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The revolution will be televised : articulation of open alternatives through teleSUR

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THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED:
ARTICULATION OF OPEN ALTERNATIVES THROUGH teleSUR

by
Tania M. Alvarez, BA Hons. McMaster University 2004
Hamilton Ontario

A thesis presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in the Program of
Communication and Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2007

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Abstract:

The Revolution will be Televised: Articulation of Open Alternatives through teleSUR

Master of Arts, 2007

Tania M. Alvarez

Communication and Culture

Ryerson University

Bolivarianism, as both populist political practice and political re-articulation of democracy, development and identity in Latin America offers a new vision of the world that resists globalization and encourages participation, popular empowerment, Latin American integration and independence. The thesis employs discourse analysis to examine the newly launched teleSUR, an international public broadcasting network (the first of its kind) conceived as an alternative media text to American and private television and as a medium of political change. Specifically, I apply my analysis to the news and testimony genre as a particular moments articulated together within a wider discourse of Bolivarianism emerging out of Venezuela today. An attempt will be made to uncover the key signifiers in the broadcasts and identify the strengths of the links regarding discursive constructions of supra- and plurinationalism, political participation and national sovereignty.

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In loving dedication to the memory of Ermina Velasco, my guardian angel, and the countless disappeared among her who fought for social justice.

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Introduction

Vernos es conocernos, reconocernos es respetarnos, respetarnos es aprender a querernos, querernos es el primer paso para integrarnos.

To see ourselves is to know ourselves, to recognize ourselves is to respect ourselves, to respect ourselves is to learn to care for ourselves; to care for ourselves is the first step towards integrating ourselves. (teleSUR)

The contingent is the conditional; it is the possible but not necessary, and understanding the ways in which assumed and presupposed understandings of our world are in fact contingent on lesser contested meanings and struggles over definition exposes the fluidity of social reality and the politics of exclusion that constitute language. So it is that media portrayals of Latin America have increasingly come to be challenged by counter discourses emerging from within the region in an attempt to articulate identity more meaningfully in the context of great social unrest. This alternative vision is informed by decades of injustice and widespread disillusionment with the dominant neoliberal approach to development in the region. It is in light of this that my thesis project aims to critically analyze by way of discourse theory the socio-political impact of Venezuela's recent launch of the public satellite channel the *Nueva Televisora del Sur* or teleSUR. teleSUR is a project initiated by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in order to provide an alternative news media source. Based in Venezuela, it seeks to challenge common perceptions of Latin American identity within a larger political strategy of Bolivarian pan-Latin Americanism. This research project therefore considers the discursive and by implication the wider socio-political value of alternative media, specifically the international and publicly funded broadcast network teleSUR. Through the use of discourse theory to examine this network as an alternative media text this

project seeks to elucidate the radical potential of teleSUR in a region that is used to the images and portrayals of Latin America by private and foreign-owned television stations. Specifically, I will analyze teleSUR's news and testimony segments as genres that articulate particular moments of a new discourse of Bolivarianism that is being taken up for the first time through mass communications.

The democratic socialist* ideals contained within Bolivarianism, an ongoing mass social movement and political process in South America inspired by the early 19th Century Latin America historical independence figure Simón Bolívar, have been taken up in new ways to constitute a counter-public and alternative to neoliberal globalization in Venezuela today. Through discourse analysis of teleSUR's broadcasts I will attempt to evidence the network's political and social shift and the ways in which it conveys a distinct view of the world and of 'third world' development and democracy over a decade after the Washington Consensus and the application of neoliberal reforms throughout Latin America. My objective is therefore to shed light on the Bolivarian Revolution taking place in Venezuela today and identify its strengths and weaknesses as a particular political organization.

Michel Foucault's elucidation of the power configurations which underlie particular truth regimes forms the basis of this discourse analysis, as well as Escobar's (1995) work on development as discourse, although more cautiously since I will argue that development as a concept can still hold the promise of social equality. This project will also be informed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory as well as Laclau's work on populism and emancipation.

* Chávez has, in fact, referred to his political movement as a "21st Century Socialism"

To be sure, the methodological approach of discourse analysis goes beyond simply an analysis of text, concerning itself with the larger dialectic interrelationships between language and society and the ways in which discourse or the particular use of language effects ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘reality.’ An integral mode of communication today is through the medium of television which circulates, legitimizes and consolidates particular world views through the use of language and genre. I refer here specifically to the news as a particular genre to which can be applied a deconstructionist approach in order to identify its ideological freight. In the contemporary context it is important to consider the fact that news in general is highly commodified and therefore greatly influenced by the imperatives of capital. Thus, the news is a legitimizing institution that, in many ways, maintains and perpetuates the status quo. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the media reflect social and cultural values through devices such as framing, or the perspectives they take on particular events and phenomena. Accordingly, the media must be understood to play a significant role in cultivating public consciousness. In Venezuela in particular, an overview of the recent events related to the uses and abuses of mass media communication will demonstrate the immense power of the news media, in particular in effecting politics. In fact, the title of this thesis references the documentary *The Revolution will not be Televised*, which details some of the private media’s deliberate manipulation of news footage and coverage in order to undermine Chávez’s presidency.

In contrast to the news, I will also analyze the subaltern testimonies broadcast on teleSUR to illuminate how the objectives of Bolivarianism are facilitated by this genre, keeping in mind the lessons of the past with respect to testimonial literature and avoiding

a focus on ‘truth claims’ at the expense of acknowledging the experiences and voice of the marginalized other.

Moreover, through the application of articulation theory to map out the directions and focal points of the Bolivarian movement, I hope to explore alternative discursive strategies to development against those offered by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund –part of what is commonly referred to as neoliberal globalization. Furthermore, I will deconstruct that political label ‘populism’ applied to Hugo Chávez and explore the context in which it arises and the possibilities it contains as a political organization around which to mobilize citizens. All of these dimensions will be considered in the context of a traditional political left in disarray, and in Venezuela specifically, a situation in which a strong coalition existed between a major union bureaucracy and the traditional ruling political party Democratic Action (AD).

In light of the recent ‘left-wing’ trend in Latin America with the election of a number of left-of-centre governments, all with varying political projects based on stronger government commitment to social responsibility, it is critical to understand the political and social dynamics of these counter-hegemonic movements in reaction to the numerous neoliberal economic policies imposed on the region and that had worked to disarticulate the social.

The consistent message from Latin America's voters is for change. They are fed up with corruption and an economic model which has not improved the lot of many ordinary people.¹

Consequently, I hope that this research project will successfully investigate the ways in which citizens are mobilized around the discourse of Bolivarianism in Venezuela today by President Hugo Chávez through the medium of satellite television.

The Bolivarian Revolution, a Protagonist Democracy

A distinct form of government and participatory democracy is taking shape in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela which is seeking to challenge neoliberal hegemony in the region by forging a regional economic and political bloc in opposition to free-market fundamentalism, or the belief that left to the economy all social problems will be solved. Therefore, this new approach opposes economic pacts with the US that are always on unfavourable terms for the majority of Latin Americans. However, like most countries in Latin America, Venezuelan society is deeply divided by class as well as degrees of political participation, with redistribution of the nation's resources perceived by elites to be antagonistic to their narrow class interests.²

Significantly, it has been suggested that in order to successfully create a practical alternative to the dominant model of economic liberalism, the poor majority must be included into the revolutionary process as genuine policy protagonists which would allow for the development of a proactive political culture that would be able to withstand both internal and external threats as well as new leadership.³ It is in light of this that the Bolivarian Revolution has the potential to fulfill the aspirations of a popular emancipatory project that would offer a viable alternative model of development based on a privileging of social and democratic empowerment.

In Latin America, a region with 225 million people living in poverty or 43.9% of the population,⁴ citizens are demanding change, and they are doing this in South America through the ballot box. It is obvious that there is popular support for new approaches to government and public policy that address the concerns of a growingly vocal majority. The Chávez administration has sought to take this opportunity to deepen revolutionary

consciousness and political participation in a number of unorthodox ways, opening up the way for mobilization from below whether through a new progressive constitution or support for co-operatives, social programs[†] and grass-roots community movements and organizations; essentially, a top-down approach to empowerment at different levels.

Bolivarianism, an integrationist strategy that promotes regional cooperation and solidarity, and encourages participatory democracy and popular empowerment as central political initiatives (again, consider the incredibly progressive Bolivarian constitution which was created with the Venezuelan people who were invited to submit their own proposals to the government, 70 percent of which were incorporated). The biggest challenge facing the current Venezuelan administration, therefore, is building political hegemony for the ideas contained within the Bolivarian project, one that seeks to consolidate what Chávez refers to as a protagonist democracy. One way of building support for and commitment to the ideals and beliefs of this new political system is through the use of the mass media. Before examining the ways in which Chávez has attempted to harness the power of the mass media in Venezuela however, an overview of the situation that existed in the country with respect to the power and influence of the private media will help to contextualize the emergence of not only a flourishing alternative community media, but the public and pan-Latin American broadcasting network teleSUR.

[†] The “misiones,” or emergency social programs are used by Chávez to resolve the urgent problems of development. These social programs known were founded in 2003 and include free primary health care (Barrio Adentro provides Cuban doctors to rural areas, low-income citizens, along with free medicines), a country-wide literacy campaign (through the Robinson Mission), food distribution (subsidized and run through Mission Mercal), soup kitchens, rural cooperatives and job training, among others.

The Private Media in Venezuela

The relationship between the current Venezuelan administration and the private media is a bitterly antagonistic one. The private media have always been partial in their coverage of Chávez, supporting the opposition from the time Chávez embarked on his presidential campaign in 1998, and becoming overtly critical once he came into power. The private media consistently use the airwaves to disparage and undermine the president, accusing him of attempting to establish a dictatorship, linking him to terrorism, comparing him to fascist dictators of the past, and as despot attempting to eliminate freedom of speech –all claims that are ultimately baseless (see Lemoine, 2002, Boudin, 2006). Although Chávez has responded to the media attacks in his speeches, he has not introduced restrictive measures regarding information flows nor has he ever imprisoned journalists.⁵

Only rarely do the private media report on government statements or concede that he is supported by the majority of the population despite having won the elections in 1998 with more than 57 percent of the popular vote, as well as subsequent democratic elections. At the same time, the private media ignore working class concerns, denying working-class leaders and organizations media representation, rarely ever reporting on living conditions in the countryside or shantytowns.⁶ Thus the private media in Venezuela today have been very much involved and continue to be a powerful part of aggressive attempts to undermine Hugo Chávez's government. The reason for this is that Chávez does not represent the elite interests as the traditional parties once did, nor does he give media their traditional input into his cabinet appointments.⁷ Popular dissatisfaction with the corruption and mismanagement of the last three Venezuelan

administrations led to the collapse of state institutions along with the dominant political parties *Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Partido Social Cristiano de Venezuela* (COPEI) which had, until then, alternately controlled the government since the end of dictatorial rule in the country in 1959.⁸ With Chávez's electoral success in 1998, the traditional parties were displaced alongside the Punto Fijo regime –a long-standing political power sharing agreement between the two traditional democratic parties in Venezuela– as well as the interest groups that supported them, among them businessman and the leaders of major economic groups. Feeling threatened, elites began to heavily invest resources into the corporate media, consequently launching the private media into the role of political actors. The media, furthermore, existed within a laissez-faire economy that was in place before Chávez came to power that gave them the legal space to begin an unprecedented and overtly biased political campaign against the president without restriction.⁹ Opposition parties quickly followed suite seeking to appear on television shows in order to gain popular support.¹⁰ In short, with the coming to power of Chávez and his socialist political agenda, the traditional parties lost their political influence, prompting the private national media chains, who shared those interests, to fill the void.

In Venezuela, five major private television networks control at least 90 percent of the market with smaller private stations controlling another 5 percent.¹¹ After Chávez came to power in 1998 the five main private owned channels – *Venevisión*, *Radio Caracas Televisión* (RCTV), *Globovisión*, *Televen*, and CMT –and nine out of the ten major national newspapers took over the role of the losing traditional political parties and exploited what amounts to a near monopoly on information in Venezuela.¹² To be sure, a history of patronage and clientalism between the traditional political parties and the

media has always existed, with government subsidies going to government friendly media stations.

Station ownership long enjoyed a chummy relationship with the politicians who ran the country up to Chávez's election in 1998. The politicians received handsome salaries for op-ed pieces and guest appearances, while the media received generous advertising and subsidies from the oil-rich state. The only rule was for the media not to openly align itself with one of the two big parties against the other.¹³

However, this patronage was never to the extent to which the private media implicated themselves during the brief ouster of Chávez in 2002.

In April 2002 the media played a decisive role in overthrowing Chávez during a brief coup d'état. Massive protests on April 11th of that year against the Chávez administration were staged as part of a larger strategy led by Pedro Carmona Estanga, president of the Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce (Fedecámaras), the country's most powerful business association, with the help of the private media, as well as dozens of generals in the armed forces. Since the election of Chávez, the private media has regularly and openly called for the overthrow of the president. Furthermore, it has been widely accused of inciting violence through manipulation of video footage and news information in order to encourage dissidents to overthrow the democratically elected leader.¹⁴ In fact, footage was aired by the private media during the violence leading up to the coup which seemed to indicate that Chávez supporters were firing at opposition demonstrators which were later proved to be manipulated; clips that were broadcast along with a succession of retired officers calling for Chávez's resignation.¹⁵ In fact, this particular example of the private media's role in the coup inspired the documentary 'The Revolution will not be Televised' which is where this thesis draws its title.

In the days leading up to the coup, RCTV and other stations' broadcasts repeated calls for the people to attend an opposition march that was diverted at the last

minute toward the presidential palace, where thousands of Chávez supporters had gathered. The resulting clash produced dozens of dead and injured. TV news reports showed Chávez supporters firing pistols from an overpass down to where the opposition march supposedly was passing. In fact, footage shown from another angle showed that the streets below were nearly empty. However, the media repeatedly aired the fabricated opposition story, which played a major role in provoking action by the military.¹⁶

On the day of the coup, amidst a violent clash between an organized opposition group and a smaller hastily assembled group of Chávez supporters, and a treacherous army that was rapidly aligning itself with opposition, Chávez made one last attempt to regain control through a *cadena*, a chain broadcast during which all the radio and television stations must link to the government signal and carry the speech by the President. The chain was used frequently by Chávez during his administration to combat misinformation spread by the opposition media.¹⁷ However, the impact of his speech was compromised when the major private stations split the screens, juxtaposing what was made to look like a disturbing calmness by the President against images of violent scenes from the streets.¹⁸ Chávez, understanding the damaging effect the private media was having, subsequently ordered them to shut down, an order that was ignored.¹⁹ Moreover, the state television station Channel 8 had been sabotaged and therefore unable to counter-act the misinformation and influence of the private media at any level. Essentially then, the private media used tactics in their communication practices that provoked violent clashes as well as civilian deaths, and played a crucial role in the fall of Chávez's government in April of 2002. In fact, on the second day of the coup, media owners visited the Miraflores Palace to express their solidarity with President Carmona.²⁰ In a statement to coup leaders by a representative of the private media, the *Economist* reported,

...a group of top media executives rolled up in their limousines for a meeting with Mr. Carmona [the transitional president], at the 19th-century Miraflores palace.... Gustavo Cisneros, owner of the Venevision television channel and perhaps the country's richest man, headed the group. Also present were Miguel Henrique Otero, publisher of the El Nacional group of newspapers, Alberto Federico Ravell, chief executive of Globovision (Venezuela's answer to CNN) and Marcel Granier of the RCTV channel. "We can't guarantee you the loyalty of the army," a presidential guard heard one of them tell Mr. Carmona, "but we can promise you the support of the media."...Mr. Carmona was overheard telling them: "In your hands lie the safety and stability of the government." ²¹

The Venezuelan Information Office in Washington also added,

In a desperate bid to hold on to power, the government's media allies conspired to suppress all news of its difficulties. A regime that had seized power while waving the flag of press freedom spent its 36 hours in office doing its best to keep the truth from the public... ²²

In fact, RCTV was granted privileged interviews with members of the military's high command and important figures of the new administration. In one instance, one of the station's top reporters, Napoleon Bravo, "gleefully accepted an admiral's congratulations to the media for helping make the plot work." ²³

During Chávez's detainment, *all* the private media initiated a national media blackout of information and news on developing events, refusing to cover the massive uprisings in Venezuela by thousands of citizens demanding his return, or the initial steps taken by the army to re-instate the detained President, keeping most Venezuelans outside of Caracas completely unaware of the turn of events. In fact, with the growing momentum of the counter-coup (initiated by loyal military units and an uprising by poor Venezuelans), RCTV and Globovisión stopped airing twenty-four hour news celebrating the coup, broadcasting instead old movies and cartoons. ²⁴ When then RCTV reporter Andres Izarra attempted to report on the changing situation, he was censored by station management, leading to his resignation (and later to his brief position in the Ministry of Communications for Chávez's government). ²⁵

Andrés Izarra, former managing producer of *El Observador* (A news program on the private station RCTV), testified to the Venezuelan National Assembly that he received clear instructions from Marcel Granier, the owner of RCTV, on the day of the coup and the following days to air “[n]o information on Chávez, his followers, his ministers, and all others that could be related to him.” Furthermore, Izarra confirmed that on the day of the coup, RCTV had a report from CNN that Chávez had not resigned but had been kidnapped and jailed, yet the station owner refused to report the story. In fact all the private channels disseminated the news that President Chávez had resigned, despite their knowledge to the contrary.²⁶

The actions on the part of the four main private media stations to undermine Chávez provoked the President upon reflecting back on the events of April 2002, to refer to them as the ‘four horsemen of the apocalypse.’[‡] However, although Chávez returned to power the morning of April 14th, only a few days after he was forcibly removed from office, the private media only strengthened their resolve to sabotage the presidency. Subsequent to the reinstatement of Chávez’s Fifth Republican Movement (MVR), the private media colluded with business elites to initiate an illegal national strike later that year, inciting fear, chaos and panic on a massive scale (a situation I will elaborate further).

Teun Van Dijk (1993a, 1993b, 1992) has indicated the power of the press in maintaining official dominant ideologies in the face of very opposing realities is particularly strong in situations where citizens have very little alternative information. This is part of the reason why the opposition seems to be able to play so powerfully to middle-class fears of instability and therefore able to mobilize large numbers of people even if it is against the broader interests of society and the country as a whole.

The Private Media, Foreign Intervention and the National Lockout

American involvement has also been cited as a major contributor of support to the Venezuelan private media’s role in destabilizing the country. Through the *National*

[‡] An intertextual reference I might add, with religious connotations that hold currency in a deeply Catholic region.

Endowment for Democracy (NED) a conservative American think-tank and the *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID), a US government organization responsible for most non-military foreign aid in advancement of US foreign policy objectives, the US has channeled millions of dollars into front groups and new political parties aimed, ostensibly at ‘supporting democracy’ in the country; a version of democracy, however, concerned primarily with safeguarding US geopolitical interests.²⁷

Under the pretense of promoting democracy in Latin America then, the US has and continues to pour millions of dollars into Venezuela to destabilize the country in what amounts to direct intervention into a sovereign nation. Significantly, the private media has been a key tool in advancing US foreign policy initiatives in the country.

Using *Development Alternatives Inc.* (DAI), a private American consulting company which was contracted by USAID, a \$7 million grant fund and program was established, and which was ultimately monitored by high-ranking American federal officials.²⁸

Through the Venezuela Construction of Confidence Initiative (VICC) initiated by DAI, funding was given to Venezuelan opposition groups, some of who were involved in the attempted overthrow of Chávez earlier that year.²⁹ One of the first grants was given to the private media. This project involved the creation of television and radio commercials to promote “democratic and modern values, rupturing with the patterns of paternalism and populism” (DAI grant G-3822-101-008).³⁰ The project was supported by the new Fedecámaras president, Carlos Fernandez, who succeeded Pedro Carmona –Carmona now a political exile in neighbouring Colombia after serving as interim president during the brief coup.³¹

The renewed media campaign against Chávez began December 9th, 2002, a week after the commencement of a national wide ‘general strike.’ More accurately, a nation-wide two month lockout organized by Fedecámaras, the top leadership of Venezuela’s Confederation of Workers (CTV),[§] and the opposition parties now known collectively as *Coordinadora Democrática* (CD) –without ever informing or including general workers.^{**} Thus, the strike was not actualized by common workers, but by owners, executives and high level managers who forced workers to stay at home when shops and businesses closed. Despite the lock-out, the private channels portrayed it as a massive general workers strike in an effort to support a wider strategy of destabilization that would force President Chávez to resign.³² The private media suspended all regular programming and commercials, donating all air space to strike coverage and promotion, broadcasting to more than four million screens in Venezuela.³³

The CD, with the help of Venezuela’s top public relations firms and USAID, produced some of the most highly crafted anti- Chávez commercials, often broadcast ten at a time in between coverage of opposition marches, speeches and interviews, contained varying messages on Chávez’s failures, alleged human rights abuses, and the overall political crisis and poor state of the nation. Some of the commercial exploited images of children singing and stamping red colored handprints, symbolizing blood, on walls, with messages about the “future of the nation,” the “safety of children.” And the “need for a new Venezuela.”³⁴

[§] The CTV was allied with the AD, and it was this alliance that had prevented organized labour from forming a response to the corruption and mismanagement of President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1989 during the economic crisis (Roberts: 2003, 61). With more workers being forced into the informal sector precisely because of neoliberal ‘shock therapy’ structural adjustments, the CTV was no longer effective in articulating political identities or representing the interests of informal workers who now made up a greater part of the labour force in Venezuela (Roberts, 61). In fact, the portion of workers belonging to the union dropped nearly half between 1988 (26.4 percent) and 1995 (13.5 percent). Thus organized labour came to depend on the membership of a relatively privileged group of workers in the public sector who had little in common with an increasingly privatized and informal workforce (Roberts, 61).

