2019: 58).

With Chávez, ghosts that seemed exorcised in the Venezuelan political imaginary returned once again, that is to say, the search for a strong man to avoid the disintegration of society, especially since the political and economic crisis present since the eighties. And even, many years for the emergence of a "new gendarme" capable of achieving Venezuela's freedom.

## **The problem of pacification and the insurrection of the masses**

For the positivists, order and progress were fundamental; without peace there could be no political stability or protection for businesses and property required to achieve the development of a nation. The series of uprisings and assaults to achieve power was considered a common defect of Venezuelans throughout the 19th century.

The lack of compliance with the law was notorious during this long period, which is why Vallenilla Lanz called it the organic or real constitution, which was based not on laws but on

the conduct of the population, always given to transgressing the established order in the Venezuelan case (Vallenilla, 2000). There was a combination of a modern legal system with primitive political and social practices typical of nations that live in permanent conflict at the margin of any legal system.

Hobbes, in "Leviathan", explains how the State arises to avoid the war of all against all (Hobbes, 1980). Venezuela had not entered modernity according to these rationales, the State existed only as an entelechy in the 19th century, the reality was that of a people that followed the caudillos but not the laws.

Vallenilla Lanz analyzes the situation of anarchy that became notorious during independence, based on the marked social differences. The conditions of the climate and society are explained in his work:

...the geographical constitution of the country, which condemned it to the dangers brought about in all latitudes and at all times by the proximity of nomadic peoples, always ready to commit the most horrible depredations on urban and sedentary populations, driven by their characteristic instincts. Venezuela presented in those years the same spectacle as the Roman world with the invasion of the barbarians (Vallenilla, 2000: 97).

It was a clear description of the influence of geographic conditions on populations as posited by the classical positivists. Societies with tropical climates and nomadic peoples were more prone to anarchy. It was the classic opposition between barbarism and civilization.

Comparing the Venezuelan case with the barbarian invasions exemplifies the level of barbarism present at that time, according to the author. Above all, the analogy serves to argue that if a savage people is not contained, it can definitely wipe out the whole society as it happened to the Romans.

This is where the legitimate use of force by the State must become present: "the bandits can only submit to brute force; and from the bosom of that immense anarchy will emerge for the first time the class of dominators: the caudillos, the caciques, the party chiefs" (Vallenilla, 2000: 97).

The characteristics of the leader are associated with being a strong man, capable of controlling and guiding the masses in times of social conflict. There is no way to fight bandits if not through the use of force, that is, the *Necessary Gendarme*.

This was in line with what was expressed by some authors, such as Stuart Mill, who explained that the existence of despotism was necessary in certain circumstances: "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government, when the governed are still to be civilized, provided that the end proposed is their progress and that the means are justified by really serving this end" (Mill, 2004).

In a state governed by the rule of law there are principles that cannot be violated, but when the people are not civilized, the use of repression as an instrument of pacification is valid. Vallenilla Lanz uses the term nomadic a lot to refer to the Venezuelan society, in the context that they are wild people and difficult to control by nature.

It is the circumstances that define the action of the masses, when Vallenilla Lanz makes reference to Boves during the independence he mentions that:

...is a legitimate son of the environment in which he became a man and in whose bosom he had to act as the logical leader of an enormous majority, who deeply shared his instinctive hatreds, his plebeian passions, his unconscious motives, his heroic courage, his adventurous spirit and his legendary ferocity (Vallenilla, 2000: 100).

According to this approach, leaders are a reflection of their governed; in order to guide a mass full of passions, the leader must also be strong in order to gain the respect of his followers. Without being Venezuelan, Boves adopted the customs of the llaneros because of the time he spent with them. His action must be understood within the logic of the civil war of independence, beyond all patriotic rhetoric.

