

Good Cynicism: The Civic Potentials of Political Comedy and The Reasons for Its Absence on Colombian Television

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses the potential of political comedy and satire as television genres in the construction of democracy and civic culture in Colombia. Through a set of elite interviews with representative individuals in the media, political humor and media scholarship circles of the country; and through genre-based and political, economical and cultural analyses, this research underscores the real reasons for the absence of domestic political comedy on Colombian television. The discussions take into account constraints such as media ownership issues, censorship, economic bans, power struggles, the assassination of the comedian Jaime Garzón, and the Colombian audiences' TV consumption habits. At the same time, it is explained how the *telenovela* TV genre adopted some aspects of political comedy, thus helping to the survival of satirism in the medium.

Also, this research discloses how entertaining politics can provide useful input to the formation of cultural citizenship, and explores the civic skills that a society would develop if political comedy shows were produced. Furthermore, a new approach is suggested to understand the *political cynicism* concept used by political communication scholars to explain the citizens' apathy and political disengagement resulting from the consumption of media contents -particularly entertaining ones. By bringing into the debate a contextual *re-signification* of the term *cynicism*, this research finds that a sort of 'good cynicism', represented by more analytical and critical stances towards the powers, can politically engage the potential viewership of political comedy and satirical shows on Colombian television.

Key words: media, media power, media ownership, censorship, Colombia, political comedy, satire, humor, television, radio, TV genre, telenovela, cynicism, politics, good cynicism, cultural citizenship, monitorial citizenship, civic culture, leveling.

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INTRODUCTION

Television is the *king* of all media outlets that Colombians interact with for informative purposes, preferred over all other mediums of communication (Rojas and Piug-i-Abril, 2009:109; Richard and Rojas, 2010:174; Rojas and Mazorra, 2011:19). Yet, there is no existing political comedy currently on Colombian TV. This thesis aims to explore the reasons why political comedy is absent from the television-production spheres in Colombia. Since almost a decade ago there are no fake news programs, satirical spaces in actuality shows, humorous sketches about politics or politicians, social criticisms through parodies, satirical sitcoms, nor animated or puppet shows on television.

This lack of audiovisual content contrasts with the success of satire and political comedy in mediums such as literature, theater, radio, and print media; and the remarkable explosion of internet-based satire. It is also easy to access political comedy produced in other countries (through the Internet and cable TV), accentuating in this regard the Colombian TV's lack of domestically made productions. Rather than accept the absence of political comedy, this thesis investigates why it is missing from the biggest platform in Colombia that reaches most diverse groups of citizens, especially since political comedy can contribute to a country's democracy, to public debates, the enhancement of civic culture, the strengthening of citizens' skills in their interaction with the news, politics, and the *infotaining* part of popular culture (Van Zoonen, 2005). In other words, and as Stephen Coleman (2012:1) defined it, this thesis wants to see if 'a civic mix' of popular culture techniques and relevant information for democratic deliberation, can be achieved through political humor on TV, even if such goals are mediated by the adoption of critical views towards power and by the use of '*good cynicism*' to reflect about politics.

Therefore, by studying the political, satirical and media landscapes in Colombia through a set of 33 representative elite interviews and contextually-based analyses, this thesis' research questions are:

1. What are the political, cultural, and economic constraints for producing political comedy in contemporary Colombian TV?
2. What role can television satire play in empowering citizens and enhancing civic culture in Colombia?

In order to answer such questions, this research's objectives are to map out the kinds of political comedy existing in contemporary Colombian culture; to explain why television is absent in the actual political comedy production; and to determine the extent to which political comedy can cross boundaries between information and entertainment in Colombian popular culture, hence fostering the civic skills among the citizenship.

The Problem

Commentators question the reasons for an absence of political comedy on Colombian television¹. The political scientist and dean of the Social Sciences Faculty at *Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano*, Sandra Borda (2015), asks herself whenever she watches American shows like *The Daily Show*, the *Colbert Report* or *Last Week Tonight*, why in Colombia the relationship between humor and politics is so distant, and 'why in this country humor is not brash, irreverent, critical, and does not fulfill its function of expressing the discontent and frustrations of ordinary citizens?' The satirist and *Señal Colombia*'s (public service) ombudsman Eduardo Arias (in Ruge, 2008:4-5) also lamented that there are no political comedy TV shows as they were in the past, like those in which he worked as scriptwriter and actor: *Zoociedad* and *Quac*.

The reasons for the absence of political comedy on Colombian television are critically examined in this research. Through a combination of genre analysis, political economic analysis of Colombian television and political comedy, and elite interviews, this thesis considers issues such as power struggles embedded in the society and the media landscape, the threat of violence, formal and informal censorship, factual and entertainment consumption habits, the talent industry, TV markets, and the adoption of humor by other TV genres. Such issues point to the significance of systemic and symbolic power in Colombian television and the increasing significance of political comedy as a symbolic leveler in a country and culture where politics are understood as sacred spheres full of politicians 'immune' to criticism.

History

As mentioned, Colombia has a history of political comedy on different media, and also within artistic expressions such as literature, theater, and painting. These could be traced back, for instance, to the writings of Miguel Antonio Caro, a Colombian president in the XIX century who played two distinct roles of being a politician and an ironic intellectual, influenced by the ridicule, mockery and harshness of Swift and Voltaire (Hernández, 1988:14). Rafael Arango

Villegas, a businessman who used political comedy in every newspaper column he wrote since the 1920s, also exemplified Colombian satire. He went so far as to mock all the dignitaries of the country, portraying President Pedro Nel Ospina as a person who could only move by horse, even when going from one room to another within his presidential palace (Arango, 1979:192).

This kind of intellectual sharpness based on political comedy, shows a very rooted and historical proclivity towards humor among Colombians, who found in arts and media mainstream rhetorical escape valves for the constraints that the political world and its players represent². For example, Álvaro Salom-Becerra (1969) used his narratives to whip politicians and politics. Alfredo Iriarte, in his novels, caricatured presidents as ‘gassy’ (1999), and politicians as rodents (1979; 2010). Even more, the novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch* by the Colombian Nobel Prize laureate Gabriel García Márquez (1975) was written as a colorful fable about the solitude of power of a fictional dictator representing the rulers of many Latin American countries during the ‘dictatorships era’ in the region.

Such prolificacy of political humor makes an absence of the genre on TV an intriguing phenomenon. Therefore, there are two issues which work as framing ideas through this thesis: first, the fertile political context in Colombia which allows for mockery of politics amongst satirists and citizens³, and secondly the marked lack of political shows on TV, particularly after the assassination of the comedian Jaime Garzón in 1999. Regarding the first issue, it can be said that Colombia is a country where everything seems to be critical, but nothing very serious. Interviewees in this research noted how humor is a means to laugh at the difficulties of the political context of everyday life⁴. A critical explanation of such widely shared appetite for humor can be found in Richard Hoggart’s analysis of the working-class culture:

When people feel that they cannot do much about the main elements of their situation, feel it not necessarily with despair or disappointment or resentment, but simply as a fact of life, they adopt attitudes toward that situation which allows them to have a liveable life under its shadow, a life without a constant and pressing sense of the larger situation. (Hoggart, 1954:77-78)

Hence, the perceptions about the convulsed politics in the country represent a broadly shared social construction among the interviewees of how the Colombian political context seems to be ripe for political comedy.

Secondly, the killing of Jaime Garzón on the 13th of August 1999 set a precedent for political humor on Colombian TV. Garzón was the comedian with the sharpest and most direct humor towards politicians, illegal armed groups, and economic powers in the country. He hosted and acted in the 1990's satirical shows *Zoociedad* and *Quac*, and impersonated a shoeshine boy called *Heriberto de la Calle* who asked harsh questions to politicians in different news broadcasts. After his murder, very few political comedy shows have appeared in Colombian programming⁵, but also they have been cancelled because of powerful constraints to be explored in-depth through this research. None of them adopted Garzón's *black humor* as a genre, hence making this absence and his killing two remarkable explanatory elements among Colombians for the lack of satire and political comedy on television. This thesis critically examines these two frames through a rigorous analysis of this hybrid genre and its political and cultural contexts in Colombia, becoming the first research to analyze this topic in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no need to go back to the Greeks to find the origins of western politics, nor to the 1950s to build a genealogy of the media research. With a small sail over the oceans of ink used to explain the relationship between media, politics and entertainment during the last three decades, this research examines the recent evolution of discourses about the transgressive potential of TV entertainment and political comedy. This chapter will address the role of media in its interaction with politics and ‘the political,’ the civic, deliberative, agonistic, and culturally formed venue of politics (Mouffe, 1999:754), its expected civic function, and its powerful character.

The Roots of Media and Politics

The political role of media in liberal democracies has fluctuated from being the ‘fourth branch of government,’ to adopting a watchdog role over the politics and its participants. Back in the late 1700s, Edmund Burke (in Baker, 2007:5) observed that ‘there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all,’ and nearly a century later, John Delane wrote, in a now famous editorial, that:

The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the events of the time and instantly by disclosing them. (...) The press lives by disclosures... bound to tell the truth as we find it without fear of consequences –to lend no convenient shelter to acts of injustice and oppression, but to consign them to the judgment of the world. (Delane, in Schultz, 1998:25)

That dual role of media in the political realm reveals some issues that have to do first, with the power it has structurally attained, and second, with the moral duties it has historically taken on. The first one, which orbits the matters of access and institutions (power), will have its own segment below; but its function as the *vigilante* of the political world, and the instructor of the citizenship, is what has been most central to recent debates (Bennett and Serrin, 2005 [2007]).

Among liberals, society was seen as a simple aggregation of individuals, therefore the media was the nexus between the individual and the state. Additionally, media was viewed as a permanent protector ‘patrolling against the abuse of executive power and safeguarding individual liberty,’ as pointed out by Curran (1991:29). However, this perspective became

old-fashioned since it ignored wider social and theoretical cleavages, gathered up along the second half of the 20th century by the Frankfurt School disciples and the American pragmatists. This is not to say that the media lost its *Cerberus* role in politics, but rather its duties and perspectives evolved into matters related to discursive and structural powers, linguistics, rhetoric, media effects, behavioralism, ideologies, media access, ownership, technological developments, history, audiences, contexts, emotions, etc.

From Habermas to Dahlgren and Day

All these theoretical mechanisms converged into public sphere studies, which found in the exploration of the moral grounds and the potentials and constraints in democracy building environments, a good approach to social, political and media phenomena. Nonetheless, such public sphere scholars did not follow a single methodological tradition to address political and media issues, but instead embodied three different branches, carefully explained by Peter Dahlgren (2009:4-5). The first was the *political communication* division, emerging from political science and treating communication as a mechanism of interaction between formal actors, what in terms of Shah (2009:30) is a ‘very superficial’ perspective to research communication processes. The second, *the public sphere tradition*, had Habermas’ theories (1989) in its roots, and mainly focused on the deliberation and communicative rationality as pillars for achieving a strong civil society in democracy. The third, identified by Dahlgren as the ‘*culturalist*’ approach to humans’ daily interaction, focused on contexts, ideologies and the agents’ sense-making character.

Now, the three perspectives rather than colliding for the purpose of this thesis set the theoretical bases from which the analytical discussions of this thesis can depart. Although, the habermasian tradition in which the importance of the media outlets and its contents, and the production of politically engaged citizens can be built upon, gives this research a wider and more solid civic background, encouraging the deliberation and the dialogical character of media and political communication processes. The habermasian perspective might not address the media relationship with politics in a very systemic flux, or from a very agential or constructivist angle, yet it reinforces the democratic grounds targeted in this research, in a manner in which the positive outcomes of entertaining content actually contributes to the political literacy and engagement of citizens through the discussion of topics previously thought exclusive to news media consumers or people with any sort of linkage with politics.

Consequently, the public sphere, beyond its formalisms and regarding the potential of a well-functioning political comedy, is ‘enmeshed with discourses from entertainment’ (Dahlgren, 1991:17), a connection that opens the door to the emergence of more politically engaged and participatory citizens through the mixture of journalism and popular culture. In order to be clearer, this research recognizes the benefits of the public sphere perspective in Amber Day’s (2011:19) definition, which goes beyond the specifically political and dialogical perspective, and arrives to the concept of public sphere as ‘social communication about all matters of collective concern, discursive spaces in which social narratives are created, sustained, dispersed, and challenged.’ Hence, this thesis also assumes that entertaining contents can lead people, especially youngsters, as main consumers of such genres, to deliberate, to come up with political opinions, and to engage with the political in an easier way than other outlets have done or have failed to do.

Politics and Cultural Citizenship

In the year 2000, two fundamental publications for the study of media and politics came to light. First, Robert D. Putnam wrote about the collapse of what he called ‘social capital’ in the American society. His point was that such social catastrophe, including the civic disengagement from the politics, was a product of the influence of technology and mass media, with television playing a central role in that withdrawal amongst U.S. citizens. Putnam⁶ was not alone in his views. Other scholars blamed various forms of media, including radio, TV, newspapers, Internet, and its entertainment contents for the low participatory rates and political disengagement (Patterson, 1994 and 2003; Fallows, 1996; Wilkins, 2000). Even more, Pinkleton et al. (1998) suggested that media is more likely to stir up cynical views on politics among the audience members.

On the other hand, the same year of Putnam’s release, Pippa Norris (2000) published her book *A Virtuous Circle*, in which she mentions that since the 1960s, the literature about ‘media malaise’ has abounded. Considering that the term ‘media malaise’ is used as a sort of societal sickness rooted in the impact of mass media and technology on the democratic behaviors and the civic engagement, Norris found that despite the consumption of media, individuals receive more political inputs from several sources and cultural habits, which may also result in disengagement. Moreover, she pointed out that media-consumption can difficultly be culpable for such conduct, since, as she probed, media consumers are indeed more engaged, than those who do not consume media⁷ (Norris, 2000:17). But as if Norris’

answer to Putnam's position was not enough, the rebuttals kept coming and this time from the cognitive perspective of Doris Graber, who said that:

The basic complaint about television broadcasts (...) is that the content is unsatisfactory and that it harms various publics socially and politically. (...) Media impact tends to be misunderstood and often exaggerated because hypodermic theories remain rampant. According to these discredited theories, people exposed to messages adopt and interpret them exactly as presented, akin to medical patients who are treated with disease-specific vaccine. (Graber, 2001:99)

Now, in terms of academic equilibrium, it becomes relevant to admit that those debates about the media effects in politics are far from resolution. This is because, as McCombs et al. (2011) pointed out, political knowledge is related to a bigger consumption of media, thus to political participation, and such variables are extremely difficult to measure since human rational decisions, in political ways, do not always follow preexisting notions, or new mediated messages and information. Furthermore, it is not only difficult to measure them in terms of voter turnout or political deliberation in a Habermasian way, but it is that way because "the daily citizen engagement with politics is more frequently textual than organizational or 'participatory' in any traditional sense" (Jones, 2010:23). This means that the most common forms of political activity appear through individual choice and through the processing all the media texts about the political practices, which entails a sort of 'self-informing citizenship (...) [through which the] knowledge is enhanced by its distance from the custody of official gatekeepers,' as Coleman explained (in Hartley et al., 2013:384).

It is difficult to understand politics happening in a vacuum outside the media, and vice versa. The political communication, the institutional and governmental watchdog role of media, all the political news, or, as it concerns to this thesis, the popular culture represented by political comedy, constitute the amalgamation of the media and politics. And this is the reason why Jones emphasized in *Entertaining Politics* that 'politics and popular culture are essentially opposite sides of the same coin' (2010:24); a coin which makes relevant all Schudson's ideas supporting the understanding of nowadays' media consumers as 'monitorial citizens.' They, for instance, rather than simply watch television, 'scan the information environment in a way so that they may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of ends and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways.'

(Schudson, 1998:310-311) That type of citizen is one that regardless the media or their contents, grasps the best for his/her political decision-making processes, is influenced by what is watched on television, by his/her neighbor's partisan affiliations, by online activist movements, or even his/her own educational background.

Also, that modern citizen is the one that can recognize that television provides a vast amount of popular culture contents, including serious ones related directly to politics, that touch the audiences in many different ways⁸. Hence, those citizens also become 'cultural citizens,' who value the democratic potential of popular culture and who bond and build community by 'partaking of the text-related practices of reading, consuming, celebrating, and criticizing offered in the realm of (popular) culture,' as said by Hermes (2005:10).

Media and Power

Since this research explicitly aligns with the transgressive and powerful potential of satire, as a discursive tool for citizens' deliberation and political engagement, it becomes relevant to track down the evolution of the relationship between power and media. This mapping exercise will work as a frame to the debates that address the enhancement of political scopes through which citizens challenge power structures, and the big relevance acquired by the use of rhetorical elements in the individual's political participation.

In this regard, the discussions about media power have evolved from the systemic approach of seeing media as an influential apparatus over the citizens' perceptions and the political structures, to a broader scenario in which the discourse, access, and ownership acquired great relevance. For instance, Mancini and Swanson (1996:11) said, '[media is] no longer merely a means by which other subsystems, such as political parties, can spread their own messages,' but it emerged in 'modern polyarchies as an autonomous power center in reciprocal competition with other power centers.'

In the first part of the literature review, the role of media fluctuated from one political theory to the other. The same happens with the notion of 'media power,' because even though it became commonplace in media and political research there is still a lot of debate around how and where the power manifests itself. Perhaps one of the most influential scholars that tried to handle the difficult task of scrutinizing power was Steven Lukes, who in 1974 and in his work's actualization in 2005, organized the concept into three dimensions: decision-

making power, non-decision-making power, and ideological power. Whilst these scopes were widely accepted and popular amongst political science researchers, they presented refreshing perspectives diverging from the mainstream power explanations given by Weber, Habermas, and Foucault. They lacked certain elements to understand the relationship to the media, the sources and effects of power beyond institutionalism and the instrumentalists' ways of performing that power.

Successively came John Street (2001:232-233), who separated power into another three-forms matrix, which could better fit the studies in communication: *discursive power*, *access power*, and *resource power*. For him, the discursive power, a core topic in this thesis, rests on, essentially, the control that media uses over audiences, through the 'way it privileges particular discourses and constructs particular forms of reality.'

Before describing the other two forms, it is relevant to notice that Street's discursive power perspective, by considering media an autonomous entity rather than a means or a tool, disregards the discursive influences coming from all the fronts involved in the communication process, and goes back to the notions of top-down regulations that nowadays are contested, for example, by interactive audiences and the structural challenges of the Internet. Furthermore, by having a utilitarian perspective, Street ignores the potential of anonymity and the satirical skills that political humor deploys within the civic deliberation of random citizens, regardless of their means of expression. For instance, Gamal Abdel-Nasser had a personal employee with the only task of bringing him, every day, the latest jokes about his government that circulated in Cairo's streets (Vélez-Montoya, 2012:54). This is a tremendous example of discursive power following the bottom-up direction and without any media apparatus in between, considering that humor, even from a cognitive angle (Pinker, 1998:547-548), is envisaged as a means of communicating antagonism against power holders⁹.