^{**} This was especially the case for the major oil company PDVSA, see “Open Letter to the Worker’s Group of the International Labor Organization (ILO)” by the *National Union of Workers of Venezuela* (UNT), 2005. Available at www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1381

At the same time, the private media's distorted coverage was filtered through to the international press, prompting one author to comment that, "Rarely have political developments in an important country—one of the greatest oil producers of the Western world—been so inadequately reported and analyzed by the foreign media"³⁵; a reoccurring problem even today.^{††}

Media Monopolies

Media ownership is highly concentrated in Venezuela with ownership predominantly in the hands of two families; the Cisernos, who own Venevisión (the largest station in the country), and Bottome & Granier Group, who own Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV) and Radio Caracas Radio. These media conglomerates also own advertising and public relations agencies, record labels, as well as other cultural industries. Through alliances with US multinationals, Cisernos also owns over 70 media outlets in 39 countries, including *DirecTV Latin America*, *AOL Latin America*, *Caracol Television* (Colombia), the *Univisión Network* in the US, *Galavisión*, and *Playboy Latin America*, as well as beverage and food product distribution (Coca-Cola bottling, Regional Beer, Pizza Hut in Venezuela, dairy distributors, and other local food products) and cultural entities (such as Los Leones Baseball team of Caracas and the Miss Venezuela Pageant).³⁶ These types of media monopolies are precisely what developed nations seek to prohibit in their countries.³⁷

Thus, it was that media consortia Cisernos was able *not only* to provide television coverage in support of the national strike, but also facilitate the creation of an artificial

^{††} For a critical Toronto Star article on the Ontario Press Council's support of a complaint against a series of skewed articles on Venezuela published May 2006 in the Star entitled 'Star stories on Venezuela lacked balance, panel rules,' see *Toronto Star*, March 13, 2007. Available online at www.thestar.com.

food shortage with the deliberate closure of its beverage and food product distribution companies in an attempt to trigger public desperation and frustration with the government when commodities became in dangerously short-supply.**

At Cisernos's milk farm in the state of Mérida, witnesses saw workers pouring milk into the rivers instead of bottling it for sale. Cisernos had decided that depriving Venezuelan children of milk was fair game in the war to get rid of Chávez.³⁸

With the end of the two month national 'strike' two of the major stations became considerably more moderate of Chávez. The all-news stations RCTV and Globovisión, however, did not. Most recently, these stations deliberately tried to confuse public opinion through the manipulation of polls leading up to the December 3, 2006 presidential elections.³⁹ The intended objectives were to boost electoral support for the opposition candidate, Manuel Rosales, and to make credible claims of fraud after Chávez had won.⁴⁰ However, when it was confirmed that Chávez had indeed won, Rosales, accepted the results, squelching all hopes by the Washington supported RCTV and Globovisión to incite social unrest and undermine international confidence in the results.⁴¹

More recently, the Venezuelan President has said that he will not renew RCTV's license which expires in March 2007. In an address to troops in late December 2006, Chávez stated he would not tolerate media outlets supporting coups against him, asserting, the channel was "at the service of coups against the people, against the nation, against national independence, against the dignity of the republic."⁴²

** This situation is reminiscent of CIA involvement in Chile in 1973 when, along with many other measures, the creation of an artificial shortage of food helped to create the conditions for the successful military ouster and death of democratically elected President Salvador Allende on September 11th of that year, only to be replaced by almost 16 years of brutal dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet.

According to Daniel Hellinger, professor of Political Science at Webster University, the non-renewal of RCTV's license is consistent with Venezuelan laws that mandate social responsibility and are consistent with social responsibility reforms that were consolidated in a January 2007 media reform conference held in Memphis.⁴³ Nevertheless, RCTV will still be able to continue to distribute its programming via cable and other media. Therefore, Chávez has not revoked the license, as some initial reports had it, but determined, legitimately, not to renew it once the previous one expired.⁴⁴

Moreover, on January 26th, 2007 teleSUR broadcast an interview with Venezuelan Minister of Telecommunications, Jesse Chacón and analyst Alberto Aranguibel detailing the context within which this decision was taken and its constitutionality in order to adequately inform Venezuelans.⁴⁵ For his part, RCTV's Marcel Granier has vowed to fight against the president's plans in Venezuela's courts and on the international stage.⁴⁶

It is also significant to mention that RCTV workers affiliated with the 'chavista' Union of Professional Workers of the Audiovisual Media of Venezuela made a proposal on Jan. 23 that the station be turned over to the employees to manage;⁴⁷ a telling example of the new political culture emerging in Venezuela.

Redefining Democracy through Alternative Media

The discourse of neoliberalism refers not only to a particular model of economic development implemented in the South (i.e. structural adjustment), but the ways in which this discourse has colonized the whole social field. In Latin America particularly, neoliberalism was institutionalized in laws that helped to protect the interests of elite groups and multinationals. So it was that Constitutional reforms, labour and criminal law,

among others, were re-written in order to support a free-market society.^{§§} Essentially the product of the Chicago School of Economics contemporary *neoliberalism* refers to economic policies that hold the efficiency of market competition and the role of individuals in determining the best economic outcomes; as such government intervention and regulation of markets are perceived as distortions.⁴⁸ As a post-Keynesian approach, it refers to ‘new’ or ‘neo’ economic liberalism, and articulates the idea of the rights of the individual through its connection and extension to the realm of the market. The very idea of a ‘free market’ reifies the abstract idea of markets, giving them the quality of something concrete. ‘Free’ in this sense is essentially a metaphor and, significantly, proves the power of language in determining social reality around the implicit metaphor contained in the idea of ‘economic liberalism.’ Thus it is only through a set of particular economic conditions associated with unfettered capital that the ideal situation in which freedom is maximized is achieved according to this view. Economic liberalism is therefore articulated as intrinsic to political freedom and democracy.

Discursive regimes, such as neoliberalism, aim to remove perceptual ambiguities of the social world through a process of closure that seeks to fix key referents, like ‘democracy’ and establish hegemony over the social field. Nevertheless, these meanings are constantly posed with the threat of displacement by other possibilities of meaning and are therefore always potentially polysemic. Articulations, therefore, either reproduce or challenge the existing discourses by fixing meaning in particular ways and which are always necessarily exclusionary of different interpretations, and therefore ultimately political. So it is that the process of articulation involves the connecting of disparate

^{§§} These issues were the focus of arguments made by Lukas Savino in a paper entitled “Exclusions of Identity: Neoliberalism(s) in Latin America” at the conference *Illusions of Identity: Resisting (Beyond) Identity Politics*, held October 14-15, 2006 at the University of Western Ontario, London, Ont.

elements together to form a contingent unity within a particular context; “a linkage whose conditions of existence need to be located in the contingencies of circumstance.”⁴⁹

Chávez’s Bolivarian discourse reproduces notions of democracy, yet challenges and transforms the concept by redefining what has traditionally been an integral nodal point—a privileged sign around which all others signs are ordered and acquire meaning—in opposition to the failed representative democracy of the former Punto Fijo regime (the power sharing agreement between AD and COPEI) and in contrast to the dominant US model of democracy, both of which supported the neoliberal model of development. Consequently, this redefinition points to a struggle over meaning concerning the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘development.’

Political analysts have noted that despite the strengthening of political rights, there is currently a democratic deficit in Latin America due to the lack of important social, cultural and human rights.⁵⁰ Part of this deficit is a lack of access to and sources of accurate information that are required for citizens to make informed decisions about the world in which they live, as a critical aspect of any democracy. As part of a larger political and social project to address this issue, Hugo Chávez, realizing the power of the media, launched an international media strategy that included the development of teleSUR, a TV news channel modeled on the Arabic channel Al Jazeera.^{***} It was expected that teleSUR would become a regional news source that would rival CNN en Español and Univisión, the current leading regional news networks.⁵¹ teleSUR Director Aram Aharonian asserts,

^{***} In fact, teleSUR and Al Jazeera signed an agreement to exchange information and technology on February 2, 2006, formalizing a growing link that was initiated when teleSUR began transmitting across Latin America. See Jim McIlroy and Coral Wynter, “Telesur: Another Television is Possible” 15/02/2006. Available online at: <http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/articles.php?artno=1671>

We are transmitting 24 hours a day and 60% of our program content is news. The news is all original, from Caracas and our other offices. We need to create a genuine Latin American audio-visual industry. We don't want to transmit Walt Disney cartoons and other Hollywood mass culture all day. At present, 97% of our TV comes from the United States. We have to change that.⁵²

Before Hugo Chávez was elected president in December 1998, the former Venezuelan government had planned to privatize the nation's communication infrastructure including the state-owned VTV or Channel 8. One such strategy involved deliberately offering exorbitant benefits in work contracts that would ultimately make the enterprise unprofitable and open the way for private takeover.⁵³ The Venezuelan government under Chávez, on the other hand, has invested in technical modernization and training through the new Communications Ministry and through the financing of the pan-American television initiative teleSUR.

Significantly, the Venezuelan government owns only 51% of the network in a strategic attempt to inhibit future privatization of the broadcast network, sharing ownership with Argentina (20%), Cuba (19%), Uruguay (10%) as well as content and technology from Brazil.^{†††} These countries also help to supply news material, resources, and, most importantly, audiences.⁵⁴ teleSUR was established on the 24th of January, 2005, according to Venezuela's ministerial decree No. 411, and has a budget of roughly 2.5 million dollars, with an additional 10 million dollars expected from commercial sponsors.⁵⁵ Beginning in July 2005, moreover, teleSUR began to offer twenty-four-hour news coverage broadcast via satellite throughout Latin America.

teleSUR thus represents the possibility of giving an alternative voice and vision to the people of Latin America who were long accustomed to receiving their news from one

††† On April 6, 2006, Bolivia's President Evo Morales agreed to buy a 5% stake in teleSUR according to BBC News "Venezuela quits Andean trade bloc," 20 April 2006.

of a few private networks. Yuri Pimentel, the Venezuelan Minister of Communication and Information asserts, “Nothing is harder than to make a peaceful, democratic revolution. We want to put the media in the vanguard of this struggle,” stressing, furthermore, that it is not the government’s intention to put the media under state control but to strengthen the power of citizens over the media and take initiatives to build a continent-wide media alternative through teleSUR.⁵⁶ Pimentel also highlighted the way in which the brief coup of Chávez on April 11, 2002 had exposed the government’s underestimation of the media’s power.⁵⁷

In fact, the Ministry of Communication for which Yuri Pimentel works was set up (after the events of 2002) to replace the old Ministry of Information and to create a government body devoted to supporting Venezuela’s flourishing community and alternative broadcasting.⁵⁸ Against a private media campaign of disinformation and anti-Chávez propaganda leading up to the coup, and the subsequent media blackout, community radio played a decisive role in informing Venezuelans citizens in rural communities throughout the country about the unfolding events in the capital. In so doing, they mobilized the mass turnouts that, along with key military decisions, were then able to reverse the coup.⁵⁹ Therefore, the new ministry as Pimentel describes, exists to strengthen these community movements at the grassroots level and to compliment state radio and television. “We have to make the people feel they are represented in the media,” he says, “This is not easy. This is part of building what we call participatory democracy.”⁶⁰

In fact, part of the inspiration for teleSUR comes from Venezuela’s community media movement. One organization in particular, Catia TV, located in the shanty town of

San Juan, Caracas, recruits and trains production teams among the ordinary population to give communities the opportunity to broadcast the information that is most relevant to them.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, their slogan is, “Don’t watch television. Make it”. One of Catia’s cofounders, Blanca Eekhout, is now the head of the Venezuelan state television station, VTV, and also served as an advisor for the government during meetings planning the initiation of teleSUR. She said in an interview with a BBC journalist, “For me it’s indispensable for communities to have in their own hands channels of communication which are their own. And what’s more, this has to have an international aspect.”⁶² Although teleSUR is not intended to simply copy community channels like Catia TV, it nevertheless exists to build on similar principles that encourage the mainstreaming of peripheral and marginal perspectives in Venezuela as well as promote critical debate and action.

The programming, the cornerstone of [teleSUR’s] commitment, encourages active users, stimulating participation, fomenting critical attitudes, promoting action, and making it possible to have a protagonist television viewer.⁶³ (own translation)

To give an approximation of what one might expect to see on teleSUR, within about an hour span during mid-day hours November 2005, I viewed a news broadcast that covered the Chilean, Bolivian and Haitian elections, the controversy surrounding Peruvian Fujimori, Mexican officials concern over US agricultural subsidies, a high-profile case involving the convictions of the murderers in the assassination of an American human and environmental rights activist and nun in Brazil, and other important news from around the world. It reminded me very much of the BBC world news except that during the breaks there were testimonies given by ordinary Venezuelans speaking to the opportunities afforded them by different co-operative work programs, the great

service Cuban doctors were providing in the country, as well as a public service announcement concerning the Venezuela's state oil firm PDVSA –reflecting Chávez's major restructuring of Venezuela's oil policy and the regaining of national control over the industry in order to recover oil revenues for the purpose of domestic economic and social development.⁶⁴ The station also had musical interludes and trailers for upcoming documentary programs that evoked the revolutionary spirit of Latin America with images of Simón Bolívar, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and protestors, among others. I did not get the impression that the station was strictly a mouthpiece for Chávez although it does represent a different perspective compared to CNN Spanish-language news broadcasts. teleSUR's general director, Aram Aharonian, a former journalist and newspaper director asserts,

Telesur is a strategic project that was born out of the need to give voice to Latin Americas confronted by an accumulation of thoughts and images transmitted by commercial media and out of the urgency to see ourselves through our own eyes and to discover our own solutions to our problems. If we do not start there, the dream of Latin American integration will be no more than a salute to the flag.⁶⁵

Moreover, Aharonian claims that teleSUR is a political act in the sense that it parallels the objectives of community media, however, with access to much more resources; “telesur will follow the same premises that for decades took refuge in small alternative and community media. But now we have left our marginal niche and are heading toward mass communications,” he affirms.⁶⁶ In its first broadcast, the channel's president, the former Venezuelan communications minister, Andres Izarra, told viewers in as many as 23 Latin American countries that teleSUR was aimed at countering cultural imperialism, which he said had gone unchallenged in the region for 50 years.⁶⁷ At the same time, a week before teleSUR began to broadcast, the US House of Representatives voted to enable the US administration

to begin broadcasting its own TV signals to Venezuela, which it maintained was intended to counter what it called anti-US propaganda (similar to pro-US Radio and TV Marti in Cuba).⁶⁸

Thus, the newly launched teleSUR allows for an articulation of the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ that is accessible to many millions of Venezuelans and Latin Americans, encouraging understanding of and support for new approaches to democracy and development. This alternative discourse thus attempts to fix meanings that offer a version of development conceived of from within the South itself. In this way, teleSUR re-appropriates the language of development through terms such as empowerment, participation and democracy. Arguably then, by analyzing Bolivarianism, in particular through teleSUR, the possibilities for real political, economic and social change can be evaluated. It is to this end that I use both discourse theory and method to analyze the alternative media discourses presented by teleSUR today and its relevance not only at the political level but also within a wider cultural struggle for identity.

The next section will outline theoretical approaches to discourse analysis and media as text, in particular, as it relates to the Venezuelan context. The second chapter will engage teleSUR transcripts in order to evaluate its potential as an effective counter-discourse and meaningful alternative to private and foreign owned media news.

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Chapter 1: Approaches to Discourse

Theoretical Framework: Discourse Analysis and Media as Text

This chapter seeks to outline the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis as both a theory and methodological approach, outlining the epistemological advantages as well as the limitations of its use for research related to the study of alternative news media texts. I give particular focus to the Essex school of thought on discourse theory. Furthermore, with reference to the importance of the media, a discussion of genre, news and testimony analysis, as well as the dominant discursive characterization of information and communication and the construction of audiences and publics will also help to situate this study.

David Howarth (2000) clearly indicates the research concerns for discourse theorists vis-à-vis more empirical methodologies. Discourse analysis, he states, looks to elucidate how and under what conditions as well as for what reasons discourses are constructed, contested and change.¹ It follows that discourse theorists seek to describe, understand and explain particular historical events and processes, rather than establish empirical generalizations or test universal hypothesis.² Research related to the study of alternative media texts then is not an attempt to establish any hidden truths but rather to evidence the ways in which counter-discourses attempt to articulate alternative projects that better reflect the lived experience of a majority of peoples while at the same time constructing the social in new ways, for example through empowerment as I will argue that Bolivarianism attempts to do.

Post-structuralism and Discourse Analysis

To begin with, discourse theory is most closely associated with post-structuralist thought. A founding post-structuralist thinker, Michel Foucault theorized that the humanist discourses of modernity were not given but, rather, that they were constructed knowledge systems that informed and institutionalized technologies of power.³ Foucault's research and analysis focused on the discursive origins and development of the modern human sciences –for example, psychiatry– as well as the rise of their affiliated institutions –e.g. the asylum– and the associated production of truth governed by these discursive power regimes.⁴ Through his notion and method of archaeology, moreover, Foucault demonstrates how the structures of discourse prevail over human agency; “It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice.”⁵ According to Foucault then, meaning does not originate in the speaking subject, but rather, governed by the formative rules of discourse, profoundly changing the way in which social identity is understood. He thus shattered the myth that identity was whole and true, evidencing the ways in which it is fragmented and made up of a number of discursive formations leading to an unstable and shifting identity, or more accurately, identities.⁶ Foucault's method of *Genealogy*, moreover, demonstrated the ways in which the body is articulated historically and politically by competing discourses in particular contexts.⁷

Significantly, Foucault's use of the term ‘discourse’ in the place of ideology was a deliberate attempt to move away from suggesting or assuming, as the concept of ‘ideology’ does, that an ultimate or essential “truth” exists or that human subjectivity is

such that it can be deceived by ideology or break free and become enlightened by some ultimate ‘truth.’⁸ For Foucault all discourse is the product of power relations and it within discourse that power becomes fused with knowledge. Knowledge can thus be understood as specific truth claims that enable the formation of hegemonic structures⁹; thus power is intrinsically tied to knowledge.

Essentially then, discourse analysis is not concerned with perpetuating the same simple binaries between what is ‘true’ and what is ‘false’ since these are always contingent, but in mapping out historically how the effects of particular truth claims are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true or false.¹⁰ For example, using this theoretical framework, one cannot assume that the democratic model of one country is the ‘true’ and universal one, dismissing any alternative as false, propagandistic or merely rhetorical. For discourse analysts it is not an issue of truth or falsehood but rather a concern with the articulations of specific world views that organize the social, political, and cultural in specific ways. Genealogy is therefore, an effective approach to analyzing the ways in which dominant constructions of the social become naturalized as well as opening up possible alternatives to dominant understandings of foundational premises, such as those of democracy which are ambiguous but vital links to larger political discourses.

At a fundamental level then, Foucault’s post-structuralist theory rejects the idea and assumptions of progress, attempting, rather, to define specific forms of articulation between different practices. An integral aspect of the genealogical approach, problematization, or the critical questioning of particular elements in a specific articulation will therefore shed light on key power dynamics working concordantly with

other relational elements within a field of discourse¹¹ (this will become more apparent with the discussion of A. Escobar's 1995 work to follow).

Significantly, Foucault makes a fundamental distinction between *domination* and *power*, evidencing the ways in which the productive notion of power offers a space for resistance and empowerment.¹² Since power and knowledge are intrinsically related, alternative meanings and openness of meaning can offer up a real challenge to hegemonic discourses while not necessarily dominating particular groups of people or essentializing identity.

Foucault does not present us with a system of domination that imposes a rationalizing bureaucratic logic or class interest on a manipulated and deluded subaltern grouping. Foucault's objections to these accounts concentrate on the assumption that there is a 'true consciousness' or 'essence' that is being contaminated by power and domination – in other words, that there is a singular mechanism to which power relations are functional and can be made intelligible; that resistance to power and domination is negligible, and always integrated into the Moloch-like system of domination. In so doing, Foucault develops further the key distinction between domination and power, while articulating a productive notion of power that is not antithetical to freedom, subjectivity and resistance.¹³

Another fundamental influence of Foucault's post-structuralist thought to discourse theory was his particular perspective on "power" which advanced the idea that it is not power that represses or creates hierarchies and divisions, but rather, power which produces and reproduces systems of oppression, always in constant circulation (and never localized) within a society.¹⁴ Although Foucault has been criticized for the lack of conceptual clarity in his account of power and its relation to domination, resistance and the subject,¹⁵ the more recent work of post-structuralist theorists such as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe offer sophisticated theories and approaches to analysis of discourse, subject formation and resistance.

The Essex School

Laclau & Mouffe develop Foucault's productive conception of power in their own theory of discourse, expanding the constitutive nature of discourse to all aspects of life. Essentially, the social space (including organizations, institutions, social categories, concepts, identities and relationships, etc.) as well as the world of material objects are conceived of as discursive in nature.¹⁶ In fact, Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's claim that nothing exists outside of text has often been critiqued as ideational, a misunderstanding in terms of an assumption that L&M deny the existence of the material world completely –which is not the case at all. Their point, simply put, is that nothing is understood outside of discourse, including the material world itself.* At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that Michel Foucault and, more recently, Norman Fairclough have both been critiqued for *not* being able to clearly define the limits of their understanding of the discursive and non-discursive aspects of social life; to be clear, neither offer a clear method of delineation that would allow one to distinguish where one begins and the other ends.

Following from post-structuralist theory and in contrast to linguistics, furthermore, is the idea that the process of meaning making in relation to people and objects is caught up in an infinite play of “horizontal” difference or equivalence.¹⁷ These processes include false dichotomies, binary oppositions and other simplifications of meaning as well as ‘chains of equivalence’ (the linking together of disparate concepts and ideas ideologically). Moreover, meaning is never fixed absolutely and is therefore, always in an unstable flux, although there are attempts at closure (or the fixing of

* See Stuart Hall (1986) for his critique of Laclau and Mouffe. (Hall, S. 1986 “On Postmodernism and Articulation: an Interview with Stuart Hall” Lawrence Grossberg ed. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. Vol.10 (2) pg 42-60)

meaning) which emerge as partially stable configurations that can last according to the strength of the larger hegemonic discourse.¹⁸ Thus,

Laclau and Mouffe challenge the 'closure' of the [structuralist] linguistic model, which reduces all elements to the internal moments of the system. This [closure] implies that every social action repeats an already existing system of meanings and practices, in which case there is no possibility of constructing new nodal points that 'partially fix meaning', which is the chief characteristic of an articulatory practice.¹⁹

The Essex School, a discourse theory led by Ernesto Laclau is influenced by Antonio Gramsci's revision of Marx through a post-structuralist lens, hence the importance of the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony' or 'ideological hegemony'.²⁰ Hegemony refers to the process whereby a dominant class contrives to retain political power by manipulating public opinion and creating 'popular consensus' or 'common-sense' support for a particular organization of social life in an unconscious way.²¹ The political ontology of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is, therefore, post-Marxist in the sense that they abandon class-essentialism (they do not essentialize social struggles as strictly class-antagonisms), but recognize the contingency of social struggles as well as their plurality and instability.²² Nevertheless, theirs remains a critical theory in that discourse analysis is a method primarily concerned with social justice and equality through the disruption of the naturalized hegemonic ordering of everyday life in order to open up new ways of perceiving social life and making meaning of the world in ways that are more socially equitable.

Another important intellectual antecedent of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is psychoanalysis. The concept used in discourse theory of 'over-determination' is derived from Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and refers to an important process in discursive formations relating to nodal points (a concept borrowed from Lacan) or

privileged discursive points which sustain a particular discourse by constructing a definite knot of meanings that help to maintain social hegemony as well as help to conceal the ambiguities of key terms (vague concepts such as ‘freedom’ or ‘democracy’).²³

The main shortcoming of post-structuralist discourse theory, however, lay with its weak methodological approach; it fails to be explicit about how to engage in this type of analysis considering the methodology must be non-essentializing and non-positivistic in its production of knowledge. From reading other works using discourse analysis as a method and being creative in the analytical process itself, as well as using Foucault’s genealogical approach, as Howarth (2000) suggests, this limitation can be overcome. Furthermore, for specific analysis of genres like news media and testimonies a variety of resources exists.