Vallenilla Lanz exposes the double interpretations that are given about the so-called people, depending on their support or not to the pro-independence cause. Thus, he points out:

We shall see how those men become from "cutthroats" into "legendary heroes"; and how in the service of the patriotic caudillos, displaying the same energies, the same courage, the same ferocity, dragged by the same incentives of blood and plunder and by the same fanatical enthusiasm as when they ran to gather around the invincible lance of José Tomás Boves, they contributed to the noble enterprise of creating nations, traveling in triumph across half the continent, from the Orinoco to the very margins of the Río de la Plata (Vallenilla, 2000: 109).

Although Vallenilla Lanz tries to justify and even acknowledge the hard work of the heroes of independence for having to battle against their own people, he gives a fairly realistic view of the historical process. He exposes the abrupt changes in the narratives depending on the side on which one fights.

The behavior of both the so-called royalists and the patriots is similar; there is looting, plundering, and a desire for revenge. In the end, Vallenilla Lanz tries to analyze the behavior of Venezuelans, not of a single class or political faction. These are the conditions of the people in general, given to anarchy regardless of the cause or the side in which they fight.

When those who fought for Boves' cause join the so-called patriot side, all their misdeeds are forgiven (Vallenilla, 2000). They are even extolled as part of the liberating people. Bolívar himself had to offer rewards and honors. What prevailed was political pragmatism in the context



of a war, victory was fundamental. Boves would probably have been a hero if he fought for the patriot cause, even if he committed the same crimes.

Respect for private property has not been something commonly practiced neither in the monarchic era nor in the republic, the dictatorship of Gómez made great advances to guarantee the safeguarding of property in the 20th century, although he himself misappropriated large extensions of land. But these are the sociological problems analyzed by Vallenilla Lanz, a people that likes to plunder the wealth of others, inspired by the desire to pillage and ferocity to obtain something to which they think they are entitled. In this context, economic progress was impossible.

In this way, he explains the complexity of history and the actions of men, which is why he posed the problem of the social struggle and psychology of the masses during independence and the whole set of “vague desires, vague yearnings, egalitarian impulses, confused economic demands, which constitute the whole fabric of the social and political evolution of Venezuela” (Vallenilla, 2000: 110).

Social psychology as a science for the time Vallenilla Lanz wrote it was not developed, but the attempt to understand it in order to explain the behavior of is notorious. It is an accurate account of the problems that the Venezuelan people have been facing throughout history.

Sometimes Vallenilla Lanz's arguments are dismissed precisely because they give a negative idea of Venezuela, but it would be worthwhile to really discuss the assertiveness of his arguments. Elías Pino Iturrieta describes the gendarme's thesis as “Ideas about an inept people: the justification of gomecismo” (Pino, 1993).

Although there may be a certain underestimation of the social behavior of the people, perhaps it is not a matter of ineptitude of Venezuelans, nor conditions that cannot be changed with better institutions, but it is prudent to warn about certain historical actions of the masses. After all, it is true that there are frustrations, resentments, and the search for a permanent desire for change but without being clear about what is wanted.

The confusing economic demands are a success in Vallenilla Lanz's thesis, always under the cloak of wanting greater equality but leading to looting and resentment towards those who have the most. Even in contemporary times, such judgments can be made about part of the Venezuelan society.

At the political and even academic level, demagogic explanations about the behavior of the Venezuelan people prevail. Their actions are constantly being vindicated. never assuming their mistakes. Today the National History Center has proposed to promote an insurgent history, where the people are no longer seen only as a barbaric mass in constant struggle. In this way, Aura Rojas explains that “we see how, for the people, we apply names such as “turbas”, “populacho”, “canallas”, “la hez de la sociedad” and others... (Rojas, 2009: 12).

It is a reaction to that positivist history that despised the masses. While it is true that more nuanced and more balanced analyses of each historical process should be attempted, a greater understanding of national problems is needed, where society really bears its fair share of responsibility for the failure to achieve certain objectives. In any era, cruder visions that emphasize social defects provoke controversy and resistance.

## The psychology of the masses in the work of Vallenilla Lanz

The psychology of the masses occupies a fundamental place throughout the author's work. He devotes an entire chapter to deal with the problem, especially during independence. This process receives great attention because from there the republic was born, but with a series of problems that could not be overcome with the passage of time.

