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Media Imperialism in Latin America and the emergence of *Telesur*

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to study in an historical context the arrival of *Telesur* in Latin America. Using media research an attempt will be made to demonstrate how media conglomerates have played an important role in shaping society's ideology and political processes in Latin America. Within this has emerged a new television station, which claims to have another perspective than the mainstream one, and have as a purpose of breaking with media hegemony. The mass media in Latin America have been owned by the conservative elite which has led to a certain way of portraying news which is biased, and has encouraged a particular understanding of political processes. *Telesur's* emergence comes in a particular historical moment in the region and in the middle of a media war, as an alternative to counter private media, and aims to follow the example of *al-Jazeera*, along with other state-funded counter-hegemonic media around the world. This dissertation will examine the process of its emergence. Its theoretical framework includes media imperialism, cultural imperialism and the 'centre-periphery' model.

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Introduction

For around the past thirty years, mass media in Latin America have been monopolized by the conservative elite which have had economic and corporate interests. During the 1980's and early 1990's, Latin American governments introduced privatization and conservative policies, but now, since Chavez came to power in Venezuela, there has been a turn in the political inclination in Latin American nations. Private mass media, which is about 90% of the total media, have positioned themselves as the political opposition. These media and their reporting have been funneled according to their ideological interests, which have strong ties with U.S. interests. They have penetrated to the Latin American audience together with the incursion of U.S media conglomerates such as *Univisión*, *Telemundo*, and *CNN in Spanish* to the media market in the region. Fidel Castro, anti-imperialist icon, once said that what Latin America needed was its own mass media to counteract the reports from these media conglomerates. Hugo Chávez put action and funding to Castro's words, and with the support of other Latin American leaders created *Telesur*. Telesur's board of members says that it aims to give another perspective from the mainstream one, and to provide an alternative to the audience to achieve a plurality in news. Its emergence in the Latin American media industry has been received by criticism from its detractors, by joy from its supporters, and by skepticism from others.

In this essay it will be argued the reasons for the emergence of *Telesur*, was there a real necessity for the emergence of it in the media market in Latin America? Why *Telesur* emerges in the specific time it did? Why was there a necessity to launch an alternative to private hegemonic media in the region? Had mass media in Latin America been pluralistic or had been ideologically monopolized? Had there been attempts to cut media monopolies in the world? What particularities have caused the region to attempt to counteract hegemonic

media? In what ways have *Telesur* differentiated itself from mainstream media? Is the attempt to challenge hegemonic-media particular to Latin America or is it occurring in other places? If so, why have these other places also decided to counteract them? These are some of the questions that this dissertation attempt to answer. A concept that will be used throughout the paper is that of 'media war', which means when media positions them towards a political position and manipulates information as a way of propaganda towards their interests. When this situation has occurred media have adopted a position of extreme antagonism in which no media has the truth, but a distortion of reality. This concept will be mainly used when referring to Venezuela and the media under Chávez government, in which media has positioned them as radically anti-*chavista* or government media as pro-*chavista*. The audience has been affected by the radical partisan coverage.

Chapter one will consist of an historical background in Latin American mass media. It will discuss the privatization trend in the media market in the 1970's, which contributed to the current elite-controlled mass media, as well as to the creation of media conglomerates. Two examples of media conglomerates in Latin America are discussed: *Venevisión*, and the empire of media tycoon Ángel González. The chapter will also examine two examples of media conglomerates financed and produced from the United States to the Latin American audience, and Latinos in the United States: *Univisión* and *Telemundo*. It will then discuss how Latin American mass media have played an important role in shaping political processes in the region, and how, historically, the right-wing has had the control over these media. They have helped in shaping political processes in favor of their interests. It is presented two specific events in which media played a fundamental role in supporting coups, the 1973 coup in Chile and the 2002 coup in Venezuela. Chapter two will consist of the theoretical framework for understanding how the incursion of *Telesur* in the media industry has attempted to challenge media monopoly. It will apply the concepts of media

imperialism, cultural imperialism and the 'centre-periphery' model. Chapter three will analyse the emergence of *Telesur* in Latin America within a media and political context, and the particularities of the historical moment of its emergence, as it emerged in the middle of a media war in Latin America, specifically in the heart of it, Caracas. Chapter four presents *Telesur* as part of a state-funded counter-hegemonic media boom in early 21st century, examining the cases of *al-Jazeera* and *France 24*.

Telesur has been a motive for research lately, there are two papers which has been used as part of the references: (1) James Painter's "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of *Telesur*", and (2) Freja Salo and Elisabeth Terenius's "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study". Painter's paper and Salo and Terenius's paper focus, among other topics, on *Telesur*'s coverage, specifically about how Venezuela and Chávez are covered in *Telesur*'s news. This paper does not include a study about how many times Venezuela or Chávez are treated in its coverage since its author thinks it is not necessary since every media is the product of how, where, and when it is conceived, it represents and defends the interests of the socio-economical system from where it emerges. As an example, *Univisión* and *Telemundo*, portray mostly life of Latinos in the U.S., and news about Mexico much more than about any other news. They have a corporate ideology therefore present light and commercial entertainment programs. *Telesur*, on the other hand, is the product of a revolution, and is trying to break media hegemony from these big media firms. These three news stations were conceived in a different historical time and place, and they stand for that. Both papers neglected to address the historical context of the mass media in Latin America and Venezuela and how they have played decisive roles in politics, usually aligning to the right-wing. They have also neglected to explain the historical context of *Telesur*'s emergence. This paper focuses in that, in the historical context of the mass media in Latin America, and the emergence of *Telesur* among

them, aiming to break the media monopoly of the conservative elite with strong ties to Miami media firms.