Another significant criticism of discourse theory and analysis, specifically as it pertains to studies of the developing world, is that the method reduces development to texts. Artz (1997) warns that postmodern abstractions to such a level can sacrifice ‘precision, consistency and clarity.’²⁴ Specifically, he argues that that lack of application and examples by Laclau of discourse analysis in his work regarding hegemony and social change fails to offer practical value to studies of concrete historical events and social movements. It is within this nexus that I hope that my application of discourse analysis will have relevant practical applications.

Articulation Theory

The Essex school contributed much to the development of articulation theory, an integral aspect of discourse theory. To begin with, articulation is the formation of links

between concepts to form discourses that shape our perceptions of the world.²⁵ These concepts are not logically or necessarily related but, rather, are bound together simply by connotative or evocative links, making both the concepts and the links that unify them contingent; that is, possible but not necessary. Hegemony, the organizing of consent around a specific ideology, can be understood as an articulating practice, for example, the articulation of liberal democracy which links democracy (the rule of the people) with *laissez-faire* capitalism, a specific organization of the economy based on free enterprise. Simply stated, articulation is the formation of links between concepts to form discourses and 'common sense' perceptions of our world.

Theoretically, articulation can be understood as a way of de-constructing a social formation without making the error of reductionism by focusing on the unessential nature of particular regimes of truth. Significantly, it also provides a methodological as well as contextualizing framework for discourse analysis that allows for the deconstruction of naturalized ideas and beliefs, evidencing discourses as fragmentary and contradictory rather than unified wholes. At the political level articulation evidences the structure and play of relations of power, and at the strategic level it provides an avenue for intervention that allows for the conception of alternative possibilities.²⁶

The purpose of this analysis, then, is to elucidate how discourse analysis and articulation theory can further understandings of the reaction taken up by the alternative communications media teleSUR, to dominant discourses in a strategic move towards Latin American political integration, and at the same time evaluate the discourse of Bolivarianism as a potentially powerful and effective counter-discourse.

Development as Discourse

Postmodernist theory has actualized a real crisis in thinking about important issues such as (third-world) *development*. Ronaldo Munck (2000), however, asserts the possibility of a critical postmodernism in helping to resolve the impasse of development studies, in particular, and larger social issues in general. Munck advocates the use of postmodern theory to re-politicize the debate, or impasse in which development theory seems to find itself. Munck points to the continued dependence on modernist discourses by development theorists, which he asserts has affected the unification of the whole field of development studies from the most conservative elements like the World Bank to the radical fringe, characterizing alternative paradigms as mostly inadequate.²⁷ Significantly, Munck points towards the importance of language use in development discourse, which he asserts has been hijacked by international development organizations to support neoliberal agendas (See Munck 2000). Arguably then, by analyzing alternative discourses that attempt to fix meanings within a new order of discourse regarding (third world) development, distinct ideas and approaches can be perceived from within the South itself allowing for the possibility of real political, economic and social change to emerge. Herein lies the difference between what Munck terms anti-development, which still operates under the same essentialism of the mainstream development discourse (Marxism), and postdevelopment theories which do not deny globalization or modernity but attempt to find ways of living with it and imaginatively transcending it.²⁸

In *Deconstructing Development Discourses: Of Impasses, Alternatives and Politics*, Ronaldo Munck relays the theoretical and practical consequences of a political history of development discourse and theory that has seemingly ended in an impasse,

caught in between the failure and de-legitimization of the modernization approaches to development from the 1950s and the limitations of dependency theory in the 1970s (a response to the modernization paradigm which claimed that it was the cause of the ‘development of underdevelopment’ in the so-called ‘third world’). Essentially the crisis of Marxism –the realization that this critical tradition remained within the enlightenment project– brought about by postmodern thought, showed that it was not a radical break from the “theoretical and political coordinates of the modernization paradigm”; a crisis made obvious with the collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁹

The impasse was perceived to be political, therefore, by “Burying their own impoverished version of Marxism,” Munck argues, development theorists returned to the old modernization paradigm in the form of neoliberalism, a discourse consolidated with the Washington Consensus –a reference to a series of neoliberal policies promoted as a formula for engendering economic growth in many parts of Latin America in particular and the developing world in general. Significantly, the problems of development were framed in technical (economic) terms rather than political or social ones. The focus now however was not limited to national development like that of the original modernization theory, but development tied to trade and the interrelatedness of national economies globally.

The World Bank in its 1980 World Development Report ‘officially’ signaled the end of the long-running definition of development as nationally managed growth. Henceforth, ‘development’ would measure the extent of participation in and integration with the world market. The notion of ‘reform’ was also rewritten to erase any connotation of income redistribution or agrarian reform, to signify the extent to which mechanisms should be given free reign.³⁰

In this same work, Munck briefly touches upon ‘popular development’ as an alternative strategy that can be loosely understood as the prioritization of issues such as gender, the

environment, participation, popular planning and a focus on needs. Essentially, what popular development takes as its goal is the achievement of popular empowerment and independence, something Munck quickly dismisses as too simplistic and evocative of Soviet socialism –perhaps too quickly.

teleSUR and Discourse Analysis

Neoliberalism can be understood as a political project for the reconstruction of society in accord with the demands of an unrestrained global capitalism (Bourdieu 1998 in Fairclough, 2000). Fairclough, like many others, have argued that neoliberalism has in fact produced a new imperialism, where international economic organizations indiscriminately impose restructuring on the so-called ‘third world,’ often times with devastating consequences. In an editorial entitled *Language and Neoliberalism*, Norman Fairclough (2000)[†] calls for coordinated action against neoliberalism on the part of critical language researchers, arguing that this particular form of capitalism is gaining ascendancy in the world today to the benefit of a few.³¹ Increasing inequality gaps, decreasing security and democracy as well as environmental degradation are among the losses associated with globalized unrestrained capital. He urges critics to challenge the new order, especially the claim that it is inevitable.

Critical language researchers, for Fairclough, play a critical role in deconstructing the discourse of an imposed representation of the world, urging new articulations of an alternative world order through new genres because the struggle against the new neoliberal order, Fairclough asserts, is partly a struggle over language.³² Significantly, he

[†] Although Norman Fairclough refers to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which differs slightly in defining discursive as well as non-discursive aspects of the social, his approach to discourse analysis as well as his arguments are still valid, relevant and important to my analysis.

asserts, applying discourse analysis then should not be limited to specifying the threat, but also in specifying emergent practices of resistance, and so discern possibilities for change.³³

Discourse analysis is a particularly suited theory and methodological approach to the study of media, in particular, the analysis of alternative media texts from the so-called ‘third world’, which on a fundamental level challenge hegemonic constructions of the social space by articulating new ways of perceiving it (hence their alternative nature) and questioning traditional and taken for granted notions of ‘development,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘third world’. My research focus is therefore the discursive strategies of the newly launched Venezuelan channel teleSUR, specifically, teleSUR’s news broadcasts and testimony intermissions. Drawing on news discourse theories, I will attempt to elucidate the revolutionary ways in which Bolivarianism, as a Latin American political discourse, is being taken up by the news genre to articulate a particular political, economic and social organization of South America that includes the redefinition of ‘development’ and ‘democracy’ as well as the articulation of a strong current of pan-Latin Americanism. Furthermore, by critically analyzing the key signifiers (integral nodal points which help to organize discourse) of this modern day ‘revolution’ I hope to be able to evaluate it as a truly socially conscious movement. Language then, must be understood as a form of social practice, and television as a particular text is discursive, even as an alternative discursive strategy and articulation of the political and social field.

Approaching an analysis of teleSUR through the lens of discourse theory has profound consequences for understanding the potential challenges that it poses to dominant social, economic and political discourses through the re-articulation of

important nodal points or important signifiers. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, in particular, elucidate the ways in which meaning can never be ultimately fixed, but continually negotiated with respect to dominant ideologies.

Discourse theory aims to unpack prevalent ontologies to reveal the assumptions they make as well as the political exclusion of different understandings they imply.³⁴ Thus, discourse analysis includes a critique of 'reality', society, and identity, revealing the underlying processes in the production of meaning.

Specifically, this approach has important implications for understanding "third world development." As Arturo Escobar elucidates in his work *Encountering Development* (1995), for the past two decades, the institutionalized discourses of development concentrated power with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund through a particular monopoly on knowledge claims about the 'third world', essentially objectifying the 'third world' subject in vastly homogenizing ways to the benefit of global capital. Escobar engages in an analysis of development as discourse as an establishment of the realm of the real. Thus, development discourse is understood as a regime of truths and representations that systematically shapes and constructs identities, in essence constituting the Third World.³⁵ The creation of these regimes of truth is necessarily power over them because the process is a delineating and delimiting one that undermines conceptualizations outside of the hegemonic discourse. This is where *problematization* occurs, that is, the appropriation of a fundamental experience (e.g. poverty) and the consequent disposition through the institutionalization of the discourse, that is, the establishment of institutions that function for the purpose of perpetuating the discourse—institutions like the World Bank.³⁶ It is within discourse then that power and

knowledge come together. Consequently the Third World's capacity for self-definition (culturally, socially, politically), its autonomy and different modes of knowing are undermined.³⁷

To be sure, underdevelopment is a very real historical formation (economic exploitation, life conditions) but as a fundamental human experience, Escobar elucidates, it has been appropriated and manipulated in ways that allow the West to control and manage the third world by turning the poor into objects of knowledge and management.³⁸ The discourse of development and the subsequent definition of third world countries in vastly generalized and stereotypical terms have historically led to its control and legitimized standardized neoliberal approaches to the considerably diverse places that constitute the 'third world.'³⁹ 'Problems,' Escobar says, were articulated rather than identified to fit within the dominant discourse of underdevelopment thereby establishing the third world as a legitimate target of specific treatment that resulted in the creation of an ever-encompassing field of intervention.⁴⁰ This development paradigm was promoted globally and internalized in the third world as a self-evident truth. So it was that the interventionist development strategies that began with outright violence and repression in Latin America gave way to the normalization of development ideology in the last two decades.

Besides creating technological dependency the neoliberal approach provided a channel by which American capitalist norms and values could be imposed at the expense other cultural belief systems. Significantly, it is this perception that teleSUR aims to challenge. Yuri Pimentel, Minister of Communications and Information asserts of teleSUR,

The idea is to present a Latin American vision to a Latin American audience. Mostly what we get from abroad is a stereotyped image of poverty. It's a distorted, pathetic image... We really don't know much about one another. Rarely do we [Venezuelans] see a program about Brazil, or Brazilians something about Peru, or Peruvians about Mexicans. ...It's a channel to promote integration.⁴¹

The limited conception of 'third world' countries that Escobar draws our attention to overlooks significant historical and political realities that, in turn, shape skewed policies in the region.⁴² This absence of historical, political and cultural specificity is addressed by teleSUR and informed by Bolivarianism. The ideals of Bolivarianism include the promotion of the shared political histories and cultures of Latin America, which distinguish it, and help to lay the foundation for identification, while at the same time challenging Western conceptions of democracy and the nation-state.

Pimentel's comments also highlight a crucial issue regarding the compartmentalization and disassociation of Latin American countries from each other. This point is emphasized and taken up by Bolivarian ideology (a point that will be discussed further). The challenge confronting Chávez then is to build political hegemony for Bolivarian and anti-neoliberal values and commitments which are where the objectives of teleSUR lay.

To be clear, Escobar's genealogical analysis of development as discourse (a construction designed to extend power and control over the so-called third world) only cautiously informs this study since I believe the term "development" itself can still be 'rescued' and made relevant to the ongoing struggle for social justice. Thus, "development" as a nodal point in neoliberal discourse needs to be re-articulated if different possibilities for development are to be pursued. This can be achieved by contesting the neoliberal hegemony over the meaning of development and offering alternative definitions. By contesting the nodality of "development" as a neoliberal

concept strictly, the term can be re-appropriated by those whom it affects most to their benefit. The concept thus acquires a polysemic quality and enables the Bolivarian version a privileged status within Chávez's larger political discourse, ultimately recovering 'development' for the purpose of social justice.

Bolivarianism as Counter-Discourse

The democratic socialist ideals contained within Bolivarianism, an ongoing mass social movement and political process in South America, were inspired by the early 19th Century Latin America historical independence figure Simón Bolívar. Bolivarianism's most significant political manifestation today is found in Venezuela where president Hugo Chávez has mobilized support around a discourse that interprets several of Bolívar's ideals into everyday affairs including the 1999 Constitution.⁴³ To reiterate, as both a cultural and identity movement, it expounds the ideas of Latin American integration and political mobilization

Bolivarianism, as a set of political doctrines, enjoys currency in an increasing number of countries in South America today considering the recent left-wing trend in that region which has seen the coming to power of a number of social democratic governments, some of whom are actively forging closer ties between each other.

Bolivarianism, therefore, is a struggle at the level of discourse, albeit a populist one with its own attendant weaknesses. Through a discourse analysis of particular news broadcasts via teleSUR I hope to demonstrate attempts at fixing polysemic elements within a particular order of discourse so as to establish closure, i.e. fixed meaning. Order of discourse refers to a particular social ordering of relationships among different ways of making meaning through the interplay of diverse genres, discourses and styles that

structure semiotic difference. One aspect of this ordering is its privilege within discourse; that is, whether it is a dominant way of making meaning or whether it is marginal, oppositional or alternative approach to meaning-making.⁴⁴ For example, the dominant approach to conducting a medical examination is usually site specific, isolating different parts of the body, whereas alternative medicine prefers a holistic approach to wellness and health. I will therefore reflect on the order of discourse articulated through teleSUR and the privileging of the testimony genre within an innovative approach to news media communication.

Furthermore, I hope to demonstrate whether Bolivarianism as an alternative discourse poses a substantive challenge through its use of key elements, concepts such as ‘democracy’ and ‘development,’ to articulate its broader social vision –in other words, how it legitimates itself and a vision of supra-nationalism and socialist democracy– and whether it has the potential to effectively meaningfully articulate and interpellate subject positions and what those subject positions might be since they imply certain expectations about how to act and think about the world.⁴⁵ Specifically, it is important to evidence attempts at fixing polysemic elements which are shared between the discourses of Bolivarianism and neoliberalism, the dominant economic and political ordering of the world today (i.e. globalization), in order to bring to light the creation of alternative chains of equivalence or meaning (disarticulating any necessary relationship between democracy and economic liberalism). Moreover, in seeking to establish alternative articulations, exclusions must also be identified.

Discourse theory posits definitions as inherently essentialist, however, it is still important to identify integral concepts with the caveat that the researcher avoids reifying

and, rather, engage the terms critically in their work. To begin with, let us carve out the signification of the ideas encompassed by the description “Bolivarian Revolution,” a discursive movement taken up by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez as a reaction to the dominant neoliberal globalization paradigm. This movement focuses on a redefinition of social, political and economic life related to both new understandings and pragmatic approaches to development and democracy tied to social justice. It also refers to a concerted effort at South American regional integration. In this way, terms like development and democracy can be understood as crucial but empty signifiers which Chávez attempts to fix within an alternative vision of Latin America that challenges hegemonic constructions and problematizations of the so-called ‘third world.’ Thus, the new discourse of Bolivarianism will be compared against the dominant conceptions of ‘third world’ development as manifest in the neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAPs) of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as the dominant globalization paradigm concerned with free markets, unfettered trade and unfair economic pacts. To reiterate, neoliberalism can be summarized as laissez-faire economic policies which hold that states produce the best conditions for capital will best determine efficiency and lead to growth while any government intervention through things like subsidies and nationalization of key industries creates artificial conditions leading to economic inefficiency and stagnation.[‡] The rise of neoliberal thinking as regards development programs comes at a particular historical juncture proceeding the collapse of the Keynesian Welfare Estate, the failures of Import Substitution Industrialization in Latin America, the return of the assumptions underlying Modernization theory, the fall of

[‡] As it applies to the so-called ‘third world,’ since the United States still favours agricultural subsidies, a contentious issue during World Trade meetings.

the Soviet Union, the oil crisis and subsequent debt crisis, and finally, the consolidation of the Washington Consensus and US model of democracy.

All closures (attempts at fixing meaning) are contingent and therefore always unstable to a certain degree. At the same time, power is a manifold, diffuse and conflictual phenomenon that can be used but is not limited to domination and thus offers the potential for challenging existing relationships of power.⁴⁶ The question I hope to answer then is whether teleSUR might just pose this kind of revolutionary challenge. More specifically, this thesis project also hopes to reveal what socialism means in practice to Chávez and whether teleSUR is a means of political conscientization or the awakening of consciousness, “but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality.”⁴⁷

Neoliberalism

With the oil crisis of the 1970s a debt crisis was triggered in the 1980s. The looming threat of widespread ‘third world’ default led to the turn from capital export (the Modernization development paradigm that also served particular Northern interests through such things as the expansion of markets) to the prioritization of capital-recovery by commercial banks and with them neoliberal economic policies that released resources for debt repayment.⁴⁸

Since the 1980’s, almost all so-called ‘third world’ countries have been forced to adopt structural adjustment programs (SAPs), the predominant approach to neoliberal economic reform through international economic institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Neoliberalism was consolidated under the Washington Consensus, a set of free-market oriented policies promulgated by (American)

economists as a way of promoting economic growth in Latin America and other parts of the world. These reforms have been widely criticized as another set of exploitative measures that funnel economic productivity from Latin American countries to large multinational companies and their wealthy owners in advanced first world economies and to serve the larger interests of finance capital.⁴⁹ Although neoliberal discourse (through the IMF and WB) favours the interests of key Northern actors, it has also allowed many Southern state actors to maintain or extend their political power as a consequence of the absence of political analysis of the state and a narrow focus on the 'technical' issues of economic adjustment and efficiency, therefore perpetuating and cementing deep social divisions.⁵⁰ This was certainly the case in Venezuela with the Punto Fijo Pact of the late 1950s, a power-sharing agreement that allowed the two dominant political parties, AD and COPEI to effectively shut out all other parties from participating in political life. The pact was made at the time in order to stabilize the young democracy from extremist social movements, however, in practice it amounted to decades of patronage that created an enormous amount of political apathy in the majority of Venezuelans who felt political leaders did not represent them but that they had no other choice.⁵¹ In fact, President Chávez was the first Venezuelan since Punto Fijo to win the presidency as a third-party candidate.

The oversimplified discursive equation of free markets and democracy has underemphasized the crucial role state institutions must play in order for stable market democracies to thrive.⁵² Arguably then, if the World Bank adopted neoliberal policies as a part of a wider geopolitical strategy stemming from the North, then perhaps a more viable region-specific approach to development can be hoped to come out of the South.

Resistance

For Arturo Escobar (1995) effective resistance requires analyzing the specificity of power and identifying the political technologies that are made by the interrelation of contemporary forms of knowledge and power. This approach allows for the elucidation of hegemonic strategies of domination, consequently bringing about historical awareness of the contingency of present circumstances and normalized conceptualizations of the social and political field.⁵³ Thus, new ways to politicize oppressed individuals should be undertaken, a specific objective of the pan-Latin American broadcaster teleSUR.

Escobar, furthermore, asserts that resistance should be based on the recognition of three factors. Firstly, that cultural values should be retained, defended and strengthened and that new ways of cultural politicization should also be fostered.⁵⁴ Escobar's second recommendation, however, is problematic in that he promotes the "consciousness of the class-structure of society" in order to enter into a "class-revolutionary process."⁵⁵ Laclau and Mouffe diverge from this point, moving away from essentializing notions of class, which in this case are the product of a tenacious historical materialism. Nevertheless, any re-articulation of social reality is necessarily revolutionary in that it challenges traditional ways of conceiving subjectivity and society, influencing individual and group actions that, as a result, can lead to the naturalization of new meanings, and power relations. For Laclau and Mouffe, politics has primacy; that is, political articulations ultimately determine the forms of mobilizations that take place, if it does at all.⁵⁶

Escobar's third factor is the recognition of the existence of several grand strategies constructed by the developed countries that play a crucial role in maintaining

domination over the 'third world' which include development discourse, its attendant theories and institutions.⁵⁷ Part of my analysis will thus evaluate whether teleSUR sufficiently evidences the contingency of the dominant development paradigm (neoliberal globalization) by opening up the possibilities for meaning that 'development,' as a concept model with far reaching consequences, can take.

The Media and Development as Domination

The use of the media to serve particular interests is a very problematic historical reality. Modernization theory, a socio-economic theory applied to the so-called third world in the years following the Second World War, highlighted the positive role played by the developed world in modernizing and helping to develop underdeveloped nations. Its initial focus was placed on the mass media as a modernizing force integral to the diffusion of modern forms of social organization and technology over traditional economies. Adopting the use of modern technology that included television and radio, modernization theorists claimed, performed the dual function of both economic progress and the diffusion of liberal-democratic political ideals within less developed countries (see Lerner, Daniel and Schramm, Wilbur L. *Communication and change in the developing countries*, East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1967). The concept of 'modernity' and the discursive narrative of 'progress' supported the modernization socio-economic approach to development that held that the 'backward' societies of the South could benefit from the modernizing role and values of the developed world. Focusing on the mass media to diffuse modern forms of social organization and technology as well as liberal-democratic political ideals, modernization theory ignored the colonial history and

political circumstances of these countries, assuming, rather, a patronizing development schema.

Furthermore, this view posited the role of Western nations as a guiding one in which developing nations would benefit economically, politically and culturally by absorbing the modern values of the first world that would replace the ‘backwards’ ‘traditional’ and hindering values, beliefs and practices of the third world.

Communications was therefore tied to development in a very specific way.

The conceptualization of mass media as both an index of development and an agent of modernization dates back to over four decades ago when the ground-breaking work of Daniel Lerner (1958) and Wilbur Schramm (1964) on mass media was released, following the United Nations’ 1958 clarion call for “a program of concrete action to build up press, radio broadcasting, film, and television facilities in countries in process of economic and social development” (UNESCO, 1964 quoted in Schramm, 1964: vii). Both Lerner and Schramm believed that mass media would bring development to developing countries if people in these countries were exposed to the ‘modernized’ world and culture of the West; and in turn learn new lifestyles, behavior and culture of the West.⁵⁸

Thus, development and the ideas of liberty and freedom, defined in contingent ways by Western governments, has functioned as the underlining trope (the trope of development in this case) supporting specific projects that served to advance the narrow interests of global capital.