He begins by exploiting the motivations of each side in dispute, royalists and patriots, here he reinforces what was previously stated, the Manichaeism with which the process is analyzed. Some are praised, others are stigmatized, in spite of behaving in a similar way during the conflict.

It is a direct way of attacking the patriotic and nationalist historiography hegemonic at the beginning of the 20th century. For this, the foundational myth par excellence is that of independence. It then questions the false constructions about that civil war:

The national legend, when it relates, full of horror, the blurred scenes of the War to Death, describes the royalist soldiers as a "fanatic and stupid mass, a bunch of thieves and murderers". And it is, nevertheless, from those delinquent mobs, from "those hordes of barbarians", from which soon emerge distinguished warriors of independence (Vallenilla, 2000: 115).

He assumes that the independence discourse is epic and loaded with many fictions. He states something very true: on both sides there were crimes and there were authoritarian leaders. The war to the death was only the expression of a struggle that had been bloody for a long time.

Ángel Lombardi in his text *Banderas del Rey* (2006) and Tomás Straka in his book *La voz de los vencidos* (2000), set out to investigate the realist vision of independence. This in order to demystify many actions, and to abandon Manichean accounts of a complex process.

At the beginning of the 20th century, when *Cesarismo Democrático* was published, the national identity and the consolidation of the State were still in the process of construction, and these circumstances partly justified the false construction of the past. Vallenilla Lanz's discourse was intended to show a more realistic vision of national identity at a time of fundamental historical change.

The modernization undertaken by the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez required a transformation in the formal institutions of the State, as well as in the mentality and the way Venezuelans behaved. To guarantee the order previously violated by the masses, to put an end to the historical caudillismo and to achieve the consolidation of a single leader.

Then the text proposes to identify these historical constants through the study of the psychology of the masses. With respect to Páez, whose “llaneros” were the same men of Boves who committed all kinds of crimes, these praises are given based on his changes to the patriot side. Again, this situation is demystified:

...we must discard these phrases of pure ornamentation the affirmations that the llaneros learned in the independent ranks and under the orders of Páez, what the homeland was, since he himself, like almost all the other caudillos, did not know it then; much less that they acquired the idea of justice nor that they respected any other authority than that of force (Vallenilla, 2000: 117).

The concept of homeland, let alone nation, did not yet exist or was only in the process of being constructed, used only as political rhetoric to attract sympathizers during the independence. The point is to explain the motivations of these masses; it was not a patriotic ideal that guided them.

The nodal issue, in order to justify the theory of the *Necessary Gendarme*, was the idea of following the strong man. The only way to respect authority was through the use of force. At the time Boves and later Páez, both managed to captivate the masses by their military skill, by the strength shown during battles.

At this point it is explained that it is not the ideals that guide the actions of men, especially because their ideas have always been confused, but the following of leaders, the personalization of politics. In this way, it is possible to support characters with such contradictory objectives as Páez or Boves.

One fought in theory to maintain the monarchical system, the other to achieve independence. The issue is irrelevant for the masses, what counts is to improve their living conditions, each side had to offer different perks to attract the various social groups.

Graciela Soriano already pointed out how political personalism understood as “the personal exercise of power, as the will to dominate subject only to his or her discretion was correlated to institutional weakness and the scarce rootedness of the norm, was a recurrent phenomenon in the history of Latin America in both the 19th and 20th centuries” (Soriano, 1996: 9).

The so-called popular sectors are attracted by these strong political leaders. The danger of the masses was always warned by the Liberator himself, that is why it is mentioned that: “Bolívar had penetrated so deeply into the spirit of those men, that since 1821 he foresaw the impossibility of establishing a solid peace in Venezuela, unless Boves’ disciples were contained by force, which was, however, very dangerous” (Vallenilla, 2000: 119-120).

The “pardocracy” was always viewed with fear by Bolívar. After all, the Libertador belonged to the Creole elite, he did not think precisely as part of the common “people”. He was not a popular leader as were Boves and Páez who managed to drag the masses.