The second form of power according to Street concerns access. This refers to the way in which the media controls access to voices and interests to its outlets; and the third (resource power), 'refers to the way in which media conglomerates can affect the actions of governments or states' (2001:234-236). Even though these two last forms of power can be independently analyzed as Street did, because they focus on media in a more structural manner rather than rhetorical, they could as well be grouped into a one single theoretic category, more holistic, in the way Corner (2011) suggested. For Corner, media power is

better to be seen as a system, rather than a sum of *good* or *bad* (predominant in media research) outcomes made or facilitated by media.

The Discursive Power of Satire

Within his *systemic power* approach, Corner created a tailor-made dualistic typology for media and power studies: *structural power* and *discursive power*. This typology is very helpful to understand the power relations implicit in the Colombian media spheres to be research in this thesis. For instance, inside the *structural power* can be set all the struggles and results of media access, ownership and trust (or deception) from the citizenship towards governments, force users, politics and politicians, media conglomerates, economic systems, and even political ideologies. Even more, in the Colombian context, the alliances between the *political* and the illegal armed forces, such as the guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug cartels, etc., may also affect power structures, their influences on media content, and the democratic rights of citizens to express and publish their opinions and dissent through media, as it may have been the case in Jaime Garzón's assassination.

Thus, this model of presenting the structural powers in media, allows this research to explore to what extent such pressures and institutional practices have led the Colombian democratic system and televisual environment to a scenario dominated by interconnected political and economic powers, hence to a lack of political comedy on TV. This approach also allows this research to look for structural production constraints of satirical contents, like censorship and self-censorship¹⁰.

Censorship and self-censorship are structural because they are results of implicit or tacit pressures coming from the alignment of media conglomerates, corporations and governments¹¹. Strictly speaking, as Baker (2007:41) said, many media workers habitually report 'avoiding investigations in areas where the story could be embarrassing to the enterprise's outside interests, (...) [and] editors occasionally admit pressures to consciously design content to promote the conglomerate's other products or to benefit the conglomerate's overall political interests.'

On the other hand, Corner's concept of systemic power also includes a notion of *discursive power*, which relieves discursivity from the structural and top-down constraints

established by Street. In this regard, *discursive power* according to Corner (2011) synthesizes the ‘*transgressive*’ potential that media and citizens hold in their communicative processes.

Then, such transgressive potential, as it concerns to this thesis, can be found in political humor and satire, because they represent mechanisms allowing the citizenship to moralize or dissent about the struggles they face and the misconduct they see in the power-holders and the institutions framing their political lives. Satire and political comedy succeed in the materialization of that kind of power because their rhetorical and discursive instruments are key components of democratic vitality, especially since they provide the citizens with ‘a degree of disrespectful distance from the power system and the power elite, augmenting the grounds for critical engagement and renewal.’ (Corner et al., 2012:13)

Even more, political humor and satire become transgressive and discursive weapons precisely when structural constraints and the threats of the powerful restrict the normal functioning of the citizens’ and media freedoms. Dustin Griffin condensed this by saying:

It is the limitation of free inquiry and dissent that provokes one (...) to satire. If open challenge to orthodoxy is freely permitted, then writers will take the most direct route and debate the ideas and characters of political leaders openly in newspapers, protected by guarantees of free speech. It is difficult, or unnecessary, to satirize our political leaders when the newspapers are filled with open attacks on their integrity and intelligence. But if open challenge is not permitted, writers will turn to irony, indirection, innuendo, allegory, fable –to the fictions of satire. (Griffin, 1994:139)

Then, the discursive power of political comedy, exercised by the citizenship and the satirists, is the one that will end up supporting the importance of having satirical shows on Colombian TV. Despite the issues that could foster or restrain satire to happen in a society, it represents a good mechanism to be used when political opinions cannot be freely shared or when they are undermined by the structural political, economic and media powers.

Entertaining Politics

The studies about the political effects of entertainment emanate from the mentioned media malaise’s circles, which extend the negative outcomes of mass media and technology to the popular culture terrains. It became mainstream to relate disengagement and cynicism to media

effects, thus to the consumption of media contents that were not framed explicitly as serious news or politically relevant. The negative outcomes of media evolved into entertainment malaise, and eventually television malaise, explaining in that way why television is mainly identified with amusement purposes only, as if, how Van Zoonen (2005:11) complained, ‘television journalism would thus be an inevitable contradiction in terms.’

Uneasiness in the political and entertainment relationship reflects a conceptual segregation that can be solved, as Van Zoonen (2005:3) claimed, by avoiding many denunciative expectations on entertainment, advocating for “the isolation of politics or the abolition of entertainment, or simply propose the education of citizens to ‘higher’ standards.” By lowering such politically based hopes, the phenomenon of entertaining within the political and about it, can disclose new lenses through which a more accurate knowledge around the subject replaces the scientists’ and philosophers’ discontent. Citizenship requires a performance, so as Van Zoonen also claimed, it consists more in what citizens do with entertaining contents, and not in how entertaining politics affect them.

One way to start shifting the perspective is by looking at how entertaining contents and television genres; such as parodies, impersonations, animations, satiric discourses, fake news programs, political comedy, etc.; can actually entertain citizens, instead of preserving the idea of television as a medium that amuses uncritical masses, which also lack agential consciousness (plus, are ignorant of the requirements and virtues of political citizenship achieved through popular culture). That perspective is relevant because it looks at the individuals as conscious citizens who can actually understand messages and act politically, deciding and having opinions about politics, and utilize comedy as an intellectual trigger.

However, the successful transition to value entertainment as an informative source, can be achieved by not only changing the approach to television and popular culture manifestations, but to journalism and the parameters of exercising it, since its normative boundaries have been blurred by the actual political engagement of the audiences, which rather prefer clever and audacious reporters and coverage angles over the same old-fashioned way of informing about politics. Even more, the audiences have started to disregard the sources, by not differentiating between sources of political savvy: journalistic or comedic. For instance, ‘news journalists who aggressively question politicians are popular with audiences

because they are perceived to get behind the performance in order to inform the public about what is really going on' (Hill, 2007:16).

In this regard, and in a way that solidifies the tendency of appreciating the political features of entertainment in contradiction to the usual forms of deliberating about politics, theorists like John Street have defended political comedy arguing that "the way people see and experience politics is not confined to news and current affairs, (...) [because] the way 'politics' emerges in mass entertainment is through the stories it tells, the jokes it makes and the motives it assumes" (2001:79), rather than through the intellectual environments and programs from where they come or the places where they are received. These positions reinforce such journalistic paradigm shifting, which includes new and more entertaining techniques of engaging the citizens, and involving them in political debates through interactive ways of engaging with the information.

These theoretical approaches show that popular culture TV genres can attract more politically interested audiences than other modes of political information sources have traditionally done. However, it does not mean that according to different contexts and audiences, the perceptions about the informative benefits of political comedy cannot vary. For instance, Ferré-Pavia et al. (2015) found that whilst some politicians and officials give credit to the importance of satire on TV in shaping public opinion, some citizens did not believe that it could heighten their interest in politics nor lead to a change of opinions. Yet, that does not mean that satire has to enlighten new perceptions or change opinions of audiences. It is also accurate to say, as Feinberg did in 1967 (in Day, 2011:13) that 'when people already hold the opinions which satire expresses, those opinions are reinforced.'

However, this research rather than questioning the nature of the citizens' perceptions supports a more conceptual understanding of the messages and values that the discursive potentials of satire, like many other rhetoric instruments, give to democracy and freedom of expression. Particularly, because of the competition such entertaining genres are creating within the traditional ways of informing. Jeffrey Jones says that 'the news media's authority and legitimacy as the primary arbiters of political truth is under challenge,' because (and these are the potentialities of the new forms): 'new political television has played an important role in articulating those failings, and produced alternative narratives [satire and political comedy] for what constitutes truth and political reality.' (2010:92)

Furthermore, Coleman (2012:6) mentioned, ‘television has a potential role in stimulating, organizing, disseminating, and reflecting’ on far-reaching entertaining politics genres ‘that should not be overlooked simply because it rarely happens or there are other promising spaces in which debate might happen,’ such as factual genres or through news and current affairs coverage.

Finally, inside the popular culture interaction with politics, challenging subgenres bring intrinsically empowering potential to the disenfranchised audiences and to the traditionally informed ones, in a manner that appreciates humor’s value as a channel to a larger truth. Also, because ‘satire can be cathartic for those with little power, and it can help to build solidarity,’ as the anthropology professor Angelique Haugerud (in Plump, 2015) suggested when she was asked about the transgressive, counter-powerful, and very good political outcomes that appear within the deliberative fields of entertainment contents that deal with politics in a television dominated era.

Political Comedy

According to the social scientist Michael Billig (2005:5) there are three great (but not only) historical traditions for understanding humor: ‘the theories of superiority, incongruity and release.’ Within the superiority ones, theorists have been seen as the enemies of laughter, or in words of Meredith (1897): ‘misogelasts’. They, more than haters of laughter, believe that people should ‘reduce the amount of frivolity in the cause of a serious philosophy’ (Billig, 2005:37). The incongruity scholars appeared to strip away the responsibilities of laughter from the agents, to place it into the incongruous features that generate that laughter in life; and the relief theorists basically followed the path of Darwinism and suggested that laughter, more than an intellectual problem, represents a biological feature of the human bodies. Such humor studies evolved into other theories like Bergson’s focus on humor’s disciplinary roles, cruelty and its social functions, and Freud’s explanations of humor as a human reaction to external demands, hence laughter is a product of such evasions and omissions of the subject to what reality presents to him, or as Billig (ibid: 6) summarized: ‘laughter is not necessarily an honest reflection of the soul.’

Beyond all these perspectives, which direct their attention to the agents and the philosophical and behavioral expressions of humor, other scholars made great contributions to

the studies of satire and political humor, particularly focusing on the transgressive potential and causalities for such mechanisms of ridicule in societies, and particularly in western literature (Griffin, 1994). Goffman (1956, 1967) tackled the embarrassment and its connections with laughter, Berger the interaction of humor and the social order (in Billig, 2006:213) and Bakhtin the subversive nature of joking (ibid: 208), just to mention some of the biggest approaches humor has represented among scholars. Even more, political humor has also faced the dissection of its meaning in literature, as scholars and critics have tried to differentiate rhetorically the proper uses of the terms satire, humor, comedy, etc. (Tsakona and Popa, 2011:5), and some other writers have focused their works on the ethical and aesthetics features of comedy, including the violence, decorum and morality of the jokes circulating constantly through media (Lockyer and Pickering, 2005).

Literature mapping provides support and converges scholarship about humor, laughter, satire and comedy in what this thesis considers is the most accurate definition of political comedy, hence a strong conceptual framework for this entire research:

Political humor brings to the surface the inconsistencies and inadequacy of political decisions and acts, and the incompetence, recklessness and corruption of politicians and political leaders. (Tsakona and Popa, 2011:6)

Political Humor and Satire on TV

Before getting in depth with the genre topic, and as a follow-up aspect of the previous debate about the effects and usefulness of entertaining contents in politics, it is relevant to say that the discussions about the political effectiveness and uses of political humor and satire are everything but contemporary issues.

Even after John Dryden drew his famous state of art of satire back in the 1600s, and despite the massive scholarship of Isaac Casaubon on the topic in the late 1500s, scholars ceaselessly discussed fundamental questions about the utility of satire, or to whom to give the founder status of the different satirical movements: Horace? Juvenal? Persius? Is ‘the satirist an unbalanced and ferocious malcontent, or a man of good nature and high principle? Was satire ideally a rugged and rough-edged form, or should it display the same kind of polish and urbanity as the speech of witty gentlemen?’ (Griffin, 1994:15).

Such dilemmas, which frame the agential concerns of those that use political humor as a medium of expression, actually work as historical roots of the nowadays typologies created to identify the satirical TV subgenre, which mainly differ from each other, as in the past, on the objectives of this rhetoric resources, the moral stances of their creators, the kind of ideological biases portrayed, the mockery targets, and media assets employed to tackle the understanding -political literacy- and engagement through entertaining and popular contents.

For instance, Amber Day (2011) acknowledged the renaissance of political satire during the last decades, not only as a literary phenomena like in the old days, but in a mediated, especially TV dominating era. The revival of *satirism* is noticeable in many countries; it has deployed its influential tentacles through all possible media, and has inserted its texts in the mainstream political coverage, turning satirists into big and legitimate players in the serious political dialogues. In Day's opinion, satirists, comedians, pranksters and entertainers, regardless of their ulterior objectives or ideological biases (as were the concerns centuries ago), are 'gathering so much authority,' since they are seen like 'representatives who will push their particular worldview into the wider public sphere' (2011:11).

Even though satire is not new, perhaps its contemporary influence leans towards a more accurate measurement, or it is affecting more people than in the old days, due to its multi-platform media *spreadability* (Jenkins et al., 2013). This success makes satire a new big audiovisual genre, because, paraphrasing Day (2011:11), it functions as a tool of alienation, poses questions that others might not, attracts audiences, creates widely viewed popular culture texts, and insinuates its subject matter into broader discussions. It exists as a link between entertainment and critical thought, which turns out to be relevant to this research in the way it underscores the absence of such potential in the current Colombian TV production context, while at the same time, providing great possibilities for nurturing the civic culture in the country if it is taken into account in further productions.

By considering *satire* as a genre, this research sees in Day's trilogy of subgenres a typology that permits the understanding of the entertaining political phenomena taking place on the screens of millions of viewers throughout, at least, most of the countries of the western world (Baym and Jones, 2012:2). Day's trilogy consists of *the satiric documentary*, *the parodic news show*, and *ironic, media-savvy activism*. These subgenres exclusively rely on the deconstruction of real events, pranks and embarrassment of public figures.

It is important to note that those subgenres have in common the fact that they desire to challenge the standard formulas entrenched within the mainstream media, and they do so by ‘highlighting absurdities and inconsistencies through the use of irony, and a reliance on impromptu personal interactions and engagement in an attempt to reveal, trip up, or sabotage.’ (Day, 2011:23) They do so by going beyond the ‘cynical’ critic through sparking the interest of the audiences, which appreciate their highly political perspectives.

Now, although Day’s approach does not take into consideration aspects of political comedy as impersonations or fictionalized contents, and frames satirical contents with the label of *parodic shows* as if they were only producers of fake news, her set of subgenres brings a structural ground that mixes satire and formal political dialogue, where the analysis can depart from. It does not mean that under the light of the Colombian TV context, which lacks all kinds of whether fictional or parodic contents (as it was described in the introductory part), the trilogy constitutes a concrete theoretical template to follow. Rather, it works as a guideline to facilitate this Colombian-based research on the exclusion of the subgenres, like the satirical documentary boom experienced in the United States of America following Michael Moore’s activist films, or the irony expressed with political agenda purposes in online media (memes, blogs, tweets, etc.).

This subgenre selection leaves us with the only one strictly stuck to the contents produced for television: *the parodic news shows*. Here, it is fundamental to draw a landmark: because the lack of any kind of political humor, hence satirical content, thus ironic performers on Colombian TV (within private and public channels); the conceptual analysis has to include more types of TV shows and genres, than researchers have investigated in other latitudes, including Day and her typology. That is the reason why this literature review has tried to include them by randomly intercalating the terms *political humor* and *satire*.

Perhaps, their meanings are not interchangeable as it has been happening until this point, but they work together as a conceptual framework that, for instance Day, and Baym and Jones (2012) have strictly defined as *news parody*. This research admits such typology, but in the Colombian case, due to the absence of any kind of satire or political humor on TV, *news parody* becomes an umbrella term, in a certain sense limited, for what happens in the context researched. Even Baym and Jones (2012:4) admit such deficiencies in the labeling by saying

that: ‘while many programs (...) employ a fake news style (similar to *The Daily Show*) in direct parody of the television news form, others use quite different methods (puppets, for example) in pursuit of similar goals.’

Strictly speaking, the humor and sarcasm used in e.g. *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, or *South Park*, have been relegated from contemporary satirical genre research because they are part of the fiction family, although some academics recognize their socially critical components. Also, they are not very appealing to be included into the research trends, because as might be seen if we turn back to the previous segments, it will be very difficult to evaluate the direct influence of their contents, only shown as amusing messages in the political engagement and voter turnout. That could be a big mistake, since it may be taken for granted that the intentions of the scriptwriters, producers, guest voices, and high rank corporate members (and owners) of the TV companies, as if the social and political criticisms that those programs bring attached to them were aseptic and made without any critical interest of mocking certain aspects or individuals in politics.

This is important to bring to light because in the Colombian context it is necessary to include such types of TV shows in the analysis of political, social and satirical humor. The contemporary absence of programs produced even through fictional ways and animations [as happened about a decade ago with *El Siguiente Programa* (harsh-animated series) or until 2013 with *NP& con Los Reencauchados* (satirism on TV through puppets)] gives a lot of background related to structural constraints and threats that satire producers have to face because of their jokes and sarcasms, even when they are disguised by puppets and do not make physical appearances in the shows. Clearly, even through animations, social satirism can be a hazardous job.

This explains why, within the Colombian context, it is relevant to include fictionalized parodies and social jokes to the research analysis. In other words, and considering the Colombian TV landscape, this research demonstrates the significance of including all kinds of social and political satire in the analysis, not only the *parody news* format widely accepted among scholars. In that regard, this thesis uses the terms ‘*satire*’ and ‘*political comedy*’ to refer to any form of communication that alludes to something political and social, and is intended to make people laugh.

Can Day's TV satire subgenre division of *parody news shows* be dissected even more in order to reach a better understanding of how it is made? Yes, and that is precisely one of the biggest contributions of Lichter et al. (2015), who beyond their qualitative and quantitative research about the impact of political jokes through mass media in American culture and the indulgence they give to the audiences' satisfaction of laughing at politicians, they formulated a division, also subscribed by this research, about the three major types of late night televised political humor: the first is the straightforward joke -usually a one-liner- that is mainly used by stand-up comedians (like Leno, Letterman, Kimmel, Fallon).

The second is the more complex political satire of Stewart and Colbert. Finally, [the third type] we include in our discussion the sketch comedy of *Saturday Night Live*. (Lichter et al., 2015:9).

This typology allows differentiating, for the benefit of this research, the types of satirical productions and their functional mechanisms to produce impact among audiences. What has been the subject of scrutiny in terms of the satire genre and its subgenres? Research done on the topic has mostly focused on, as seen before, the effectiveness of guiding young audiences towards the political engagement, the matter of representation of black people, lack of women in comedy, non-conservative perspectives, the ideological biases, etc.- (Jones, 2010:237), the environments that award the political incorrectness like the political engagement generated by *South Park* (Thompson, 2009:230), and the same old debates about its usefulness and moral dilemmas about the jokes provenance that took place centuries ago.