Walter Mignolo (2002) theorizes modernity within a larger historical narrative that served to consolidate the idea of the West. Modernity, he asserts, was established as a global design, that is, an attempt to manage the world discursively that was intrinsically bound to colonialism. In other words, “coloniality is the hidden face of modernity and its very condition for possibility.”⁵⁹ Thus, the colonization of the Americas, Africa and Asia solidified (and reified) an idea of the West as a geopolitical image exhibiting chronological movement or progress.⁶⁰ The idea of the West is therefore inherently tied

to the emergence and expansion of capitalism, and originally fostered by the Atlantic commercial circuit (involving the massive trade in African slaves). Thus, modernizations theories were flawed at their very core. Today the myth of progress still underlies development paradigms although linked to the ideas encompassed by the *laissez-faire* approach to economics as well as the myths of ‘comparative advantage’ and the ‘free market.’

Bolivarianism: Populist Rhetoric or Mobilizing Force?

Of equal importance is engagement with the idea of populism as a form of political organization in order to properly contextualize Hugo Chávez’s current Bolivarian political struggle. Ernesto Laclau holds that,

...a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as populist, but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents – whatever those contents are.⁶¹

Thus, rather than understanding populism as a ‘pure’ foundation on which ideology and social movements are founded, Laclau elucidates the ways that social practices constitute or interpellate social agents.⁶² Understanding the specificity of populism, as Laclau explains, requires starting the analysis from units smaller than the group and focusing attention at the level of ‘demand’ in a situation –a political democracy– where maintaining the communitarian space (society, the nation) by way of particular representations is ostensibly supposed to reflect the general will.⁶³

More precisely, a demand reflects a social need that takes form as an isolated request to the particular governmental institution. This demand is closed within itself yet also works to legitimize the authority that is responsible for meeting a specific need (the request/demand) in a non-antagonist and administrative way, because it is taken as a

given that this institution should rightfully deal with these demands.⁶⁴ However, if these demands are constantly frustrated they give way to a type of solidarity formed between different sectors of society whose demands are continually being ignored (no matter how disparate these demands are, be it for health care, education, infrastructure, etc.), which over time become unified, despite their differential character, re-aggregating themselves and forming “equivalential chains” linked to the totality of their demands.⁶⁵ To be clear, chains of equivalence within discourse refer to the linking together of signifiers that establish discourse relationally; in other words, the investment of key signifiers in relation to each other to form broader chains of meaning. In this case, a vague articulation of a diverse group’s frustration at not having their demands met.

Significantly, the democratic subject with an isolated request becomes displaced in the face of these unmet demands and replaced by the popular subject motivated by a plurality of demands which can not be absorbed by the institutional system (the existing government), giving rise to the emergence of a popular subjectivity.⁶⁶ This new subject position is dependent upon the creation of an internal frontier dividing the social into two camps: power and the underdog, a development, moreover, that changes the nature of the demands into *fighting demands*.⁶⁷ It is important to note, however, that the equivalence of the demands (their articulation together) emerges entirely from opposition to the power that is failing to meet these demands. A political frontier is created in response, however, this does not satisfy any of the equivalential demands, a particular characteristic of this political organization (i.e. populism) since it is established through an empty signifier; that is to say the negative feature underlying the demands which is a lack.⁶⁸ Thus, these equivalential chains are contingent and particularly unstable. For instance, the more the

populist chain of equivalence is extended to cover more disparate demands the weaker it becomes as a unifying and mobilizing force, or, on the other hand, the more the demands are met the less relevant that political organization becomes.⁶⁹

Thus populism employs dichotomous rhetoric and promotes the need for control of the state in order to make its policies reflect the interests of the majority and not a minority elite. Essentially then, Bolivarianism can be understood as a particular populist political organization, which in Venezuela today is dependent upon the charismatic Hugo Chávez. Furthermore, it is a reactive discourse that garners strength and support from its interpellation of Venezuela's poor majority in opposition to globalizing "imperialism," as Chávez identifies it, or neoliberal globalization, which has been cited as the cause of the further impoverishment of the developing world. In essence, Bolivarianism is the product of a global political and economic organization of the world unable to meet the diverse demands of Venezuelans in particular and Latin America in general.

Moreover, the last two decades in Latin America created a situation that included a perceived lack in balanced news coverage internally as well as a space for the marginalized majority of Venezuelans (those who live in the rural areas or shantytowns). Central to this analysis is the evaluation of the re-articulation of 'third world' development by Bolivarianism as taken up by teleSUR and its contribution to articulating meaningful identity positions to Venezuelans. Of primary importance then, is the identification of Bolivarian discursive elements within teleSUR broadcasts in order to theorize the effectiveness of this discourse as a counter-hegemonic regime of new and revolutionary truth claims including who it professes to represent.

Dislocation and Antagonism

According to Laclau dislocations are those contingent events that cannot be symbolized or represented within a discourse, and thus disrupt and destabilize orders of meaning.⁷⁰ Particular discursive responses that arise out of these dislocations represent social antagonisms in mythical ways that have the potential to give rise to new collective social imaginaries depending on the degree to which they can function as ‘spaces of inscription’ for a variety of heterogeneous demands and identities.⁷¹

These conceptual insights are exceptionally useful in attempting to theorize teleSUR –and by implication Bolivarianism– as a particular antagonistic, mythical and discursive response to significant political, economic and social dislocations within Venezuela. A discourse analysis of teleSUR broadcasts, specifically its news broadcasts, would reveal the ways in which it conceives of its audience in its attempt to capture the social imaginary and how well it might function as a space of the inscription for disparate demands and identities. If dislocation is that which cannot be subsumed within a dominant discourse, yet is contingent in itself, perhaps looking at the culmination of dissent in Venezuela prior to the emergence of Hugo Chávez as a powerful political figure could shed light on specific disruptions to neoliberal hegemony in that country (essentially the crisis of neoliberalism in Venezuela, a crisis similar to that taking place across the region).

There can be no doubt that the events of February 27, 1989 when then-Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez ordered the army to fire on unarmed civilians protesting his economic policies (in what became known as the *Caracazo*) dramatically dislocated

the political project of neoliberalism and liberal democracy he represented. In calling in the military to suppress protestors which resulted in the violent deaths of thousands of civilians Pérez radicalized Venezuelans who felt the system did not represent them and yet continued to feel that government should be responsive to their needs.[§] In fact, Hugo Chávez, before winning his first election, had launched an unsuccessful coup in 1992 as a Lt. Colonel in the military and became a national hero after taking responsibility in a national television address precisely because the majority of Venezuelans no longer felt their government to be legitimate. Chávez was sent to prison for his part in the failed coup but pardoned two years later under a new president.

Thus, as Howarth explains, if dislocatory experiences provide the conditions for the construction of antagonistic relations between agents, and yet do not determine the form these discursive constructions take, it is important to analyze cultural and political artifacts like teleSUR. More specifically, in analyzing this broadcast channel we can come to understand how and what forms Bolivarian discourse takes as a reaction and response to (neoliberal) dislocatory experiences (that had actually created a space for its conception), the way in which it constructs social antagonisms and how it delineates political frontiers.

teleSUR and Media Representation

To begin with, discourse theory attempts to understand the social as a discursive construction that can be unpacked and critically engaged with through the use of the analytical tools of discourse.⁷² Essentially premised on the idea that meaning is never

[§] This situation already points to how populism as a political organization became the particular response in professing to speak on behalf of the majority of oppressed peoples despite a diversity of demands and identifications between them.

completely fixed, discourse theory precludes constant definitions and elucidates the ways in which meanings about society and identity are contested, and with resulting social effects.⁷³

Drawing attention to the need for media representations of the continent that are produced within the continent itself, teleSUR's strategy is intrinsically bound to important notions of identity, claiming to offer Latin Americans an opportunity to "see themselves in their own eyes," as the broadcasts assert.⁷⁴ TeleSUR thus highlights the political nuances of media representations and how they are able to or, contrariwise, not able to meaningfully represent society to their audiences, claiming their own legitimacy over private owned stations. teleSUR news director Jorge Botero highlighted the network's stance asserting that the motivation for the channel came to exist out of a concern for the perspective Latin Americans were being exposed to, suggesting the US version of Latin American social values is skewed and unatuned to Hispanic-world subtleties. "We want to look at it from right here," he said, adding "*The true face of Latin America*," repeating the network's slogan. It follows then that if teleSUR is the 'true' face then implicit in that statement is a binary that exists in relation to its opposite; the untruths, misrepresentations and even the outright lies of foreign media stations. In fact, teleSUR's official website offers these critical reasons for its existence:

Since the mediated image spread across the region today is not representative of its reality... Since, at the present time there does not exist the means with the intention and resources to build bridges between Latin American towns and nations... Since integration has been and still is today an urgent historical commitment... We will be the audio-visual alternative that helps to promote Latin American identity... the promotion of participatory democracy, human development, [vs strictly economic], solidarity... truth and justice.⁷⁵ (own translation)

“Nuestro Norte es el Sur” or ‘Our North is the South’ claims the axiom that welcomes audiences to teleSUR’s official website. Again, the new discourse attempts to disqualify the traditional dichotomy between what is generally perceived to be the North or the Developed World and the South/Underdeveloped World, by asserting that a complete understanding of Latin America can exist independently of the West. Significantly, the contingency of Latin American identity formed by its juxtaposition against the developed world are brought to light, encouraging new ways of self understanding. Thus, teleSUR distinguishes Latin America in a positive light promoting its capacity for self-definition, as well as the (contingent) promotion of a sense of supra-national or Latin American sense of pride not limited to individual countries.

Identity

Discourse theory posits identity as interpellation by discourses; that is, subjectivity is understood as a particular ‘subject position’ within particular discursive structures. Owing to the differing discourses that represent society, subjects are ‘fragmented,’ referring to the multiplicity of ways in which subjects are positioned by different discourses and the idea that identity is always a negotiated process. Furthermore, when conflicts occur between the differing discourses ‘overdetermination’ arises.⁷⁶ For Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe subjects are always overdetermined because discourses are always contingent; in other words, there is no objective logic that points to a single subject position.⁷⁷ At the same time, subject positions that are not in obvious conflict with other positions are the outcome of hegemonic processes whereby alternative possibilities have been excluded and a particular discourse has been naturalized.⁷⁸ In the context of this project what teleSUR aims to do is challenge

mediated images that up until now have enjoyed a monopoly in media representations of Latin American society, and which, because of failing to accurately represent the lived experience of the majority of peoples, have been profoundly alienating. Another subject position is therefore offered, not only by teleSUR of course, but as a part of Hugo Chávez's wider integrationist policies (policies that will be elaborated further in the section dealing with group formation) to promote an alternative subject position.

Hugo Chávez has been elected by large margins three times since 1998, having sufficiently recognized the concerns of the country's poor majority and restored to them a sense of personal dignity.⁷⁹ According to some political analysts this has been accomplished through Chávez's incorporation of the concept of "el pueblo" or 'the people' into his discourse and the identification of el pueblo with the nation.⁸⁰ However, teleSUR is not the first media project of President Chávez. Through a weekly radio and television program, *Aló Presidente!*, Chávez speaks of "*el soberano*," the sovereign people, "a hardworking, vigorous, valiant, courageous, noble and beautiful people with whom he is allied and who are the real protagonists of history."⁸¹

In a revisionist writing of history drawn from his own extensive historical study, [Chávez] links them [the people] with the great historical achievements and figures of the 19th century, especially with the struggle for independence, and with figures like Simón Bolívar...⁸²

TeleSUR thus represents a conflict of mediated images, disrupting American influence and the hegemony of the private media by offering alternative understandings of Latin American identity, political history and, as we shall see, development.

Although the term 'identity' itself has been at the center of theoretical debates in cultural studies, raising questions as to its efficacy as a conceptual tool with which to think with, it remains an integral signifier. The problems associated with the term

‘identity’ are that it assumes that a subject can know itself ‘truly’ and even entirely.

Stuart Hall (1996) offers a critical way in which to conceptualize identity, shifting focus away from the term ‘identity’ to the continuous process of *identification*.⁸³

...what is not required is the abandonment of ‘the subject’ per se but a re-conceptualization as a displaced and decentred term...or rather, as one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail, the question of *identification*...Identification as constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.⁸⁴

Therefore, identity has to be understood not as a fixed ‘thing,’ but as a constant and ultimately contingent process, the process of identification. At the same time, identities are never unified, but always fragmented and often conflicting. Furthermore, it is a process that is reliant on shared values, beliefs and ideals;

...actually identities are about questions of using resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.⁸⁵

Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) was a South American revolutionary leader who fought for independence in what are now the countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia and therefore revered as a hero in these countries and throughout much of Latin America. Bolívar holds deep cultural significance representing the national sentiments of liberation, the right to self-governance, and, significantly, political unity among Latin American nations. Bolivarian ideology establishes itself upon a common geographic area and language (Spanish for the most part) as well as a similar history of colonialism and, more recently, neoliberal economic exploitation. All these factors are reorganized and articulated together by Chávez in his political discourse to promote a supra-national sense of belonging and a wider socialist project (keeping in

mind socialism was not a term used by Bolívar). Chávez is therefore narrating the subject of Latin America, as a fluid historical and political figure. The necessarily fictional nature of this process, as Hall points out, however, in no way undermines its discursive, material, or political effectiveness.⁸⁶ To be sure, all national (or regional) identities are imaginary and symbolic, always constructed, but no less powerful as markers of identity and as a catalyst for action (social, political and otherwise). Furthermore, Hall asserts that,

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies.⁸⁷

Hall thus elucidates the ways in which all identity formations are ultimately contingent, as well as the power of language in mobilizing people within specific contexts with real effects. It is in this sense that teleSUR promotes a shared sense of common conditions and interests irrespective of actual territorial boundaries. The Latin-American wide satellite TV network teleSUR thus strengthens the myth of the nation in a broader sense, the idea of an imagined community as described by Benedict Anderson. Anderson defines the nation-state as an imagined political community; *imagined* because all the members, without knowing everyone in that nation will hold a belief in their shared unity within a circumscribed space.⁸⁸ The term also includes the idea of political sovereignty and a sense of community despite the social inequities that may exist in that nation.⁸⁹ Bolivarian ideology, nevertheless, holds all of Latin America as an imagined community that surpasses territorial boundaries with respect to a common language and history. TeleSUR thus functions as a channel for integration that can be read on the station's website:

[It] is born of an evident Latin American necessity to be able to rely on a medium that permits, all those living in this vast region, to spread their own values, make known their particular image represented, debate their specific ideas and transmit their very own subject matter freely and equitably. In the face of a singular discourse sustained by the largest corporations, who deliberately negate, limit or ignore the right to information, it becomes essential that an alternative capable of representing the fundamental principles of an authentic medium of communication come to exist: veracity, justice, respect and solidarity. That alternative is teleSUR. Having at its disposal talent and the most advanced technology for the service of integration for the nations and the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean ... it aims at the co-creation of the Bolivarian ideal.⁹⁰

It is in these terms that the new network attempts to build a consensus for a new social ideal and mobilizing force.

TeleSUR's president, and former Venezuelan Communications Minister Andres Izarra sees the channel as an essential prerequisite for closer political and economic links across Latin America, "We're launching teleSUR as an initiative to integrate through communication the different countries of the region... It's a window so we can get to know each other better" he says.⁹¹ Promotional materials advertising the channel before it began broadcasting included a clip into an investigation into "the hidden threads of Plan Colombia" the \$3 billion US-funded drug-eradication program in Colombia, hinting at the corruption of both Colombian and American officials.⁹² It can thus be asserted that Chávez's new discourse draws its particular articulations from Bolivarian revolutionary ideas of pan-Latin Americanism that present 'reality' from an alternative perspective and which articulate a new identity for Latin Americans long tired of the disruptive and destructive effects of neoliberal globalization and the failure of liberal democracy. As Robert Kenneth points out, neoliberal structural adjustment led to social disarticulation;

Clearly chronic poverty had remained a blight on Venezuela's development model even during the oil boom of the 1970s, but the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s transformed the scope and character of the problem. Whereas previously poverty affected a minority of the populace who had yet to share in the oil bonanza, by the 1990s it affected an absolute majority, who were

systematically excluded from meaningful participation in the development model... divisions sharpened.⁹³

The effectiveness of Chávez's Bolivarian discourse will depend on how well it can join subjects meaningfully to structures of meaning, and whether it offers the type of ideal Venezuelans, and Latin Americans in general can invest in.

Media as Discursive Text, News as Social Construct

To understand the media it is important to consider their functions, since they "provide the signs which give meaning to the events of everyday life."⁹⁴ The news, specifically, attributes meaning to social reality, circulating knowledge and maintaining power relations. The news as a particularly important part of mass media communication literally refers to the 'new'. In other words, news, by its very definition, is the communication of recent information and current events or developments,⁹⁵ and as a specific genre is available through the mass media, whether through printed text such as newspapers or broadcast over more advanced technological means. The function of the news is to disseminate important information; however, even this function is heavily influenced by the routine professional practices of journalism.

In fact, the dominant perception of information and knowledge can differ considerably from one context to the next. Information, inserted within one particular discourse can take the form of commodity, and, conversely, inserted into another can be valued as a public good. News in particular has tended to become commodified; in fact, it has supported major media industries based on a constant public demand for current information.⁹⁶ News as a commodity speaks to viewers as individuals whereas news that values news as information/knowledge helps to construct and solidify audiences as a

public with civic responsibilities (this will become more apparent with the discussion of agenda-setting, as well as episodic and thematic conveyance). At the same time, it would be naïve to assume that all important issues and events are covered by the news. The news is a highly structured, selective, and decontextualized, and therefore subject to the interests and biases of key actors. The commentary, analysis and criticism can be highly speculative and tends towards sensationalism and entertainment in competition for audiences.⁹⁷ Moreover, it is important to point out that the international media are dominated by a capitalist ideology, affecting the way news is conceived and distributed as well as the particular perspectives and world views they make. Other key issues that are important to consider when evaluating news are editorial influences, issues of access and literacy, among others, which, although significant aspects of media analysis fall beyond the scope of this paper.

The important work of Gaye Tuchman (1978) has elucidated the ways in which news as a particular mediation and representation or construction of reality, reproduces itself as a historical given and which not only defines and redefines, constitutes and reconstitutes social meanings, but also (re)defines and (re)constitutes ways of doing things or existing processes in existing institutions.⁹⁸ Tuchman uses the metaphor of news as a window to the world to ground her analysis of news framing, asserting that we learn about ourselves and our institutions, leaders and lifestyles as well as those of other nations through the news media. A frame is therefore a conceptual construct used to help organize the world in which we live. The news media aims “to tell us what we want to know, need to know and should know,” and in this way circulates and shapes knowledge. She points out that news framing is problematic in its inherent contingency and therefore

opens up the way for exploring how news frames are constituted.⁹⁹ By researching the processes by which news is socially constructed and how everyday occurrences are rendered into narratives occupying time and space in a world called news, Tuchman denaturalizes the assumptions that viewers have of the news. The news persuades its viewers to consider certain issues in particular ways. For example, the news sets the agenda, prioritizing issues that are subsequently paralleled by news consumers. Moreover, the ways in which the public perceives an issue can have a important consequences for public policies, demonstrating how the media's effects can be quite far-reaching indeed.

Framing, the lens through which issues are interpreted, is an important aspect of news broadcasts that enable viewers to think and make decisions about particular events. A public character is lent to occurrences by the news, making them publicly discussable events. Another important concept related to news media analysis is that of *priming* or the information that is provided as relevant by the media for social and political judgments.¹⁰⁰ Consideration of priming requires understanding what information is not provided, including significant things like historical context, a crucial aspect of any public discussion of important issues and events.

The media's political influence arises from their ability to frame the news in ways that favor one side over another. By employing framing strategies that necessarily exclude other meanings the news delimits what is considered valuable, making it a political act. By selecting and highlighting some facts, events or issues, and making connections among them specific interpretations, evaluations and/or solutions are promoted.¹⁰¹

For power may be realized through dissemination of some knowledge and the suppression of other ideas. And it may be reinforced by the way knowledge is framed as a resource for social action. News...is a social resource whose construction limits an analytic understanding of contemporary life.¹⁰²

More specifically, the use of either the *episodic* or the *thematic* news frame affects how individuals assign responsibility for political issues; episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic attributions of responsibility while thematic framing tends to elicit societal attributions of responsibility. In other words, how problems are perceived by the viewing public and whether they believe the solution to be found at the level of the individual or broader government institutions. The episodic frame tends to reduce coverage of life events to a series of disconnected and random events, focusing on the personal details of a particular story rather than provide detailed information about relevant trends or identify the flaws in the system that contributed to the problem as thematic frames do.¹⁰³ Thematic frames, on the other hand, encourage citizens to contextualize stories and hold government accountable for finding effective solutions to the problems identified. Conversely, episodic frames promote a view of individual responsibility and, arguably, apathy since the issue will seem out of people's control, confirming a sense of powerlessness to effect change. The ways in which the news consistently frames important issues also has consequences beyond the initial impression of a news segment, influencing habits of thought and expectation, for example, whether we become apathetic to problems perhaps at one extreme or whether we become motivated to seek changes to help advance public policies on the other.

Essentially then, framing is the outcome of deliberate decisions and choices that highlight some events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and solution.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, messages conveyed by

mainstream media take on the value of public narratives and perceptions. It is in this way that the media do not simply tell us what to think about, but also how to think about specific issues.¹⁰⁵ Essentially then, news is active negotiation and interpretation of important issues and events rather than pure truth. Furthermore, news is a legitimating institution which reifies the political and economic system within which it exists.¹⁰⁶ It has been suggested that any alternative to the commercial model of news would involve an innovative master frame that would prioritize policy initiatives, demonstrating that solutions exist and inviting citizens to participate in them.¹⁰⁷ Arguably, Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution functions as such a unifying framework, in particular through teleSUR, as a revolutionary way to approach the dissemination of important information within the context of a socialist movement that highly values political empowerment and engagement of Venezuelans in particular and Latin Americans in general. All of this has implications for the kind of audience conceived by the alternative news network, which articulates its audience as citizens with the potential to participate in Chavez's revolution, and with the social and political values and responsibilities that would inspire a mass response.