Bolívar was not willing to share leadership either, he was a leader with authoritarian characteristics, he always warned about the need for a strong and centralized government to maintain unity. Both in times of war and peace, this led him to clash with different political groups in the provinces.

The Liberator becomes the perfect character to justify militarism and the figure of a *Necessary Gendarme*, what Elías Pino calls “Nothing without a man” in his text (Pino, 2013). The most authoritarian rulers are therefore those who have abused and used the figure of Bolívar the most.

*Democratic Caesarism* does not intend to question Bolívar’s image, only again to justify the adverse circumstances under which the Liberator had to act during independence. He only praises his conduct and his clear knowledge of the society of the time. Thus, he emphasizes “...the deep knowledge that the Liberator had of the psychology of our llaneros and he was persuaded of what they were capable of if they were not fulfilled the promises of rewarding their services by distributing their properties” (Vallenilla, 2000: 119- 122).

Rebellions were always latent in the face of a non-conformist people, and the need to distribute benefits was fundamental to keep the population pacified. Since there were no resources, the best the so-called patriots could do was to distribute land as a means of payment.

Given the unsuccessfulness of the law of land distribution, which ended up being sold due to the inability of the new owners to put them into production, they were offered at market prices, which at that time were low. In this situation, what the Liberator warned about happened:

The llaneros were once again engaged in robbery and plunder, as they had been practicing since colonial times, with the difference that now they could enjoy their Bavarian impulses proclaiming political principles and constitutional “reforms”. Our nomads had already entered history (Vallenilla, 2000: 123).

The republic was a continuation of the monarchic era, of anarchism and the struggle expressed in the war of independence. Only the political scenario is very different, now they can use slogans such as demand for citizens’ rights or ask for legal changes.

The multiple constitutional changes made by the caudillos show the persistence of the organic or real constitution, which simply adapted the laws to the needs of power without really respecting the institutions. In this scenario, it was impossible to impose order.

Thus, in the historical evolution of Venezuela it is clearly observed how “the same brutal instincts, the same impulses of murder and pillage, and how the same hordes of Boves and Yañes continued to emerge from the bosom of our popular masses...” (Vallenilla, 2000: 124).

Here we are already thinking of formulating the general laws that have determined the historical evolution of Venezuelan society. Certainly a very crude reading of what happened. Great attention is given to the llaneros, their role in the independence was fundamental, although in some regions of the west of the country civil wars were not so common or bloody.

Perhaps the author may exaggerate certain behaviors, but no one can deny the institutional weakness of the republic and the constant political instability, which undoubtedly made it difficult to enforce the law, especially when they were continually changed.

There was no evolution in the psychology of the masses, therefore “in spite of the transformations, the intimate background of the people continued for many years to be the same as that of the colony” (Vallenilla, 2000: 124). Based on this interpretation, he again mentions “passions, unconscious mobile instincts and hereditary prejudices had to continue being the elements of destruction and ruin” (Vallenilla, 2000: 124).

Thus, the justification of the necessary gendarme clearly begins to take shape. Especially when he states that “the coercive means of the State should be used, without any possible subjection to the dreamed guarantees written in the constitutions” (Vallenilla, 2000: 124). That is to say, the law and citizens’ rights can be violated if it is possible to put a brake on anarchy. Even modern constitutions have taken up the principles of states of exception to deal with extraordinary situations.

It was the interpretation that the laws were not in accordance with the behavior of society in general. There were still no citizens capable of behaving in a republican context. This added to the fact that only a minority of the population had the levels of education and income necessary to gain access to citizenship rights in the 19th century.

This was the elite in charge of directing the republican destiny, and many of them were the ones who guided the independence process. But they did not understand the society they were about to govern, so they wanted to solve everything with legal changes. Therefore, the changes in the laws were insufficient:

With absolute faith in the effective influence of the laws, the educated men tended to change with constitutional precepts that state of spontaneous anarchy, without even suspecting that they were the logical expression of a rudimentary social organism in the midst of the work of “integration” (Vallenilla, 2000: 125).