Along with modernization and technology, mass culture has been accessible to a broader audience, transgressing many types of barriers. National, cultural, language, or ideological barriers have had to soften to give way to a globalized world. More than simply unifying audiences, media globalization has been an attempt to establish domination of the dominant ideology over the periphery audience. Hegemonic media usually presents a general view of particularities about the periphery world, which is presented and perceived by the peripheral audience as the news. In this way hegemonic media has power over the peripheral audience. Dorfman and Mattelart have argued that:

“Mass culture has... generated a cultural elite which has cut itself off more and more from the masses. Contrary to the democratic potential of mass culture, this elite has plunged mass culture into a suffocating complexity of solutions, approaches and techniques, each of which is comprehensible only to a narrow circle of readers.”¹

¹ Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to read Donald Duck: Imperialist ideology in the Disney comic*, p. 31.

CHAPTER I

An historical background to Latin American media industries

1.1 An historical background of Latin American media

In Latin America, media have been in the hands of big corporations which decide what to present to the audience. Chilean journalist Ernesto Carmona has argued that in each of the countries of Latin America there is a unilateral media power, with a monotheist vision of society, which worships neo-conservatism ideology, which, at the same time, supports the neoliberal economic model and is an enemy of pluralism.²

Latin American broadcasting began in the 1920's. The emergence of broadcasting was seen by most of the people as a mediator of national unification in the different parts of the region. Political elites did not consider it in this same way. For the political elite, the media was not a nation-building instrument, but an essential instrument for retaining political control. The elites preferred to retain political control of the media more than any other thing, as a way to maintain some stability of the already unstable governments.³ Although this key function has remained consistent, there have also been changes since the 1920s. The mass media began to attract state interference early in the 1930's. Government censorship, government licensing, and paid government advertising became part of private commercial broadcasting.⁴ At the end of the 1950's, "the big three" American networks (NBC, ABC, and CBS) started to export "technology, expertise, and programming" to Latin America, which helped to increase the US investments in the region, and introduced the commercial model of television.⁵

In the 1970's, commercial broadcasting increased alongside free-market economies led by military dictatorships. The state and the media relationship evolved. The national states

² Carmona, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 92.

³ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 8.

⁴ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 11.

⁵ Waisbord, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, p. 53.

forged a mutually beneficial relationship with national broadcasting industries, developing strong media conglomerates, particularly in Mexico and Brazil.⁶ All countries in South America, except Colombia and Venezuela, were under dictatorships which were supported by the dominant media. The media in the 70's supported the military coups and regimes, supported neo-liberal economic programs developed by the military leaders, and were silent when human rights violations were committed by the military state. Television networks, such as Brazil's Globo, now one of the main conglomerates in Latin America, became the military government's spokesperson.

In the 1990's, Latin American media followed the privatization current followed by the U.S. media, which gave way to: the formation of multimedia corporations; the decline of family-owned companies; the articulation between local, regional, and international capital; the intensification of cross-regional trade and content; and the increase in the production and export of television programming.⁷ The privatization flow was taking place in the media industry and market-oriented policies were adopted worldwide, as well as liberalization and deregulation. The separation of state monopolies meant the entrance of foreign media companies, such as Telefonica (Spain), Telecom (France), and Bell South (U.S.), which changed the structures and dynamics in telecommunications⁸. The owners of large media companies started to buy interests in smaller media companies such as mobile phone, cable television, and internet companies, creating media conglomerates. These owners are tycoons in their countries, as we will see later in the case of Ángel González. They are the owners of the channels which transmit news, talk shows, entertainment shows, soap operas, and many other television programmes which appeal to the audience. These conglomerates control most of the media interests in Latin American countries, and the

⁶ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 14.

⁷ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 9.

⁸ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 12.

main television stations and networks. They receive the largest share of advertising revenues, and draw the largest audiences.⁹ Behind the main television channels, newspapers, radio stations, and telecommunications in general there are media conglomerates, which present only one point of view, ignoring perspectives other than the mainstream one.

During the last decade, Latin American media was shaped by two parallel forces, local politics and the globalization of media markets. The development of the media in the region took place in part because of the technological changes of the decade and the emergence of the global market.¹⁰ Given the economic changes taking place in the Western world in the last decade, media power concentrated in private ownership. Latin American broadcast media are mostly private and commercially operated, like in the U.S., but unlike Western Europe, where there has been to some degree state regulation.¹¹ Media markets are dominated by a few conglomerates that have benefited from the politics of privatization and liberalization in the 1990's, and from proximity to governments. The Latin American commercial broadcasting model has been contradictory, both unregulated and highly controlled.¹²

Media are essential to political matters because they inform, they suggest attitudes to the audience and they help them forge an ideology; therefore the media are an important target for political issues. They are usually backed up by governments because the two sets of institutions intertwine and help each other in order to protect each other's interests. Governments will always want to have media support to make sure they have a good public

⁹ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*. p. 12.

¹⁰ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*. p. ix.

¹¹ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*.

¹² Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 1.

opinion rating. While, on the other hand, the media corporations will want to have government support in order to take advantages from them, such as to keep broadcasting licenses, to expand business, to get preference for news and press releases, etc.¹³ It is a symbiotic relationship based on power. "If the press recoiled from printing inconvenient news or cheered official messages, governments corresponded by cancelling large debts with official financial institutions, offering special exchange rates to modernize newsrooms, and granting broadcasting licenses."¹⁴ Both, media and governments are two of the most powerful institutions in a society, which have worked together to benefit one from another, contrary to the postulates of liberalism, which the media industry have boasted to follow. In theory, media industry follows a liberal model, in the way that it promulgates total independence from state. But they have failed to achieve this ideal: "press owners rhetorically exalted liberalism but ceaselessly courted states, supported military interventions, and only (and vociferously) criticized government intrusion that affected their own political and economic interests."¹⁵ Silvio Waisbord suggests that the problem in Latin American media has been the excessive power of governments and private interests.¹⁶ He argues that while the mainstream press has occasionally brought about a plurality of voices in society, most of the time these efforts are futile in press systems due to prioritization of the interests of both government and large corporations. Media in Latin America have tended to have close relationships to governments, except in times of political polarization, when press and government relations have been under tension, as is the case in the emergence of *Telesur* in the media industry of Latin America. Since the late 1990's, a polarization between some governments and private media corporations has taken place. Since the political advent of left-wing governments in many Latin American countries, the

¹³ Waisbord, Silvio. 2008. "Press and the Public Sphere in Contemporary Latin America", p. 4.