Globalization and Subjectivity

Moreover, I would like to contextualize this study within a broader understanding of globalization and what that means for subject formation as Jesus Martin-Barbero points out in his essay, *Identities: traditions and new communities*, which sheds light on the effects of globalization on subject formation. Essentially, Martin-Barbero argues that a major effect of globalization has been the disarticulation of the social through the

individualizing and atomizing discourses of globalization, what he refers to as identity crisis;

This is a globalization that aspires to dissolve society as a community of meaning, replacing it with a world comprising markets, networks and flows of information.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, because globalization aggravates and distorts basic identities whose roots reach deep into history, Martin-Barbero argues that we may see trend of the entrenchment of different collective forms of identity.¹⁰⁹ Thus, it is in this new context of globalization that we have a related reactionary explosion of new and not-so-new identities and the struggles associated with them. This upsurge in identity politics, Martin-Barbero points out is not linked to any one cause but a plurality of,

...reasons and motives [sic] enmeshed in a web consisting of neglected historical grievances, land claims, ingrained biological prejudices, religious fervor, sudden memory-lapses, long-standing battles for recognition... [as well as] new and old struggles for power.¹¹⁰

In other words, what Martin-Barbero is arguing is that what is taking place is the disconnection of individuals and groups in peripheral nations, which is increasingly translating into social and cultural exclusion, ever-decreasing standards of living for the majority, the breaking of the social contract between work, capital and the state, as well as the destruction of solidarity that once made social security possible.¹¹¹ In fact, about half of the urban population live in the precarious barrios or slums that have been spreading in Venezuela's cities for half a century.¹¹² It could be argued then that the structural adjustment policies implemented in Venezuela, the attendant aggressive pursuance of market fundamentalism, the dissolution of communities of meaning, the majority's decreasing standard of living and the associated fear and desperation as well as the destruction of the social contract all contributed to the dislocation of identity in that

country and created the space for new articulations of identity. It is at this juncture that mobilization around social and personal identities takes place, a mobilization ‘based on images of the past that are projected onto a utopian future to overcome an intolerable present.’¹¹³

Conceiving of the Audience

To be sure, the ‘audience’ does not refer to any literal thing, but rather to a discursive construct that is imagined empirically, theoretically and politically, as Bratich (2005) points out in his genealogical discussion of academic discourses on audiences. Although this thesis project does not take as its purpose making any claims about audience reception, it does incorporate the idea of the discursive construction of the audience. In particular, the ways in which teleSUR activates audiences in specific ways. Bratich treats the audience as signifier and subject position rather than referent and autonomous subject, which has important implications for any media analysis. Arguably, teleSUR as a particular regime of representation takes as its object a certain empowered and politically activated subject. Aram Aharonian asserts of teleSUR’s audience, “The people are no longer passive in the face of what is said on television. They watch and try to read between the lines, to discover what is hidden, what is not said.”¹¹⁴ By conceiving of its audience as such, teleSUR aims to mobilize viewers and harness audience constituent power, a trajectory foreclosed by mainstream constitutive conceptions of the audience.¹¹⁵

In [past] problematizations of the audience as mass (the vulnerable audience of propaganda and the desiring audience of consumer society), media subjects were defined through their irrationality, as a bundle of emotions, impulses, and desires. Rather than dismiss these accounts for not cultivating the innate capacities for informed and reasoned choice, however, we can at least acknowledge that their problematizations rested on a belief in the powers of the mass. Whether

positioned as a threat or a resource, subjects were acknowledged to be able to produce their own sense, to activate their desires through a relation to media, and to enhance their own power with media. However, this audience constituent power was acknowledged, then countered, by the propaganda and market frameworks, which sought to transform these impulses for their own interests, winnowing audience potentialities into prescribed pathways. The response to audience constituent power ultimately dampened and froze the capacities in their self-valorizing open-endedness and potentiality.¹¹⁶

In other words, teleSUR activates media subjects for particular purposes, therefore, just as media can activate audiences to consume, teleSUR has the potential to activate audiences through politicization and problematization of development and identity in Latin America. Articulating audiences in this way, as Bratich asserts, has associated consequences for action. teleSUR thus empowers its audience as active social agents, supporting social creativity, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Information and Knowledge as Resource

The struggle for equality in communications by the developing world is a recent one that has important implications for development. Reflecting on the struggle, Antonio Pasquali, Former Assistant Director General (Communication) UNESCO, asserts, that the South began to challenge the dichotomy during the Cold War set up between East and West, creating independent alternatives that diverged from both discourses, and which came out of the Non-Aligned movement and the Group of 77.¹¹⁷ The very fact that the inequalities in the international information order continued to exist even after the fall of communism is evidence, Pasquali claims, pointed to inherent structural problems related to the North/South axis and not Cold War politics.¹¹⁸ Specifically, he says, the problems of the silenced and marginalized South are the direct and indirect result of, initially

colonial policies, then Cold War strategies, and today the ‘pseudo-rationality’ of economic globalization. In his essay *The South and the imbalance in communication* he reviews the movement for equality in communications beginning with the UN commitment to a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974 and the subsequent Technical Cooperation between Developing Countries (TCDC) project, which he says has now been reduced to insignificant proportions along with the International Programme for Communication Development (IPDC).

The South attempted to make use of particular NIEO resolutions in order to correct the informational imbalances that penalized weak communicators –even though the term ‘communication’ was not mentioned specifically by those resolutions. By the time of the Symposium on Information on Non- Aligned Countries, held in Tunisia in March 1976, not only was a strategic visibility regarding communications present, but a new understanding of the ‘new order’ that was no longer limited to economic issues but also information problems as well. Moreover, it was stated that the establishment of a new world information order acted as the essential and natural consequence of the new international economic order.¹¹⁹ Thus, it was established by 1976 that it was essential for economic development that the inequalities within the world information order be rectified, thus the explicit link between economic development and information (including access, equality, delivery, production, etc.) was made. In 1977 this led to the UNESCO sponsored International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems to determine the state of global communications related matters, called the MacBride Report. In September 1978, the XX General Conference of UNESCO, in its Resolution 4/9, reaffirmed:

... the evident need to end the dependence of the developing world as regards information and communication ... Approves the efforts aimed to establish a more fair and balanced new information and communication order ... and Invites the Director General to continue his efforts ... with a view to establishing such a new order.¹²⁰

Thus, UNESCO reaffirmed the need to break the dependence of the developing world with respect to communications and recommended more fair and balanced communications. Later that same year the UN approved further resolutions that expressed the ‘...need to establish a new, more equitable and effective information and communication order ... supported on the free circulation and a wider and more balanced dissemination of information’ which was essentially entrusted to UNESCO because of its constitutional mandate of ‘assuring everyone ... the free exchange of ideas and knowledge’ and ‘lending its cooperation to the information organs for the masses ... as well as facilitate the free circulation of ideas by means of words and images’ (Preamble and Article 1 of UNESCO Constitution).¹²¹ Thus was born in 1980 during the XXI Session in Belgrade, Resolution 4.19 relating to a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

The debates surrounding international news flow that took place at this time gave developing nations a chance to bring attention to the imbalance of news flows across national borders and the issue of insufficient and un-representative information concerning the developing world conveyed by the western news agencies, and therefore unable to meet the needs of the developing countries.¹²² As a result, they advocated NWICO to rectify the issue of unbalanced information flows. Western countries, however, rejected these arguments by the developing nations, counter-arguing that news content should not and cannot be controlled since it was their belief that information

flows across national borders should not be restricted in any way.¹²³ Unfortunately, these debates have waned without having actually having resolved any of the major issues.

Before moving on I would like to highlight two important points which Pasquali helps to locate within a particular history of struggle for equitable communications by the South. The first is quite significant in pointing out the established link between development and more equal communications and secondly, what the new information communication order encompasses; that is, the free exchange of ideas and knowledge and the facilitation of the free circulation of ideas by means of words and images.

Pasquali makes the important link between development and communication making three important points in this respect. The first is linked to the universal *right* to communicate which Pasquali claims can be delegated by means of a social contract to an individual or group but which cannot be waived. Secondly is the need to *democratize* communication both at the national and international levels. He states that this can only be done by extending to information and communication certain distinctive characteristics of democracy. These include:

...respecting minorities, guaranteeing the plurality of content, effective public oversight of private and public communication, ensuring that the few privileged broadcasters truly represent the public's rights to communicate; the identification of a media monopoly as being the same as a dictatorship, an effective fight against international dumping in the sector; a reasonably equitable access to the use of channels, languages, software and inputs; a Communication *supra partes* authority agreed by consensus and an honest application of the right to reply.¹²⁴

Thirdly, Pasquali elucidates the conceptual pairing of *access* with respect to reception and *participation*, in terms of transmission. Pasquali points out that the dominant discourses of communication tend to conflate progress, freedom and development in communications with a focus on 'access' at the expense of 'participation' (for Pasquali specifically, this means citizen participation as a source of information).¹²⁵ This

according to Pasquali. leads to greater dependency on the part of countries less able to transmit themselves and therefore have easier access to foreign messages at the expense of endogenous conceptions of identity. ** The government under Chavez invests substantially in supporting Venezuelan community media, confirming the fact that communications for Chavez is not concerned solely with access (the solution to which was teleSUR, a satellite network that reaches millions across Latin America and even parts of North America) but also participation. In fact, Venezuela is one of the few countries in the region where legislation specifically addresses and supports community broadcast stations. Legal regulations are in place in order for community media to obtain funding, rules such as the promotion of a plurality of ideas broadcast, that the community media asking for funding must be part of organized civil society, and that 70 percent of the content must originate with community members, as well as regulations limiting the length of advertisements.¹²⁶ Thus number of alternative radio and TV stations has increased in the past year. Goals of community/alternative media to transform profound social inequalities in each community and attain their full development, function to help increase democraticization of access to information media and expanding right to information and freedom of expression (National Association of Free and Alternative Communication Media ANMCLA).¹²⁷ Significantly, it is important to remember that a strong community media had existed before this legislation was enacted and it was the community media that during the brief overthrow of Chavez helped to re-initiate government television broadcasts after it was forcibly shut down and in the face of

** As Pasquali points out, there is no necessary relationship that guarantees that more access leads to more participation. In fact, he argues that saturation of access in societies to the exogenous message is done in order to inhibit their will to participate, produce and circulate endogenous messages, justifying the search for greater balance between reception and transmission.

attacks made on their own community media centers during the interim government of Pedro Carmona.

Moreover, the testimonies by common Venezuelans on teleSUR, as I will show, help to solidify and validate particular histories, experiences and identifications. Significantly, teleSUR claims that its ‘North is the South,’ claiming a project of ‘horizontal communication’ (Artz, 2006) that celebrates the cultural heterogeneity of Latin America. Significantly, for Artz what is unique about teleSUR is precisely the fact that it does not attempt to balance out communication by means of contraflow –that is, exporting its own broadcasts to the North– but rather makes an exerted attempt to communicate alternative ideas and images to its own citizens within Venezuela and South America in general.^{††} Moreover, Artz links the prioritization of horizontal flow by teleSUR and a deliberate class awareness and political consciencization;

This is not contraflow – the international communication process of ideas and culture ‘flowing’ from the developing nations of the South and influencing the Western nations in the North. The process here does not go up or down, North or South, it goes across. TeleSUR is the first internationally institutionalized medium to advocate and realize ‘horizontal’ communication, where the interests of the working class, peasantry, indigenous nations and urban poor provide the news frames, and where voices of popular classes appear as credible sources. Neither is there contraflow, because TeleSUR does not speak to the North... TeleSUR is the means for the Latin American working classes and masses to communicate among themselves. TeleSUR gives the practical answer to the theoretical confusion wrought by ignoring the social class character of international media practices.¹²⁸

An important example today of the continuing debates surrounding international information flows and one that highlights the contingent nature of our perceptions of news communications in general is to examine how alternative articulations of

^{††} This may perhaps point to another intervention in subaltern studies, that is to say, teleSUR, as a dialogue between different populations of the South, which allows the intellectual in the North (that problematic of Spivak’s well know essay) to listen in rather than speak for.

information can open up a plurality of possibilities that are not available under more narrow commercial conceptions. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), a project endorsed by the United Nations was held in order to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and take concrete steps to establish the foundations for an inclusive Information Society for all. The first phase of this innovative project took place in Geneva in mid-December 2003.¹²⁹ WSIS re-inscribed the discourse on information, differentiating it from mainstream conceptions as a commodity, and re-establishing it as a resource. Inserted in this particular discourse one could now speak of knowledge and information in terms of sustainability. According to WSIS, information as commodity implied short-range use, created an artificial scarcity of knowledge, and was not particularly interested in the long-term security of individual or social development, or for the freedom in the use of knowledge and information. The conception of information as a resource, on the other hand, supported the idea of knowledge societies, social justice and equality of opportunity in usage of knowledge and information, as well as advocating the preservation and promotion of cultural and media diversity as a condition for individual and democratic development and the promotion of peace.¹³⁰

By re-articulating information and knowledge in terms of resource sustainability and inserting it within the larger and powerful discourse on human rights within a new Charter of Human Rights for Sustainable Knowledge Societies, WSIS is able to create clear goals associated with the future of the information society. Under the primacy of sustainability, knowledge and information, it is asserted, should be freely accessible to all as a civil right to political participation as well as a transparent administration. Furthermore, the charter addressed the need to guard against media monopolies, the

preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity as well as the security of media security and public opinion, among others.¹³¹

Interestingly, the Venezuela Information Office, an official government body dedicated to clarifying issues to the Western press regarding the affairs of Venezuela, and located in Washington D.C, released the following as part of a press release regarding the objectives of teleSUR:

Latin America currently receives a lot of its news from US or European-based television networks, including CNN, TVE, BBC, Telemundo, and Univisión. Many of these broadcasts focus on issues that are of less importance to Latin Americans, such as Michael Jackson's trial in Los Angeles or President Bush's trip to Eastern Europe. Likewise, news on Latin America is presented from a US or European standpoint, generally neglecting to include a regional perspective. In an effort to provide Latin Americans with a channel that broadcasts regional news with a regional perspective, the governments of Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba launched Telesur./ Telesur will be a "continental communicational instrument to disseminate the region's informational, social, and cultural diversity from a Latin American perspective." Its programming will include news broadcasts, opinion shows, features, documentaries, special investigative reports, and other sources to analyze and spread the region's culture and customs. Overall, Telesur is an initiative that will promote political and economic integration and build a link between Latin America's communication production and that of the rest of the world.¹³²

Clearly, the project of teleSUR has the fundamental issues underlying the debates of previous international organizations as the focus of its mandate. teleSUR, therefore, offers a revolutionary approach the problem of international communication flows, especially news flows, prioritizing diversity and Latin American culture, and all from a regional perspective. Like the UNESCO projects before it, the project of teleSUR is founded on the link between development and communication as well as the universal right of all to have a means to which communicate. Furthermore, teleSUR is a particular solution to a variety of problems associated with the private and foreign media (including its manipulative and monopolistic character), whose foundation is grounded in the social contract which Chávez has committed to through his Bolivarian Revolution.

In the following chapters I hope to contextualize the discursive analysis of teleSUR with respect to the forms of genre and apply discourse theory to random sample transcripts obtained from real-time online broadcasts of the pan-Latin American network. Following this will be a discussion of Bolivarianism as an open discourse based on a universalizing project of human rights, and teleSUR as a mediation and particular mode of articulation creating chains of equivalence between different events and issues that support a new vision of democracy, development and identity.

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Chapter 2: TeleSUR: A Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1998) argues in a well-known essay that it is not the intellectual's place to ask 'can the subaltern speak?' but rather, that it is more productive to ask, 'why is the subaltern mute?' or 'why has the subaltern been muted thus far?.' Her work clearly articulates a response to the essentialist impasse many academics have confronted in attempting to theorize identity politics as a mobilizing force in the so-called third world. Spivak thus asserts that any attempt to understand the world currently involves engagement with global political economy and addressing the issues of what she aptly refers to as the international division of labour or the organization of the world politically, economically and socially in (neo-) colonialist ways. The past few years has seen the rise of socialist oriented democratic political regimes in South America which could arguably be the site of that very potential for the voice of the subaltern to be heard.* To be sure, it is not only important that these historically peripheral voices be heard by the hegemonic center but that the voices themselves are heard in self-confirmation and self-validation of a newly empowered people. This is not to suggest that a homogenous and uniform 'subaltern' voice exists, but that an alternative voice is possible. In this way, the newly launched teleSUR news channel gives form and life to that alternative conceptualization of social, political and cultural organization in a wider struggle for the production of meanings concerning development, identity and international political economy.

* Or the former subaltern since Spivak makes it quite clear that homogenizing terms such as these can be limiting.

Before engaging in a discursive analysis of teleSUR broadcast segments, it is important to clarify some key terms and concepts. To begin with, the term ‘genre’ generally refers to a type of text with characteristics that are recognizable or ‘typical’ because they follow certain rules related to content, form and/or function and are also defined by them.¹ Content refers to the information that is given by the communication act and its study is an analysis of discourse. Some genres are defined by content, for example the tragic comedy which has a particular storyline, characters and motifs, while other genres are characterized on the basis of the means of expression or media they use – Van Leeuwen gives the example of a string quartet because it comprises four string instruments regardless of what they play. A genre can also be defined by the function it performs, take for instance the genre of advertising which is defined by its function of selling products or services and, increasingly, ideas.² On the other hand the genre of news is defined by its function of providing information about recent events of public interest.³ Importantly, any combination of form, function and content can also define specific genres in important ways. Let us take the example of television news. Arguably, the content is given added immediacy and urgency by the medium of television when we look at instances where news is being covered ‘live’ or is ‘late breaking.’ Thus, television news lends more credibility to a particular framing of events in these instances because the viewer can ‘see’ the events of news as they are happening or visuals that suggest that because we can physically see the relevant images the newscast is in fact the closest ‘truth’ that we can know.

Specifically, the study of genre involves a focus on the *function* of texts in social interactions through the means of texts. In other words, how different kinds of

communicative structures help to enact particular communicative practices. Hence this approach is one that goes beyond the text and extends to communicative actions that make up genres and the ways these are embedded in social practices.⁴ Thus, genre as a particular usage of language participates in and constitutes part of a particular social practice.⁵

Many of the above cited examples of genres, like that of news, are quite common and easily recognized. In contrast, the testimonial/testimony as a particular genre and critical aspect of the innovative nature of teleSUR is not as widespread or common. The testimonial,[†] is a subaltern text traditionally defined, Arturo Arias (2001) says, within the strictures of the literary as a ‘...written means for exploring the contours of a collective identity based in concrete historical experiences that have required political mobilization in the face of repression.’⁶ The testimonial in this sense is a means by which the subaltern is given a space to voice herself. teleSUR provides such a space, not for the literary testimonial as such, but for a particular type of related testimony. In distinguishing the short newscast interviews or intermission breaks during teleSUR newscasts then, I refer to the testimony as a particular genre closely related to the genre of the literary and biographical testimonial.

A major criticism today associated with identity politics, in which the testimonial genre is implicated, is the reification of difference, the universalizing and homogenization of what are essentially very heterogeneous communities, as well as the sustaining of inequalities of power and position. Coupled with this heavy critique of

[†] According to Arturo Arias, the testimonial, a concrete historical genre, is a written collective memory that evolved in Latin America during the “guerrillista” period (1960-1990), at the same time that it emerged in other parts of the world during specific historical events, ‘such as the Spanish civil war, the Algerian war, or the Palestinian struggle for a homeland’ (Arias, 81).

identity politics is the question of the role of the ‘first-world’ intellectual *vis-à-vis* the theorization of alterity. The controversy surrounding the Nobel peace laureate and indigenous Mayan from Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchú and her *testimonio* (literary testimonial) brought to light the issue of reification (of difference) as well as the problems of objectification by dominant regimes of Western ‘truths,’ positivism and cultural racism when anthropologist David Stoll attempted to de-legitimize Menchú’s claims, choosing to ignore the brutality of the Guatemalan government and military by pointing out inconsistencies in Menchú’s work. The 1982 testimonial in the form of a mediated autobiography entitled *I, Rigoberta Menchú* was translated from the Spanish (which was not Rigoberta’s first language, she spoke an indigenous language) into the English so that it could reach an international audience and draw attention to the plight of the indigenous peoples of Guatemala during the violent civil war raging at the time.

Another important issue with the testimonial is the ways in which it can be appropriated and colonized in order to normalize and perpetuate the pervasive penetration of global capitalism (See Spivak in Didur, 2003), and in this way also preserve the Western subject while also defining the homogenous object of development in ways that ignore historical realities and preserve the interests of global capital which reside predominantly in the North.[‡]

Essentially, what Spivak argues is that even now in the current era of globalization, the subaltern is still muted by agencies and organizations that claim to represent her as they also claim an intention to promote ‘development’ within particular

[‡] It is important to remember that the colonial dichotomies of the past do not structure the New Empire (the pervasive penetration of global capital) in the same ways. Class inequalities enabled by global capital do not configure along the center/periphery binary as before, but also exist within ‘third world’ countries. (See Spivak CPR)

capitalist market-oriented frameworks. She gives the example of micro-credit programmes which present a number of problems; firstly, this strategy and others like them, follow from the logic of neoliberalism, which diverts attention from alternative strategies like land reform⁷. Secondly, these programmes in the form of foreign aid leave third world countries feeling indebted and obliged to the first world. And thirdly, the subaltern is not only muted by the narrow interests of global capital, but is also constructed as the object of neoliberal development discourse, reaffirming the skewed discursive narratives of capitalism and ‘third world development.’ These programs, moreover, are legitimized on the basis of subaltern testimonies.

Credit baiting... problematically embraces the ‘concrete experience’ of these women as their testimonies are read as a rationale for globalization, so once again, the transparent reading of the other and the reading of the other as transparent is used to consolidate an imperialist capitalist empire that is quickly becoming the norm in the twenty-first century.⁸

This situation impels us to interrogate not only the genre of testimony itself, but the context in which it is ‘voiced’ in order to avoid objectifying the subaltern once again.

The conflation and assumption of transparency [both of Western subject speaker and the voice of undivided oppressed] is, Spivak argues, what continues to secure centrality of the Western Subject and the ‘West as Subject’ that depends on the muting of the subaltern as it again constructs a will for her...⁹

Whether as independent segments during intermission breaks or as part of news interviews, the testimonies on teleSUR function not to consolidate a homogenous subject, or a preeminent ‘truth’ simply because within the larger discourse of Bolivarianism disparate segments of society are mobilized against a common shared history of repression, exploitation and marginalization. This shared history is validated but not at the expense of community-specific aims and concerns (no clearer is this than the Bolivarian Constitution, an institutionalized contract designed to preserve and protect the

rights of marginal sections of society). The use of testimonies, moreover, supports a thematic approach to news which assigns social responsibility to issues of poverty, criminalization, among others, therefore encouraging the public to expect changes and solutions to originate with government and public policies. The discourse of Bolivarianism is an open one, based on the highest ideals which it attempts to universalize within the region, and also internationally. Consider the 2005 World Social Forum, an annual meeting held by members of the anti-globalization movement to coordinate world campaigns, in which Chávez participated and for which he generated a major interest concerning his Bolivarian agenda and the strategies and ideas motivating, mobilizing and empowering Venezuelans today.

Bolivarianism, as a contingent reaction to neoliberalism is, at the same time, the result of the threatening effects of globalization. The movement is one articulation in the growing anti-globalization movement that attempts to bring together diverse groups in solidarity against the abuses of global capital. Thus, the testimonies on teleSUR do not function to reify difference in the subaltern but rather, to create a space for those formally marginalized sections of society to voice their concerns and bring to light political programmes for change that are based on the belief in the universal rights of humanity. Moreover, within an order of discourse teleSUR legitimizes the personal experiences of marginalized sections of society in newscasts, rather than privileging 'expert' or 'professional' opinions as traditional media do.

teleSUR and the Project of Bolivarianism

The existence of these two distinctive genres (news and testimony) within teleSUR evidences a particular interdiscursivity or collection of genres and discourses within a text. As Fairclough points out, interdiscursivity is “where an utterance in one discourse takes on the form or style associated with another discourse.” So it is that the use of testimony in teleSUR news segments legitimizes the subaltern perspective as a credible and valid source of important and relevant information that can be used to make decisions about social life through democratic means. At the same time, using the news genre to further the aims and objectives of Bolivarianism also lends the broader movement legitimacy as a set of particular truth claims. Thus, news and testimony as particular genres are two moments articulated together within teleSUR newscasts in the broader political practice of Bolivarianism in Venezuela today. Significantly, testimony implies the logic of collective political action above any attempt to capture an individual-specific ‘truth’ (see Arias, 2002), demonstrating the political aims of teleSUR.