*Integración y disgregación* (1930), would be another fundamental text by Vallenilla Lanz where he analyzes these same problems. During the republic there were centrifugal and centripetal forces in constant struggle. It would really be Juan Vicente Gómez who would be in charge of territorially integrating regions that had always been dispersed in their functioning.

Until then, the local caudillos imposed themselves, that was the only authority recognized by the masses, not the laws, the leaders were in charge of cohesion and calming the popula-

tion. Paez in his time fulfilled that function, as well as many other autocrats, based on that dark vision of society, the point of the necessary gendarme is reached.

## **The Necessary Gendarme as a historical necessity**

This is the most polemic point of Democratic Caesarism, and the most transcendental of all its interpretation. It is a crude reading, based on positivist principles in vogue at the time, of the inability of the new Latin American nations to achieve order and cohesion.

Anomie was the norm in a state where there was no respect for the law. Bureaucracy, corruption and the granting of favors to certain political circles close to power were in part a continuity of the practices exercised by the monarchic authorities.

There was no social evolution in the terms proposed by functionalism and sociological positivism; from then on, the forms of relationships and imposition of authority remained within the logic of "primitive societies". Based on this reading, Venezuela had not entered the context of modern civilization even in the twentieth century.

However, even within modern societies, "there is always the need under certain circumstances for a necessary gendarme. In all times and countries there have been authority figures of this nature" (Vallenilla, 2000: 127). Somewhat redundantly, the role of the caudillo to maintain order, and the nomadic and anarchic characteristics of the Venezuelan people, are always emphasized.

The legitimate use of violence becomes indispensable in these scenarios. For this reason, he points out that "the uprisings could only be contained with mass executions" (Vallenilla, 2000: 139-140). The death penalty was established in the 1830 Constitution; the 1864 Constitution prohibited it in cases of political crimes, but in practice it continued to be used.

Many of these death sentences could be carried out extrajudicially. The truth is that there was a complex scenario that required the constant use of force. The lack economic progress did not help to civilize men either. That is why the paralysis of commerce after the war of independence was mentioned, and how these circumstances kept society in backwardness.

Spontaneous anarchy was favored by the difficulty of earning a living through conventional means, within a State that did not guarantee security. Embezzlement began to become a common practice; it was part of the same problem of institutional weakness.

The whole of Venezuela lived off fraud in all its forms; and one could count the employees who had their hands clean of embezzlement (Vallenilla, 2000). In the same way, the rulers enriched themselves at the expense of the public treasury. Business dealings through state assets and concessions were very common.

The caudillos, although they could be part of the robbery of the nation, sometimes managed to limit the desires of their followers. In other cases they helped to maintain political stability.

, he highlights the successes of Paez under certain circumstances, always stigmatized by his antagonistic relationship with Bolívar. Thus, he praises Paez when he says:

But fortunately, for the adolescent homeland, General Paez became a true statesman. This concept would be considered strange by those who still think that the science of governing is learned in books and not realize the positive teachings of history. One is born a statesman as one is born a poet (Vallenilla, 2000: 150).

Juan Manuel Rosas in Argentina and José Antonio Páez were the historical proofs of Democratic Caesarism, in that way, "Emblematic caudillos, caesars adored by the shepherds, were able to maintain order over the barbarian collective, to gradually lead it, like one who tames an animal (are they not after all semi-beasts?) Help to calm the masses in a difficult time, where not even the liberator himself was able to do so. Then the promotion of personalism becomes evident" (Straka, 2018: 136).

Contexts drive the nature of certain leaderships. He attributes unique characteristics to leaders, although perhaps Vallenilla Lanz does not distinguish well between leader and ruler. The art of governing can be learned through theory, but it certainly requires practical learning. Leaderships, on the other hand, are not decreed, they are built, but certain innate qualities are needed to develop those capacities to lead the masses.