¹⁴ Waisbord, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, p. 51.

¹⁵ Waisbord, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, p. 51.

¹⁶ Waisbord, Silvio. 2008. "Press and the Public Sphere in Contemporary Latin America", p. 4.

private media have been waging a media war against these governments' actions. These two social institutions, state and media, are now mainly antagonistic to each other in countries with left-wing governments, as we will analyse below.

1.2 Latin American elite owns the media

The mass media have been considered by some leaders of Latin America as dangerous to democracy, in the sense that media ownership is concentrated. They argue that transnational conglomerates manipulate coverage in favour of business or other groups with particular interests.¹⁷ They have claimed that, since the 1990s, broadcasting has been largely taken over by large corporations such as *Grupo Cisneros* in Venezuela, *Televisa* in Mexico, *Globo* in Brazil, and *Grupo Clarín* in Argentina.¹⁸

While the liberal model emphasizes press independence, critical media theory suggests that media bias emerges from structural control of the media by the elite. The latter approach is validated empirically in the Latin American context. The people who own, produce, and decide the news are usually those belonging to the small economically privileged sector of society. Christopher Dixon, director of media research for the stockbroker Paine Webber, has argued that in the 1990's has emerged a global oligopoly in the entertainment industry.¹⁹ McChesney has also argued that "the rise of a global commercial media system is closely linked to the rise of a significantly more integrated 'neoliberal' global capitalist economic system. To some extent, the rise of a global media market is encouraged by new digital and satellite technologies that make global markets both cost-effective and

¹⁷ Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media", p. 1

¹⁸ Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media", p. 2

¹⁹ Christopher Dixon quoted in McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*, p. 78.

lucrative.”²⁰ For the past years, says Michael Mandel, media and communications have become a much more significant sector for business activity.²¹

The elite class in Latin America goes back to colonial times, when Europeans went to the continent to settle. Europeans were the owners of the land, while indigenous ‘Indians’ and African slaves worked it. This sharp social stratification on grounds of race and class became important during the wars of independence, and consequently in the development of the independent countries.²² The descendants of the Europeans settlers remain nowadays in the dominant sector of society. These elites have been traditionally in power, including the ownership of media. They have been interested in controlling media mainly because it can promote political stability in their countries, which is always beneficial for them, since it is important for the elite to maintain political order, in order for them to remain in power.²³ Community media are not as massive as the commercial media, because the production and distribution costs do not allow it.²⁴ The mass media promote political stability through the commercial broadcasting model, in which the media operate mainly to entertain the audience. John Thompson has said that the development of the culture industry and of consumer culture more generally has thus brought about “the incorporation of individuals into a rationalized and reified social totality; it has stunted their imagination, stifled their revolutionary potential and rendered them vulnerable to manipulation by dictators and demagogues.”²⁵ Moreover, elite media helps conservative and long-dominant elites remove political opponents from television broadcasting. Hugo Chávez has said that “most of the

²⁰ McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*, p. 78.

²¹ Michael Mandel quoted in McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*, p. 79.

²² Salo and Terenius, “Telesur- “Telechávez” or the public service of Latin America: a case study”, p. 2.

²³ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. 1.

²⁴ Copley, “Telesur is constructing another view”.

²⁵ Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical social theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, p. 101.

world mass media belongs to elites that only defend their interests and use their resources as powerful artillery cannons.”²⁶

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer and member of *Telesur’s* advisory council, has said about development and wealth distribution in Latin America: “Development is a banquet which only has a few guests, although its glare deceives, and its main dishes are reserved to foreign jaws.”²⁷ Galeano, in his quote, makes reference to foreigners who go to southern countries to help in their ‘development’ mostly by implanting companies, business, and industries, which only accomplish the objective of benefiting themselves or the local elite minority. In the case of media conglomerates, it could represent the foreign media which the Latin American audience receive as ‘local’, such as *Telemundo*, *Univisión*, and *CNN in Spanish*, which are broadcasted in Spanish, but owned by American corporations such as *NBC Universal* and *CNN*. The news presented to the Latin American audience as local news, comes from these American media corporations. In this sense, Galeano is right; the main dishes are for the foreigners. *Telemundo*, *Univisión* and *CNN in Spanish*, have a great influence in all Latin America; they are seen throughout the entire continent. These three media firms are the largest in terms of audience, capitalization, and revenue.²⁸ They do not have rivalry in viewership, because they are three of the channels with broader coverage in the continent. Their news is projected to the audience as a broad pan-Latin American perspective.

²⁶Chávez, Hugo quoted in *Política Exterior y Soberanía*, p. 8. Original Spanish version: “La mayor parte de los medios de comunicación en el mundo, pertenecen a élites que solo defienden sus intereses y utilizan sus recursos como poderosos cañones de artillería contra la verdad.”

²⁷ Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, p. 411. Original Spanish version: “El desarrollo es una banquete con escasos invitados, aunque sus resplandores engañen, y los platos principales están reservados a las mandíbulas extranjeras.”

²⁸ Rodríguez, “*Univisión and Telemundo: The Hispanic Market Institutionalized*”, p. 61.

1.3 Television as the most important medium in political mass communication.

Media have had two essential functions in the democratization process: spreading of information and political mobilization.²⁹ The media will select the news according to their interests; economical, political, etc. They will decide which events are newsworthy, and which are not. Television is the most important instrument of communication in Latin American political campaigns because it is the medium that reaches more people in the region. "Television has at times become the window of the world"³⁰. According to World Bank and UN statistics in the Latin American region there is an average of 71 newspapers per 1,000 people, 413 radio receivers per 1,000, 269 television set per 1,000 people, 20 cable subscribers per 1,000 people and 35.7 Internet users per 1,000.³¹

Figure 1. Media Access in Latin America

Media Category	Percentage of Population
TV households	90%
Radio	41%
Pay TV	27%
Internet	15%
Newspapers	7%

Sources: World Bank and UN statistics.