Most contemporary literature that tackles the phenomena of satire on TV focuses on dissecting every politically potential aspect of renowned American shows like the ones hosted by Bill Maher, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and their counterparts in the UK (*TW3*, *Not the Nine O'Clock News*), and Canada. Their worldwide fame and the so-called 'liberal' ways of engaging the audiences to criticize decisions and members immersed in politics have become the favorite focal point of scholars researching the topic.

Some academics sustain that the success of the genre is embedded in the expansion of the TV channel spectrum, having cable TV as its epicenter (Marc, in Gray et al. (eds.), 2009:xi). In this regard, many of them acknowledge the momentum generated by *Comedy Central*, as a prolific generator of satirical content. Others focus on the techniques and explain

the satire TV attainment by praising the courage of the satirist, who managed to go beyond losing the respect for the old fashioned informative performances, and to give the camera a few whippings¹² (Álvarez-Berciano, 1999:156). Also, in terms of genre research, some scholars have rescued the contributions of the late-night television to the concept of satire as a catch-all package that mocks not only the political sphere but also other aspects of the social life, using irony as the main resource of their messages and sketches, like what was done in *Saturday Night Live* (Jones, 2009), *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, *The Tonight Show*, *The Late Show*, and all their similar in countries like Spain, or Greece (Gray et al., 2009:24).

Finally, most satire TV genre analyses take anecdotal milestones, rating measurements, fandom engagement, comedians popularity and politician responses, as tools to keep digging into the questions of how citizens are using the information received by these TV shows, or how such interaction results in more political literacy than traditional media consuming patterns. At least, that is what studies made by the *Pew Research Center*, *Nielsen Media Research*, or the *Annenberg Public Policy Center* have explored to conclude the efficacy of satiric programs in such educational goals (McClennen and Maisel, 2014:12).

Nonetheless, and regardless the potentials broadly described by satire scholarship and in particular here in this research, it is a challenge to find such advantages in a country like Colombia, where the stagnation of televised satire has made it more difficult to come up with magical formulas of genre success. At least, as a good first step, the identification of reasons for the absence of and barriers to new entertaining formats may provide academia with useful insights on how political humor may advance or succeed difficult contexts.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The aim of this research is to critically examine the potential of political comedy's discursive power in the construction of citizenship in Colombian society and culture. This research mixes empiricism and constructionism (Louw, 2005:7), and argues that the best way to understand the production of satire in Colombia as a meaningful analytical category (ontology) is by looking at the contexts, elites, power players, anecdotes, and political and democratic stances of the people involved in the making of political humor (epistemology); all such elements framed by concepts of humor, TV production genres, and the interplay between media, entertainment and democracy.

Critical realism appears as the methodology providing this research with the mechanisms, lenses, and qualitative data to analyze the Colombian context and to answer the formulated research questions. Critical realism avoids 'the pitfalls of both radical empiricism, according to which reality can only be attributed to entities that are immediately accessible to observation, and transcendental idealism, according to which reality is only accessible to people as an individual or social construction,' as pointed out by Patrick Baert (2005:90-91). Instead, critical realism allows the use of what Jackson (2011:74) calls *transfactualism*, a notion that makes possible 'to go beyond correlations and start talking about causal powers,' powers that in terms of this thesis are embodied by the barriers and the agents impeding the satirical production on Colombian TV. That *transfactual* possibility represents 'going beyond the observation that seeds grow when watered and determining precisely *why* this constant conjunction is observed as frequently as it is. Together, these two philosophical-ontological commitments shape a critical realist approach to social science.' (Ibid, 2011:75)

In this regard, the reality is represented by an empirically noticeable absence of political comedy on Colombian TV; and conceptually, as explained by Andrew Sayer (2000:27), by the seeking of 'substantial connections among phenomena rather than formal associations or regularities' resulting from the power constraints that have clogged the satirical productions in the Colombian context.

Methods

This research identifies in-depth and semi-structured elite interviews with critical media and satirical players in Colombia to be the most suitable method to grasp the real connotations of

such powers, and to realize how the importance of political comedy with regard to the construction of civic culture.

A contextual-based analysis concerning the media and satirical productions realms, nurtured by the descriptions given by the interviewees, reinforced the qualitative ends and the ‘truth-disclosure’ attempts of this thesis. So, this is an *intensive* research (Sayer, 2000:21) that focuses strictly on the reasons that have led the Colombian TV to the lack of production in question, hence looks for the answers of relevant people involved in the making of the genre, the media, and the academic research on the field. The *intensive* research ‘is primarily concerned with what makes things happen in specific cases, or (...) what kind of universe of meaning exists in a particular situation,’ as Sayer (2000:20) explained when describing the strengths of the method of interviewing experts within a critical realist perspective.

The qualitative elite interviews establish what the participants think about the subjects, corroborating or contradicting what other participants say, inferring about the Colombian context and power’s decisions constraining the satirical production on TV, and reconstructing relevant events through their narratives and anecdotes, as described on the elite-interviewing uses formulated by Oisin Tansey (2007:5). This method of interviewing people directly involved in the analysis, decision-making and production of satire in Colombia is reliable, and allows going inside the explanations about the power constraints that the genre has suffered within the TV production context in Colombia.

Other auxiliary methods used in this research were genre analysis, and political, economic, and cultural context analyses. The genre analysis, infused within the discussions of the thesis and the interviews, is rooted in the literature about media, humor, satire, its representations on television, and the examples of political comedy shows produced and aired in other countries. Moreover, the TV genre of political comedy is analyzed through the theories of traditional factual genres that inform and influence politically the viewers, and their tensions and contradictions with entertainment genres (Hill, 2007:12). Its *hybridity* in terms of the civic potentials of entertainment (Van Zoonen, 2005) is stressed by the defense of the notion of cultural citizenship (Hermes, 2005), which condenses politics and entertainment, hence mixes the popular and civic culture. And, the political, economic, and cultural contextual analyses also aided this thesis to connect the relevant events that political comedy has been part of during the last decades in Colombia, and to have a clearer picture of

the constraints and mechanisms of power that exist in the country and affect television production. Moreover, the nationality of the researcher and the interviewees (Colombians), the use of rating surveys (*ECAR*), media consumption among opinion leaders surveys (*Panel de opinion*), and media and politics research made by *Universidad Externado de Colombia* nurtured the contextual analyses of this thesis.

Sampling and Data Collection

During the sampling process, over 70 relevant elite individuals were identified as the decisive actors of satire, political comedy, and media production in Colombia, including scholars who have addressed the media and politics during the last few years. However, due to timing and resource limitations, the sample was reduced to 33 participants. After being contacted via email, phone calls and through the snowball sampling method, which according to Farquharson (2005) is an effective strategy for identifying influential individuals who might have been ignored, participants were told about the aims and objectives of the research. After showing interest in the research, interviewees set appointments for the days, hours and places of their preferences.

The 33 interviewees were clustered into four groups [see their profiles as Appendix 1], each of them representing specific experience backgrounds relevant to the research questions. The groups were determined using a combination of reputational and positional criteria based on their known relevance to the research, as suggested by Tansey (2007:20). The four groups are as follows:

1. Comedians, satirists, TV hosts, humorists and cartoonists. (14 interviewees)
2. Satirical producers, scriptwriters, directors, analysts, critics, writers, and individuals involved in Colombian satire production. (13 interviewees)
3. Media executives. (3 interviewees)
4. Media experts and scholars. (3 interviewees)

This categorization did not represent any hierarchical value given to the participants, nor any gender-based classification. In fact, since political comedy in Colombia has been historically a male-dominated field, this research managed to include three women in the sampling (two comedians and one media executive), and attempted to interview three more relevant female sources, but such attempts were unsuccessful¹³. The groups worked as a division aiming to

conduct the interviews using different scopes, theoretical and contextual frameworks, and never following a regional sample. According to this, it is important to mention that the interviews took place in three different Colombian cities: most were conducted in Bogotá, the capital where most of the interviewees live and work; nine were conducted in Medellín, second biggest city in the country; and one in Pereira. That single interview worth to go to that city since it was with ‘*Matador*’, the most popular cartoonist nowadays. Again, all the interviews followed the guide of relevance of the interviewees, rather than their regional roots or places of residence.

According to the questionnaires, the clustering did not affect the formulation of the research questions. All the participants were asked the same semi-structured questionnaire, based on the following interview topic guide:

Satire as TV genre: Why is television absent from the actual political comedy production in Colombia?

Contexts to making satire in Colombia: In your opinion, which are the biggest political, economic, and cultural constraints to political comedy in Colombia?

Satire role for civic purposes: What do you think is the role that political humor plays in enhancing the Colombians literacy and engagement with the politics?

Satire as a political information source: How do you believe satirical contents may cause cynical views of the politics among Colombians?

Such questions served as topic guides for broader discussions, which lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. After every question, the interviews focused on specific questions having to do with the profession and expertise of the interviewees. All the interviews were conducted over a period of three weeks, between the 27th of February and the 17th of March 2016, and were conducted face-to-face upon agreement between the researcher and the participants¹⁴. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, tape-recorded and transcribed for the analytical purposes of this research.

Coding and Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, all responses were coded and arranged in a systematic order (Saldaña, 2013:9) according to the analytical and descriptive categories and subcategories in discussion, which were in the case of the absence of political comedy on

Colombian television: censorship, self-censorship, satire as a dangerous genre, Jaime Garzón's death factor, political and economic constraints, power structures and relations within media, the outburst of the satirical genre in other means of communication, talent and the lack of it, ratings, and costs. These were subcategories present in all the answers, some with more stress than the others according to the professional background of the interviewees.

Another two subcategories emerged during interviewing and coding processes: the relevance of the soap genre of *telenovelas* (Rincón, 2016), which played an important role in sustaining comedy on Colombian TV, and the lack of opportunities for satire on TV based on the unwillingness of the media executives and decision-makers to make it happen (Quijano, 2016). Both subcategories enhanced the discussions with the participants who were interviewed after Ómar Rincón and Fernando Quijano, the firsts interviewees pointing out the topics. Also, in-depth inspection of all the transcriptions allowed this research to find patterns within the answers, to appreciate the narrative and critical values of some of them, to corroborate the reliability of the answers with the categories (Silverman, 1996-2003:286), and to make discursive findings like the '*good cynicism*' perspective among interviewees who appreciate the critical inputs satire gives to the audiences. Also, the category of the civic potentials fostered by political comedy was coded through the multiple issues of informative, entertaining, democratic, and cynical characteristics of political comedy in Colombia.

That exhaustive examination of the answers helped the contextualization part of this thesis to be supported by anecdotes, the recollection of events, and sociological and behavioral attitudes of the Colombians. This was important because many of the interviewees had first hand experiences and colorful answers, rhetorically nourishing the thesis. As a manner of example, such anecdotal explorations within the data allowed this research to find peculiar and descriptive answers like the one given by the cartoonist Julio César González '*Matador*' (2016), about the Colombian society's satirical nature:

Immediate and short-lasting scandals prevail in the news because everyday we have a new one. The Colombian reboots himself every morning, which makes this country a paradise for satire. It is perpetual maelstrom. I, as a political cartoonist, could die of hunger and tedium in Sweden. Colombia is a country in which everything is critical, but nothing serious. ('*Matador*', 2016)

The interviews with Sergio Valencia (2016), Ómar Rincón (2016), Juan Esteban Sampedro (2016), and Diego Mazorra (2016) were selected apart to serve as main references through the analytical process, especially after considering their fields of expertise, and their conceptual and critical stances about the topics of discussion[†].

Limitations

Andrew Sayer (2000:21) explained that the patterns and contingent relations emerging from the interviewees' answers are unlikely to be 'generalizable' to other contexts. Thus, the scope of this thesis is only circumscribed to the satirical, political and media realms of the Colombian society, and the findings do not suppose any universal truth about media production, civic culture approaches, satirical formats, etc. Since this research bases the contextual and genre analysis mostly (but not entirely) on the patterns and relevance of the answers given by the interviewees, the methods give room for small processes of introspection, which could lead to analytical processes built upon the 'simply looking for some good quotes to illustrate a previously determined position on some personal or political issue.' (Dingwall, 1997:52) Although, such pitfalls can make the research build its analysis and truth claim merely on the actors' understandings, ignoring that 'there are unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions and things [that] can happen to people regardless of their understandings,' as Sayer (2000:21) recalls. Moreover, such misinterpretations go hand in hand with a sort of '*anecdotalism* (...) [questioning] the validity of much qualitative research,' according to David Silverman (1996-2003:47). Nevertheless, the best controlling mechanism for such possible misunderstandings is the contextual analysis based on facts, events, surveys, studies, and the theoretical discussions of each of the categories emerging from the data collection and the coding.

Finally it is important to acknowledge a language limitation. Since the researcher's mother tongue is Spanish, the contextual literature used in the analysis, and all the interviews were conducted in this language, it is conceivable that the intended meanings of some interviewees' responses could have been lost in translation.

[†] Since the transcriptions of the interviews are in Spanish and the coding of all the interviews' answers are in *Excel* spreadsheets that could add over 100 pages to this thesis, they would not be inserted as appendixes.

ANALYSIS

This part of the research intends to explore the reasons why there is no political comedy on Colombian TV. Through 33 elite interviews with people involved in the making of satire in the country, this chapter looks for answers concerning the TV production context, the way satire does not seem to be fitting the current successful business models in Colombian TV, and the civic potentials TV political comedy can add to the country's democracy.

The 'Garzón Factor'

As mentioned in the introductory part, the biggest referent old and young generations of Colombians have in terms of satire is Jaime Garzón, a political comedian shot to death in 1999. Since that time, no other person has followed in his footsteps on TV. Garzón's prominence can be traced back to the answers given by all the 33 participants of this research, who unanimously highlighted that he 'set a very high standard of cynicism and satirical sharpness on TV, very difficult to match in Colombia,' as the founder and director of the political news website *La Silla Vacía*, Juanita León (2016), explained. It is precisely that legacy that sustains Garzón's aura as a martyr of comedy, which has not faded over time for two main reasons: he became very popular thanks to his very critical and unique mockery towards the all the structural powers, and secondly there is a surviving notion among the publics that he was killed because of his sharpness and criticism.

Garzón's assassination became a popular and accepted explanation for the production of satire absence in discussion, particularly among Colombian citizens who see a correlation between the unfortunate event and a subsequent fear of being killed among satirists. Nonetheless, and as a sort of finding in the research, things are more complicated than that, or at least they point to a different direction.

All 33 interviewees agreed that Garzón was not killed because of his work as a comedian. Even though the causes and the authorship of the murder are still under investigation, the case has taken a course that leads towards a revengeful act from paramilitary groups, because of Garzón's role as ransom negotiator of the kidnappings perpetrated by the leftist guerrillas. In spite of those issues, which belong to a criminal investigation debated in the media and political spheres year after year since his killing, it is also true that Garzón's prestige had an exponential growth after his assassination, which does

not mean it did not exist before. This can be supported by the fact that the productions he was part of were not the biggest and most consumed by the audiences.

For instance, Eduardo Arias (2016), a famous satirist who worked with Garzón in both of his main TV satirical shows [*Zoociedad*, and *Quac*], said that people sometimes make the wrong statement that television humor died with Jaime Garzón, ‘but two years before he died, he had no program anymore, just a small section in a newscast [*CM&*] in which he played *Heriberto de la Calle*, a shoeshiner who polished the politicians’ shoes.’ Even more, Alexandra Montoya (2016), a journalist who impersonates politician’s voices on the satirical radio show *La Luciérnaga* [The Firefly]; and Jorge Alfredo Vargas (2016), prestigious TV journalist, and director of *Blu Radio*’s satirical show *Voz Populi*; remembered that despite the high viewership of Garzón’s programs within a particular niche group, they never beat their competitor’s ratings [*Locos Videos*], a funny homemade videos show.

According to other interviewees, Garzón’s humor was not the preferred by many people in the country, as Vladimir Flórez ‘*Vladdo*’ (2016), the most consumed cartoonist among opinion leaders in the country¹⁵, also recalls: ‘there were people who believed Garzón’s humor was just silly, at the same time some of us found it hilarious.’

Such perceptions do not refute the fact that Garzón was a superstar, nor demerit in any sense his job or his contents, massively watched year after year with nostalgia and grandeur. They are not explanations or justifications for his killing either, not by a long chalk. They constitute a very relevant background to challenge the popular interpretation of his death as the biggest barrier to satirical production on TV, since it is difficult to find a connection between Garzón’s acid and humoristic comments and the hypotheses of satire-making dangerousness in Colombia, especially taking into account that Jaime Garzón did not receive threats because of his job as a comedian, not even when he was in his prime.

However, the interpretations of Garzón’s murder as a cause for the lack of satire on TV are not rootless or simply popular assumptions without historical evidence. They are commonsensical connections between the violent history of the country and the TV political humor absence in question. In other words, they reflect what Sergio Valencia (2016), a politician and former member of *Tola y Maruja* satirical show; and Antonio Caballero (2016),

writer and cartoonist at *Revista Semana*, added on the topic: ‘In Colombia it is not dangerous to do comedy. In Colombia everything is dangerous.’

According to this, Garzón’s assassination can be seen as an outcome of a violent context which ‘was dangerous to live in, despite the profession of the person. Obviously a person who mocks the powers is more vulnerable, but Jaime Garzón is the only comedian who has died in this tragic way,’ said Juan Esteban Sampedro (2016), general director of Entertainment at *Caracol TV*. In this regard, the absence of satire on Colombian TV has its roots in other soils, which will be explored below, distinct from Garzón’s murder.

Censorship

As the ‘Garzón Factor’ lacks the strength to explain the absence of political comedy on Colombian TV, other reasons come into play, such as censorship and self-censorship to media contents [not only on TV] described by the elite participants of this research. Nonetheless, an interesting but complex finding emerged from the answers of 22 out of the 33 elite interviewees: there is no censorship in Colombia. Yet, in their understanding, censorship is represented by bans and restrictive guidelines coming from authorities, powerful agents, institutions, or media owners.

For instance, Daniel Samper-Pizano (2016), a prestigious journalist who wrote satirical columns at *El Tiempo* for over 50 years, said that in Colombia there is ‘total freedom, (...) we no longer have censors like in Laureano Gómez’s or Gustavo Rojas-Pinilla’s times - political regimes in the 1950s.’ Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca (2016), Andrea Gómez (2016), and Aldo Julián Ocampo (2016), director and cast members on *El Tren de la Tarde* [satirical radio show at *RCN Radio*] understood censorship with similar points of view, commenting that they couldn’t recall any personal experiences with censorship in Colombia. ‘In none of the companies I have worked for, they have censored me,’ added Ocampo.