In a modern state, knowledge of the laws and the functioning of the institutions is very pressing, so theoretical knowledge is essential. In more anarchic societies, much more practical knowledge is essential, to gain personal prestige.

Knowing the people one is about to govern is a basic recommendation in politics since the time of Machiavelli (Machiavelli, 2001).

The example of Paez as a good ruler serves to illustrate that education is not necessary to adequately exercise power. Another way of justifying the statesmanship of Gómez, who was said to be illiterate. The majority of the population was illiterate, therefore, the knowledge of the lights was not demanded by a society with little education.

Only the Creoles had a high degree of intellectual preparation for the exercise of government, but they were unable to identify the community with their image as groups belonging to the dominant elite. In spite of the need for this strongman, it is touted as a function of being the sole leader.

Vallenilla Lanz always denotes a very negative view of the masses. In this way, he goes so far as to affirm that "The people of the Latin race, who so passionately love eloquence, think that only the gift of the word confers all the sufficiencies and especially the talent to govern" (Vallenilla, 2000: 151).

It was already a call to explain how the masses are easily manipulated by good orators. False promises are a constant on the part of the caudillos. This even in a scenario where there is no massive use of mass media, but speeches in politics have always been fundamental.

The problem is to grant rhetoric the most relevant quality to support a leader. That is why aspiring rulers always give great importance to developing their oratory skills, "Hence the ever-increasing number of professional orators who fill the assemblies, despite the fact that it has been the industrialists and merchants, rather than brilliant orators, who have produced the most knowledgeable politicians, the most apt rulers" (Vallenilla, 2000: 151).

It is the opposition between what should be and reality. The need for the caudillo and the gen- me is alleged because of the characteristics of Venezuelan society, not because it is the best way to maintain order. As a good positivist, his vision of progress is in line with the principles of the industrial revolution, therefore the best people to govern are businessmen.

In the 19th century in Venezuela there really was no industry, even though in the documents of the time it was common to refer to "industrialists", especially when making tax classifications, but what there were mainly were small producers and merchants.

A country without industry could not prosper, and that was one of the efforts made by Gómez with oil exploitation, although it did not lead to industrialization as such, but it was a significant advance for the economy. Vallenilla Lanz highlights the important role of merchants and industrialists in directing the destiny of a nation because of their vision and capacity to create wealth.

In Venezuela, on the contrary, industrialists and merchants were often stigmatized as speculators and usurers, not understanding the laws of the market, nor the limited scope of the national productive system, which is why the mercantile sectors were accused of abusing profits. In this way, preference was often given to members of the masses themselves as leaders to defend their interests.

Vallenilla Lanz focuses his study on the dynamics of political power and who have been protagonists that have achieved access to government. Even at the end of the text he justifies the reason why he wrote *Cesarismo Democrático*, carried out with the purpose of "contributing to the elaboration of the national sentiment" Vallenilla, 2000: 253).

A very reckless assertion, since principles to contribute to national sentiment are usually made on the basis of idealism. But it is more an exercise in political understanding, without it peoples cannot move forward. What it does is to explain how anarchy has been successfully dealt with throughout history.

Jorge Bracho explains, analyzing the work *Cesarismo Democrático*, that what had prevented the realization of a true national sentiment nested in the territorial extension and discontinuity, the population disposition, the educational deficiencies, the racial variety and its scarce interpenetration, the economic poverty, the excessive revolutions, the transposed constitutions and the most valuable, natural (cultural) survival of the inhabitants of Venezuela (Bracho, 2003).

Politics is then conditioned by cultural behavior, because the "system of government is produced by the people themselves according to their idiosyncrasy and their degree of culture" (Vallenilla, 2000: 253). This explanation is true, rulers are a reflection of their society, and political



leaders have sometimes believed themselves to be above the law, this occurs in societies with weak institutional structure and social anarchy.

The author goes so far as to deny “that our people are even democrats in the scientific meaning of the word” (Vallenilla, 2000: 225). For the time when the author writes the text, it is certainly implausible to speak of a democratic people. Although there were processes of resistance against authoritarianism in the context of the Gomecista dictatorship, autocratic rulers had been predominant in national history.