Along with China, Latin American is one of the third-world regions where television has most closely approximated its dominance in the industrial world.³² Radio stations, newspapers, and internet are also important but they do not have the visual impact on the whole society as television does. Radio is the most approachable medium of getting informed from but it does not have any visual impact at all; it does not provide images that can be related to the

²⁹ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 7.

³⁰ Gomery and Lichty, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 24.

³¹ Salo and Terenius, "Telesur- "Telechávez" or the public service of Latin America: a case study", p. 11.

³² Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 10.

news. Newspapers are accessible to many people if living in communities or conglomerated places, but newspapers require a literate readership, and in most of the region's countries the illiteracy rate is very high making the information unreachable for non-readers. Nicaragua has the highest illiteracy rate in Latin America, where 33.5% of its population is illiterate, and Guatemala follows with 31.5%.³³ "Print media are... highly important in informing the elite and the policymakers. In a country like Mexico, with its very low readership, that may be virtually their only function."³⁴ In the case of getting information from the Internet, it is only for an exclusive sector of society, since only 13% of the Latin American population connects regularly to the internet.³⁵ Most of the people do not have access to the internet; hence it is not substantially persuasive for politics in the region, while local television stations are fundamental in campaigning, as television is the main medium for political information.³⁶ James Schwoch argues about the continuing possibilities of political messages in entertaining programming, which can hold the potential for major impact on eventual political movements and elections.³⁷ The television stations and the way they pronounce and portray the news will incline sympathy or antipathy in the audience towards political campaigns. They are at times indirectly (or sometimes directly) accomplices of political outcomes.

1.4 Main Latin American media corporations today

In Latin America, the biggest media conglomerates are Mexico's *Televisa* and Brazil's *TV Globo*, which are enormous media centres, even rivalling the previously mentioned "big three" U.S. media corporations in viewing figures. Their influence within Latin America is

³³ UNESCO. Latin America and the Caribbean. Selected education indicators 2000.

³⁴ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 7.

³⁵ Comscore publishes first review of Latin American Internet usage. July 25, 2007.

³⁶ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 1.

³⁷ Schwoch, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 47.

greater than any other media company in the U.S.³⁸. These conglomerates dominate the media scenario in Latin America; they are the biggest media monopolies in the region.

In Mexico's case, *Televisa*, the biggest conglomerate in the Spanish-speaking world and the biggest soap-operas distributor in the world, has been openly a PRI ally and supporter for decades. PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was Mexico's ruling party for more than sixty consecutive years, from 1929 to 1991; it was referred also as the "official party" of Mexico. It follows a conservative ideology, and since *Televisa's* launching year, 1950, a strong union between media and State was formed. Writer Elizabeth Fox argues that "*Televisa* and *TV Globo* have long maintained a quasi-monopolistic position in the television industry that allowed them to capture the largest share of television audience and advertising in the biggest and richest Spanish and Portuguese-speaking markets, respectively".³⁹

There are others important in media industries such as Venezuela's *Venevisión*, which is a television station within the Gustavo Cisneros Group of Companies, one of the largest media, entertainment, telecommunications, and consumer products companies in Latin America. *Venevisión's* owner, Gustavo Cisneros, from an exiled Cuban family, is the second wealthiest man in Latin America, and an anti-*chavista*. Other media tycoons in the region include Guatemala's Ángel González, a mysterious character in the media world, who has been quietly taking control of many channels and television stations.⁴⁰ Ángel González, Mexican-born and Miami-based, owns at least four of the main television stations in

³⁸ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 1.

³⁹ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*. p. 18.

⁴⁰ Prensa Libre, "Ángel González expande su poderío a Argentina".

Guatemala and more than 30 channels throughout the continent.⁴¹ He has a virtual monopoly of commercial television in some parts of Latin America.

These four examples of massive private media corporations in Latin America are owned by media tycoons in their countries; businessmen who are ideologically conservative. They promote their interests to their massive audience. Tina Rosenberg, *The New York Times* journalist, argues that "in Latin American nations, the media are dominated by single owners, or one political point of view."⁴² She presents the example of Salvadorian media, which is owned by a single man, Boris Eserski⁴³, who controls 90% of the total television stations in the country, and all the newspapers circulated in the country, which both speak for the nation's elite minority.⁴⁴ Their perspective comes from the elite sector, which is what they promote. In 1989, emerged a controversy concerning the content of the Hispanic media in the U.S. Critics argued that the networks' newscasts and entertainment programs appeared to emphasize the "bourgeois" concerns of people who had assimilated into American society more than most Mexican immigrants had.⁴⁵ Raúl Ruiz, a professor of Chicano studies at California State University, stated to *The New York Times* that "the programming (*Univision's* and *Telemundo's*) may make some sense in Miami, but it certainly seems to lack all relevance to a blue-collar working-class Mexican population here in Los Angeles".⁴⁶ Both networks denied the accusations.

⁴¹ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*. P. xii.

⁴² Rosenberg, "Editorial Observer; The Monochromatic Media of Latin America" in *The New York Times*.

⁴³ Zamora, "Another media empresario for president? The case of El Salvador".

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, "Editorial Observer; The Monochromatic Media of Latin America" in *The New York Times*.

⁴⁵ Mydans, "Spanish-Language TV called Bias".

⁴⁶ Mydans, "Spanish-Language TV called Bias".