Despite these particular and formalistic ways of comprehending the existence of censorship, which reflect no current censorial policies in Colombia, some other interviewees recalled previous attempts to ban satirical contents in the media. This is the case of Crisanto Vargas ‘*Vargasvil*’ (2016), actor, comedian and politician impersonator, who recalled that in the 1980s, when he started imitating the President Belisario Betancur’s voice on his radio show *El Manicomio de Vargasvil*, a message from the Ministry of Communications was sent

to the radio station saying that ‘we could not mock him or any of the Presidents.’ A more recent example of attempted censorship is the one mentioned by the comedian and cast member of *La Luciérnaga*, Óscar Monsalve ‘*Risaloca*’ (2016), who said that some years ago the radio company he works for detected a bill passing through the first stages of parliamentary debates in Congress, which was looking to restrict the impersonations and parodies of politicians. ‘If *Caracol Radio* did not react quickly, by exposing on the different media that covert process, we would be talking about an existing censorship,’ he added.

These ban examples admit that despite censorship attempts in the past, nowadays there are no reported guidelines, nor legal and formal restrictions on the production of political comedy in the country. Yet, these events do not support the absence of other censorship mechanisms, which are more oblique than a systematic policy of content restriction. In other words, ‘in Colombia there is no official press censorship. Pressures? Yes,’ as the famous writer and cartoonist Antonio Caballero (2016) pointed out.

The ‘Other’ Censorship

As Caballero mentioned, and even though it can be said ‘in Colombia censorship does not exist’ in the formalistic way many of the participants understood it, censorship does not only appear with the outfit of governmental decisions or orders from the bosses. Censorship also shows up as subtle comments, suggestions, moralistic standards, editorial filters, the lack of opportunities, different priorities, and conflict of interests within the power spheres of a society (Corner, 2011). According to this list of restrictive patterns, most of the interviewees had something to say about how such elements, present in other media outlets, can explain the absence of satirical contents on Colombian TV.

According to Esteban París (2016), in-house political cartoonist at *El Colombiano*, the editorial position of the medium is one of the first filters working as a type of censorship. ‘They [media companies] have editorial committees that, in terms of political cartoons, select the ones better-suited to their interests. The rest, if they do not fit the standards, are thrown in the bin.’ This was confirmed by Fernando Quijano (2016), *La República* newspaper’s general director, who said that since 1992, when he started working for newspapers, he witnessed ‘censorships over cartoons, because sometimes they are very harsh. In all the papers I have worked with, they make this control.’ Another confirming statement of the existence of censorship in the making of satire in Colombia is the one given by Gonzalo Valderrama

(2016), one of the stand-up comedy pioneers in Colombia, who recalled that when he worked at the stand-up show *Comediantes de la Noche*, aired a few years ago on *RCN TV*, he could not tell a joke about how in some restaurants only serve *Postobón* sodas, ‘because *Postobón* is a company owned by the same corporation controlling *RCN*.’

Thus, these unofficial forms of censorship disclose a threatening mechanism for the satirical production in Colombia, which goes beyond formalities and is directly related to the media ownership in the country, a problem addressed in the following segment.

Media Ownership: A Very Closed TV Ecosystem

Without counting newspapers, magazines, radio, and the main news websites [which also belong to corporate holdings], the Colombian TV ecosystem is a duopoly with no opponents in sight: *Caracol TV* and *RCN Televisión* have a dominant position among all Colombian TV sets. The former belongs to *Valórem (Grupo Santo Domingo)*, and the latter to *Organización Ardila Lülle*, two of the biggest conglomerates with lots of investments in almost every field of the country’s economy. Public service channels, after the spectrum opening back in 1990s, lost all their muscle and influence in Colombia and lagged behind the rest; and the cable stations survive with few audiences, low budgets, and narrow penetration. Beyond the two main privately-owned TV companies, the rest of the channels hardly make their way up to the top in the rating surveys and audience measurements (RatingColombia.com, 2016).

With this panorama, it can be said that Colombian TV is a very ‘closed industry, with two companies producing almost everything, hence political humor has found other outlets to keep circulating its contents,’ as resumed by the media expert Diego Mazorra (2016), professor of political communication at *Universidad Externado de Colombia*. Moreover, and in the way 17 participants of this research referred, the absence of satirical spaces on TV can be attributed to the lack of opportunities that such restrictive TV production system sets in the Colombian context.

One of those interviewees is Carlos Mario Gallego ‘Mico’ (2016), a respected cartoonist and political comedian who founded and still produces *Tola y Maruja*’s satirical show and a weekly column for *El Espectador*. He pointed out that ‘one of the biggest barriers is the lack of opportunities that the TV context gives to satire.’ *La Luciérnaga*’s cast member Alexandra Montoya (2016) reinforced that ownership issue by mentioning that, ‘the conflict

of interests among the powers does not give too much chance to do many things.’ In the same direction was the opinion of *El Tren de la Tarde* satirical radio show director, Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca (2016), who clearly mentioned that the main obstacle satire faces on TV is that ‘media companies in Colombia are part of bigger conglomerates. They belong to people from the industries, and business associations, so we would never say anything about the banks, agro industries, oil companies, etc. We have to be careful about not bothering the interests of the owner of the media company we work for.’¹⁶

Pascual Gaviria (2016), *Universo Centro* newspaper’s editor and cast member of the satirical radio show *La Luciérnaga*, added that all the media companies ‘end up defending their owners’ interests;’ a situation aligned with the description given by the famous comedian and theater businessman Germán Carvajal (2016), who put it as simple as ‘the TV stations do not care about humor since TV became more private than public. The satirical shows disappeared just after the birthday of private TV channels.’

What all these comments have in common is the clear and decisive role that the media ownership landscape of the country plays in television production. In that regard, the media ownership problem is brought into line with Baker’s (2007:41) ideas of the pressures that journalists and comedians receive from the corporations and the economic powers in society, which in the end are real representations of the *structural powers*, discussed by John Corner (2011) in the theoretical part of this research. The mechanisms used by such powers surpass the simplicity of a formal ban, and appear as trouble and collision avoidances among them, and through decisions like the unwillingness to produce humor mocking on themselves, or by simply placing other kinds of contents as the most important [profitable] to their interests. Moreover, such decisions leave little room to contents that could potentially criticize the means, forms, and people involved in political and economic relations, hence turning those powerful scenarios into barriers and constraints to the freedom of expression in Colombia (Griffin, 1994). In plain words: journalists and satirists are inclined to avoid biting the hand that feeds them, a pragmatic decision to prevent distress with their employers; an example of the self-censorship that will be presented in the following segments.

These strong ties between the political and the economic suggest that TV companies prefer not to step on politicians’ toes to avoid the undermining of both structural powers and interests. That trouble-avoidance behavior was resumed by Germán Carvajal (2016) as the

‘*hagámonos pasito*’¹⁷ attitude between powers: ‘I do not criticize you through humor, and you do not use the State’s apparatus to *f...* my TV stations, my companies, etc.’ Along the line of Carvajal’s words, these inconvenient alliances among powers were described by satire producers like Eduardo Arias, Alexandra Montoya, Jairo Chaparro, and Gustavo Gómez (2016); the latter leaving this reflection: ‘In political comedy one cannot be too close to the powers. One has to keep a safe distance from them.’

To add another ingredient to the full picture of the unofficial forms of censorship circulating in the media context in Colombia, the ‘friendly phone-call’ from the powers targeted by the political comedians shows up as one of the most threatening barriers.

The Uncomfortable Call

This kind of censorship does not require a specific ban or forbiddance, neither a direct pressure from the owners of the media. It appears as an innocent comment, a reminder, or even a joke about the contents produced by satirists. And that is exactly what happened to interviewees like Hernán Peláez, a media personality that founded in 1992 the long-running show *La Luciérnaga* and who is perceived by many interviewees as the ‘father’ of the satirical genre on Colombian radio¹⁸. Peláez (2016) recalled that occasionally he received phone calls from influential people saying ‘look, do not talk that much about this or that. Obviously, our reaction to those calls was doing the opposite.’ Pascual Gaviria (2016), who also worked with Peláez in the same radio show, added that once during Luis Alfredo Ramos’ period as Antioquia’s governor (2008-2011), a high executive at *Caracol Radio*, approached him saying that in the Governor’s office were worried about the treatment he was receiving in the news coverage of the network. Victim of the same kind of pressures, Julio César González ‘*Matador*’ (2016) –the most popular political cartoonist nowadays, said that he received calls from people in the electoral campaign of the mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, trying delicately to instruct him about the beneficial aspects of the candidate’s first period in office.

Such examples, coming from the radio and printed parts of the Colombian ‘satire universe’, exemplify a pressuring trend that also lives within the TV productions of political comedy. For instance, *Caracol TV*’s Entertainment director, Juan Esteban Sampedro, acknowledged that while he was involved in TV shows like *La Banda Francotiradores* (RCN-1999), or *NP&* (*Caracol TV*-2009), people called to the channels’ executives to complain about contents that raised the hackles within powerful spheres. ‘After those calls, nothing

changed, but the calls existed,' clarified Sampedro (2016). And Jorge Alfredo Vargas (2016), who precisely was *NP&*'s director, added that politicians called asking why they were frequently targeted by the satirists of the program.

Now, all these kinds of pressures, which appear as *naïve* questionings behind a friendly dialogical *façade*, usually wrap censoring intentions very connected to the elite self-perception of being influential, not only through formal mechanisms of censorship or authoritarian orders, but also using discursivity and soft power mechanisms. Those sorts of behaviors reveal that Corner's (2011) *discursive power* is not exclusive to the citizens, or the comedians in this particular case, but also that it is used by the powerful and that it can change framings and media agendas by using rhetorical and informal tools appearing to be empty of repressive potential. Moreover, those phone calls represent widespread acknowledgment among the power spheres about the destabilizer and the potential to ridicule, as Amber Day explained in *Satire and Dissent* (2011). But, more interesting is that such potential is not only perceived as a negative mechanism that undermines the reputation and the legitimacy of the elites, but also as a flexible tool that can be used to foster politicians popularity. For instance, those were the cases described by interviewees like the satirical radio producers Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca, Gustavo Gómez, and Jairo Chaparro (2016) who explained that some of those phone calls come from politicians wanting to be targeted in their satirical shows. Yes, some of them shamelessly call and almost beg to be impersonated, to the point 'they are willing to pay for it,' as César Augusto Betancur '*Pucheros*' (2016), the most famous humor and drama scriptwriter nowadays, pointed out.

That sort of popularity-intended request, which to the naked eye looks like a good intention to help the satirical production, constitutes a veiled mechanism to manipulate satirical contents and represents what in colloquial terms is *a wolf in sheep's clothing*.

The Commercial Bans

Another means of censorship originates in the commercial, and advertising departments of the TV channels. This sort of restrictive mechanism for political comedy programs is represented by reputation and marketing worries from the sponsors, which embody the financial support for all private productions on Colombian TV. For instance, there have been cases in which companies prefer to set aside satirical contents because they target politicians, hence the sponsors believe their brands could be associated with criticism towards the establishment –

'fights' they rather prefer not to be related to. This commercial behavior was reported by 22 of the 33 interviewees, who within their answers catalogued the 'sponsors' bans' as one of the biggest barriers for satire on TV.

One of the co-founders (who prefers to remain anonymous) of the mainstream fake news website *Actualidad Panamericana* (2016), explained that because of the market rules many advertisers show their 'conservative' side and their overprotection of their brands, as if they were 'controlling parents of a virgin teenager'. *La República's* general director, Fernando Quijano (2016) went further by saying that he dubiously sees brands like *Grupo Éxito* (supermarkets), *Claro* (telecommunications), or *Avianca* (airline) advertising in anything that will make political humor or satire on TV, in the way those companies mostly prefer to be associated to less controversial contents.

This kind of prior restraint coming from the corporative world denotes prevention towards satirical contents, but there have also been cases in which those same avoiding decisions were taken after the publications of satires and parodies involving their brands. In this regard, Eduardo Arias (2016), a prolific satirist since the 1980s in print media and TV shows, remembers that his purely satirical magazine *Larrivista* (2008) closed after it ran off sponsors, and recalled that years before that endeavor, he published in *Semana* a 'graphic parody of the *World Trade Center* attacks in New York with one of the towers falling as an *Absolut* vodka bottle... They removed their advertising from *Semana* for over a year.' The same happened to 'Vladdo', who years ago was recriminated by commercial executives of *Semana* who lost their *Coca-Cola's* and *American Airlines'* accounts, after these firms were parodied in some of his cartoons.

On TV the situation is not very different. *La Luciérnaga's* director Gustavo Gómez and the cartoonist 'Matador' mentioned, separately, that they tried to keep alive their satirical TV programs at *Canal 1*, but since it is a public channel the funding they received from advertising was very low and that factor economically asphyxiated their shows. More recently, *NP&* suffered from the avoidance of commercial clients that did not want to be there. "They did not, because they said 'you are mocking the government and I do not support what I do not agree with,'" mentioned Diego Briceño (2016), content director at *Caracol TV* and cast member of *Blue Radio's* satirical show *Voz Populi*. This research participants like Esteban París, Juan Esteban Sampedro, Germán Carvajal, Antonio Caballero, and Hernando

Paniagua (2016) have all similar perceptions to how the commercial censorship became a relevant barrier to the satire production on Colombian TV. But, what are the brands actually afraid of? The best explanation resides on the fact that political comedy has intrinsic characters of rejection to the pomp, decorum, and authority of the adversaries represented by the elites, as it was explained by Pinker (1998). Thus, the satirical underscoring of the powers' weak points transforms itself into a threatening factor for the brands, which support all their popularity on their image and reputation, rather than on their own products.

Nonetheless, this sort of commercial censorship and satirism-avoidance way of thinking is easily arguable if the satirical radio success is pondered. The tremendous ratings and financial successes of the late afternoon satirical radio shows can only be explained by the fact that they have a lot of advertisements, and that they are the best-seller spots within their broadcasting networks. This explanation can also be found within the answers of the radio producers Jairo Chaparro and Hernán Peláez (2016), who remembered that, for example, the oil company *Pacific Rubiales* insisted on placing its ads on *La Luciérnaga*, despite the fact that the comedians criticized every day what the company was wrongdoing.

Therefore, the analysis about the commercial censorship to satire becomes more problematic than corporative avoidance of political humoristic contents, because it is difficult to understand why advertising behavior is the main reason behind the absence of satire on TV, but the same cannot be said for satire on the radio. A possible theoretical rationalization can be that the big capitalist corporations in the country have not managed to appropriate the 'cool' signs and symbols that satire provides on TV or print media, but they have done it with the radio based ones. This discussion is framed by the notions of 'cool capitalism' (McGuigan, 2009), which establish that capitalism has been able to adopt the criticism and disaffection to itself, in order to transform it into affection by spreading the 'cool' notion of things, 'thereby contributing to the reproduction of the system and reducing opposition to it' (McGuigan, 2008:309). In this regard, and according to the elite interviewees' opinions, corporations may have adopted satirical spaces of radio as a good marketing platform that only appeals to the good will of the programs, rather than to the satirical opinions infused in the daily news.

Also, it can be said that such advertising patterns seen on TV and print political comedy, show fiercer potential of elite defiance, and a very critical capability that can be

translated by the audiences as strong discursive power against structural powers, hence undermining people's associations of symbols characterizing the brands. In other words, 'cool capitalism' is more comfortable with the essence of opposition derived from radio contents, but still prefers to avoid or has not found the way to make harsher criticisms on TV and the press, a neutralizing weapon for its own success. Thus, it will be a very interesting topic for further research to find the way the image [logos, symbols, signs] of the companies' advertising in Colombian media can be more negatively affected by appearing on TV than, for instance, on satirical radio programs.

Self-censorship

After exploring the formal and tacit forms of censorship that, to some extent, could explain the lack of satirical-making processes on Colombian TV, a short and extra piece of analysis appears as a result of the previously explained constraints: self-censorship. The self-censorship in Colombia does not emerge as an intended mechanism without reasons in sight. This human behavior, present in the satires of some of the interviewees, is stimulated by external power restraints, like the strong connections between structural powers described above. This is backed, for instance, by *La Luciérnaga's* cast member Pascual Gaviria, and the cartoonist 'Matador' (2016) who believe that there are 'fears of confronting certain economic and State powers' and that such powers 'sometimes are hidden to the citizens' sight, but they are there, very stuck to each other', as they respectively mentioned.

These discrete behaviors were better explained by *El Tren de la Tarde's* satirical radio show director Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca (2016), who said that 'when you know whom you work for, you follow the rules of the company,' referring to the self-discipline he inflicted to his political jokes on *RCN Radio*, in order to avoid messing with the corporation's interests. And such pragmatist acknowledgments of the real capabilities of the structural powers in the Colombian context are not always related to the economical forms of censorship, but to a survival instinct as well. For instance, Hernando Paniagua, managing editor at *Univision* and former cast-member at *Blu Radio's* satirical show *Voz Populi*, pointed out that in a country with the violent background like that of Colombia, making fun of certain illegal armed forces [guerrillas, paramilitaries, or drug cartels] can become dangerous, thus a perfect motive for self-censorship: 'I am not one of those that put their lives at risk,' concluded Paniagua (2016).

Now, besides the power-rooted constraints to satire, self-censorship also appears when a morality filter is placed inside the political comedy production process. And this is related to the impact of the jokes and ironies among the audiences, the contexts, the settings, the competences of their deliveries, the identity of the teller, the intention they bring, etc. Those meanings of what the comic is or not, make humor a very ‘volatile substance,’ explaining why ‘what is funny at one time is not funny at another’ (Pickering and Lockyer, 2009:11).

In this regard, the satirist Daniel Samper-Pizano (2016) explained that ‘in political humor not everything can be said everywhere. Nowadays, you cannot tell a joke about the disabled, unless you are also disabled.’ This ethical and double standard towards humor, which describes that Colombian satire tends to overpass the boundaries of the politically correct, was acknowledged by nearly all of the participants in this research. For instance, Alexandra Montoya, Juan Esteban Sampedro, ‘*Pucheros*’, ‘*Vargasvil*’, ‘*Matador*’, and Esteban París (2016) agreed that currently it is more complicated to make fun of physical appearances, or taboo topics like sex or god, because they raise a lot of indignation from the public. That factor also functions as a self-censorship mechanism among many of the satirical content producers in Colombia, despite the mediums they use to mock about politics.

But, can those joke-quality measurements explain that the absence of satirical shows on Colombian television is driven by self-censorship? This is doubtful. The offensiveness of a joke belongs more to the realm of the social standards and principles of the societies and their contexts, rather than to the TV production structures. This can be noticed in the fact that, through social networks and behind nicknames, people still transgress and produce political and taboo-challenging contents, without any kind of visible self-censorship process.

Did Radio and the Internet Fill the Gap?

After the considerations about the censorship and self-censorship affecting the production of political comedy in Colombia, this analysis explores other explanations for such absence; reasons that are unrelated to constraints, but because of their relevance they could have affected the comedy production in the country, like for instance a migration of audiences and media preferences to other outlets different to television.

