

El blues del perdedor. Los derechos humanos en las letras y actitudes del rock venezolano

Gregorio Montiel Cupello

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In general terms, the bibliography about Venezuelan rock can be described as scarce. However, in recent years, social communicators have published texts that offer a panoramic view of the different music scenes, bands and their impact on generations of Venezuelans. It is in this context where the publishing of Montiel Cupello's book can be thought of as a novelty. In his text, the author tells a history of Venezuelan rock based on songs with lyrics on political denunciation, protest music and criticism of the socio-political situation of the country at different times, which makes it relevant, since it uncovers ways in which protests, political circumstances and human rights have permeated rock bands.

This book has several goals, the first and most important of which is the contribution of PROVEA (Venezuelan Program for Human Rights Education/Action, for its name in Spanish) to human rights education through rock music produced in the country. The second goal is to show how human rights, as a theme, have remained in the rock movement, with greater or lesser intensity over time. One aspect that does not go unnoticed in the book is the chronological organization of its chapters, which are arranged according to the emergence of the different bands; this leads to a better understanding of the socio-political context of each approached situation.

The first four chapters are circumscribed to what is called the Venezuelan democratic era, which was characterized by a boom of oil income, socioeconomic growth of the middle class, but also by gaps and inequalities in other segments of Venezuelan society. Chapter 1 (1959-1969) reviews the appearance of the first Venezuelan bands that made Spanish versions of songs by The Beatles and Bob Dylan. Chapter 2 (1970-1979) shows how Venezuelan bands begin to outline their own identity, although with evident influence from psychedelia and musical experimentation. In chapter 3 (1980-1985), the focus is on the heavy metal bands that reached a rapid zenith and, in the same way, disappeared. Chapter 4 (1986-2000) focuses on the contribution of the three bands with the greatest projection in local history: Sentimiento Muerto, Desorden Público and Zapato 3.

The last two chapters deal with the era of the Bolivarian Revolution, led by Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías (1999-2013) and later by Nicolás Maduro (2013-present). Chapter 5 (2001-2012) summarizes the beginnings of the revolutionary era and presents the contradictions of groups that were once anti-system and now organize in favor of the government. The last chapter (2013-2020) focuses on the civil protests of 2014 and 2017, the humanitarian crisis, the systematic violation of civil rights and the inevitable Venezuelan diaspora with entire groups making a life outside the country; besides, this chapter points at the emerging local scene of punk music.

Montiel Cupello can then be seen as a chronicler. He has been an actor and observer of almost everything he writes about; he has supported his book with a large amount of archival, newspaper and record material, difficult to access nowadays. In addition, the author has interviewed almost all the protagonists in the past; some of this material has been published in national media, others remain unpublished and may be used in future works. Nonetheless, two aspects are missing in the book: first, all the narration is focused on Caracas, with minor references to other cities such as Valencia, Barquisimeto and Maracaibo; this might be inevitable, if we consider the strategic geopolitical situation of the capital. Second, in the last two chapters there is no mention of the rock bands that are part of the Bolivarian revolution; although, of course, their lyrics are not protest, but rather they advocate the Revolution, perhaps this is why they are not included.

Montiel Cupello has been one of the most outstanding journalists on the Venezuelan national scene. He has been producer and broadcaster of radio and television programs. In 2004, he published the book *Rock en Venezuela* (Caracas: Fundación Bigott), which summarizes the national music scene of this genre. In *El blues del perdedor...*, the writing style is clear, a combination of journalistic chronicle and historical review. Far from technical complications, his style aims at a wide range of readers, from amateur music lovers to specialists in language and communication, sociology or musicology. In addition, the author has provided the lyrics of some songs that are considered emblematic regarding the theme of civil rights and protest, which gives a view of the different contexts he narrates.

The sources that support the work offer a historiographic genealogy on rock music in the country. In fact, the discography cited throughout the text is abundant; however, their systematization is lacking at the end. The graphic material gives testimony of an era and there are QR codes that lead virtually to recordings, interviews or documentary videos that exponentially complement the sources of

information and consultation. The book comes with a CD that contains fifteen songs that summarize the chronology made by the author.

There is no commercial purpose behind this editorial production. The book has been created in the midst of the worst humanitarian crisis the country has experienced. PROVEA was in charge of the editorial management and the book can only be purchased in exchange for medicines. Despite the adversities, the quality of the printing is remarkable: A4 format, graphic material reproduced in high resolution and mastered recordings. Considering the restrictions of economic and political freedom that the country is experiencing, this is a book that in the medium term will be the document of an era, which is why its acquisition is imperative for specialists who deal with the subject of music, politics, protest and human rights in the region.