1.4.i Venevisión

Venevisión is the largest television network in Venezuela and it controls most of the show business activity in the country. It has been traditionally a media associated with former Venezuelan governments, until 1998 when the political course of the country changed in order to take a populist way. "Chávez seems to have cut the traditional tie between media and politicians" says Fox and Waisbord.⁴⁷ The private media in Venezuela has been explicitly against the Chávez government, and has declared media war against him and his government; more details are given in chapter three. The old close relationship between Venezuelan private media and former Venezuelan governments had been proved when during the 1992 coup led by Chávez against former Venezuela president, Carlos Andrés Pérez, Cisneros placed *Venevisión* at Pérez's disposal.⁴⁸ Pérez took refuge inside *Venevisión* headquarters, and was broadcasted the day of the coup. Pérez spoke to the Venezuelan people from *Venevisión*, making clear the close ties between the two. He was being protected by media. Mostly, media conglomerates protect those who maintain the media in power.

1.4.ii Ángel González

As mentioned above, one of the main media tycoons in Latin America and most mysterious is Ángel González, a Mexican-born media owner who now lives in Miami. He is one of the most powerful men in Guatemala. According to Miguel Alejandro Gutiérrez Pizarro, Costa Rican writer, the way Ángel González operates is by maintaining good relations with current governments, asking his media stations to give favourable treatment to presidential

⁴⁷ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*. P. xx.

⁴⁸ Gott, *New Left Review* 39, "Venezuela's Murdoch", p. 3.

candidates with more probabilities in winning. He offers special conditions for political propaganda for the projected winners; therefore any electoral campaign could not be successful without González media support.⁴⁹ To win elections in Guatemala, candidates should be aligned with Ángel González in order to get a good public image. Also, if the president at the time is dissatisfied by comments about his government made in the media, González would take charge of suppressing the undesirable comments. González has bought channels in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Paraguay. Usually the kind of television programs broadcast in his channels are reruns, bought from other television stations. Thomas Skidmore has argued that "Latin America has frequently rerun the worst of U.S. television - endless cartoons (simply dubbed directly from the U.S. originals, although many are also from Japan), variety shows with clownish emcees who target audiences made up of rural immigrants, or the infinite reruns of ancient U.S police and action series. Latin American media critics tend to see the U.S-style TV political slots and advertising agency packaging of candidates as simply another expression of the worst of the North American *teleinvasion*."⁵⁰

1.5 U.S. media conglomerates for the Latin American audience

In the U.S., there are media corporations focused on Latin American and Hispanic-American audiences, which are very influential, culturally and politically. The two biggest of these media corporations are *Univisión* and *Telemundo*, both being broadcasted mostly from Miami. Both networks are directed from the U.S. to the Spanish-speaking audiences in the Americas, including Spanish-speakers from North America. *Univisión* has contracts with some of the Latin American conglomerates and broadcast some of the programs and soap-

⁴⁹ Gutiérrez Pizarro, Miguel Alejandro. "Repretel: Representaciones televisivas de Costa Rica".

⁵⁰ Skidmore, *Television, Politics, and the Transition to Democracy in Latin America*, p. 8.

operas produced by *Venevisión* and *Televisa*. Their news is directed to Spanish-speakers in North America and to Latin Americans. The broadcasts are in Spanish but their ideology is basically pro-corporate and pro-American.

Univisión has the largest Latin American viewership throughout the Hispanic community in the U.S. and Latin America. It is a Spanish broadcast television network, whose headquarters are in New York, after years in Los Angeles, but with its major production facilities in Miami.⁵¹ *Univisión* has ties with Mexico's *Televisa*, Venezuela's *Venevisión*, and *CNN in Spanish*, among other media corporations. Its present owners are not Latin American. It started in Mexico, kept growing efficiently, and then was sold to foreign investors. It is owned by a consortium of several personalities and companies, such as the Jewish-American conservative Haim Saban, and American private equity firms such as Thomas H. Lee Partners and Madison Dearborn Partners.⁵²

Telemundo is the second-largest Spanish language network in the U.S. *Telemundo* is internationally famous for its soap-operas; it is the only Spanish-language network in the U.S. to produce them. This network is the second-largest producer of *telenovelas* (soap-operas) in the world, after *Televisa*, and they sell them to international markets.⁵³

Telemundo is part of *NBC Universal*, a global media and entertainment enterprise which is owned 80% by General Electric and 20% by Vivendi Universal Entertainment, a French media conglomerate.⁵⁴ Eight Latin women interviewed by Viviana Rojas, concluded that the *Univisión* and *Telemundo* networks fulfill an "entertainment" function more than being a service for Latinos. They stated that these networks have too many soap operas, little or

⁵¹ Rodríguez, "Univision". The Museum of Broadcast Communications.

⁵² Rodríguez, "Univision". The Museum of Broadcast Communications.

⁵³ Constantakis-Valdez, "Telemundo: U.S. Spanish-language network". The Museum of Broadcast Communications.

⁵⁴ CNBC Europe. "NBC and Vivendi Universal Entertainment unite to create NBC Universal".

almost no information about their countries of origin, and a sensationalist programming mainly for commercial purposes.⁵⁵ These two stations are full of soap operas and women talk shows, to what media critic Dana Cloud has claimed that these “are politicized consciousness-raising”. Cloud asserts that “in the analysis of these programs, it is necessary to consider (1) the predominantly conservative ideological role of the therapeutic discourses in contemporary mass culture, (2) the links between the talk shows’ familial ideology to contemporary political imperatives and (3) the links between talk shows industry's profit imperatives to the overall conservatism of the programs.”⁵⁶

Both news stations, *Univisión* and *Telemundo*, are based in Miami, capital city of the mass media targeted to the Latin American audience. Miami, in particular, has undergone an inverse acculturation process in which the Latin American elite that lives there have affirmed cultural and language hegemony in the city.⁵⁷ Miami is also an important destination and refuge for the Latin American elite and political exiled communities (especially Cubans). Miami is a popular destination for the affluent classes in Latin America who have felt threatened by the leftists and populists movements in recent decades. There are the exiles of the Cuban Revolution, the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, and more recently, the affluent and political opposition in Venezuela are leaving their country and heading for Miami. These influential and powerful people are moving there and many of the most important mass media target for the region’s audience coming from Miami makes the coverage coming from Miami usually inclined politically towards conservative policies. One of the main reasons for Miami to become the city it is today for Latin Americans is in part because of the great capital accumulated there in the hands of Latin Americans. During the

⁵⁵ Rojas, “Do I see myself represented on Spanish television? Latinas ‘talk back’ to *Univision* and *Telemundo*”, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Dana Cloud quoted in Rojas, “Do I see myself represented on Spanish television? Latinas ‘talk back’ to *Univision* and *Telemundo*”, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Sinclair, “De latinoamericanos a latinos. La televisión en español y sus audiencias en Estados Unidos”.