At the same time it is important to recognize that the act of forging collective identity does not necessarily preclude recognition of heterogeneity among specific communities; in fact, it forms the crucial foundations for any type of political mobilization. In this sense, identity is the starting point for any political project of solidarity, in particular if one understands any claim to identity as a reactive process. Jesús Martín-Barbero argues in a recent article (2002) that the upsurge in identity politics is a complex contemporary phenomenon;

The reasons and motives are enmeshed in a web consisting of neglected historical grievances, land claims, ingrained biological prejudices, religious fervor, sudden memory-lapses, long-standing battles for recognition and, criss-crossing all these elements and bringing them to the boil, new and old struggles for power.¹⁰

Arguably then, the relatively new pan-Latin American television network takes as its *raison d'être* the re-presentation of relations between the government and the public both in Venezuela and in South America generally, in a movement against neoliberal globalization. Fundamentally, it is a vehicle for politicization and social change, articulating a new problematization of development, democracy and Latin American integration.

The following news text is a relay of events the day after the Mercosur (regional trading block) summit, which was held in Caracas, Venezuela in July 2006 to formally recognize Venezuela's new membership in the organization. The clips selected in this broadcast give focus to issues and visions for South America articulated by South American leaders working in concert and with parallel objectives, values and priorities. Issues of economy, social issues and regional development are given specific attention. This text should address the very issues I am concerned with in outlining Chávez's agenda with respect to Venezuela as well as the continent of South America as a whole. (The full segment is transcribed and translated from the Spanish)

Transcript #1

Transcript for teleSUR broadcast July 4th, 2006 on the summit incorporating Venezuela as a full member of the regional trading block Mercosur which took place the day prior.

First Broadcaster in studio (B1): ...the summit which took place in Venezuela, a regional organization [Mercosur] founded in the year '91 [1991] by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. [This] consolidates the construction of the gas pipeline of the South for the energy process that is most important for the region, which also drives social integration with the important goal of union between these nations.
We go to our report.

B2: Now Mercosur extends as far as the Caribbean Sea with the incorporation of Venezuela as a full member of the regional [trading] block. This [Mercosur] will represent 78 percent of the internal raw material products of South America [GDP].

Insert Hugo Chavez speaking at summit: Not one of our countries could by itself advance a

real integral project of development where the saying [mandate] of [Independence hero Simón] Bolívar is fulfilled –that a system of government, the most perfect should be given to their people [pueblo], the highest level of social security, the highest level of political stability and the highest level of happiness possible.

B2: The president of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay celebrate amidst embraces and secrets [to be understood as show of friendliness and familiarity] the entry of the new associate that at its own discernment/knowledge will equilibrate the relations between the nations of the group.

Insert President of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez speaking at summit:

This dear fraternal country, brother to Mercosur will bring fresh air to achieve, yes, concretize the deeds that are the desire, the dream, that we intend for our people to help us like Chavez and you fellow Venezuelans, find the way to achieve in practical terms and in our deeds to concretize the good intentions that we demonstrate when we use this platform.

Insert President of Paraguay, Nicanor Duarte speaking at summit:

I am confident that the incorporation of Venezuela, the historical moment that it lives and for the leadership that today with President Chavez will be a strong amplifier so that our voice resounds and persuades the most powerful regions of the world.

Insert B2: The Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez also stressed the importance of advancing the consolidation of the union of South American nations. He assures that Venezuela will [continue to] drive social and energy-based integration.

Insert President of Argentina, Nestor Kirchner speaking at summit:

The entry of the dear Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is an inestimable contribution for Mercosur. A commercial and economic contribution as well as a cultural and political one with the rich history of its people.

Insert President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio ‘Lula’ da Silva speaking at summit:

With the entry of Venezuela the opportunity to renew our commitment to solidarity with the region of Venezuela.

B2: now the socio-political agenda of Venezuela will be maintained in concordance with the other four sister nations who together represent 260 million inhabitants.

B3: Venezuela will participate for the first time as a full member of Mercosur in the next convening summit July 20th in the city of Cordoba, Argentina.

The central topic of the meeting will be the inclusion of the social groups within the organization.

[signing off] Jose Michelli, teleSUR Caracas

B1 back at the studio: For his part, Bolivian President Evo Morales who attended the extraordinary Mercosur summit to outline the socio-commercial condition which maintains Bolivia with the regional block[’s agenda since Bolivia is still not a member]. [He] also expressed his expectations in the new setting [Caracas] which opens with the new incorporation of Venezuela as a full member of the organization.

Insert President Evo Morales of Bolivia speaking at summit [not yet an official member]: I would like to tell you here [at this place] brothers and comrade presidents, people of Venezuela,

the people of Latin America that in Bolivia will begin that process of change, a democratic revolution, a pacifist culture happily that vocation of the Bolivian people expressed last Sunday to change the economic model that has caused such harm to my country, the permanent [un-renewed] removal of natural resources, the humiliation, the discrimination, the hatred towards our indigenous [peoples] [Pres Morales being indigenous]. We want change and I would want el pueblo [the people] of Latin America, el pueblo, los pueblos, from the marginal indigenous, the social movements, workers, patriotic businesses, not only from Bolivia but from all of our Latin America to accompany this process of change. And that this encounter of presidents strengthens those who think about equality and fight for our dignity, and above all, unity. And experience lived through labour unions, the union of those leaders is important on behalf of those they represent [workers]. And the unity of presidents will be a base for uniting the pueblos, and together the pueblos, and presidents, governments to defend the dignity of Latin America. I would only like to say to brother compañero [comrade] Chavez that now that he is a full member of Mercosur well, that he not abandon us and not abandon other pueblos [since not yet a member of Mercosur]. And this is for the most part, be it from President Lula and other presidents like Kirchner, this solidarity, this political will-power to support [each other], to cooperate. And I have much confidence in you, my president friends, to go on to resolve the social problems [of South America].

B1: For now, this was the only way to finish with the neoliberal politics –through the elimination of latifundio [enormous concentration of land by the few] and other projects that destroy the social sectors. The act of adding Venezuela to the Common Market of the South [Mercosur] allows us definitively to a venture of growth for our pueblo which should be built strategically.

B4: In the Miraflores Palace [in Caracas] headquarters of the Venezuelan executive Kirchner and Chavez also agree to the creation of the Bi-national Bonds [which could serve to support investment and economic growth in both countries] a title of public debt with the backing of states on both sides [i.e. both Venezuela and Argentina].

Insert Hugo Chavez: Now this wonderful idea that came from there, the bonds of the South, Bi-national Bonds, in order to continue impelling, to continue to sustain economic growth. Argentina and Venezuela, we are the foremost places of economic growth in the world.

...

Analysis and Interpretation

In the first lines of the teleSUR clip the broadcaster explicitly links energy commitments –specifically a gas pipeline– and social integration. This is reiterated later when he says, “[Chávez] assures that Venezuela will drive social and energy-based integration.” Here we can understand a shift from a primarily economic focus of development in the region to a broader social pact, in contrast to the narrow focus of neoliberal development policies. In an insert of Hugo Chávez speaking at the summit, the

Venezuelan president outlines a new project of development that incorporates social security, political stability and utilitarian goals. Interestingly, President Duarte of Paraguay identifies a potential frontier in claiming that with Chávez now newly incorporated into the Mercosur trading bloc it might persuade ‘the most powerful regions of the world.’ President Kirchner of Argentina also claims that Venezuela’s entry into Mercosur is not only of economic and commercial benefit but also of cultural and political importance. Brazilian President ‘Lula’ de Silva reiterates this point claiming *solidarity* with Venezuela, an important descriptor given weight by its history in labour and political struggles. The most politically charged statements from Evo Morales (a close political ally of Venezuela) refers to his fellow presidents as comrades (a socialist referent that goes all the way back to the first democratically elected socialist President, Salvador Allende of Chile) and the changes in Bolivia as part of a revolution that is (still) democratic but which involves a paradigm shift from the previous economic model which he asserts ‘caused so much harm to my country’ through the removal of natural resources, and the ‘humiliation, discrimination and hatred towards [its] indigenous peoples.’

Morales further refers to the meeting of presidents as a strengthening strategy on the part of the movement for equality and dignity, drawing a parallel between union leaders and workers to this meeting of presidents as representatives of the various communities on resolving social problems.

Significantly, the first broadcaster specifically mentions neoliberal politics and its projects as the cause of the destruction of the social sectors, and then identifies himself with the viewers as a particular community stating, ‘The act of adding Venezuela to the

Common Market of the South [Mercosur] allows us definitively to a venture of growth for our community which should be built strategically.’ Clearly the broadcaster is establishing a ‘we’ from which he claims to speak. This broadcast also reveals something entirely different about teleSUR newscasts which specifically call attention to the neoliberal capitalist economic model. News broadcasts rarely if ever mention context in this sense by referring to capitalism as a particular economic model, usually taking it for granted and as given.

Arguably, a subject division is being created; that of the Latin American subject apart from that homogenous ‘Other,’ the ‘third world’ subject of the dominant neoliberal development projects established by international economic organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. In other words the social and political processes of Bolivarianism are dividing the ‘self’ from the marginalized ‘Other’ (the construct of international political forces) within a specific historical juncture; the crisis of neoliberalism in Latin America. Moreover, this particular clip from teleSUR clearly indicates the antagonism being set up between neoliberalism as a political and economic strategy –and by implication the IMF and WB– as well as ‘the most powerful regions of the world’ and a newly asserted Latin American political subject. The economic and social dislocations of neoliberal policies in Latin America have thus allowed Hugo Chávez to mobilize support around the mythical and historical narrative of Simón Bolívar in order to carry out specific socialist strategies.

teleSUR, therefore, conceives of and identifies its audience as the subjects materially affected and dislocated by neoliberal policies that are now taken up with the particular socialist discourse of Bolivarianism. Thus, Bolivarianism is not a necessary

response to neoliberalism but one that has the potential to capture the social imaginary through cultural, historical and even practical referents, as well as function as a space for the inscription of disparate demands and identities as a populist discourse. The election of Chavez in Venezuela in two elections and a referendum are proof that this project is one that the majority of Venezuelans identify with. Thus, the new discursive articulations of Bolivarianism offer a different way of conceiving the connections between citizenship, sovereignty, nationalism (supra-nationalism), and development in ways that respond to the particular dislocations of neoliberalism. Of primary importance then, is the identification of Bolivarian discursive elements within teleSUR broadcasts in order to theorize the effectiveness of this rhetoric as a counter-hegemonic regime of new and revolutionary ‘truths.’

The following is an imperfect but accurate translation of a segment from teleSUR broadcast on April 10th 2006. This segment regards testimony by a former Colombian intelligence official who implicates the Colombian government in intervening into Venezuelan in order to destabilize Chavez’s government, as well as election fraud. The segment that follows relates a Chilean indigenous hunger strike by Mapuche prisoners.

Transcript #2

Segment of teleSUR broadcast on April 10th 2006

Broadcaster: ...Rafael Garcia [one-time director of computer systems for the DAS Colombian secret police] attests to the fact that the former intelligence director of [the DAS] organization Jorge Noguera and another six other officials from Colombia participated in a plan to kill [Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez] and destabilize Venezuela, according to the eyewitness account. This plan, Garcia tells us, began two years ago when the Venezuelan authorities captured 114 youths who belonged to a paramilitary squadron led by Rodrigo Tovar Pupo, alias ‘Jorge 40’ and that this agitator had contemplated the assassination of high ranking civil servants of the Venezuelan government including president Chávez. ‘I know that a destabilization plan existed against the Venezuelan government. As far as I know, there were only two people who knew about this, the former director of intelligence and me. ‘And from the highest ranks of the Colombian government there are six others compromisingly involved,’ the witness Garcia is on

record for having stated. Nevertheless, he refused to denounce the members of the [Colombian] Uribe government who knew of the plan against the Venezuelan government... Garcia says he has more information and is ready to share it with the Venezuelan justice officials. Lastly, the witness revealed that the DAS made a large investment in order to mount an intelligence apparatus along the Venezuelan border in order to be able to monitor certain people.

But the denunciations of the witness revealed by the public prosecutor not only speak of a destabilization plan against the Venezuelan government but also point to a strategic plan involving members of parliament, the friends of the paramilitaries, to win votes. This same system of fraud was utilized in order to allow the current Colombian president to win his election in the first round. According to Garcia the fraud consisted of buying the electoral registry of four departments (provinces) and the use of judges and the paramilitary to supplant the votes... The article in the magazine 'Semana' (news weekly) mentions that they verified the situation occurred in several departments along the Atlantic coast like Magdalena Coast and Bolivar. Garcia explained that the candidate of Magdalena, Jose Gamoro asked a Venezuelan that worked eighteen years in the registry to look for a way to guarantee the vote without actually having the people vote that way. Then, ...administered by Gamoro... bought the... electorate votes of... Magdalena, the Guajira and Bolivar. The voters list appearing at each table, and, Garcia says that at the end of the day the judges marked the ballots with the name of the candidate which elected the North block... signing for someone who never came out to vote. The article mentions that in the municipal election in Magdalena, a judge... confirmed that 40 votes were entered and that at the end of the day a paramilitary of that area (zone) obligated him to mark another 400,000 electoral ballots with the names of the persons who would have voted at that table. At the same time, other members of the electoral registry of ...Ibicio?... he assured them of the [win of the] presidential elections. The judges twice passed the votes that were for their opponents. Garcia indicates that that fraud gave [Colombian President Alvaro] Uribe approximately 300,000 votes without which they would had not been able to win in the first run.

The following is a news story that followed the previous one on April 10, 2006.

Broadcaster: In the capital of Chile the Mapuche indigenous [the Arauco Malleco Coordinating Group of Communities in Conflict, CAM] organization marched in support and freedom for four political prisoners, leaders of its community who have been on hunger strike since March 13 [2006]. They were imprisoned under the application of the anti-terrorism law. Through 27 days of hunger strike the Mapuche political prisoners sit together in a prison located in the south of the country. They were given five and ten year sentences under the antiterrorism laws...

Camera shot switches from main broadcaster to a Mapuche representative on site who explains: "They have us imprisoned us, tied us up, and therefore we are saying loud and clear that this is going to end in this country. In this country exists a total racism, so much so that the judicial powers, the executive powers are all a part of it... But we are not asking for this place here [land] although we would have every right to ask it... but we ask for the return of territory to the community that it belongs to... and to let [the Mapuche] take care of its children, its family and to be allowed to unite/mobilize its people."

Eye witness account/ supporter testimonial: "They're not taking any food, the brothers only drink water and liquids, nothing else. Our brothers are weak but their will is strong. The brothers have the political clarity of knowing that they are not common criminals, the brothers are political prisoners. The government...[is ignoring] completely our brothers because as far as the

government is concerned they are imprisoned justly, but for us that is not true, nor for the families and the prisoners themselves. The Mapuche movement is not a terrorist organization. The brothers are imprisoned because of their intent to mobilize *el pueblo Mapuche*”

Broadcaster: The Mapuche political prisoners were charged under the antiterrorism laws... while the political establishment continues its silence in the face of the hunger strike...

(See Article 2 for a more detailed outline of issues concerning this story)

Commercial break promoting teleSUR (traditional music playing)

Voiceover:

“We’re also transmitting teleSUR. We are now getting to know one another”

Read: teleSUR of Argentina

Interpretation and Analysis

In the first news item, information is disclosed about secret political deals incriminating top Colombian government officials with the help of the illegal right-wing paramilitaries in murder plots and destabilization strategies against the Venezuelan government as well as fraudulent elections. Although the segment is not overtly ‘Bolivarian’ in any way it does serve to evidence and reinforce the existence of forces antagonistic to it, a framing of the issues to be precise. Significantly, the story of the subaltern has historically been the story of repression of the so-called third world by elites within the country with the support of elites abroad, and it is in this sense that such a revelation powerfully reinforces the ‘fight of the oppressed’ or ‘the poor’ or ‘the underdog’ who Hugo Chávez acknowledges as those whom he represents as a Bolivarian leader. Again, the impact of the evidence of such a plan can not be emphasized enough considering the majority of Venezuelans live in poverty and share a history of violent political struggle for social justice that is consistent with the rest of Latin America (consider the brutal dictatorships of the 1970s replaced by debilitating neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and the counter-movements they inspired). Significantly, this opposition lies within the traditional dichotomy that exists between conservative right-wing political

regimes and socialist left-wing ones, evidencing the ways in which ultra-right regimes, in this case the Colombian government, through corruption and violence, hold and exert power, in particular in the face of a threat to its ideological, economic and political interests. In this way a narrative is created between the forces of capital on one hand and the majority of the historically oppressed.

Althusser elucidated the ways in which the state exerts control over its subjects by theorizing its manifestations through the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) in order to reproduce its productive power.¹¹ In this particular example, the Colombian State, feeling threatened ideologically by the democratic socialist Chávez government (a state it can only influence in a limited way through its ISA because Venezuela is a sovereign country and thus separate from Colombia) exercises the RSA and attempts, through coercion, to destabilize its neighbouring country.

Specifically, with reference to the struggle at the level of discourse, the conservative ideology being referred to here is intrinsically connected to neoliberalism, or to the political-economic philosophy that de-emphasizes or rejects government intervention in the economy (however, to avoid reifying ‘neoliberalism’ as such, it is important to note that the U.S. government is heavily involved in the Latin American economies. In fact, American corporations retain their power in Latin America with the intervention of the U.S. government) and the prioritization of free market reforms, the legal protection of property rights with few restrictions on capital. In foreign policy, moreover, neoliberalism favors the opening of foreign markets by political means, using economic pressure, diplomacy, and/or military intervention. Neoliberalism generally

favors multilateral political pressure through international organizations or treaty devices such as the World Trade Organization and the World Bank (particular forms of government intervention). It is an ideology that prioritizes the opening of markets refers and free trade, as well as sustaining of an international division of labor (specialization in production on a global scale that holds that the so-called third world is suited best at producing primary products or raw materials while developed nations specialize in more technologically advanced and higher level service industry jobs). Furthermore, neoliberal policies attempt to undercut and over-ride labor policies such as minimum wage, protectionism, environmentalism and any form of socialism in order to create a system that creates the best conditions for capital.

By exposing the electoral fraud that is said to have installed Alvaro Uribe's conservative government into power, teleSUR's primetime broadcasts will reach Colombians with information they may not have been aware of or its extent. Colombia's a population also suffers from overwhelming poverty, marginalization and violence (both from the paramilitaries and to a lesser extent from the Marxist guerilla forces that occupy territories in the country).

This searing and critical news piece about the Colombian government serves to reinforce the dichotomy between a corrupt and illegitimate ultra-conservative regime which threatens the self-development and self-preservation of the Bolivarian socialist regime. Moreover, it serves to further legitimize the Chávez government which is portrayed as the victim of illegal covert military operations. In this way it seems to parallel the struggle of the poor peasant or farmer at the level of the macrocosm, a framing of a particular perspective of the world. Interestingly, only the witness Rafael

Garcia is sourced while any responses by the implicated Colombian government officials to the allegations are absent, the reasons for which are not given.

The second news item deals with indigenous rights and social justice. The Chilean Mapuche hunger strikers had no other mainstream news coverage other than that of teleSUR which highlights the alternative nature of the news media and its mandate of giving a voice to the hitherto unheard within the mainstream. Ignored by most media institutions, teleSUR makes public the issue of indigenous land claims, a controversial subject in all parts of the world. It should also be mentioned that under Hugo Chávez many reforms have been made to protect the indigenous Venezuelan population including their provisions enshrined within the socially progressive Bolivarian constitution. This particular broadcast, with its attendant first hand accounts and testimonies legitimizes the indigenous struggle for autonomy and specific human rights in the face of state repression. The lack of an official Chilean state response to the hunger strike is described as “the political establishment’s silence” implying insensitivity to the suffering of the “brothers” or “political prisoners.” Moreover, it gives a thematic cue, implying that the solution is to be found with government policies rather than an isolated occurrence, promoting viewers to assign responsibility to the state. In this broadcast, the peripheral voice of the indigenous peoples are made public as well as their repression by the state’s use of the law against them to imprison them unjustly. This is certainly the underdog’s perspective of the world and a look at specific fighting demands which can be linked to the broader struggle of the oppressed, an important aspect of populist discourse.

It is important to contextualize the testimony as a genre within a teleSUR newscast. Testimonies in this context are news actualities; they offer a space for people to

speak about their personal struggles and experiences. It is an innovative journalistic practice that creates a strategic space in which to stake a claim to ‘truth.’ The use of testimonies is a deliberate attempt to forge an order of discourse in which personal experience is privileged over mediated versions. This is not to say that the testimony is not mediated, but rather that the genre gives the illusion that it is not. It is an integral aspect of the rhetoric of the testimony to be perceived as direct and unmediated, and therefore a powerful strategy in the struggle for legitimacy and ‘truth.’

teleSUR also uses testimonies in the breaks between newscasts, creating a space for seemingly ‘common’ people to tell the stories of their own beneficial experiences with Chavez’s reforms including his programs supporting cooperatives, the availability of Cuban doctors in rural areas as well as the nationalization of oil (PDVSA) and the new benefits its employees now receive.

Another promotional commercial for teleSUR highlights the launch of teleSUR broadcasts in Argentina, saying, “We’re also transmitting teleSUR. We are now getting to know one another.” This brief announcement directly advances the Bolivarian cause of Latin American integration through the use of the media. Significantly, it also deals with the issue of identity, specifically, the subject of Latin America rather than the sole subject of one particular Latin American nation state. It is in terms such as these that the new network attempts to build a consensus for a new social reality that also serves as a mobilizing force, drawing on wider discourses of pan-Latin Americanism and Latin American integration as symbolized by the revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar.

The following news item more specifically outlines particular Bolivarian strategies for South American integration, highlighting parts of a meeting between four

South American Presidents including Hugo Chávez discussing the plans they hope to jointly develop.

Transcript #3

TeleSUR broadcast accessed online April 20, 2006:

Broadcaster: Members from Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Venezuela, initiated [the meeting of South American states] the summit. The President of Venezuela Hugo Chávez assured that he is disposed at a new attempt at Mercosur[§] [regional trading bloc] far removed from the neoliberal current.