Consequently, it is important to note how the role of satirical radio has become decisive for the survival of the genre over the last decades with few TV productions. To

support this, *La Luciérnaga*'s satirical radio show director Gustavo Gómez (2016) said: 'a minute of good satire from *La Luciérnaga* can be more useful to influence a person's judgment, than 25 press articles.' This kind of relevance given to the satirism made on radio is not simply an assumption coming from a person involved in the production of a specific program, but is backed by the overwhelming numbers of audience consumption habits. For example, according to the last *Estudio Continuo de Audiencia Radial*¹⁹ (ECAR, 2016-1), out of the 1,355,899 radio listeners in the whole country who turn on their receivers from 5 to 8 p.m. on weekdays, 623,491 listen to *Caracol Radio* (with 46% of share), 238,825 to *Blu Radio* (with 17.6% of share), and 173,186 to *RCN Radio* (with 12.8% of share). This means that about 1,035,502 Colombians (76.4% of the national radio listeners), in a population of 48 million, are connected to political comedy radio shows on any given afternoon²⁰; with the interesting fact that during this specific late afternoon period, on those three national radio stations, the content is strictly and uniquely satirical.

Having this panorama, radio companies found a great opportunity to target the masses of Colombian workers returning home with soft informative products, taking into account that depending on the urban area, such trips can last hours. But, why are those radio programs so successful? Because all follow the same formula established 24 years ago by *La Luciérnaga*, a show that found in the fusion of hard news, opinion, analysis, music, and humor, the best way to inform and entertain, at the same time ridiculing politicians and the structural powers in Colombia. Basically the recipe consists in the use of humor to make the listeners swallow the bait of hard news, a fishhook avoided by current affairs programs and political debates on radio, because of its formal and serious character. In this regard, all the interviewees referenced *La Luciérnaga* of *Caracol Radio* as groundbreaking for political humor in Colombia. Its creator Hernán Peláez (in Peláez and Rincón, 2012:12-13) described it as a program that uses 'irony, sarcasm, laughter and music, which work as *Vaseline* [of hard news], to get into the heart of news and their main characters.' Alike *La Luciérnaga*, *Blu Radio* does something very similar with *Voz Populi*, a recent bid to compete for the same audience; and *RCN Radio* has *El Tren de la Tarde*.

Their success can be explained by the words of professor Laura Basu (2014:101), who recognizes that features of satire as 'irony, innuendo, burlesque, parody, allegory, mimicry, exaggeration; are devices of indirection which make the originally unacceptable impulse palatable.' And that kind of explanation goes along with what Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca

(2016), director of *El Tren de la Tarde*, thinks about the satirical boom on radio: ‘In Colombia there is always an issue, a problem, thus a justification for humor.’ Hernán Peláez agrees with him on the fact that radio satire is a successful infotainment formula, and gives it a more reflective meaning, rather than a business-framed one:

Humor is an effective way of soothing the harshness of life. [Political] reality is cruel, dramatic... In radio, I cannot be always spreading pessimism... It does not mean we ignore the existing bad things; we give the listeners real stuff, but we try every person to understand that life is about crying and smiling. People attend funerals to drink tea, to talk and meet others, not to say prayers for the dead... What I mean is that we [the satire radio shows producers] go after audiences that can get along with a tough reality like the Colombian, and laugh of it. (Peláez, 2016)

Hence, and despite the fact that satire performed on radio stations has received little scholarly attention (Punnett, 2015), this research can say that radio became during the last three decades the only mainstream medium Colombians have had to receive hard information, politically related, with humoristic framings. It has played a role that has benefited itself from the absence on television, and has found the niche of satire consumers that have not found these kinds of contents in other media, only menaced (or reinforced) in some way by the outburst of online based political comedy, also due to be discussed here.

New Media Content: Between Brilliance and Sewers

Diego Briceño (2016), cast member at *Blue Radio*’s satirical show *Voz Populi* says, ‘Colombia might be the biggest humor meme producer on earth... We learned by force to mock ourselves.’ Beyond the hyperbole, the spirit of that answer can be traced back to a factual phenomena stimulated by the upsurge of social media. Thereafter, the boom can be analyzed from two perspectives: the uses citizens give to the tools, and the quality of the content. Related to the first, there is a connotation about power and access to social media that is represented on the Internet’s potential to provide ‘the means to turn the mass into a public through universal availability of the knowledge and participation that marks the informed citizen,’ as suggested by Richard Butsch (2008:143). Moreover, that access has broadened the Colombians opportunities for democratic engagement citizenship and activism. Peter Dahlgren (2009:199) summed it up as way of empowerment ‘that can follow from net activism supports newer forms of citizen identity.’

Such access does not remain static as a self-explanatory parameter of the boom of online satirical content, though. It entails, as mentioned in the theory part, a *discursive power* character (Street, 2001; Corner, 2011). Meanwhile, online networks like *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Instagram*, plus instant messaging platforms like *Whatsapp*, allow the citizens not only to produce immediate and unrestricted satirical contents, but also to spread them extensively: ‘user-circulated content,’ in terms of Jenkins et al. (2013). John Street (1997:11-12) even argues that those sort of online reactions from the audiences reflect their ‘passionate involvement’ in popular culture, which also acquires political significance. And that popular culture implicitly has the ‘ability to articulate the feelings and passions that drive politics’ in the way individuals ‘engage with politics’. That idea is what the expert Ómar Rincón backed:

Nowadays, the citizen has more narrative resources. We leave in ‘content-based’ societies and keep emphasizing on contents rather than on formats. In the way more formats are released, more political humor will be made. That is exactly what the online memes did: they freed the capabilities of making humor and people adopted them to be used at any time. (Rincón, 2016)

Such benefits were also mentioned by interviewees like León, García, and Díaz-Salamanca (2016); who also praised the *infotaining* potential of tweets, podcasts and satirical online-based contents like the produced by *El Pequeño Tirano* (1999), and *Internautismo Crónico*.

The second point of view has to do with the content of that satire. And it is, according to some interviewees, the most problematic one. Whilst all the participants appreciate a tremendous civic and democratic potential of interactive tools and social networks (París, 2016), some others agree upon the presence of a quality standard that only covers a very small part of the online humor production. Even more, certain interviewees, regardless their backgrounds (comedians, cartoonists, script-writers, producers, and media executives), coincide on the same adjectives: trash, sewer.

The satirist ‘Mico’ (2016) said, ‘I like *Twitter* and there is a lot of humor on it. It is an example of what freedom of expression is. Nonetheless it is also full of trash and stupidity.’ Social networks produce good things as well as lot of ‘rubbish’, says the cartoonist ‘Vladdo’ (2016). The quality-based evaluation of online satire continues: ‘in social networks a lot of

uncensored things are said. (...) Online satire production became a monster that consumes itself very quickly, allowing people to make the contents without quality and rigor,' said the comedian Germán Carvajal (2016) in the same direction of the scriptwriter '*Pucheros*' (2016), who reiterated that despite the existence of users producing funny things, 'there is a bulk of trashy contents coming from all kinds of individuals, whether they are real or posting through nicknames.' Daniel Samper-Ospina (2016), whose satirical weekly column is the second most read among opinion leaders²¹, hopped on the same 'quality curators wagon' by saying 'social networks are sewers.'

As seen, social networks' satirical content generates very bad sentiments, especially from professional comedians and people in the business of political humor. Nonetheless, the lack of quality of the internet-based satire targeted by the mentioned participants, excludes their own contents uploaded to such online platforms; an aspect that leans mostly towards a professionalization of the political humor, a refinement harder to find in massive tweets, posts and memes; more than towards a discredit of the act of tweeting or uploading satirical stuff. And, this common reaction towards online satirism is interesting because it shows how those individuals, that make professional satire, feel with the upsurge of amateur satirical contents, focusing more on the quality than on the civic potentials. It is also interesting, since it sets a perspective almost always ignored by the scholarship of online satire, which most of the time worries about the contexts, agents targeted, and civic potentials of online comedy, but hardly on its *humoristic* quality (Tay, 2012).

But, besides the quality and civic potential of satire on radio and online platforms, could have they replaced TV as a medium to mock politicians and the powers in Colombia? The cartoonist '*Matador*' (2016), gave a good sum-up answer saying 'today, there is no need to go and search for satire on TV, radio or in the press. People already make lots of political comedy sketches online. The problem is that most that humor is very bad, and what ends up mediating in that situation is the real talent and the political content it has. But what is also true is that through all those social networks, blogs and messaging groups and chains, my cartoons can become the voice of many people, and that is a civic identity fostered through new media.'

Still, it can be stated that the substantial impact of radio and online-amateur political comedy has progressed within the last decades in Colombia, and that it has become very

relevant for the survival of the genre as a watchdog of the political and the powers in the country, those phenomena do not explain by their own means the lack of satire on TV, neither they fulfill the expectations political comedy on TV has set in other societies. ‘Television has become the primary and unavoidable mean of political communication and information’, as Van Zoonen (2005:21) concluded her treaty on civic entertainment. This does not mean that other media expressions are not relevant for the public discussions, the political literacy and debates in the country, but they hardly gain the relevance TV contents reach among the audiences, nor lack of the nurturing civic potentials TV has achieved by becoming the main source of ‘political information, deliberation, evaluation, and popular engagement with politics,’ as explained by Gray, Jones, and Thompson (2009:6). And this is because, as Jones (2010:33) remembers, ‘television narratives brought politics vividly to life (and into their lives), to a place where citizens felt comfortable or emboldened enough to participate;’ a factor still to be proved within the Colombian radio and online satirical contexts.

Perhaps It Is a Matter of ‘Talent’

This category aims to identify reasons to explain the absence of satire on Colombian TV, and addresses the possibility of a lack of talent or ability among comedians, even though it ended up receiving unanimous answers from all the participants like ‘yes, there is a tremendous talent’, and ‘no, there is no lack of talent in any form.’

To support that, most of the interviewees brought satirical examples from the radio, the Internet, print media, TV joke tellers, scriptwriters, and a ‘humoristic nature’ of the Colombians. Many of them were even proud of Colombian humor, and remembered that the country has ‘the longest running TV sketch comedy show’²² in the world, which is *Sábados Felices*. Even more, many ended up saying that the online-based creativity explains how and why Colombia is a country full of satirical aptitudes²³. Nonetheless, a couple of interesting findings surfaced from the 33 answers. The first is related to a lack of expertise on TV satirism, and the other talks about the missing of a ‘superstar’ that breaks the mold.

The first hypothesis was brought up by scholars like Miguel García, director of the Democracy Observatory at *Universidad de Los Andes*; and Ómar Rincón, director of the Journalism Studies Center at the same university, who said that probably the Colombian TV production context cannot be compared with other countries’ like the American, Spanish, or Argentinean ones, in terms of looking for similar shows to *Saturday Night Live*, *Colbert*

Report, CQC, and Diego Capusotto's shows, because 'here we do not have that tradition. Our tradition is to watch joke tellers and soft parodies on *Sábados Felices*, and to watch *telenovelas*, not to have TV hosts commenting on politics or current affairs,' as stressed by Rincón (2016). García (2016) also believed that, for instance, '*Saturday Night Live* is a school of satirists we have never had in Colombia. We have a school of impersonators and comedians that have a niche on the radio, but on TV you need more than a funny voice.'

The second explanation continues on the track of 'there is ability among Colombian comedians and producers,' but understanding that to be successful on TV someone has to be very talented, almost a genius of satire. And that is what the *La Luciérnaga*'s cast member Pascual Gaviria (2016) added to the discussion: 'Perhaps Colombia is not lacking of talents, but a character that breaks the mold with the things he says, with his information and opinions. That person will force TV channels to care more about satire.'

'*Pucheros*' (2016), a prestigious comedian and satire scriptwriter, also said that 'those programs which are very popular in other countries have never been successful in Colombia,' and added that he remembers *Yo, José Gabriel* (1998), an attempt of having a late show in Colombian TV, but obviously it did not work well.

Maybe we have not found the right guy to do it. That person has to be a humorist able to follow a script, to improvise a monologue, to be very amusing, to host very good interviews, to have clever comments about politics... many things are needed. It is very hard to find a Letterman, a figure that is capable of doing many things, and do them well. ('*Pucheros*', 2016)

This description found an echo in the words of *Caracol TV*'s entertainment director, Juan Esteban Sampedro (2016), who explained that the successful satirical programs in other countries depend on one big host:

'Jaimes Garzones', or 'Salustianos Tapias' [Humberto Martínez-Salcedo] are not born very often. These types of characters that can lead a show with mental and conceptual clarity, with rigor, that know what they are saying, (...) need to be advantaged people, out of the ordinary, and those are not born every day. (Sampedro, 2016)²⁴

What is shown by this commonly shared typology of political comedian is that perhaps one of the causes for the absence of satire on Colombian TV is the challenge producers may have to find that ‘*super*’ person capable to run a show with the global standards of the genre, with exceptional skills exceeding that of an average comedian. Nonetheless, it also shows that the perception of talent for TV is exclusively based on the skills of a host like Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert, dismissing any other kind of satirical productions inspired on collective work intending to ridicule politicians or any other power in society. It is problematic, in a philosophical way, since in humor studies there have been three schools of thought (Billig, 2005)²⁵ that do not really subordinate the production of satire to any specific formula or talent. Hence, basing the explanation of the absence of satire on Colombian TV on the lack of a superstar constitutes an opinion based on the reflex in other’s mirrors, rather than on any particular recipe of successful satirism. The intentions of humor and laughter, as the theories explored, do not come with production specifications, thus with no particular requirements for the political comedians.

On the other hand, it is true that nowadays ‘the easiest place to see such beneficial political humour is on television programs like *The Daily Show*,’ as John Monrreal (2009:80) pointed out. Yet the ways of participating in televised political humor are not restricted to specific genres (Day, 2011). Even joke telling, drama parodies, and fiction-based programs have the potential to impulse the talents of the Colombian comedians, as all the participants in the beginning accepted their abundance.

Perhaps the ‘school missing’ theory and the ‘superstar absence’ can work as relaxed reasons for the lack of satire on TV, but they do not take into consideration the political humor potential of the talents the participants described as existing in Colombia. Michael Billig (2005:184) said ‘the world of humour is democratic, for it is not restricted only to those who possess a particular talent, background or status.’ Hence, the political comedy is not stuck to any particular expression of the genre; it only needs the will of making it happen, a reason belonging more to the realm of TV producers than to the satirists’ talent.

Ratings: The Subjacent Reason?

Ratings are more than simple numbers used for seeing how audiences like or dislike a program; they are part of a chain of events that affect the production of certain TV genres, shows, etc. That seems to be the case of satirical production in Colombia. Low viewership

generates low advertising; low advertising is traduced into budget deficits; low profitability cause programs cancellations. It happens everywhere, but in the Colombian context it becomes relevant since no satirical, political humoristic or even animated TV show survives to the date. Yet, if humor subsists through stand-up programs, game shows, and entertainment in general, why only the satirical ones do not? The political comedian ‘*Mico*’ (2016) believes that maybe ‘they do not have enough ratings... Apparently happier programs do better, those that do not question the powers that much.’

And ‘*Mico*’ could be right, considering that the most common explanation for the absence, given by many of the participants involved in the production of satire in Colombia: ‘It is because of the ratings’. Some recalled for instance, that the most recent rating flop was *NP&*’s one, a satirical latex puppet show broadcasted on *Caracol TV* canceled after its numbers went down. In addition to this, if low ratings are combined with high producing costs, the result is not other than the program’s cancelation. And that is what happened to *La Banda Francotiradores* (2000s), a satirical show with a very expensive roster, which ‘the owner of *RCN Television* maintained on air for years because he liked it, even though its ratings were falling,’ as ‘*Pucheros*’ (2016), one of its scriptwriters, remembered.

Then, if the ratings are big determinants of the non-existence of satirical shows on TV, seeing the bigger picture on the matter becomes relevant to find the causes of such absence. Since *Caracol TV* and *RCN TV* dominate TV programming in the country, they do not feel the threat of an outsider or a third party that pushes them to change the formula of producing TV, especially after they found that Colombian audiences prefer consuming reality shows and *telenovelas*, more than any other kind of production. In that regard, bidding to have a satirical show would depend on how good the ratings behave in front of the competitor’s bid, and if it is any of the mentioned successful TV genres, the result is a very guaranteed cancelation.

Jorge Alfredo Vargas (2016), director of *Blu Radio*’s satirical show *Voz Populi* and former head of *NP&*, said that Colombian TV unlike the other countries’, is more horizontal than vertical. That means that a program aired once a week does not engage the audiences the same way a program aired every day does. ‘That is why when we buy reality shows, instead of 20 episodes we buy 70, because the Colombian audience does not like programs aired once a week,’ explained *Caracol TV*’s contents director Diego Briceño (2016). And that is a major constraint for satirical shows: according to nowadays Colombians’ TV consumption habits, a

weekly show would not give the returns and profits a daily-based program would. Hence having a daily comedy show would require bigger budgets to compete in an illustrated niche market, which is far away from the interests of mainstream TV channels.

But there is also an explanation that resides more in the TV consumer realm than in the TV production one, according to some interviewees working on media. The interviewees comment that the Colombian viewer asks for more cultural, opinion, and satirical TV products, but when it is time to watch them, they do not. ‘When you make a satirical show with extraordinary standards of humor and magnificent contents, and the other channel has a more popular product, thus the first will tend to extinction, because the latter exterminates it,’ commented Juan Esteban Sampedro (2016). Gustavo Gómez (2016) added: ‘Colombian people request media products that they do not want to watch.’

Then, if ratings and costs were so widely accepted as constraints for the production of political comedy on TV, plus satirical programs would not work as daily entertainment because Colombians are not used to weekly shows, the result would be: there is no room for political comedy at all. And that is an argument pretty debatable because it attaches satire to the mainstream, to the market rules, and to merely entertaining purposes; ignoring the niche-based audiences, the public service capabilities, and the civic potentials that that sort of contents can bring to the society. That argument, however, only sees how Colombians consume entertainment, and ignores that TV is the biggest source of information in Colombia (Rojas and Mazorra, 2011:19), and that there has been an increase in humor-based content consumption within the last 10 years in the country (Rojas and Puig-i-Abril, 2009:110). Moreover, and besides their entertaining potential, satirical shows belong more to the analytical, factual and political world’s part of the spectrum, rather than to the merely amusing’, as will be explained in the last segment about the civic potentials of political shows in the Colombian context.

Ratings Vs. Civic Potential

Before continuing with the explorations of why there are no satirical TV shows in Colombia, and which are the potentials such may give to Colombian democracy, a relevant debate can be set before to contradict the rating-cost-based explanation discussed above. What all the opinions backing the ratings’ problem have in common is, as mentioned, an implicit assumption about how the viewership of satirical contents will only depend on how

entertaining they are, hence on a mainstream-based scale aligned with the market rules. Even more, the rating explanations end up dividing the audiences into two static categories: those that watch entertainment and those that watch news (which according to those TV production explanations will have other rating scales to be measured with).

However, Colombian citizens who look for information on current affairs and news on TV also like entertainment. And that is why such categorization coming from the rating-based explanations cannot explain the absence of satire properly, especially because the intellectual and civic potentials of political humor are being measured with an entertainment-based scale (hence rating-based), not through the lens of the informative quality such TV shows have.