Cold War, due to its closeness to Cuba, the city was politically over-determined.⁵⁸ Cubans in Miami are obstinately pro-American and furiously anti-Castro. Most of them moved to Miami when Castro came to power, and have become a “large, affluent, influential, conservative and vocal” population within the south of Florida.⁵⁹ If the exiled Cuban community in Miami has felt misunderstandings from liberal media they have complained. In 1987 this important sector in Miami complained to the *Miami Herald* of not treating Cuban issues with enough hardness; they claimed insensitivity towards Cuban issues in the press and too much softness against communism when these issues have not been treated with the harshness they wish.⁶⁰ Luis Botifol, trustee of the Cuban American National Foundation, has argued that the *Miami Herald* refused to understand how anyone can feel such passion against communism without being right-wing kooks on the fringe of society.⁶¹ The exiled Cuban community has forged a conservative ideology in the south of Florida, which has welcomed other elite conservatives from Latin America. They have strongly complained and outcry when mass media are inclining by liberal policies, while U.S. liberal media have openly called them the “Miami Mafia”.⁶²

From a normative point of view, there should be critical perspective of the news, while “assimilation through conditioning” should be avoided. There has to be a clear difference between a critical press and the political opposition. This opposition, just like the government, should not be allowed to control the press as a means of propaganda. Media has to be understood as a form of popular representation for citizens. The critique of the liberal model in media argues that export of Western models and content is neither

⁵⁸ Sinclair, “De latinoamericanos a latinos. La televisión en español y sus audiencias en Estados Unidos”.

⁵⁹ Soruco, *Cubans and the mass media in South Florida*, p. 41.

⁶⁰ Soruco, *Cubans and the mass media in South Florida*, p. 41.

⁶¹ Luis Botifol quoted in Soruco, *Cubans and the mass media in South Florida*, p. 41.

⁶² Blazquez, “The Opening of Pandora’s Box in Miami”.

desirable nor appropriate in Latin America.⁶³ This critique goes against media owners and modernization theories. According to this critique, as long as the media are organized around capitalist principles, they will constitute obstacles rather than an approach for democracy. Media operations mainly interested in profit-making rather than to inform the audience will make the ruling economical and political interests prevail and will reinforce the suppression of alternative views.⁶⁴

1.6 Mass media and political processes

Historically, media conglomerates have played an important role in shaping political processes in Latin America, as we have already mentioned. Private media have been mostly controlled by right-wing conservative ownership, which has played an active role manipulating the information presented to the audience in order to match its right-wing, pro-business, pro-free trade interests. In Latin America, historically, private media and power have gone together. Private media have encouraged many political processes in the region, especially in their host countries. In some cases they have even been financed by foreign interests, such as the C.I.A., in order to promote policies favorable to these foreign and powerful elements. Furthermore, the U.S. has constantly intervened in political processes in Latin America when they are not turning in a conservative and pro-American way. They have funded counter media in an attempt to create internal subversion in these countries, such as *Radio Martí* and *TV Martí*, for Cuba. *Radio Martí* and *TV Martí* were created in the 1980's by the Reagan administration, they were based in Miami and their shared goal was to reach Castro's Cuba. There are also two particular cases in which the private media played a protagonist role in coups to overthrow legitimate governments: the

⁶³ Waisbord, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Waisbord, *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, p. 52.

1973 coup against President of Chile, Salvador Allende, and the 2002 frustrated coup against President of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez. This section will discuss these cases.

"In the second half of the 20th century, during the Cold War, regional written press was cheekily used by the C.I.A. in order to manipulate public opinion and justify the overthrowing of democratic governments; such as in: Argentina, Guatemala, Uruguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Nicaragua. It is well known, the role the press has had, especially the commercial press, in the overthrowing of these governments."⁶⁵

The United States government, throughout the second half of the 20th century, and still in the early 21st century, has economically and ideologically sponsored opposition movements in countries where democratically elected leaders with ideas of wealth redistribution have taken power. Some of this sponsorship has been carried out through media. The media have been psychological agents in the collective understanding of the political processes that have taken place.

1.6.i The Edwards Family in Chile

The Edwards family is the richest family in Chile, and one of the most financially and politically influential families there.⁶⁶ They own *El Mercurio*, the main conservative newspaper in Chile, and also one of the oldest and most trusted newspapers. The Edwards family fled to New York during the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973), since part of Allende's message was that large corporations, including transnationals,

⁶⁵ Izarra, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 16. Original Spanish version: "En la segunda mitad del siglo XX, durante la Guerra Fría, la prensa escrita regional fue utilizada descaradamente por la C.I.A. para manipular la opinión pública y justificar el derrocamiento de gobiernos democráticos; ahí tenemos los casos de Argentina, Guatemala, Uruguay, Brasil, Ecuador, Chile, República Dominicana, Granada, Panamá, de Nicaragua. Todos sabemos el rol que cumplió la prensa, sobre todo la prensa comercial, en el derrocamiento de esos gobiernos."