Insert of Chávez speaking at the summit:

“We believe that we are finally going to obtain, that it is possible to change and it will change into the backbone of a plural and complete integration, because we should think this way or else we will not commit ourselves. Not only in our own specific cases, it is necessary to think about a set of development projects both social and economic throughout this entire region, our home... but it is necessary to rearticulate the fundamental premise [of this integration strategy]...[there was some advancement] in the 1970s which neoliberalism erased, wanted to erase, but which you [members of the summit] would like to develop. My very modest point of view is that of development, the real development of Panama, Paraguay, of Uruguay, a development of the entire region; that a set of plans is consolidated towards the goal of development.”

Insert of Chávez speaking about another subject at the same meeting:

“We say gas, our gas, the gas of South America, we should use them [petroleum products] as a tool for integration and internal development. Agriculture, agro-industrial [economic sectors should also be used] for the supranational development of this immense territory. Industrial projects, agricultural projects, projects of development, small cooperatives busy with production. The economy is vital for development. We are here to discuss projects that are truly meant for us [Latin American] not prioritizing the free market and the free trade agreements, and, well, the United States market. Which is not to say that the US market is not something to be considered, we [Venezuela] too sell products there, but that is not the only market. The second largest market in the world is Europe, there are the Middle Eastern countries...”

Insert of Chávez again addressing another issue:

“We are disposed to design a model of joint commerce where Venezuela would eliminate taxes for imports... products like soya... The economy is vital for development. There is no conflict in terms of balancing imports between Paraguay and Bolivia (with respect to soya in particular). There is a solution, mainly, the industrialization of soya, as well as coca. We too would like to incorporate ourselves in that work which is considered bad for some... but for [the] Coca Cola [company] was not at one time.

[§] Mersocur is a free trade agreement founded in 1991 between particular South American countries that was hoped would allow for balance between them and other economic super powers, in particular since it had the potential to trump other free trade agreements and allow their resources to be mobilized around economic integration to the benefit of all member countries.

Broadcaster:

They met in Asuncion, Paraguay... against imperialism...

Insert of Chávez at meeting:

Mercosur needs to be restructured or it will die, it will die.

Insert of Bolivian President Evo Morales:

"We need to recuperate our rights over our natural resources...we have the obligation..."

Broadcaster:

There were also discussions on plans for a new gas pipeline between Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia as well as Venezuela...

Insert of Chávez with closing statements:

"We have to internalize this [summit talks] in our most profound consciousness, the new concept of integration in what we're doing...[must fix] something [Mersocur] that doesn't work. No real coordination exists..."

Insert of Bolivian President:

The instruments [economic neoliberalism] of disintegration, colonization, of politics, of hunger and misery for the majority of peoples...

.....

Insert of Chávez speaking about teleSUR:

Bolivia just initiated teleSUR broadcasts, welcome "a nuestra casa, a teleSUR"(our home, teleSUR)...(speaks about attempting receive an open signal like Bolivia has rather than relying on satellite dishes)... now there is no need to envy CNN, CNS. TeleSUR is now a reality, watch it. It is our voice, the voice of the South, the voice of integration.

Interpretation and Analysis

Bolivarianism is a nodal point or privileged sign around which other signs are ordered and acquire meaning, and as an alternative conceptualization of development poses a challenge ideologically at the level of global politics and also identity. What Chávez is advancing is a new discourse on development from within the countries considered third world themselves. Rather than characterizing poverty as a de-contextualized result of problems within the so-called third world, Chávez links 'third world' poverty and underdevelopment to exploitation by the so-called first world through neoliberal economic policies which he refers to as colonial in nature. His ideological

movement attempts to fix polysemic elements, specifically those of development and economy, which are shared between the discourses of neoliberalism and Bolivarianism (both key signifiers), but rather than a laissez faire approach (free and unrestrained capital), this articulation promotes social welfare, political integration and greater autonomy among Latin American nation-states and their mutual assistance in order to balance global inequities. Development, therefore, acquires new meaning, removed from the neoliberal economic policies the so-called third world has been forced to adopt indiscriminately (including removal of protectionist measures, privatization, loose financial controls, elimination of subsidies, the dismantling of social welfare, etc.) by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, with a focus on “real development,” as Chávez describes in the news segment. In fact, Chávez says, “...it is necessary to think about a set of development projects, both social and economic, throughout this entire region, our home.” The teleSUR broadcaster also refers to a newly structured Mercosur regional trading block of the South that is “far removed from the neoliberal current.” Furthermore, petroleum and gas will be used as economic tools towards this type of development (both social and economic) rather than as just a resource to be exploited by private interests. By nationalizing the gas industry, Chávez hopes to redistribute wealth and close the gap between the rich and the poor in Venezuela. Furthermore, gas will fuel the integration process by offering cheaper oil to other South American countries.

Moreover, as Stuart Hall (1996) points out, identities “emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity...” (Hall, 4). So it is that Latin American identity is articulated as a reaction against the ‘third

world' subject of Structural Adjustment Policies, and given meaning through a new socialist vision of development.** Significantly, Chávez points out the link between free trade ideology and the United States market, saying that other markets should also be considered and that free trade should not be prioritized above social welfare and Latin American integration.

Chávez also underscores the uniqueness of Latin America by setting out a plan of development strategies specific to the region (and not the blanket approach imposed by American economists). This uniqueness is brought out in Chavez's support of coca production, a contentious issue since the election of Bolivian President Evo Morales, an Aymaran Indian, who made it clear after his sweeping victory his intent to legalize its production as a traditional plant used by the indigenous peoples of the region. The legalization of coca is a controversial issue which the United States is particularly disapproving of considering its investment in the 'war on drugs' (which itself is a questionable plan linked to the direct intervention of the US in Latin American affairs). Evo Morales further reaffirms the stance that neoliberal development schemes have served only to further alienate Latin American countries from each other, has perpetuated neocolonial of the region, and exacerbated economic divides between smaller elite class and a growing poor class. Morales also stressed the need for Latin America to exert control over their natural resources for the advancement of development of the region.

** Perhaps, as Martin-Barbero points out, the very mobilization around group identities are in themselves resistances to the isolating and alienating effects of globalization that seek to create a society of consumers and specialized labourers. For him, globalization entails the reshaping of social exclusion so that it no longer depends on frontiers –since these would inhibit flows of commodities and information (he mentions multiculturalism as a part of this process) – but the imposing of social distances that 'keep everyone in their place' (Martin-Barbero: 2002, 623).

It is generally accepted of the news media that their function lies with informing citizens about political developments so that they can more effectively protect and promote their own interests as well as that of the public.¹² In other words, the news should foster thoughtful consideration and debate around important political issues that permit citizens to make informed decisions about the world around them. According to Murray Edelman (1988) however, these unquestioned beliefs assume that a world in which facts with determinable meanings exist. This important insight elucidates the manner in which meanings are unstable and ultimately contingent. According to Edelman, political news is made spectacle by creating an audience of spectators (or witnesses) rather than participants. The argument could be made, however, that even though 'alternative' media discourses are still constructions and particular problematizations, a news broadcast network like teleSUR does encourage critical analysis of relevant events with respect to issues of development, economic independence and national as well as supra-national claims to identity as well as encouraging participation and involvement in the political-economy through support of community media as well as alternative development strategies such as co-operatives.

In the case of Venezuela, where teleSUR originated and where a mass social movement is taking place, one can clearly see the use of identity politics as a platform from which socialist ideals have been mobilized against the sweeping tide of neoliberal reforms (both structural, cultural and political). In the personality of President Hugo Chávez, not only popular support for change in the country, but the shared experience of repression and poverty created the conditions for a revival of socialist aims around a particular identity politic –in this case very much linked to the underdog of recent

Venezuelan history. As Eriksen asserts, "...the centripetal or unifying forces of globalization and the centrifugal or fragmenting forces of identity politics are two sides of the same coin."¹³ By galvanizing support around the historical independence figure Simón Bolívar, Chávez has created a myth that he uses as a conduit for the emerging social movements in Venezuela that seek change based on a re-articulation of identity that, "based on images of the past and projected onto a utopian future, allow them to overcome an intolerable present"¹⁴ –a world order imposed by the narrow aims of neoliberal globalization.

Significantly, what is distinct about this particular movement in the current context is that although it began at the grassroots level –with various segments of society demanding change– the ideals contained within in them were taken up by Hugo Chávez within his political platform. As a populist leader, moreover, Chávez was able to garner broad constituency support precisely because he offered the majority of Venezuelans an alternative that spoke to their aspirations for change and, significantly, validation. Furthermore, his movement is not the steamroller of homogenization which some critics may attribute to identity politics, but rather, because of its affirmation of the social contract between the state, labour and capital, provides the foundations on which various communities can go about their daily practices without fear of threat to their livelihoods, their independence, or their sense of identity.

Universalism Without Essentialism

One of the major obstacles in theorizing identity politics today is the conflict between universalism –the conviction some hold in the universal nature of a given system of ideas and beliefs– on one hand and essentialism or particularism –in particular

regarding fixed subject positions— on the other. In his essay *After Identity, Politics: The Return of Universalism* (2000), Eric Lott, drawing on Ernesto Laclau's work *Emancipation(s)* and reiterating some of its main points, illuminates an identity politic that is open to the fluidity of human identification and the dynamism of human actions and reactions but which is based on a universalized social agenda. Laclau points out that the historical forms in which the relationship between the universal and particular has been thought has been based on two assumptions; firstly, that there is an uncontaminated dividing line between the universal and the particular which is premised on, a second assumption, the idea that the universal is entirely graspable by reason.¹⁵ In which case, there is no possible mediation between universality and particularity —the particular can only corrupt the universal.¹⁶ On the other hand, Laclau theorizes that something like the argument for rights cannot be based on particularism (ethnic, racial, sexual, etc.) otherwise all particulars would have to be defended including reactionary forms such as racist groups. To ground the case of human rights on pure particularism, Laclau asserts, would be self-defeating because the differential aspect is stressed while relations of power are systematically ignored.

Eric Lott begins his analysis with a retrospect on the 1999 Seattle protests, perceiving the galvanization of disparate interests in the form of a negative reaction (perhaps even rejoinder) against the World Trade Organization, and the following year against the World Bank in Washington. Significantly, what Lott emphasizes is precisely the fact that no universal or essentialist manifesto was ever formulated by the diverse groups that formed the mass —or multitude— of protesters prior to the demonstrations that Lott brings our attention to. In other words, this reaction was not “in the final instance”

based on something like class divisions (as traditional Marxism has held) but rather, a momentary convergence around a common objective¹⁷; that is to say, protesters came together to express discontent and outright anger as well as collective solidarity against the policies and ideology of neoliberalism. The diverse groups that comprised these important demonstrations, as Lott asserts, “were not ‘discovered’ at last as some sort of preexisting essence but were ‘articulated’ into a claim of totality or universality that nonetheless cannot be fixed and is not final”.¹⁸

This kind of situation, I think, is what one gets “after” identity politics: a politics of *participatory discrepancy* that comes about as a congeries of new social movements jostle, collide, and sometimes collude in broad, transmovement desires.”¹⁹

If these demonstrations had been based a priori on an essentializing political ideology, Lott states, “its political grounding would be either totalitarian closure or a pre-given unity (anti-global-capitalists or whatever) waiting to be realized.”²⁰ If that was the case, as Laclau argues, radical democracy would be impossible precisely because it would be held back by the particular universalisms of this type of strict delineation of the social.²¹

What the Seattle protests signaled was a look at the new social movements, which as Lott asserts, are not all that different from the so-called identity movements before it which prioritized the political more than the motivating identity.²² The main concern of identity politics has always been activism in order to secure their place politically and thus also secure not only the material needs of one’s group but also its social and culturally needs for recognition and validation; demands which are always based on universal claims about such things as access to education, safe drinking water and land.²³ Thus, as Lott elucidates, it is much more productive to talk about identity based political

movements rather than identity politics as such, which are not about ‘who we are’ but rather ‘what our program is,’ in particular since identity only becomes an issue when a particular group feels threatened.^{††} By moving away from an ‘identity politics,’ and, instead, theorizing the moment of ideological antagonism or political stance, a more productive and open political programme could be pursued.²⁴

Identifying that moment of “disagreement” that Walter Benn Michaels points out in his essay *Political Science Fictions* (2000), is that which constitutes politics. Disagreement is not, as Michaels points out, a differential or particularist category but a “universal” one because the position taken up within a particular situation of antagonism is not one held to be specific to that particular group but the right position (politically speaking) for all human society to be based.²⁵ To be sure, Lott points out that these positions are never fixed or ‘true’ but the product of experience;

Political positions are still not foundational or given, of course, but come out of the historical experience of human communities; no one can tell (and so who cares?) whether or not they are True; and though one believes them right for all, they’re definitely not guaranteed to be right for all time. But as Michaels shows, and as Laclau elaborates with greater political impact, they’re universals all the same, and they’re the important if not the only thing on which to stake your claim.²⁶

It is in this light that arguments are made for the formulation of some kind of universalism as a political necessity for current social movements that need to move beyond recognition of pure difference and which, according to Laclau is an already inherent aspect of identity movements.²⁷ But how we define what this universalism looks like is precisely the question which speaks to a new articulation of democracy, development and society. As Lott states, it is the project of imagining a non-essentialist

^{††} Importantly, Lott reminds us that theorists and activists alike must work at avoiding the risk of essentializing political demands within marginalized bodies –reifying the subaltern– focusing, rather, on disrupting the normative regimes that produced them in the first place. (Lott, 667)

left which is what Laclau refers to in his suggestion that the political universal is not so much something which can be known than a constitutive *lack*, “the empty site of a political desire whose fulfillment is less important (and impossible anyway) than its generating of a broad democratic field of would-be hegemonic attempts to capture it.”²⁸ At its most fundamental level, what Laclau proposes is a new theoretical rationale for social movements that pursues a project of universality without the ‘dead weight of essentialism’ based not on any claim to ‘truth’ or any essentialist subject of a particular ideology but an empty signifier –a *lack*.²⁹

[Laclau] proposes a return to the idea in a strictly political sense that has nothing to do with the quest for Truth or a true Subject or an end of historical contradiction in the rule of a universal class... [and basically to] argue that the only acceptable political notion of the universal—and therefore of the organizational imperative—is that of an empty signifier, not a present, given, or essential fullness waiting for troops but an impossible ideal whose very emptiness and lack creates a pluralized, difference based competition on the part of various particularisms in a democratic social-symbolic field to assume the position of the universal organization.³⁰ In fact, Laclau argues that the idea of some universal actually makes democracy

possible as different groups within society compete to give meaning and significance to the content which the nodal point ‘democracy’ signifies.

If democracy is possible, its because the universal has no necessary body or content; different groups, instead, compete between themselves to temporarily give their particularisms a function of universal representation. Society generates a whole vocabulary of empty signifiers whose temporary signifieds are the result of a political competition. It is this final failure of society –which is the same thing as the failure of constituting difference as difference –which makes the distance between the universal and the particular unbridgeable, and burdens concrete social agents with impossible task of making democratic interaction achievable.³¹

Democracy is, therefore, a constant process that goes far beyond any simple politics of preservation of identity.

Some have pointed out that “Venezuela’s social polarization lacks the organizational dimension of a fully formed class cleavage.”³² For instance, the divisions in the country do not take on the traditional institutionalized form like that of the labour

against capital. In fact, organized labour has increasingly lost its capacity to meaningfully represent workers in Venezuela, in particular because of the growth of the informal sectors “that are notoriously difficult to organize, given the diffuse and heterogeneous character of their economic activities and the ambiguity of their class positions,” as well as the concessions made by the major union CTV with the traditional political party AD.³³ These circumstances have resulted in the proliferation of politically unincorporated grassroots organizations and civic protest movements, and thus the “growing fragmentation and diversification of civil society.”³⁴ Interestingly, this has been perceived as a negative outcome precisely because Chávez has refused to mobilize his political followers around an essentialist category of identity.

Although Chávez has given electoral expression to class-based political distinctions, these distinctions are not well organized on the basis of class in either political or civil society. They exist primarily as differentiated sentiments or preferences, rather than institutionalized sociopolitical alternatives.³⁵

Rather, Chávez has articulated the social in a most open and non-essentializing terms (his extensive social projects covering a wide range of concerns), and teleSUR is a mediation of that open discourse of Bolivarianism which seeks only to fulfill a political programme based on the belief of universal rights and the responsibility governments have to their citizens. As Laclau points out, identity is based on the universal as far as there is a lack, “that is, as far as my differential [or particular] identity has failed in its process of constitution.”³⁶ In other words, any particular identity will claim as universal those important aspects of life that they feel are being withheld and which are perceived as a threat to their identity in so far as they are unable to be constituted or validated as such.

These ideas, therefore, offer a response to the dilemma of essentialism related to identity in cultural studies today as well as the outright rejections of Western universal

values, since, as Laclau points out “It is one thing to say that the universalistic values of the West are the preserve of its traditional dominant groups; it is very different to assert that the historical links between the two is a contingent and unacceptable fact which can be modified through political and social struggles.”³⁷

Thus, Chávez disarticulates the hegemonic link between neoliberalism and democracy, offering Bolivarianism as an alternative yet contingent intervention, evidencing the ways in which neoliberalism denies universal rights even as it claims to strengthen them, bringing new attention to those who it excludes (‘the people’ a significant nodal point in Chávez’s Bolivarian discourse) and extends its applicability not only to the region but internationally.

Transcript #4 and Analysis

On January 7th, 2007, teleSUR broadcast a special edition of a news program called “In Synthesis” which highlighted major events covered by the news network in the year 2006, and which was broadcast in two parts. In the second portion the female anchor introduces the first two stories concerning the widely publicized speech by Hugo Chávez at the United Nations in September and a controversial interview with the leader of Colombia’s largest rebel group (translated from the Spanish):

Anchor: “Transmitting from Caracas Venezuela, hello from Johanna Hopkins. Welcome to a special edition of *In Synthesis*. We take this opportunity to bring you the second part of that which was the news in the year 2006. We begin with news from the General Assembly at the United Nations. Moreover, we will be presenting portions of an exclusive interview given to teleSUR by the principle spokesmen and Commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Raúl Reyes.”

This introduction is followed by a clip of the United Nations and a voiceover explaining the situation at the UN:

Voiceover/reporter: “The 20th of September at the meeting of the fifty-sixth UN General Assembly the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela called his colleague George W Bush ‘devil’ and during his intercession reiterated that the end of world imperialism is near.”

This clip is immediately followed by another in which Chávez is speaking at the UN General Assembly in the midst of another round of votes that will determine the Latin American and Caribbean representative to the United Nations Security Council. The voting so far has only resulted in heightening tensions between the contending countries, Venezuela and Guatemala, as well as the United States as an influential supporter of Guatemala.

Chávez at the UN: “Mr. President of the United States, whom I call the ‘devil,’ came here speaking like the owner of the world. A psychiatrist could be used to analyze the US president’s statement made yesterday. Like a spokesperson for imperialism, he came to give his nostrums, in an attempt to maintain a real scheme of domination, of exploitation, and pillage of the peoples of the world.”

Followed by the **reporter:**

“Moreover, the leader of Venezuela accused the US government of initiating a campaign against Venezuela and the aspirations that this country would have of securing a seat on the UN Security Council.”

The reporter clearly frames the issue of Chávez’s speech in the context of US influence in effecting the outcome. Chávez parallels a broader antagonism between US ‘imperialist’ objectives and the developing world to the UN election process and the belief that the American administration is attempting to exert influence over the voting countries in order to undermine Venezuela’s chances of winning, and, furthermore, to support Guatemala’s bid.

Chávez: “I have the impression, Mister Imperialist Dictator that you will live the rest of your life with a nightmare, because wherever you look the rest of us are standing up, all those who are rising up against American imperialism, those who clamor plainly for the liberty of the world, for the equality among peoples, for the respect of the sovereignty of our nations. If they call us extremists, we rebel against imperialism; we rise up against that model of domination...”

Chávez is clearly speaking and making appeals to a particular audience, the nations that comprise the South or the developing world. Chávez refers to real social inequalities which is a message that teleSUR brings attention to. The private networks as well as the foreign stations in Venezuela rarely mention issues of inequality or the existence of different socio-economic classes. Significantly, Chávez refers to an important nodal point, 'the people' in his speech: "...wherever you look *the rest of us* are standing up...", "they call *us* extremists, *we* rebel against imperialism; *we* rise up against that model of domination...", directly identifying with the marginalized and oppressed in the world.

Reporter: "The president of Venezuela culminated in emphasizing the re-embarking of the non-aligned group after their re-union in Cuba, and we will continue with the UN where in the month of October the election of the non-permanent members to the Security Council of this international entity will be realized. Of the five seats, four were chosen without a problem. The protagonists of this assembly resulted being Venezuela and Guatemala, who have disputed the last Latin American seat of this organization."

Different Reporter (Fabían Vendaño), Voiceover: "What began as a normal UN Security Council member vote became an intense dispute between Latin American nations as to who should succeed Argentina as a member of the organization. The countries [vying for the seat] are Guatemala and Venezuela. The first candidate supported by the US, and the second, which symbolizes the rejection by all the peoples to be dominated by foreign countries. During the struggle, the Venezuelan ambassador, before the UN, assured that North America [US] is part of a campaign against the petrol nation."

This report implies that the US is using Guatemala as a proxy in order to protect wider American foreign policy objectives in the region. This last report is a moment articulating the frustrations of the South into a particular mobilization of people in rejection of foreign domination and the crystallization of the broader crisis of neoliberalism; an articulation that draws on Bolivarianism and 'the people' as a privileged nodal point.

Insert of **Francisco Arias Cárdenas, Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN** (he is giving reporters his opinion of the situation to reporters after the meeting):
"The US is not involved in the campaign [to undermine Venezuela's candidacy to UN Security Council]? Then I do not see why they are going form one side to another. We have the photos showing them saying things to other countries. That you didn't see here at the UN. That doesn't help democracy between nations. In any case, we uphold the dignity of the countries that indicate non acceptance of the imposition, non-acceptance of

pressure—we are obligated to respond, we are going to maintain our candidacy. There is no possibility that we retire, and we profoundly appreciate those countries that have not succumbed to the pressure, that [influence/pressure] which is obscene, which is course.”

Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN Cárdenas was vociferous about what he called US “blackmail” and bribery during the election process, holding up the front page of *El País*, a Spanish newspaper, which showed a picture of John Bolton, the American Ambassador to the UN, leaning over and whispering to the Guatemalan Foreign Minister, Gert Rosenthal.³⁸ Cárdenas opinion on the matter helps to support the belief by Chávez, and others that the US is attempting to intervene. Significantly, Cárdenas calls attention to US actions and their incongruence with the values of democracy in the context of an international stage. Nevertheless, teleSUR also shows a clip of John Bolton’s response to the speech by Chávez:

Voiceover/reporter: “As such, the US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, reiterated his confidence for the victory of the country [Guatemala] they support, in the UN.”