In this regard, some caution is also needed, especially if the analysis leads to the understanding of satirical productions on TV as a potential unique source of information among the spectators. The information consumption processes are more complex than simply reaching knowledge about any political topic through one specific type of content, medium, rhetoric, and so on. ‘One does not consume one kind of TV, or one kind of radio, or one kind of digital content, or one type of press. On the contrary, people consume all of them, some of them, in a diverse way,’ as professor Diego Mazorra (2016) explained. Moreover, the same happens with humor and comedy. ‘When I consume satire, it does not mean I spend all my time consuming satire. I go to current affairs programs, to the news, I talk to my family, I discuss political topics with my coworkers, and all those informative approaches lead political participation afterwards, not just the satirical consumption,’ added professor Mazorra.

That idea captures one of the main findings of this research. Colombians do not only receive information, opinion, critical elements and news about politics from satire. Rojas and Gil-de-Zúñiga (2010:24-25), found that the traditional media consumption in Colombia, plus the political conversations within interpersonal networks, play the main role in the construction of social capital (Norris, 2000) in the society. This shows that, as mentioned in the theoretical part, Colombians rather than just media and satire consumers are ‘monitorial citizens’, because they ‘scan the information environment in a way so that they may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of ends and may be mobilized around those issues in a large variety of ways,’ as Schudson (1998:310-311) explained.

Therefore, it can be said that beyond the means through which Colombians interact with information, and regardless the rhetorical spirits wrapping the contents [satire, news, jokes, podcasts, etc.], they represent a sort of ‘self-informing citizens’ (Coleman, in Hartley et al. (eds.), 2013:383-384), because they moved from just being the recipients of democratic and civic elements from media and politicians, to become interactive, self-knowledgeable, and also producers of satirical contents in online platforms.

Telenovelas, the Unexpected Finding

On the 2nd of March 2016, during the interview with the TV analyst and expert Ómar Rincón, a powerful fact about Colombian TV came into the conversation:

Humor was swallowed by fiction. In Colombia we stopped producing comedy. There are no more *Romeo y Busetta*, no more *Don Chinche* [famous comedies in the 1980’s]; there is nothing like that, because the *telenovela* is an ‘*anthropophagus*’ genre. In that regard *Ugly Betty* is a telenovela with comedy; *Escobar, El Patrón del Mal* is a tragic comedy. That genre, which is our greatest success on TV, eats everything and turns it into fiction. In it, they mock the policeman, the politician, and all those sorts of things. (Rincón, 2016)

According to this, it is relevant to say that *telenovelas* have placed the Latin-American TV production on a wide-world spotlight, particularly since the Mexicans and Venezuelans lifted the genre of drama in the 1970s and 1980s. After this production boom permeated in Colombian TV production, it took the TV channels until the 2000s to realize that humor was a great resource to take the genre to an upper level, just as Rincón noticed above. A good example of this phenomenon is that nowadays the most important TV scriptwriter in Colombia, the person behind all the main drama productions in the country is a satirist and a comedian: César Augusto Betancur ‘*Pucheros*’²⁶, whose one of his latest productions is a TV series following the lives of *Las Hermanitas Calle*, a popular music female duet that since the 1960s has been inserted in the popular culture of the country. The story, which bases most its scripts on facts and anecdotes, is full of humoristic dialogue and fictitious characters created in order to make the series more attractive to the audiences. Among such fictional characters is *Libardo Zuluaga*, a corrupt mayor who represented the most cynical and evil form of a politician.

I am completely sure that it is impossible to create a character fuller of satire and harshness than *Libardo Zuluaga*. He was the thief of thieves. He was my favorite character in the *telenovela*. ‘*Pucheros*’ achieved to put in that mayor all the corruption of ambassadors, presidents and all the politicians together. It is political criticism through a small town mayor. (*Vargasvil*, 2016)²⁷

César Augusto Betancur ‘*Pucheros*’ (2016), who also took part in this research, bases the success of that *humor+drama* formula on the fact that the characters that played the satirical roles in the series became more popular among the audiences than those that only portrayed serious and romantic themes: ‘we started copying Fernando Gaitán’s *Ugly Betty* success. Before we had had *Dejémonos de Vainas* [written by Daniel Samper-Pizano] and *Don Chinche*, but they were made in a weekly format and treated life with humor avoiding political stuff.’

Then, to analyze this particular way of TV production, it is relevant to acknowledge that *telenovelas*, despite some minor differences related with the length of the episodes and the topics, have lots of similarities with the soap opera genre. In this regard, this research can say that in the Colombian case, as Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005:33) approached the genre relationship with politics, *telenovelas*’ conventions enable a hybrid understanding of politics “in which the different logics of rational policy development, ideological struggle, personal convictions and preferences, public relations requirements, occurring incompetence, and bureaucracy unite into a coherent and persuasive picture of ‘best possible’ political practice”.

Van Zoonen (2005:20) also found that the ‘ubiquitous presence of the soap opera’ in the daily interpretations of the political life among the media, politicians and the citizens, transformed the genre into ‘a frame of reference both for presenting and understanding politics.’ Nonetheless, in the Colombian case *telenovelas* have not worked only as a source of inspiration, nor as metaphors for the citizen’s understanding of politics, but as reflex of politicians’ misbehaviors. Hence as parodies of every day’s politics in the country. And in doing so *telenovelas* adopted the role of being, somehow, satire on TV. For instance, as the scriptwriter ‘*Pucheros*’ described:

My intention with Libardo Zuluaga’s character was to portray in him all the vices of the political spheres in this country. If that character educates or enhances the political

literacy of the society or not, I do not know. The guy ends up in jail, is defeated as an antagonist, and that's it. I do not know if it worked as a civic or democratic mechanism in society, but at least as a satire and criticism, it did. (*Pucheros*, 2016)

Then, what constitutes a finding in this research is that *telenovelas* managed to hybridize its contents with political humor, and found in fiction a vehicle to say things that are not said through other genres, like fake news or parody shows, satirical documentaries, ironical activism (Day, 2011), and so on. Does it *replace* the satire and political comedy shows? Perhaps it does not. And that is not the explanation that the *telenovelas* argument is bringing to light. Van Zoonen is right when explained that the use of 'soap opera in constructing politics testifies to the fact that television culture has become a dominant, if not *the* dominant, means of interpreting social and political life' (2005:21). Yet, the *replacement* argument is flawed when looking for the real criticisms and factuality characteristics of political comedy and harsh satire. That is precisely what the satirist Sergio Valencia (2016) said admitting that humor has found a great ally on *telenovelas*, but "having a thief mayor, who can even be called 'long-hands' is not political comedy. It is not." According to Valencia both satire and political comedy are persistent, use information, do not speak in general, and talk about particular issues with names and last names, not through fiction: 'I am very glad that they portray corruption in *telenovelas*, because it is better to put the people to talk about that, than any other stupidity, it is funny; but political humor, it is not,' concluded.

Then, The Big Explanation

After exploring all the possible scenarios that could explain the lack of political comedy in Colombian television, this research arrives to the conclusion that it is an amalgamation of all the pieces mentioned above, plus the unwillingness from the TV channels to make it.

If all the expressions of censorship, menacing calls, low ratings, the emergence of other media as drivers of political humor, etc. are analyzed separately, they suggest with their own elements strong reasons for the absence of the genre on TV; but the full picture is framed by a lack of interest to make it happen. And that is precisely what the expert Ómar Rincón (2016) explained when he said that the TV executives decided not to risk anything in order to maintain a *status quo* of the TV production in the country. Such decision-making stages within the private channels in Colombia are as such because there is media concentration and the two main TV companies have no other '*heavy weight*' competitors around. Therefore they

do not see the necessity to explore other genres whose profitability and ratings are not as guaranteed as the ones resulting from *telenovelas*, TV series, sports, reality shows, etc.

The expert Rincón (2016) said ‘if TV producers do not have anything to compete with, they won’t do it. There is no political comedy because the TV channels are mediocre to make it, and it is ridiculous to blame the audiences for their own corporative incompetence.’ Such reluctance among the TV production powers was also supported by *La República*’s general director Fernando Quijano (2016), who added that the lack of satirical spaces on Colombian TV has only to do with ‘the intentionality of those in charge. If we had CEOs and executives at *RCN TV* and *Caracol TV* bidding and backing satirical shows, then we will have them.’

Such behavioral aspects of the decision-making processes in Colombian TV are well supported by the fact that, as mentioned above, the private television in Colombia is the main consumed media, and that public service stations basically do not count in any of the relevant variables of the TV market. Though, it is also true that only looking at the TV market could represent an intentional avoidance to discuss the potentials and civic duties the public service TV has in Colombian democracy. But it is not, because public channels –most of them belonging to specific regions of the country- suffer from almost nonexistent ratings, very low budgets, they have the ‘non-advertising’ restriction common in many other countries, and what is worse, they are controlled by the politicians in office, hence creating another conflict of interest that will give more material for further research.

Considering this, the lack of political comedy in Colombian television will be explained more within the realms of the private media, acknowledging that public service should be able to open spaces for this kind of contents, even if the targets of the parodies, jokes and ironies are the politicians controlling the public system. There is no need to bark up the wrong tree by assuming that because public service does not make political humor, there is no reason, obligation, or incentive for the private media to make it. It is a matter of will among the power players in both private and public services of TV in Colombia the one that truly will let the political and satirical shows flourish again in Colombian society, not only the barriers and constraints previously discussed in this chapter.

This finding is backed, as a manner of conclusion, by the words of the Entertainment director at *Caracol TV* Juan Esteban Sampedro, who recognized that:

We, as TV producers, must make a *mea culpa*. Perhaps we have not hit the mark. Perhaps what we do [in political comedy] very badly and the audiences do not like it. And we should start from there, stop, and say: is it that we are so bad that we are not able to make political comedy products? And it may be so, because we have not been able to seduce the viewers with a satire program in a forceful way. (...) I make a *mea culpa* and perhaps we have not been right and have not been sufficiently able to make an attractive program. (Sampedro, 2016)

Civic Potentials of Political Comedy on Colombian TV

In order to explore the civic potential that political comedy on TV would represent for Colombian democracy, this part of the analysis will address a theoretical discussion with all the participants of this research, arriving to an ideal scenario in which the benefits from satire are relevant in the construction of an informed and entertained citizenship.

A Terminological Preface

Among the all 33 interviewees there is a perception about political comedy and satire as genres exclusively used to refer to politicians, officials, governments, military forces, illegal groups [guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug cartels], and political parties, mechanisms and institutions. This categorization also includes any kind of relationship among those agents, and with the citizens. So, for instance, the majority of the interviewees²⁸ enhance this classification with a moral relevance of the actions such institutions make in their work and everyday life, even if they are not related to their duties inside politics.

That moral scope mostly comprises speeches, policies, ideological stances, political ties, and some behaviors (including those of the private life) of civil servants, public officers and people involved in politics. In this regard, satire and political comedy are specifically alleged to serve as control mechanisms for the moral conduct of such persons, and as a ‘potential for reflection on those norms’ (Gray et al., 2009:9). This means that the fields which political comedy and satire are expected to be committed to are all forms of corruption, mismanagement, incompetence, arrogance, deception, dishonesty, and caricaturistic physical appearances of the players in politics.

Such views work as a manner of normative understanding of political comedy and set an exclusionary boundary to other types of humor, like self-mockery of the Colombian society, or comical treatments of sociological problems (which mostly do not include the mentioned political actors and misbehaviors). In other terms, the concepts of satire and political comedy are strictly related to *politics*, rather than the *political* as Chantal Mouffe uses the terms:

By '*the political*' I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society, antagonism that can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations. *Politics*, on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are affected by the dimension of *the political*. (Mouffe, 1999:754)

Nonetheless, that political comedy interpretation is far from being a misperception and it does not implicate any lack of knowledge about the genre. In fact, it is aligned with the understanding of factually-based political comedy trilogy explained above (Day, 2011), in which social satire, fictionalized products, and fully-stocked with social criticism animations like *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, or *Family Guy* are generally excluded from the satire as genre-research field, because of their lack of direct reference to politics and everyday news. Yet, this research believes, like Baym and Jones (2012) admitted, that all kinds of satirical contents, including the socially-based, fictionalized and ridicule-full ones, should be included in the genre analyses, considering that their absence on Colombian TV raise cultural, contextual and citizen-behavioral questions.

The 'Leveling' Factor

In Colombia structural powers are easily perceptible. As mentioned earlier, powers make their appearances as political, intellectual and economic elites, military and armed forces, big or small corporate holdings, media owners and conglomerates, celebrities, etc. (Corner, 2011). In that ladder of authority and influence, citizens are usually at the bottom, though perceived as primary constituents holding the rights to vote and participate within the systemic realm of laws and normativity (rights and duties), and custodians of the discursive power.

This is why discursiveness becomes a civic tool that strengthens democracies when it reaches the citizens, and because it is understood as a 'strength-balancing' mechanism

between the weak and the powerful. So, political humor can be seen as a rhetorical weapon to ground the powerful and break down official barriers. Ridicule, derision, and playing the fool become ‘weapons of the weak’ in the same way James Scott saw gossip and minor sabotage, because they happen at the social ‘backstage’ where such actions ‘mock and negate the public ritual order, [where] elite control fall away.’ (1985:27,282)

Among the interviewees, that interpretation was adopted, for instance by the fake news website *Actualidad Panamericana* co-founder (anonymous) (2016), who described political humor as ‘a powerful, forceful and effective tool,’ or by the cartoonist ‘Mico’ (2016) who said that satire is an ‘intellectual weapon that can say things in a more precise way than a speech or an article.’ Pascual Gaviria (2016), editor of the newspaper *Universo Centro* and cast member of *La Luciérnaga*, sees satire as a form of ‘*bajarle la caña*’ [lowering the bar] to the powerful: ‘It puts them at your level. Politicians believe they are two or three floors higher than the rest and political humor overthrows those barriers and place them at our height.’

Then, a recurrent element among all these perceptions is the ‘leveling nature’ of satire. Miguel García (2016), director of the Democracy Observatory at *Universidad de Los Andes*, said that one of satire’s virtues is ‘to cut down the ceremonial character of power performers. It is a leveling tool, mainly in very unequal societies like the Colombian. So it also becomes a very efficient and effective political controlling mechanism.’ Sergio Valencia (2016), politician and former member of *Tola y Maruja* satirical show, also believes that political humor ‘lowers the status of power and throws away its sacredness. (...) Humor removes the veil, and makes people see the ridicule, stupidity, and the absurdity of life and power relations.’ Such leveling potential is very important to be taken into account when looking for the benefits of satirical contents on TV. As mentioned above, radio and the Internet already play critical roles in mocking the powers, but hardly possess the influence and viewership that television represents by its own weight. Even more, with the visual resources of television, and the enormous penetration it has among Colombian society, the leveling potential of satirical programs will be wider and, obviously, more endangering for the political and economic powers already dissected in the first segments of this analysis.

That ‘leveling’ recurrence in the views of the interviewees goes hand in hand with the relevant role of political parody in the democratic civic cultures that Robert Hariman (2008) suggested. Moreover, for this research, that precise ‘leveler attribute’ discloses three things:

the mechanisms through which the publics perceive, define and mock the existing powers; the rhetoric and discursive elements involved in the mockery and the way they adapt the serious to the funny; and the nature of the spectatorship capable to satirize and laugh at them.

Absorbing all three, Hariman (2008:255) accurately noted that what is important is that the ‘parodic form casts direct discourse into a carnivalesque spectatorship. The parodied object is held up to be seen, exposed, and ridiculed, rather than discussed, amended, and enacted. And it is offered to anyone who might be played for a laugh, that is, anyone in the most wide-open, mixed-up, unfettered public audience.’ Accordingly, part of what strengthens democracy is its bearing capacity for laughter, and its understandings and uses of the *popular*. The *popular*, in the expert Ómar Rincón’s (2016) words, emerges from what is not solemn, and in that regard the carnivals work not only as a leveler but also as a mirror of the society: ‘In Colombia, sometimes we take everything too seriously, every phrase of the politicians is interpreted philosophically... perhaps we have to go back to the banality and understand that the political is full of foolishness and stupidity.’ Such carnivalesque essence is why satire plays a solid counter-power role in the Colombian context, particularly because carnivals are artistic expressions that take a lot from the *popular*, and represent how humor empower the citizens to laugh at his own culture and the powers.

Finally professor Diego Mazorra (2016) contextualized the leveling and carnivalesque concepts to the Colombian picture by commenting that carnivals subvert the established order. “Bakhtin studied carnivalesque humor from Rabelais’ *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* in order to understand how it was relevant to society. Carnivals turned the world upside down and allowed situations in which the powerful are not so powerful and the weak are not weak,” added Mazorra, who also contextualized the concepts to the Colombian scenario by saying that ‘in places like Mocoa, they have like seven carnivals per year. It is their way of criticizing, to express political thoughts in environments where violence and the social order are very difficult, and the mediums for expressing them are very few.’

Therefore, this research can say that satire and political humor are understood as democratic tools, if not weapons, to level the status of citizens in the country, even after taking into account the already mentioned constraints that the culture, the context, the authority, and the means of repression deploy over the production of political comedy. This also means that beyond all the theoretical benefits of satire on TV explored so far, in

Colombia there is a commonly-shared perception about the potential of humor, whether it appears in traditional media or carnivalesque representations, filling with significance the purposes of this research: the importance of having political comedy on Colombian TV.

Inform and Critique

As explained in the theoretical part, some scholars discharged entertainment and humor as informative mechanisms and civic culture sponsors in society, even accused them as main reasons of political disengagement (Putnam, 2000). Also, such media and humor-malaise arguments were disproved by academicians who praised the civic potentials of satire and entertainment in the decision-making processes in democracy as Norris (2000), Corner et al. (2012), and Jones (2009; 2010) did.

When the same debate is placed in the Colombian context, the opinions of the people involved in the media and political comedy production, drive mostly towards the second perspective. In this regard, many of this research participants really believe that the TV satirical shows help the citizens to get serious and relevant news in an easier way than watching, reading or listening to them through any other outlet. For instance, the prestigious TV journalist, and director of *Blu Radio*'s show *Voz Populi*, Jorge Alfredo Vargas (2016), believes that 'political humor makes the people and the nation think about very relevant political issues.' In the same direction, the comedian Óscar Monsalve '*Risaloca*' (2016), asserts that the political humor helps the media to 'inform the citizenship in a pleasant way. It makes people think and analyze what happens in the country.' Andrea Gómez (2016), voice impersonator on *El Tren de la Tarde*, believes that satire has the muscle to "balance entertainment and information. Even more, once one of our radio listeners called and told us: 'thanks to your program I better understand reality (of current events).'"