⁶⁶ Bart, "Chile: Pinochet, the environment, and salmon" in *People's Weekly World*.

were stealing wealth from Chile.⁶⁷ From there they continued *El Mercurio* operations, and through these operations, promoted an anti-Allende coverage partially financed by the C.I.A. *El Mercurio*, through their news, intended to make Chilean society feel they had lost their traditional rationality and respect for the law. During a parliamentary election campaign in 1972, *El Mercurio* published an impressive number of news items about "Marxist violence", which came to get fused with "criminal violence". They were trying to create a state of psychological tension beyond the real one, a "strategy of tension" which finally could produce panic.

The reactionary role of the newspaper has been widely noted by commentators of both left and right. "[*El Mercurio*] was a subversive force, working for a foreign power for the overthrow of a democratically elected president", says Claudio Durán, a Chilean lecturer.⁶⁸ A C.I.A. former official, interviewed by *The Times* in 1974, said that most of the funds invested for propaganda went to *El Mercurio*. Later in 1975, the American Senate Intelligence Committee reported that "the C.I.A. covertly channelled \$11.5 million to *El Mercurio*, the largest daily paper in Chile, to insure anti-Allende coverage and to keep the paper solvent."⁶⁹ The main powers that organised the resistance against Allende's government were the Government of the U.S., the C.I.A., the multinational corporations, and the Chilean bourgeoisie. They all worked together for the eventual overthrow of Allende. Durán says that "by no means was the anti-Allende coverage innocent. On the contrary, its propaganda campaign was carefully planned by propaganda experts trained in psychoanalytic techniques to increase the paranoia and sense of distress and profound unease amongst the middle class and the military."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Bart, "Chile: Pinochet, the environment, and salmon" in *People's Weekly World*.

⁶⁸ Durán, "Psychowar of the Media in Chile under Allende."

⁶⁹ Durán, "Psychowar of the Media in Chile under Allende."

⁷⁰ Durán, "Psychowar of the Media in Chile under Allende."

Fervent supporters of Pinochet, the Edwards family returned to Chile after Popular Unity was drowned in blood in 1973.⁷¹ *El Mercurio* kept being one of the largest newspapers in the country, under Pinochet, and up to the present day. The media manipulation carried out by *El Mercurio* did not emerge immediately after the overthrow of Allende, but eventually. Claudio Durán asked himself during the Pinochet years, "what would be the reaction of the Chilean middle class if they knew that *El Mercurio* was helped by the C.I.A. for the purpose of inducing paranoia? But of course they can't know because the Junta leader, Pinochet, Augustin Edwards, and other right-wing owners have complete control of the media in Chile and don't tell them. This is the much vaunted 'free press' in action, triumphant in the suppression of information that might enlighten people."⁷²

1.7 Telesur is launched

Telesur was launched for the first time on July 24, 2005, Simón Bolívar's birthday.⁷³ Simón Bolívar, Chávez's hero, is a Latin American hero who fought against Spanish colonialism in Latin America. He promulgated the unification, integration, and anti-colonial independence of Latin America. Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution is based mainly on his ideas of integration. Bolívar's struggle was mainly for the independence of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá, Perú, and Venezuela. Bolivia was named after him, and the Venezuelan currency, the *bolívar*, is also named after him. *Telesur's* launching date was symbolic for the integration movement of the region. The idea of *Telesur* was to create a pan-Latin American information source to unify and strengthen the region. *Telesur* aims to provide a source for Latin Americans to know about themselves and their geographic and cultural neighbours, many of which are unknown to each other despite their geographic, historical and/or

⁷¹ Bart, "Chile: Pinochet, the environment, and salmon" in *People's Weekly World*.

⁷² Durán, "Psychowar of the Media in Chile under Allende."

⁷³ Salo and Terenius, "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study", p. 32.

cultural proximity. This idea was developed from what Bolívar promulgated, regional unification.

“Television is a window on the world. But if you are sitting in Latin America, that window is more likely to be facing Baghdad than Buenos Aires. Or show Michael Jackson instead of Mexico City. Or offer a clearer view of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution than the one in Ecuador last month. Those networks do not cover regional news, like CNN in Spanish, based in Atlanta, or Spain’s TVE, are often considered US or Eurocentric, with pundits sitting in Washington or Madrid.”⁷⁴

Telesur is based in Caracas, Venezuela, and it was originally proposed by Hugo Chávez. It was initially supported by the governments of Argentina, Cuba, and Uruguay. The governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Paraguay have joined later. It started with a first-year budget of around \$10 million.⁷⁵ Today, 40% of the news channel is owned by Venezuela, 20% by Cuba, 15% by Argentina, and the rest between Uruguay, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Paraguay. The two latter were introduced to *Telesur* recently, Brazil last year, and since then they are broadcasting two hours a day in Portuguese to reach the Brazilian audience. Paraguay joined in August 2008, after the leftist candidate for the Presidency, Fernando Lugo, won the elections.

Telesur emerged in the Latin American media market in 2005, in the middle of an agitated and polarized media war. It has been part of the boom in 24-hour news channels since CNN started in 1980 and the first state-funded news channel in Latin America. There are three other 24-hour news channel in the region, but owned by private capital (*Globovisión* in Caracas, *Todo Noticias* in Buenos Aires, and *Globonews* in Rio de Janeiro).⁷⁶ They are also intended for a local audience, not pan-Latin American. *Telesur*’s only direct competition would be *CNN in Spanish*, the only 24-hour news stations directed to a pan-Latin American audience. *CNN in Spanish* has been one of the most dominant news channels in Latin

⁷⁴ Harman, “Latin leader rebels against US-centric news” in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

⁷⁵ Marx, “Will truth go south to Latin America on Telesur news?” in *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁶ Painter, “The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur”.

America since its launch in 1997. It is based in Atlanta, U.S., and is directed to the Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. and the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. It reaches more than 15 million households in the Americas.⁷⁷ *CNN in Spanish* has rejected accusations about being biased towards a U.S. perspective on the news. "The overwhelming majority of editorial staff is from Latin America. We have correspondents in every country", said Caroline Rittenbery, *CNN in Spanish* spokeswoman. But essentially, it broadcasts a Spanish translation of *CNN* news and hence is part of the American mainstream media.