Colette Capriles explains that “Regardless of the evaluation that can be made of his thesis, Vallenilla undoubtedly detected an “imaginary” that was circulating in Venezuelan society at the time. There would be then, historically, two juxtaposed conceptions of democracy in Venezuela” (Capriles, 2012: 10).

Vallenilla’s thesis, although controversial, has given rise to a whole series of debates. It was partly rejected by sectors that wanted to build a new democratic imaginary in the country, generally based on idealism and flattery towards society. But in the light of the current political situation with the resurgence of authoritarianism and militarism from the Chavez’s arrival to power, it is worthwhile to keep in mind Vallenilla Lanz’s reading on the behavior and political culture of Venezuelans.

After all, as John Keane expresses, “Democracy must always become democracy again. It is a matter of action, not something achieved, stacked and stored, like gold in a vault or goods in a warehouse” (Keane, 2018: 867). As an incubated process, democracy will always be under constant threat, it is very much up to society to defend it by first of all assuming its own wrongs.

## Conclusion

The polemic on the *Necessary Gendarme* has not ceased since the work saw the light of day in 1919, although several ideas inspired by positivist principles can be objected to the text, there is no doubt that it unveils certain problems present in the political history of Venezuela. It was an attempt to explain the caudillista phenomenon, the constant political instability that has characterized Venezuelan history.

He criticizes the patriotic and nationalist historiography, for that reason he makes a new rereading of the independence. He denounces the double discourse when referring to the patriot and royalist sides, highlighting that in both groups there was anarchy and disorder, the plainsmen of Paez were the same who fought on the side of Boves.

He revalues Paez as a caudillo who helped lead the masses, another *necessary gendarme*, although he does not cease to worship Bolívar and what he considers his correct reading of the society of his time, with the fear of the masses and the need for a strong and centralized power.

Undoubtedly, independence was a much more complex conflict than the one analyzed by Vallenilla Lanz, but at least he stops explaining that process with the idealistic view of nationalist discourses. He tries to understand, based on the study of the psychology of the masses, the idiosyncrasy of Venezuelans. His reading is not at all encouraging, that is why his text produced controversy.

His simple rejection of the fact of wanting to justify the Gomecista dictatorship may lead to ignore some true ideas raised in his texts. The non-compliance with the law described by Vallenilla Lanz was a reality, which led to a state of anarchy and instability.

The political personalism represented in the figure of the caudillos has also been a historical problem, reflected in the yearning of the strong man to solve the problems of the nation that has been part of the political culture of Venezuelans, even today.

It is true that Vallenilla Lanz establishes generalizations, emphasizing above all the anarchic behavior of the llaneros, who were not necessarily a reflection of the entire society as a whole, which was highly heterogeneous. But the constant political instability and the approval of several constitutions in the nineteenth century certainly show difficulties to consolidate a republican order. A society that is not mature enough to act in a context of political modernity.

The real constitution based on political praxis distanced from the law was a reality. A product of the positivist ideas predominant at the time, it gave great importance to climate and racial factors to explain social behavior. With the arrival of democracy and the rise of populism in Venezuela, an attempt has been made to give a very idealistic vision of Venezuelan society, hiding its defects and exalting its political performance throughout the historical process in favor of freedom and democracy.

The analysis of the national reality must be nuanced, the remnants of an authoritarian culture and difficulties to abide by a legal order are problems that have not been overcome, as well as political messianism. Although it is true that the *Necessary Gendarme* is not a solution in itself, on the contrary, it perpetuates the problems, Vallenilla Lanz was trying to explain the conditions that cause its emergence.

Vallenilla Lanz's work must be analyzed in its right dimension, recognizing its limitations as a result of a different intellectual context, but without disregarding his successes in making a critical, crude and dark reading of the behavior of Venezuelan society, which must be kept in mind in order to overcome the country's historical problems that remain unsolved.

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