All those perceptions follow a pattern that has to be considered: the humor is highly relevant in guiding the views of citizens on serious matters. In addition it gives political comedy the critical role of becoming the watchdog of politics, even when journalism fails to do so. That is why the prominent satirists Daniel Samper-Ospina (2016) suggests that one of the main functions of satire is to 'criticize': 'humor has the mission of being an anti-power, a counter-power, of going against the powers and mock them. Satire without that capacity is a *saludo a la bandera* ['dead letter', useless, futile, in vain].' And that capability to critique is precisely the one that sustains the relevance of having political comedy shows on Colombian

TV. The irony embedded in satirical narratives involve sarcasm, and the highlighting of contradictions and absurdities of the political world; thus making a real impact on ‘the world of political deliberation’ (Day, 2011:187), at the same time *killing two birds with one stone*: informing and becoming an accountability tool of the political powers in the country.

A Warm Welcome to Cynicism

Fernando Quijano, *La República* newspaper’s general director, noted that:

Alexander the Great went to Corinth and people told him he had to talk with Diogenes. He visited him, and found him lying in the sun. After Alexander addressed him with greetings, asked him if he wanted anything. Diogenes answered: ‘Yes, stand a little out of my sun’. That cynicism, that reaction against the power is considered by many as wisdom, subsequently satire is good for democracies in the way it turns people into critical citizens towards the powers. (Quijano, 2016)

This Diogenes’ anecdote serves as example in an interesting debate about the potential of televised political comedy in Colombia. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this research, the *media-malaise* and *entertainment-malaise* scholars have based most of their arguments on the *spiral of cynicism* in societies, particularly referring to the framings and contents media communicate. Nonetheless, in the Colombian case, the debate about *cynicism* has to have a situational approach, rather than a generic one. Since 1996 after Cappella and Jamieson’s dispatch, political communication adopted the word *cynicism* as a recurrent term to explain the relationship between the media coverage and the decrease of trust in politics among the citizenship. The idea also explains low participation in politics, and distrust of politicians and the structural powers. In that regard, it is interesting to see how among the interviewees of this research, the word *cynicism* can be related to such civic behaviors, but also interpreted as something very good to happen in society, specially if such *cynicism* brings implicit any kind of critical perspective of reflection about politics.

That is precisely what the prolific writer and perhaps the most influential satirist in Colombian recent history, Daniel Samper-Pizano (2016), recognized when he remembered that during the Brazilian dictatorships era the only ones that stuck up for liberty were musicians and humorists.

Millôr Fernandes said ‘*la mordaza aumenta la mordacidad*’²⁹, because when the freedom of expression channels are trampled, new opportunities open to humorists, who in the end are the only ones that attack the dictatorships. If that generates and spreads *cynicism* among the citizens, then it is very welcome. Colombia, a country where everything is so weird, where all the media belong to multimillionaires, but still keeps functioning, is a country that needs a lot of *cynicism*. (Samper-Pizano, 2016)

Alike Samper, *Actualidad Panamericana*’s co-founder (anonymous) (2016), added that political humor indeed can generate cynical citizens and it is good that that happens, because ‘a cynical person is better than a devoted person. He does not swallow it whole, and is open to deliberate and listens to arguments.’ Then, it is very interesting how political, and in particular political comedy shows on TV seem to have the opportunity, strength, and potential to generate a sort of ‘*good cynicism*’ among Colombian audiences, regardless of the political communication’s understanding of the term through voters turn-out, party enrollments, or any other political-electoral mechanism describing what scholars reference as *political cynicism*.

Within this situational framework, *cynicism* can also become a vehicle of engagement among the citizenship, which by consuming political comedy and satire citizens could get informed of the political news and relevant events in the country, with the peculiarity that it will happen through a filter of irony and sarcasm. In plain words, this interpretation of *cynicism* means that Colombians could even reach very analytical skills, having in political humor a source (perhaps the first and only one) to receive information complementary to that transmitted by the news broadcasts, public debates programs, or current affairs shows. Political satire *cynicism* has the potential of making people more critical about politics.

But Also Entertain

The famous social scientist and social psychology expert Michael Billig wrote in his *Laughter and Ridicule* masterpiece that:

Today humor is a significant force within mass culture. The entertainment industry invests billions of dollars to try to make us laugh again and again, night after night. Arguably, contemporary culture cannot be understood without understanding how and why powerful economic forces are devoted to laughter. (Billig, 2005:4)

Billig's appreciation entails two important aspects: the first is related to the understanding of humor as an entertaining business model by media, and the other -perhaps not that obvious but immersed in the 'mass culture'- about humor's autonomy in terms of having a purpose only for amusement, rather than any educational drivers.

About the first, the content director at *Caracol TV* Diego Briceño (2016) admitted that, for example, the core philosophy of the TV channel 'is to entertain'. In his opinion, that priority does not mean that media do not have to inform, but in terms of business pragmatism and social needs, media and the society look for entertainment. 'Why are we full of *telenovelas*, TV series, reality shows, and entertaining programs? Because it is our mission! And our responsibility as communicators is to make good products in a shaken society that needs entertainment.' With this perspective, it is interesting to question why satirical programs have not achieved any relevant space within the putting in practice of such philosophies, giving at the same time valuable credit to the perspectives backing the criticizing, controlling and informative potential of political comedy.

About the second perspective, it is important to acknowledge that interviewees like the satirists Sergio Valencia, and Daniel Samper-Pizano; or radio producers like Hernán Peláez; and cartoonists such as '*Mico*' and '*Matador*' (2016) stressed emphatically that humor's unique essence is to generate laughter. They all believe that humor should not be seen as an instrument of politics, democracy, or even entertainment industries to reach any kind of political, educative, or economic *effects* in society (neither good ones as the widespread of political knowledge and engagement, nor negative ones as merely amusement that exercises a *stupidizing* influence over the audiences³⁰). They appealed to a more pure understanding of comedy, without looking at it as a useful tool with goals other than laughter and amusement. Moreover, Aldo Julián Ocampo (2016), scriptwriter at *El Tren de la Tarde*, thinks that 'the satirist is not compelled to teach, nor educate people; his main goal is to make people laugh'³¹. In other words, 'humor it is not the cherry of any cake, it is a cake by itself,' as Sergio Valencia (2016) sustained.

What can be inferred from these understandings of political comedy is that beyond its civic potentials, in Colombia the simple goal of joy in society can be worthwhile. And such constitutes a reinforcing argument bidding to have political comedy shows on TV, because they spur laughter, a very important feature of social life. 'Without the possibility of laughter,

serious social life could no be sustained,' said Billig (2005:5). Even more, humor in itself represents the bedrock of entertainment, which at the same time is a very relevant, if not the most relevant, pillar of popular culture (Street, 1997:7). And as Van Zoonen (2005) remembered, popular culture is very important to understand the way citizens adopt and interact with the joy entertainment provides through humor. Hence, political humor, having in the *political* a simple topic to deploy its amusing capabilities, can generate laughter as human and social behavior by simply mocking powers and laughing at them through a medium like national television.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis aimed to explore and define why there are no satirical and political comedy shows in contemporary Colombian television. Through 33 in-depth elite interviews with relevant individuals involved in the making of satire, media production spheres and communication scholarship in the country, including an analysis of the satirical context, this research managed to clarify the mechanisms that have influenced the absence of such production on Colombian TV, and suggested the civic potentials that those type of contents could potentially add to the Colombian democracy.

In order to answer the first research question of this thesis (what are the political, cultural, and economic constraints for producing political comedy in contemporary Colombian TV?) the methods employed identified many reasons, and rejected others that appeared obvious. That is the case of the popularly accepted correlation between the killing of the political comedian Jaime Garzón in 1999 and the current lack of satire on TV. This research found that such ties seem misleading since the event is strongly connected to other activities the comedian was involved in, rather than to his jokes or the political hackles he might have raised among the powers he mocked. Moreover, and in relation to the Colombian convulsed political environment, the majority of interviewees agreed that such contextual dangers involving politics and powers represent the perfect breeding ground for the emergence of satirical contents and political humor, as for example when the famous journalist Hernán Peláez (2016) said: ‘Colombian systemic mess mixed with corruption, disorder, political upheaval, and violence stimulate a humorous environment in a way that is only understandable to Colombians,’ thus a continuous source of humor. Or for instance when the politician’s voice impersonator Alexandra Montoya (2016) summed it up by saying that ‘this country’s news look more like fiction than reality. What happens here is absurd. Corruption, people dying at the entrance of the hospital because didn’t receive any treatment. There is a never ending feedstock for many satirical shows.’³² Then Garzón’s killing, more than a constraint can be understood as one of the terrible results of the continuous political agitation in Colombia, which is also where political comedy can find its inspiration.

After discarding Garzón’s death theory, contextual and genre-based reasons entered to explain the lack of satirical programs on TV. For instance, the implicit censorship in the Colombian media’s realm, the menacing phone calls with friendly outfits, the little success in terms of advertising and ratings, the TV consumption habits of the Colombians, the media

ownership, and the corruption and conflict of interests among powers contributed to the bulk of reasons behind the constraints and barriers that the production of satirical television faces nowadays. All of these issues combined explain the lack of political comedy on Colombian TV, and also provide this thesis with the elements to acknowledge the relevance other means of communication such as radio, online media, and social networks have attained.

Nevertheless, radio and social networks have found in TV's absence on the genre production a great opportunity to institutionalize themselves as the main outlets of political comedy in Colombia, notwithstanding television is still the most visible and most impactful medium, so to speak in its power and the Colombian's preferences of receiving information and entertainment (Rojas and Mazorra, 2011:19). 'Television is indeed,' recalls Van Zoonen (2005:21), 'our prime source for learning about politics, and it provides the instruments for understanding, evaluating, and appreciating it.'

This research also found that *telenovelas* appeared as a TV-genre that rescued political comedy from being cast away indefinitely from Colombian television. Despite the existence of other spaces exclusive to soft humoristic parodies, stand-up shows, or TV contests using comedic means to entertain, such do not incorporate the satirical and rhetorical resources of irony and sarcasm about the elites or structural powers in their scripts and routines, aspects that the soap producers found catchy to be included within the drama and fictional productions they make, and that are highly consumed by the Colombian spectatorship.

However, *telenovelas*' adoption of political comedy as an implicit narrative to attract viewers does not portray any of the satirical variables of the genre Amber Day (2011) dissected into *satiric documentary*, *parodic news shows*, nor *ironic media-savvy activism*. The soap opera genre hybridized the contents to end up producing soap and political comedy at the same time, but still lacks the analytical and critical perspectives political comedy entails within its very own outlets. This means, they do not comment on factual events, or about politicians, specific institutions, or identifiable elite-members; they only refer to general political and social behavior in a fictionalized way. And this happens because *telenovelas* still belong to the 'entertaining' part of the popular culture spectrum (Street, 1997), rather to the informative and civic triggering one.

This thesis also found that apart from all the constraints that hinder the production of satire on TV, the core reason for such absence could be tracked down to the unwillingness to make it happen from the executive levels and powers of the big TV channels in the country, namely *Caracol TV* and *RCN TV*. They claim that political comedy is ‘difficult to market’, for merely entertainment purposes, and based on the talents of outstanding individuals; rather than as a genre with civic potentials, and with informative and critical benefits for the audiences. Those media powers have placed themselves in a strictly ‘entertaining’ position, perhaps ignoring that the satirical productions on TV can bridge serious formats of analyzing news with entertainment. They also relied all the educative and democratic duties upon the news broadcasts, the public service and the governmental institutions. Nonetheless, such self-positioning on the ‘civic-avoidance-of-entertainment’ terrain also discloses the lack of interest and the notorious absence of satirical shows in the public TV channels in Colombia. It is clear that their budgets and ratings cannot compete with those in television’s private sector, but by not encouraging critical and satirical programs targeting the political powers of the country they depict that they are controlled by the politicians in office and their bureaucracies, which at the same time deploy their censorship mechanisms to avoid potential criticisms and discursive tools used against themselves.

Those tools are precisely the ones that embody the potential of political comedy for Colombian television, as per the second research question of this thesis (what could be the role that satire on television can play in enhancing the citizens’ empowerment and the civic culture in Colombia?). Civic questionings are the tools that empower audiences with laughter and critical positions to mock political decisions, politicians, the news, the media framings, the institutions and the elites of the country. Even more, those political comedy shows foster the leveling factor between politics and the citizens, enhancing the possibilities to express and receive political opinions, hence nurturing the political debates in the public sphere. But more important, the production of satirical shows, of any kind, even through animations, puppets, parodies, or fake news programs would give the Colombian citizens an amusing but critical medium of information and debate; a harshness, irony and sarcasm exhaust valve to a politically stirred but always fruitful context. Or as Annette Hill said: ‘the various forms of factual content available to the public open up possibilities for greater diversity and creativity within civic cultures.’ (Hill, 2007:14)

Finally, this research found that at least in the Colombian context, cynicism is a term that represents more than apathy towards the political and everything covered by the *civic* umbrella. Unlike what many political scientists and political communication scholars understand for cynicism, the criticizing, leveling-power and intellectual potential that political comedy brings to the audiences and the comedians, these are perceived by many interviewees as positive features of democracy for political literacy, participation, and engagement among the citizens. Hence, as a finding of this thesis, the term *good cynicism* can explain the analytical virtues and the empowerment of the citizens, leading them to be skeptical about the politicians and powerful wrongdoings. As such, criticizing features can be understood as vital to the consumption of political comedy and satirical programming on Colombian television.

ENDNOTES

¹ One of those analytical voices is Pascual Gaviria's (2010), a prestigious journalist who said in a column, 'on television, the treatment given to the politics causes more grime than laughter,' and pointed out that the TV channels condemned political humor to ostracism when they decided to play their 'advocates of their interests' role, referring to not being annoying to the political and economic powers in the country.

² The columnist Lucas Caballero '*Klim*'; the cartoonists Ricardo Rendón and Héctor Osuna; or for instance the satirist actor Jaime Garzón, swell the endless list of political comedians that 'have mocked and laughed at all the presidents of the Republic, the politicians, the businessmen, the celebrities, the soldiers, all the fearsome drug lords, the guerrillas' and paramilitary leaders, at their colleagues and, of course, at themselves,' just as Maria Teresa Ronderos (2007:9) underscored.

³ Print satire has been constantly published in newspapers and current affairs magazines (Acevedo, 2007); satirical radio shows dominate the current production of the genre; online fake news websites and spreadable satirical contents inundate social networks in Colombia; and in almost every Colombian city exist fully political fanzines (En Órbita, 2014) and pasquinades [*El Fute*-Pereira].

⁴ 'Here, a political comedian is plenty of raw material. I do not know how a comedian can survive in Sweden or Norway. In Colombia, if you pick up a newspaper at 7 a.m. you may find at least 20 humoristic news; tragic, outlandish, but due to turn into a satire... Colombia's conditions make political comedy to flourish, since people feel they cannot do anything but to laugh at them. Humor is a catharsis, a sedative to all the stress we manage in this country.' (Briceño, 2016)

⁵ *La Banda Francotiradores* and *NP& con Los Reencauchados*.

⁶ Even though Putnam recognized his findings were circumstantial rather than causal, they ignored facts such as historical disengagement in the American society (Schudson, 1998), even if the media contents caused a certain degree of political cynicism in the audiences, 'these information sources neither turn off voters nor decrease citizens' desire to stay informed about politics.' (Lee, 2005:427)

⁷ 'Contrary to the media malaise hypothesis, use of the news media is positively associated with a wide range of indicators of political knowledge, trust, and mobilization. People who watch more TV news, read more newspapers, surf the Net, and pay attention to campaigns are consistently more knowledgeable, trusting of government, and participatory.' (Norris, 2000:17)

⁸ 'Some of these topics can, (...) resonate with core values, suggest practices, mobilize identities, and generate engagement in the public sphere. (...) They can evoke contestation, and further develop the terrain of the political, thereby pumping blood into the body of democracy.' (Dahlgren, 2009:148)

⁹ 'Humor is the enemy of pomp and decorum, especially when they prop up the authority of an adversary or a superior. The most inviting targets of ridicule are teachers, preachers, kings, politicians, military officers, and other members of the high and mighty.' (Pinker, 1998:547-548)

¹⁰ In such politically dominated landscapes, but also with few or non official censorship and bans in sight, A.J. Liebling's (1947:265) opinion about media power, besides its implicit cynicism, becomes wisdom, when he implied that freedom of the press, basically belongs to those who own one.

¹¹ Probably, self-censorship is one of the biggest structural power's constraints that Colombian political humor faces nowadays, since it is submersed in a media culture in which the conglomerate ownerships of the media channels creates the vulnerability to receive political pressures from outside,

and it promotes internal incentives to trade the critical capacities of the journalists and satirists for the company's economic and political interests.

¹² 'The formula, in fact, has not changed much in years; (...) Parodies news and announcements, thrilling music, fast assembly, surprising situations and characters, and that kind of daring humor through which, as a veteran comedy writer said, the youngsters try to scare their elders.' (Álvarez-Berciano, 1999:156).

¹³ *María Teresa Ronderos*: journalist and writer. She wrote *5 en Humor*, a book with profiles of Colombian political humorists. Currently she is the director of the *Open Society Program* on Independent Journalism. Never answered the emails.

Claudia Gurisatti: Journalist and general director of *RCN Noticias* and the news channel *NTN24*. She hired the Peruvian writer Jaime Bayly to comment with satire and humor the presidential elections of 2008 in Colombia. Firstly agreed to participate in the research, but never set the appointment.

Sandra Borda: PhD. Political Science and dean of the Social Sciences Faculty at Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano. She wrote an article about the lack of political comedy on Colombian TV. After going three times to her office and cancelling two appointments, the interview could not be made.

¹⁴ All these specificities apply for 32 interviews, except for Antonio Caballero's one, which only could be made via email.

¹⁵ *Opinion Panel Survey 2015*: Research done among 2,372 opinion leaders in Colombia.

¹⁶ Another comment reinforcing this problem was the one brought up for discussion by the cartoonist 'Vladdo' (2016), who targeted the TV stations executives that 'believe that satirical contents may not be beneficial for their holding's interests, but maybe the owners of such companies, would not bother that much and may end up laughing.'

¹⁷ It translates literally "let's make it softer", but it has the threatening connotation of "don't mess with me, and I won't mess with you".

¹⁸ Beside all the interviewees admit the momentum of the genre after Peláez endeavor with *La Luciérnaga*, some felt they needed to make clear [Valencia; Gómez, G.; 'Vargasvil'; 'Mico'; Samper-Pizano; Díaz-Salamanca; Carvajal; Arias, E., 2016] that the satirical radio phenomena has its roots in a humoristic tradition established on radio a long time ago by people like Hebert Castro (21 years with his own comedy show); Humberto Martínez-Salcedo (*La Cantaleta-1958, El Pereque-1962, El Duende-1966, La Tapa-1967, and El Corcho-1973*); Lizardo Díaz and Jorge Ezequiel Ramírez '*Los Tolimenses*'; Guillermo Zuluaga '*Montecristo*' (*Las Aventuras de Montecristo*); and Crisanto Vargas '*Vargasvil*' (*El Manicomio de Vargasvil*).

¹⁹ Continuous Survey of Radio Audiences.