John Bolton, US Ambassador to the UN: “I suppose we will go through a number of more rounds, all I can say is, in the year 2000, I spent 31 days in Florida... this has just begun.”

Bolton’s remark refers to his involvement as a Republican lawyer in effectively stopping the 2000 US presidential election re-count in which Florida became a disputed state in the race between George W. Bush and Al Gore. Besides evoking the controversial elections, Bolton also implicates the US in Guatemala’s effort to gain a seat on the UN Security Council. The comment is not explained in this broadcast, yet it is interesting that the international press focused primarily on Chavez’s speech at the UN without really having examined what Bolton’s controversial remarks implied. The report concludes with a reporter summarizing the outcome of the UN elections with Panama being elected as a third neutral party.

Reporter: The 7th of November it was confirmed the entry of Panama as a non-permanent member representing Latin America and the Caribbean for the UN Security Council. The reactions to the entry of Panama were varied, and the Guatemalan representative continued to defend their stance and emphasized his country's support for regional integration for more than 60 years. For his part, the Venezuelan Ambassador to the UN, Francisco Arias Cárdenas believed that Panama represented balance and equilibrium amidst the pressure by the US during the electoral process. After three weeks the elections were finalized with the election of the UN Security Council representative for Latin America and the Caribbean. Panama will take the place of Argentina for the next two years beginning in January 2007.

The second news topic is an interview with FARC leader Raul Reyes:

Reporter: “Now in Colombia in the month of June, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced that they are disposed to establish a dialogue of peace with the re-elected President [of Colombia] Álvaro Uribe. In an exclusive interview with teleSUR the Commander Raul Reyes, spokesperson for the organization, made reference to the humanitarian accords and revealed the demands presented by the FARC in order to initiate peace negotiations with the government. We continue with this special report from Colombia.”

teleSUR provides an important space within which this group can make public their own stance regarding the violence in Colombia.

Raul Reyes, FARC Commander: “The FARC valorizes all suggestions that further the search for solutions to the political problems. But what is definitive is that the government will have to decide whether to continue or find a formula to get closer to the aims of the rebels in the FARC, and with the peoples of Colombia en general...”

Reporter: The FARC spokesmen revealed the conditions that the most important guerilla group demands in order to have a dialogue with the new government of Alvaro Uribe.

R. Reyes: “The eventuality of the new dialogues in the search for peace is something clamored for by the majority of Colombians, would have to participate in the demilitarization of the provinces Caqueta and Putumayo at minimum.

The demilitarization which Reyes refers to is not only the military but the right-wing paramilitaries funded by the government who have frequently been cited for human rights abuses in the country. The interview with Reyes provides a thematic approach to the situation, assigning responsibility for ending the conflict with the Colombian government who only needs to approach the problem through diplomatic means and not militarily.

Reporter: “According to the FARC spokesman, the eventuality of a possible negotiation of peace between the government and the guerrillas has to be based first on a recognition

of the existence of the conflict, something that President Uribe has denied repeatedly until this moment.”

R. Reyes: “The solution to the internal conflict in Colombia will not come to a solution with this government or any other through military means. We hope that the government is conscious of that fact and begin recognizing that there is an internal conflict. The FARC struggles for peace.”

Significantly, the Colombian government has approached the conflict by denying any voice to the FARC. This interview, however, clearly makes public the issue of internal conflict in Colombia. These were just a few important clips from this interview that demonstrate the way in which teleSUR truly functions as an alternative news source. The reporter, Freddy Muñoz, who conducted the interview with Raul Reyes was later jailed in Colombia, accused of taking part in a FARC bombing in 2002 which was based on the vague and questionable claims of a jailed FARC guerilla who later retracted his statements. The organization Reporters Without Borders has called for Muñoz’s release in light of the fact that the charges are not supported by any hard evidence, and because they believe that his teleSUR interview with a FARC leader is the real reason why the Colombian government has imprisoned him.³⁹

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- ¹ Van Leeuwen, T. (2005) *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London. Routledge.
- ² Van Leeuwen
- ³ Van Leeuwen
- ⁴ Van Leeuwen
- ⁵ Jorensen, Marianne & Louise J Phillips. "Critical discourse analysis." *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. Sage Publications Inc., California, 2002
- ⁶ Arturo Arias, "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects: Rigoberta Menchú and the Performative Production of the Subaltern Self," *PMLA*, Vol. 116, No. 1, Special Topic: Globalizing Literary Studies. (Jan., 2001), pp. 75-88.
- ⁷ Jill Didur and Teresa Heffernan, 'Revisiting the subaltern in the new empire.' *Cultural Studies*, 17.1 (2003), pp. 1-15.
- ⁸ Didur, 6.
- ⁹ Didur, 5.
- ¹⁰ Martin-Barbero, Jesus. "Identities: traditions and new communities," *Media, Culture & Society*. London: SAGE, Vol. 24: 621-641 (2002).
- ¹¹ Althusser, Louise. (1971) "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- ¹² Edelman, Murray, *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1988).
- ¹³ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "How can the global be local?," *Media & Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*. (2005) Hemer, O. and Tufte, T. (eds.), CLACSO-Nordicom: Buenos Aires, 25-40.
- ¹⁴ Castells, 1998: 48 in Martin-Barbero (2002).
- ¹⁵ Ernesto Laclau. *Emancipations*. London: Verso (1996).
- ¹⁶ Laclau, 22.
- ¹⁷ Eric Lott, "After Identity, Politics: The Return of Universalism." *New Literary History* 31:4 (2000), 665-680.
- ¹⁸ Lott, 666.
- ¹⁹ Lott, 666.
- ²⁰ Lott, 666.
- ²¹ Lott, 666.
- ²² Lott, 667.
- ²³ Laclau, 27.
- ²⁴ Lott, 667.
- ²⁵ Michaels 2000 in Lott, 668.
- ²⁶ Lott, 668.
- ²⁷ Lott, 667.
- ²⁸ Lott, 668.
- ²⁹ Lott, 668.
- ³⁰ Lott, 668.
- ³¹ Laclau, 35.
- ³² Kenneth, 68.
- ³³ Kenneth, 68.
- ³⁴ Kenneth, 68.
- ³⁵ Kenneth, 68.
- ³⁶ Laclau, 28.
- ³⁷ Laclau, 33.
- ³⁸ Warren Hoge, "Battle for seat on Security Council pits Chavez against U.S.," *International Herald Tribune*, October 17, 2006. Available online at: <http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/17/news/nations.php>
- ³⁹ Reporters without Borders, "FARC detainee retracts statement implicating detained Telesur correspondent," January 2007. Available online at: http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19804

Conclusion

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is not only the most influential leader in Latin America today, he also represents an alternative socialist vision with the financial capacity to pursue his political aims.¹ In fact, Washington has criticized the way Chávez has invested Venezuela's vast reserves of oil money –at least \$30billion – towards regional integration and reacted by portraying him as anti-democratic and a dangerous influence in the region.² For this reason, the US has sought out and continues to seek allies within Venezuela (including political parties) and the region in general to contain his influence. For instance George's W. Bush's recent tour of Latin America in March 2007 was seen by many as a direct attempt by the American president to counter Chávez's growing popularity and influence across the continent, pointing to significant power struggle.

The understanding of power as that which produces the social emphasizes the contingency of our social world since it is power that creates our knowledge, our identities and how we relate to one another as groups or individuals. Power is, therefore, productive in that it produces the social in particular ways, but also political since any definition must always exclude some other meaning. So it is that the organization of society in a particular way is also political as it is the outcome of continuous discursive struggles that attempt to sediment themselves; however, political meanings are never completely fixed.³

It is this theoretical context that teleSUR, an innovative approach to network television, can be understood as an alternative approach to communications in Latin American through its rearticulation of both the social and the political. My aim in

researching and writing on the topic of teleSUR was to critically analyze the discursive impact of this international broadcasting network as a particular mediated strategy within a larger pan-Latin American project of Bolivarianism. Moreover, the thesis, I hope, evidences parallels between teleSUR and a wider political shift in the region that conveys a distinct view of the world, development, democracy, and identity, all in contrast to the dominant discourse of neoliberal globalization; a particular set of economic policies that have worked to disarticulate the social for the past two decades.

My analysis of teleSUR focused on an interpretation of media texts through the lens of discourse theory, because, as Norman Fairclough suggests, the struggle against the neoliberal order is partly a struggle over language. Thus, applying discourse analysis should not be limited to specifying the threat, he states, but also in specifying emergent practices of resistance, which in Latin America today are defying traditional dichotomies and speaking to people's lived experiences (rather than essentialized notions of class as the traditional left did). Recognizing these new forms of resistance will therefore, as Fairclough suggests, also allow us to discern possibilities for change.⁴

The objectives of discourse analysis, therefore, are to illuminate how and under what conditions as well as for what reasons discourses are constructed, contested and change in order to describe, understand and explain particular historical events and processes.⁵ To this end, an assessment of discourse as David Howarth (2000) asserts, can be based on the degree to which it makes possible new and meaningful interpretations of the social and political. teleSUR is one aspect of Hugo Chávez's larger Bolivarian Revolution, a political, economic and cultural strategy that attempts to re-present Latin America, promoting new ways of self-understanding that are conducive to a supra-

national sense of an imagined community based both on a shared history as well as a common vision for the future. Importantly, it has been argued that although there has been a larger international response to neoliberal globalization, not much has emerged as a response to the US model or the American conception of democracy.

The failure of the Washington Consensus to deliver faster growth in developing countries—it has actually delivered slower growth—has contributed to a backlash that has significantly discredited it. There is now widespread recognition that: international financial markets can be prone to instability, export-led growth is not sufficient for domestic development and can promote global deflation and a “race to the bottom,” democracy and institutions promoting social inclusiveness are needed for development, and labor market protections are needed to prevent exploitation. However, though much progress has been made in countering the Washington Consensus, little progress has been made in combating the “U.S. model.” This poses a danger, since the U.S. model is the source of neoliberal policy, including the Washington Consensus.⁶

teleSUR as a particular mediation of Bolivarianism, however, seeks to re-define not only development, but democracy too, since Bolivarianism offers an alternative conception of democracy that has wide-reaching implications for citizenship and political identity, and which opens up new ways of conceiving political empowerment and agency. Thus, Chávez’s Bolivarian discourse reproduces notions of democracy, yet challenges and transforms the concept by redefining what has traditionally been an integral nodal point – or privileged sign – in opposition to the failed representative democracy of the former Punto Fijo regime and in contrast to the dominant US model of democracy.

Arturo Escobar reminds us that it is within discourse that power and knowledge come together and so the developing world’s capacity for self-definition (culturally, socially, and politically) its autonomy and different modes of knowing. ‘Our North is the South’ claims the axiom that welcomes audiences to teleSUR, attempting to disqualify the traditional dichotomy between what is generally perceived to be the North or the Developed World and the South/Underdeveloped World, by asserting that a valid

understanding of Latin America can exist independently of the West. It is through teleSUR then, that Chávez creates an alternative body of knowledge or ‘truth’ that is tied to power precisely because it is a political project, however, not one that is necessarily dominating. Clearly, Bolivarianism poses a substantive challenge to neoliberal globalization and offers an approach to political participation and development that is being strengthened by the use of mass media communications in order to forge and consolidate a new social contract that activates as well as empower its citizens.

Furthermore, since it is within discourse that power and knowledge come together, teleSUR is part of a larger struggle for power as a particular set of claims to ‘truth’; claims that, in this case, are open attempts to articulate a universal project of human rights, showing, as Foucault explained, that since power as a productive notion is not necessarily tied to domination it is able to offer the possibility for resistance and an open politics.

In fact, as stated previously, Chávez’s Bolivarianism is a discursive response that rose out of the dislocations of the failures of neoliberalism not only to solve the problems of development, but, in fact, worsening them. Thus, if dislocating experiences provide the conditions for the construction of antagonistic relations between agents, and yet do not determine the form these discursive constructions take, it is important to analyze cultural and political artifacts like teleSUR to understand this current and contingent form of Bolivarianism as a reaction and response to the experience of neoliberalism, the ways in which it constructs social antagonisms in the context of globalization, and how it delineates political frontiers between different actors, which can all potentially give rise

to new collective social imaginaries depending on the degree to which it can function as a ‘space of inscription’ for a variety of heterogeneous demands and identities.⁷

Thus, the approach to the study of teleSUR as a media text that attempts to articulate alternative projects that better reflect the lived experience of a majority of Latin Americans, while at the same time constructing the social in new ways, privileging empowerment, participation, and sovereignty. More specifically, teleSUR’s discursive strategies lay within the combination of both the newscast and testimony genres, two particular moments articulated in the broader political practice of Bolivarianism in Venezuela today.

News, by its very definition, is the communication of recent information and current events and developments; however, even this function is heavily influenced by the routine professional practices of journalism. The news is highly structured, selective, and decontextualized, generally reflecting and maintaining the status quo, through framing, priming and agenda-setting. It is in this way that the media do not simply tell us what to think about, but also how to think about specific issues.

It has been suggested that any alternative to the dominant commercial model of news would involve an innovative master frame that would prioritize policy initiatives, demonstrating that solutions exist and inviting citizens to participate in them. Arguably, Bolivarianism functions as such a unifying framework, in particular through teleSUR, as a revolutionary way to approach the dissemination of important information within the context of what Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez has called a socialist movement, one that highly values political empowerment and engagement.

Furthermore, as we were able to gauge from the transcripts of the MercoSUR meeting as covered by teleSUR, what Chávez is advancing is a new discourse of development from within the countries considered ‘third world’ themselves. Rather than characterizing poverty as a de-contextualized result of problems within the so-called third world, Chávez links underdevelopment to exploitation by the first world through neoliberal economic policies which he refers to as colonial in nature.

Development, therefore, acquires new meaning, removed from the neoliberal model the developing world has been forced to adopt indiscriminately. In fact, Chávez says, “...it is necessary to think about a set of development projects, both social and economic, throughout this entire region, our home” that, as the teleSUR broadcaster adds. “[is] far removed from the neoliberal current.”

On the other hand, the literary testimonial, according to Arturo Arias is a subaltern text traditionally defined within the strictures of the literary as a ‘...written means for exploring the contours of a collective identity based in concrete historical experiences that have required political mobilization in the face of repression.’⁸ Significantly, testimonial implies the logic of collective political action above any attempt to capture an individual-specific ‘truth.’ The testimonies by common Venezuelans on teleSUR, therefore, also help to solidify and validate particular histories, experiences and identifications.

Thus, teleSUR also celebrates the cultural heterogeneity of Latin America. In fact, Lee Artz links the prioritization of horizontal flow, and a deliberate class awareness or political consciencization, explaining that the network allows a space, “where the interests of the working class, peasantry, indigenous nations and urban poor provide the

news frames, and where voices of popular classes appear as credible sources.”⁹ Therefore the significant aspect of teleSUR is that it acknowledges the existence of real social inequalities.

On the other hand, the private networks as well as the foreign stations in Venezuela rarely mention issues of inequality or the existence of different socio-economic classes although about half of the urban population live in the precarious barrios or slums that have been spreading in Venezuela's cities for over half a century. Significantly, Chávez refers to an important nodal point, ‘the people’ in his speech: “...wherever you look *the rest of us* are standing up...,” he says, “they call *us* extremists, *we* rebel against imperialism; *we* rise up against that model of domination...,” directly identifying with the marginalized and oppressed in the world.

We can think back to teleSUR’s coverage of the Chilean indigenous Mapuche hunger strike. The hunger strikers had no other mainstream news coverage other than that of teleSUR. Ignored by most media institutions, teleSUR makes public the issue of indigenous land claims. That particular broadcast, with its attendant first hand accounts and testimonies legitimizes the indigenous struggle for autonomy and rights in the face of state repression. The use of testimonies, moreover, supports a thematic approach to news which assigns social responsibility to such issues, therefore encouraging citizens to expect changes and solutions to originate with government public policies.

teleSUR also uses testimonies in the intermission breaks between newscasts, creating a space for seemingly ‘common’ people to tell the stories of their own beneficial experiences with Chávez’s reforms including his programs supporting cooperatives, the

availability of Cuban doctors in rural areas as well as the nationalization of the oil company PDVSA and the new benefits its employees now enjoy.

The neoliberal approach is based on a limited conception of the developing world that overlooks significant historical and political realities. In contradistinction, the testimonies in the context of teleSUR's newscasts are news actualities; they offer a space for people to speak about their personal struggles and experiences. It is an innovative journalistic practice that creates a strategic space in which to stake a claim to 'truth.' The use of testimonies is a deliberate attempt to forge an order of discourse in which personal experience is privileged over mediated versions. This is not to say that the testimony is not mediated, but rather that the genre gives the illusion that it is not. It is an integral aspect of the rhetoric of the testimony to be perceived as direct and unmediated, and therefore a powerful strategy in the struggle for legitimacy and 'truth.' So it is that the use of testimony in teleSUR news segments legitimizes the subaltern perspective as a credible and valid source of important and relevant information. At the same time, using the news genre to further the aims and objectives of Bolivarianism also lends the broader movement legitimacy. To reiterate then, both the news and testimony genres are two moments articulated together within teleSUR newscasts in the broader political practice of Bolivarianism in Venezuela today.

Another important topic I hope my thesis helped to shed light on was the practice of populism, although much more work can be done in examining the different forms it takes, the language it uses and its associated effectiveness within different contexts. Having said that, I would argue that Chávez's rise to power had those elements identified as populist, in particular as Lacau has defined it as a particular political organization

which occurs in circumstances of volatility, but that he is, and continues to be a popular leader who represents the lived experience of a majority of Venezuelans (precisely the reason why the traditional left have not been able to make gains in the last few decades). In other words, Chávez was able to garner broad constituency support precisely because he offered the majority of Venezuelans an alternative that spoke to their aspirations for change and, significantly, validation, offering new and meaningful interpretations of the social and political, and therefore an effective political discourse.

The actions on the part of four major private media stations to undermine Chávez during the coup and subsequent lock-out provoked the President once re-installed to refer to them, quite dramatically, as the ‘four horsemen of the apocalypse.’ It was only this past December during the Venezuelan presidential elections that RCTV and Globovision attempted to undermine Chávez once again by manipulating information in order to incite social unrest and damage confidence in the vote. For these reasons, Chávez has decided not to renew RCTV’s license which ends in April 2007, an action in tandem with Venezuelan laws that mandate social responsibility and are consistent with social responsibility reforms discussed at a January 2007 media reform conference.¹⁰ It would be interesting to follow up and find out what happens to this television station. In fact workers at RCTV have proposed ownership be transferred to them to secure the station’s independence, while also allowing for another approach to alternative media. The very fact that such an option was raised shows the extent to which a new political culture is developing in Venezuela.*

* As of April 22nd, 2007, however, the government had replaced RCTV with a new state-run television offering jobs to the former RCTV staff. See “Venezuelans in TV network protest,” BBC News Online, April 22, 2007 available at www.bbc.co.uk.

It is important to remember, moreover, that teleSUR, as a part of the Bolivarian Revolution, is one movement among many new emerging forms of resistance both within the region and internationally. From the worker-recovered factories of Argentina, to the participatory budgets of Brazil to the World Social Forum and the many anti-globalization protests, parallels can be drawn between what is happening in Venezuela and other parts of the world today. For example, one look at teleSUR's advisory council—with members as diverse as Noble Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (an Argentinean human rights leader), poet and well-known liberation theologian of the Nicaraguan Revolution Ernesto Cardenal, editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and historian Ignacio Ramonet, writers Eduardo Galeano, Tariq Ali, Saul Landau and Free Software pioneer Richard Stallman, among others—can be compared to the new alliances and political formations or mobilizations that are being created in response to neoliberal globalization.

Fundamentally, teleSUR is an alternative approach to communications in Latin America and a vehicle for politicization and social change. As a particular discursive strategy teleSUR also has important implications for action, and political mobilization, empowering its audiences as citizens and active social agents, and fostering both creativity in approaching the problems of development and empowerment. However, I might point out that the question of how far-reaching teleSUR's coverage and influence might be in terms of reception. Only further studies of its impact on audiences will be able to gauge more accurately the depth to which it stimulates citizen activation. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that teleSUR, the first plurinational and supranational

television broadcaster owned and managed collectively, and with an express socially progressive dictate, is helping to foster a new and mutually beneficial political culture.[†]

teleSUR as the first international public broadcaster (with ownership divided among five South American countries) with a clear cut public service mandate, functions as an alternative source of information to the American CNN en Español and the major Venezuelan private networks. This is not to suggest that teleSUR exists to counter “Americanization,” but rather, to challenge the logic of capitalism (and the US model of democratic liberalism), and the associated rationality of communication it has entailed.[‡] This situation makes it urgent, as Jesús Martín-Barbero, (2000) has realized –in reference to unstable identity configurations that have been increasingly more conspicuous in the age of globalization– the importance of regional and national policy-makers coming together in order to enable the region to share in the benefits of increased cultural integration by establishing a Latin American audio-visual space.¹¹ At the same time, teleSUR is also the first project within the historical struggle for social justice in the region that employs technology on such a scale. It is also the first time that Bolivarianism has been taken up by the mass media. Furthermore, it seems that this mass media movement does not stop here and that plans exist for the creation of a new radio network of government or state stations called Radiosur that should start broadcasting some time in 2007.¹²

[†] I use the term ‘plurinational’ to denote not only the political practices of accommodating plural national claims but also practices that include legal recognition of diversity, plural constitutionality, participatory politics, redistribution of wealth, as well as the fostering of a culture of solidarity, economic sustainability, among others (see <http://conaie.nativeweb.org>).

[‡] The rationalization of communication according to market dictates that support policies of privatization and that view communications media as having limited functions for the transmission of information.

Generally speaking, I believe that looking at alternative media in Venezuela today opens up possibilities for further research that would explore the ways in which social change is reconfiguring news journalism, creating new communicative possibilities and shaping the dynamics of the public sphere as well as public and political culture. It also opens up possibilities for the study of other discursive strategies and values pursued in the name of Bolivarianism in Venezuela today, a movement that is increasingly gaining international attention.

¹ James Painter, "Latin America faces year of change," BBC News Online November 25, 2005. Available online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4435522.stm>

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/4435522.stm>

³ Laclau and Mouffe in Jorgensen et. al, 36.

⁴ Fairclough: 2000 (2), 147-148.

⁵ Howarth, 131.

⁶ http://www.fpif.org/papers/2004keynesianism_body.html

⁷ Laclau: 1990 in Howarth, 132.

⁸ Arias: 2001, 81.

⁹ Artz: 2006, 226.

¹⁰ Daniel Hellinger "Media Reform or Grab for Power in Venezuela" The St. Louis Journalism Review, February 2007, Vol. 35, Number 293, Digital Edition 84. Accessed online at <http://www.stljr.org/current-featurestory.htm>

¹¹ Jesús Martín-Barbero (2000) 27: 27-48 in Anny Brooksbank and Ronaldo Munck, "Introduction." *Latin American Perspectives* (2000) 27: 3-10.

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