²⁰ That percentage has a couple of provisos about the nature of the audiences though: First, it only reflects radio listeners based in urban areas, who according to the *World Bank* (2016) estimations for 2014 represents 76.2% of the countrywide population; and secondly, that percentage ignores exclusive music radio listeners (mainly youngsters), and local radio listeners. So it can be said that 3/4 of the national radio audience in Colombia are urban adults.

²¹ *Opinion Panel Survey 2015*: Research done among 2,372 opinion leaders in Colombia.

²² Produced by *Caracol TV* which premiered on 5 February 1972 and has run 44 years and 7 days as of 12 February 2016: Guinness World Records.

²³ *El Espectador* has recently backed a new way of commenting about politics with bits of humor through online videos. The project is called #LaPulla. “*Las crónicas de Rafa*” is an amateur popular *Facebook* page with opinion and satirical elements.

²⁴ The last person that did that sort of mainstream political opinion with sarcasm and irony on Colombian TV was the Peruvian writer Jaime Bayly, who was hired 8 years ago by the news channel *NTN24* to comment on the presidential election of the year. After it, he moved back to Miami, and nobody else has followed his steps.

²⁵ The Superiority Theory, the Relief Theory, and the Incongruity theory.

²⁶ According to interviewees, like Jorge Alfredo Vargas, Juan Esteban Sampedro, Diego Briceño, Hernando Paniagua, ‘*Matador*’, Esteban París, Germán Carvajal, ‘*Chicho el Malo*’, ‘*Vargasvil*’, and Gustavo Gómez (2016); ‘*Pucheros*’ is the genius that inserted the satire and the political humor into the main TV productions of Colombia in the last decade.

²⁷ Comedian who also played a role in the *telenovela Las Hermanitas Calle*.

²⁸ A precise and representative way to recognize this particular focus in most of the research answers is looking at two of them, which come from prestigious stand-up comedians. They made clear the difference between their routines built from everyday life aspects of Colombian society, and what in their opinions satire is. Mauricio Arias ‘*Chicho el malo*’ (2016) said he has partaken in stand-up ‘thematic nights’ merely focused on politics. ‘It happened the previous day of the city councils, mayors and governors’ election. The audience knew we were talking about politics.’ Or for instance, Gonzalo Valderrama (2016) -one of the pioneers of stand-up in the country, mentioned that besides he consumes American satirical late shows and bases his monologues on social frustrations, dissatisfactions and discomforts, he does not like and is not even interested in politics. When asked about whether or not he perceived aspects like corruption, bad public services, clientelism, or extreme bureaucracy as political sins inserted in Colombians’ daily grievances, he said ‘yes, those topics are clearly connected to the political universe, and embody aspects of how the political affects the citizens. Yet, I do not feel personally and humoristically attracted by them, even though we are all, somehow, victims of those themes.’

²⁹ Millor Fernandes was a Brazilian writer, journalist, humorist and cartoonist who said in Portuguese: ‘*A mordaçã aumenta a mordacidade*’, an aphorism with a wordplay which translates: The gag increases the mordacity.

³⁰ Hernando Paniagua (2016) believed that ‘of course, one of satire’s functions is to give elements to the audience to understand better the reasons of things: to deliver a message’. But added that he does not understand ‘when political comedy was saddled with the responsibility of educating people. Then, what are the universities, schools, and parenthood for? I am sorry, but comedy should not have the obligation of teaching people, in the same way *Coca-Cola* producers have no responsibility of neither fatter nor slimmer people. Water is always there, but what if people do not drink it! Some media has informative functions, other entertaining ones.’

Juan Esteban Sampedro (2016), general director of Entertainment at *Caracol TV* also thinks that political comedy –in terms of influence- has a better chance to expose situations and clarify issues in society than other mechanisms; but his worry begins when theorists start blaming entertainment and TV for issues and bad events in the social life. ‘I remember there was this case of a kid wearing a *Superman* costume who jumped out the window... He was the only one, among millions of children with *Superman* costumes in the world, who did that. So blaming entertainment and media for the unfortunate death of that kid is demonizing for the sake of it.’

³¹ In the same direction was the answer of Jairo Chaparro (2016), main scriptwriter at *La Luciérnaga*. For him, satire, media and especially radio, have a specific function, which is to keep company and to

unwind the people. 'If media can enlighten a nation, perfect. If they can educate it, even better. But such ambitions come in second place, because when Colombians turn on the radio and the TV, the main things they find are fights, yelling, and angry people... So humor should be only for entertaining and relaxing the audiences.'

³² 'Colombia is a country used to laugh at itself. I remember when Luis Carlos Galán [presidential candidate] was killed in 1989. His funeral was on a Sunday morning and the same day, at 3 p.m., the Colombian national football team had a match against Paraguay for the *World Cup Qualifiers*. In a solemn country, the game is postponed after a national tragedy. Not here. We buried him and two hours later we were celebrating. In Colombia a lot of bad things happen, but nothing serious,' added the scriptwriter Jairo Chaparro (2016).

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APPENDIX 1 - RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Group 1: Comedians, satirists, TV hosts, humorists and cartoonists.

<p>1. Carlos Mario Gallego ‘Mico’ Satirical show ‘Tola & Maruja’</p> <p>Cartoonist, satirical columnist and political comedian. He publishes a weekly cartoon and a column on <i>El Espectador</i>.</p> <p>http://www.tolaymaruja.com http://www.elespectador.com/opinion/tola-y-maruja https://twitter.com/tolaymaruja?lang=es https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tola_y_Maruja</p> <p>Interviewed February 27/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	
<p>2. Actualidad Panamericana</p> <p>One of the co-founders (anonymous) of the fake news website <i>Actualidad Panamericana</i>.</p> <p>http://www.actualidadpanamericana.com https://www.facebook.com/ActualidadPanamericana/</p> <p>Interviewed February 29/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	
<p>3. Eduardo Arias</p> <p>Political Comedian. Co-founder with Karl Troller of <i>Chapinero Magazine</i> and <i>Larrivista</i>. Scriptwriter of famous satirical and political humor TV shows like <i>Quac</i>, <i>Zoociedad</i>, <i>Los Reencauchados</i>, and former cultural editor of <i>Semana</i> news magazine. Nowadays, he works as the ombudsman at <i>Señal Colombia</i> (public service) and is a frequent columnist for <i>Revista Soho</i>.</p> <p>https://twitter.com/ariasvilla?lang=es https://www.facebook.com/Eduardo-Arias-Villa-315051201895366/</p> <p>Interviewed March 1/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	

4. Alexandra Montoya

Famous voice impersonator on *La Luciérnaga*, the most popular satirical radio show in Colombia.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandra_Montoya
<https://twitter.com/alexandramonto?lang=es>

Interviewed March 4/2016 in Bogotá.

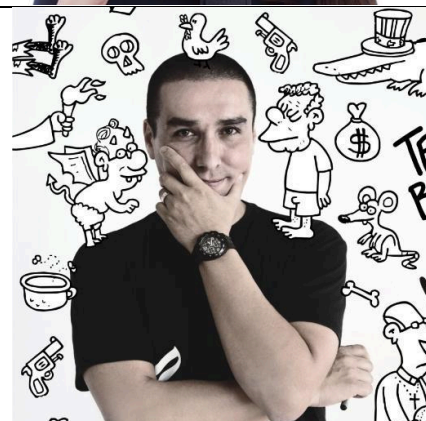


5. Julio César González 'Matador'

The most prestigious contemporary cartoonist in Colombia. He publishes 3 daily cartoons in *El Tiempo* (biggest newspaper in the country), and has published his satirical drawings on *Soho Magazine* and several books. He has been awarded twice with the *Simon Bolívar Journalism Prize*, the top award on the field in Colombia.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julio_César_González
<https://twitter.com/matadoreltiempo?lang=es>
<http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/caricaturas/matador>

Interviewed March 5/2016 in Pereira.



6. Vladimir Flórez 'Vladdo'

Famous cartoonist on *Revista Semana*. He also hosts an opinion TV show that sometimes uses satire and humor to discuss about politics on *Claro TV*. For decades he has been seen as the most influential cartoonist in Colombian politics.

<https://twitter.com/vladdo?lang=es>
<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladdo>

Interviewed March 10/2016 in Bogotá.



7. Mauricio Arias 'Chichoelmaló'

Famous twitter and stand up comedian. He also works as TV host on the late show '*Qué ha pasado*' aired on *Telemedellín* (regional public service).

http://www.elcolombiano.com/historico/chichoelmaló_gracioso_y_provocador-FBEC_171352
<https://twitter.com/chichoelmaló?lang=es>

Interviewed March 12/2016 in Medellín.

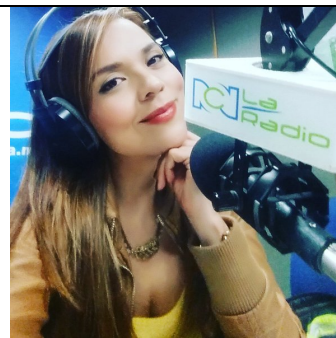


8. Andrea Gómez

Voice impersonator on *El Tren de la Tarde*. She imitates politicians and also worked as TV news presenter at *Teleantioquia* (regional public service). She hosted the cancelled satirical TV show *ETC*.

<https://twitter.com/andregomur>

Interviewed March 12/2016 in Medellín.

**9. Germán Carvajal**

Comedian founder of the parodic music group *Los Marinillos*. He has had several radio-based and TV shows in which satire and political humor are the main genres. Nowadays, he writes satirical plays and owns the Medellín-located theater *El Teatrigo*.

<https://twitter.com/germancarvajal>

<http://www.elteatrigo.co>

Interviewed March 12/2016 in Medellín.

**10. Crisanto Vargas 'Vargasvil'**

Famous impersonator in Colombia. He started with his own satirical radio show in the 1980s and also aired his own TV shows on the public service channels as *Teleantioquia* and *Telemedellín* and on private channels like *Caracol Televisión* and *RCN Televisión*. Among his impersonated politicians are ministers, senators and presidents of Colombia and Latin America. He was the first and perhaps the only one who impersonated the leaders of the guerrillas (aka Tirofijo) and paramilitary groups (Carlos Castaño), giving his characterizations a clear and very controversial political connotation. (In the picture he is imitating the Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos)

<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vargasvil>

<https://twitter.com/vargasvilcol?lang=es>

<https://www.facebook.com/lacasadecrisanto/>

Interviewed March 12/2016 in Medellín.



11. Esteban París

The only cartoonist publishing in *El Colombiano*.

<http://www.elcolombiano.com/cronologia/noticias/meta/esteban-paris>

Interviewed March 13/2016 in Medellín.



12. Óscar Monsalve 'Risaloca'

Prestigious comedian on *La Luciérnaga* and *Sábados Felices*. Also has his own comedy radio show on *Tropicana Stereo*,

<https://twitter.com/risalocahumor?lang=es>

Interviewed March 14/2016 in Medellín.



13. Gonzalo Valderrama

First stand up comedian in the country.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonzalo_Valderrama
<https://twitter.com/monobio?lang=es>

Interviewed March 17/2016 in Bogotá.



14. Aldo Julián Ocampo

Comedian working on the satirical radio-show *El Tren de la Tarde*.

<https://twitter.com/aldoesaldo>

Interviewed March 13/2016 in Medellín.



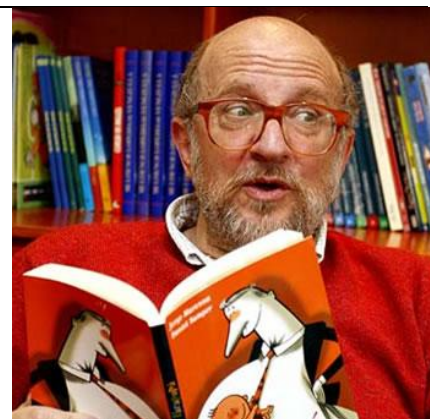
Group 2: Satirical producers, scriptwriters, directors, analysts, critics, intellectuals, and people involved in the making of satire in Colombia.

15. Daniel Samper-Pizano

Lawyer, journalist and prolific writer. For over 50 years wrote columns on *El Tiempo* and *Carrusel* magazine, combining always political information and satire. Most of his books have the same 'infotaining' formula. Currently the most prestigious humor writer in the country.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Samper_Pizano

Interviewed March 3/2016 in Bogotá.



16. Gustavo Gómez

Director of *La Luciérnaga*, news and satire radio show (the most popular and listened to on Colombian radio) aired on *Caracol Radio*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Gómez_Córdoba

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Gómez_Córdoba

<https://twitter.com/gusgomez1701?lang=es>

Interviewed March 4/2016 in Bogotá.

**17. Hernando Paniagua**

Online contents director at *Univisión*. He was cast member on *Voz Populi*, news and satirical radio show on *Blu Radio*.

<https://twitter.com/paniagua>

<http://www.bluradio.com/voz-populi-toons/personajes/hernando-paniagua-98556>

Interviewed March 7/2016

**18. Diego Briceño**

Content director at *Caracol TV*. He began telling jokes on radio (*Veracruz Stereo*), and had hosted several comedy TV shows. Nowadays is part of the cast of *Voz Populi*, satirical radio show on *Blu Radio*.

https://twitter.com/diego_briceno?lang=es

Interviewed March 8/2016 in Bogotá.

**19. Hernán Peláez**

Founder and former director of *La Luciérnaga*. With over 50 years of experience in radio and TV, he is one of the most famous and popular journalists in Colombia.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hernán_Peláez

Interviewed March 9/2016



20. Antonio Caballero

According to opinion and media consumption surveys, he is one of the most influential op-ed columnists in the country. He publishes his weekly column on *Revista Semana*. In the same magazine, he publishes political cartoons, satirizing about poverty, politics, war, drug trafficking, etc.

<http://www.semana.com/autor/antonio-caballero/5>
https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Caballero

Interviewed March 10/2016 via email.

**21. Guillermo Díaz-Salamanca**

One of the most famous voice impersonators in Colombia. He worked at *La Luciérnaga*, and now he directs his own political comedy radio show on *RCN Radio* called *El Tren de la Tarde*.

<http://www.canalrcn.com/programas/descarate-sin-evadir/videos/conozca-todas-las-vozes-de-guillermo-diaz-salamanca-47359>
<https://twitter.com/diazsalamanca?lang=es>

Interviewed March 9/2016 in Bogotá.

**22. Jairo Chaparro**

Satire and political humor scriptwriter on *La Luciérnaga*.

<https://twitter.com/chapaluciernaga>
<http://www.kienyke.com/historias/el-hombre-detras-de-la-luciernaga/>

Interviewed March 11/2016 in Bogotá.

**23. Pascual Gaviria**

Lawyer and journalist. He writes a weekly column on *El Espectador*, has conducted political debate TV shows on *CanalU* and *Teleantioquia*, is editor of the monthly newspaper *UniversoCentro*, and works as analyst and opinion leader on *La Luciérnaga*.

<https://twitter.com/rabodeajip?lang=es>
<http://www.elespectador.com/opinion/pascual-gaviria>
<http://www.rabodeaji.blogspot.com.co>

Interviewed March 13/2016 in Medellín



24. Sergio Valencia

Sergio was the first comedian who played the role of ‘*Maruja*’ in the satirical duet *Tola y Maruja*. After making satire on magazines and TV he became a politician.

<http://www.semana.com/enfoque/articulo/que-paso-con/93757-3>

Interviewed March 14/2016 in Medellín.

**25. Jorge Alfredo Vargas**

Prestigious journalist and TV host. While he worked at *RCN TV*, he directed the first and last late show in Colombian TV history *Yo, José Gabriel* (a program that was moved to *Canal 1* and finally ended up being aired on *Caracol TV*). He directed the satirical TV show *NP& con Los Reencauchados*. Currently, he directs the satire and news radio show *Voz Populi* on *Blu Radio*.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jorge_Alfredo_Vargas
<http://www.kienyke.com/historias/jorge-alfredo-vargasobsesivo-compulsivo-y-presentador/>

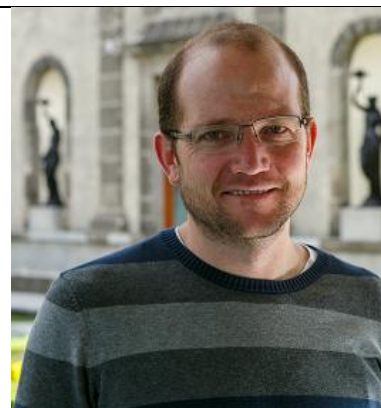
Interviewed March 15/2016 in Bogotá.

**26. Daniel Samper-Ospina**

He is a Colombian journalist and writer. He directed the magazine *Soho* for 13 years. He is currently a satirical columnist on *Semana* magazine and director of *Productora Catapulta*.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Samper_Ospina
<http://www.semana.com/autor/daniel-samper-ospina/3>
<https://twitter.com/danielsampero?lang=es>

Interviewed March 16/2016 in Bogotá.

**27. César Augusto Betancur ‘Pucheros’**

He is the most popular *telenovelas*’ and series’ scriptwriter in contemporary TV production in Colombia. He works at *Caracol TV*, and has taken part in the production of satirical programs such as *La Banda Francotiradores*, *La Zaranda*, *NP& con los Reencauchados*, and many others.

<http://www.soho.com.co/testimonio/articulo/yo-trove-con-pablo-escobar-por-cesar-augusto-betancu/32802>

Interviewed March 17/2016 in Bogotá.



Group 3: Media executives

<p>28. Fernando Quijano</p> <p>General director of <i>La República</i> newspaper.</p> <p>https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Quijano_Velasco http://www.larepublica.co</p> <p>Interviewed February 29/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	
<p>29. Juanita León</p> <p>Founder and general director of the political news website <i>La Silla Vacía</i>.</p> <p>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juanita_León</p> <p>Interviewed March 3/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	
<p>30. Juan Esteban Sampedro</p> <p>Entertainment CEO at <i>Caracol TV</i>.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm2IIRtiSI8</p> <p>Interviewed March 15/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	

Group 4: Media scholars.

<p>31. Miguel García</p> <p>Associate Professor at the Political Science Department of <i>Universidad de los Andes</i>. Director of the Latin American Public Opinion Project: <i>Uniandes</i> and <i>Vanderbilt University</i>.</p> <p>https://c-politica.uniandes.edu.co/index.php/profesores/miguel-garcia</p> <p>Interviewed March 2/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	
<p>32. Ómar Rincón</p> <p>Director of the Journalism Studies Center at <i>Universidad de los Andes</i>. TV critic and very prestigious analyst on media contents.</p> <p>http://www.eltiempo.com/noticias/omar-rincon https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Rincón https://twitter.com/omarrincontv</p> <p>Interviewed March 2/2016 in Bogotá.</p>	

33. Diego Mazorra

Post-graduate coordinator of the Political Communication Master's Program at *Universidad Externado de Colombia*.

<https://uexternado.academia.edu/DMazorra>

Interviewed March 8/2016