Telesur does not present the same news as *CNN in Spanish* or other mainstream media presents. Their coverage is different; they claim that their news is presented from a Latin American perspective. Its director, Aram Aharonian, says that they are not trying to compete on the same basis as the mainstream media. *Telesur's* success is not going head-to-head against the giants of broadcasting but providing an alternative to what Aram Aharonian, *Telesur's* Uruguayan director, calls the hegemonic, communications industry that has one way of thinking and one message. "While *CNN in Spanish* presents the last fashion tendencies in Paris, Milan or New York, the last news in Wall Street, or the last Hollywood movies coming next to theaters, *Telesur* presents documentaries about Latin American history, culture, arts, and social movements, news about Latin American regional politics, and present local and international independent movies" says Aharonian.⁷⁸ Hernán Uribe has argued that "since the fall of the Berlin Wall we have contemplated the systematic, massive, uniform inculcation that there is one truth, one market, one rationality, and one vigilance army of that only truth, of that one market, of that one rationality. The monolithic message follows the aim of removing the capacity to create critical thinking, an indispensable characteristic of an authentic democracy. In the past were the bell towers and the priests,

⁷⁷ Marx, "Will truth go south to Latin America on *Telesur* news?" in *Chicago Tribune*.

⁷⁸ Aram Aharonian cited in Najjar, "New Trends in Global Broadcasting: Nuestro Norte es el Sur (Our north is the south)", p. 3.

nowadays can be *CNN* and its pasteurized commentators."⁷⁹ He asks himself "why do we have to continue seeing ourselves through the eyes of others? Now we are going to begin seeing ourselves through our own eyes."⁸⁰ This is what *Telesur* claims to aim for, to provide a media alternative which people can identify with, that when watching a movie, or a documentary, they can see their reality, and not some other and distant reality, as Denis McQuail's media imperialism thesis states as one of the effects of globalization: global media flows give rise to a state of dominant form of culture that has no specific connection with real experience for most people.⁸¹ *Telesur's* slogan is:

"To see ourselves is to know ourselves, to recognize ourselves is to respect ourselves, to respect ourselves is to learn to love ourselves, to love ourselves is the first step to integrate ourselves. If integration is the proposition, then *Telesur* is the medium."⁸²

To conclude, mass media in Latin America have been monopolized by private media conglomerates, which have close ties to central countries, in this case to the U.S. Most of these media have the same political, economical, and ideological interests. Their particular economic interests have led them to have certain political and ideological interests as well, which is based on accumulation of profit. Media chooses what to portray and the way it should be portrayed, these are presented as the one message that has the only truth. A truth that is also aligned with American interests, since the elite in Latin America, who owns these conglomerates, is related to American interests, to interests who allow them to accumulate their profits. The McBride report was an attempt to break with the Western media monopoly in the developing world, a media monopoly which is not only smoothly

⁷⁹ Uribe, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 490.

⁸⁰ Marx, "Will truth go south to Latin America on Telesur news?" in *Chicago Tribune*.

⁸¹ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 256.

⁸² Telesur's webpage. Original Spanish version: "Vernos es conocernos, reconocernos es respetarnos, respetarnos es aprender a querernos, querernos es el primer paso para integrarnos. Si la integración es el propósito, teleSUR es el medio."

imposing a cultural hegemony, but also an ideological hegemony. The news from Latin American media conglomerates is in most cases presented from a conservative and pro-American perspective. These media conglomerates have worked against the plurality of ideas, and have disguised the Latin American reality with that one from a central country, in an attempt at imitating the Northern neighbours, since everything coming from the North is usually seen as progress and modernization. This belief should be broken in order to break the dependency patterns in the developing world, and *Telesur* is one of the starting points for this. It has been created as a news channel which aims to counteract mainstream and hegemonic ideologies in the Latin American mass media. It is an alternative to the media and ideological imperialism which has been predominant previously, based on capitalist interests. If *Telesur* consolidates, it will demonstrate that alternative mass media projects are possible and that the construction of a communicational new order is vital to world development.

As we have seen in this chapter, Latin American media have been historically controlled by the conservative elite of each country which has taken an active role shaping political processes, as well as fomenting outcomes for elections. The main private media have preferred pro-American leaders in their countries. They have accepted, and sometimes have even asked for, American intervention in order to take control of political situations when they have felt it was necessary, especially when the leaders elected were politically popular and autonomous, and distant to pro-American policies. The media have encouraged, through different ways, the political path their countries should follow; they have supported and have condemned their leaders, but on what basis have they done this? Has it been in a legitimate, non-partisan way? I would maintain, rather, that they have systematically attacked and condemned those leaders who have sought wealth redistribution, and hence who represent a personal economic threat to the private media owners. Their media control

determines *the news*, and what counts as “information” and “facts”. It also defines *which* facts are the ones the audience should know, and its particular way of approaching them. Not every fact is broadcast, only those in accordance with what is intended to be transmitted to the audience. The main private media stations are mainly one-sided, conservative and pro-business. In conclusion, as long as the media are organized along capitalist lines, they will constitute obstacles rather than conduits for democracy. This chapter has presented some of the main relevant cases of the main private television stations in Latin America being attached with political or/and ideological interests. There are more cases, not discussed, in which media have played a decisive role in the outcome of the political process. It is especially relevant nowadays, since the situation has turned into a media war, in which both factions have taken polarized sides. *Telesur* has emerged in the middle of this media battle, but according to its members it aims to unify a region, a region which media has divided into two factions, *them* and *us*.

CHAPTER II

Media Imperialism in Latin America and its theoretical framework

2.1 Media imperialism theory

This dissertation will interpret the relationship between private and counter-hegemonic media in Venezuela in terms of the promotion and contestation of media imperialism. Media imperialism is the concept used to describe in a general manner the processes by which modern communication media have operated to create, maintain and expand systems of domination and dependence on a world scale.⁸³ The concept of media imperialism has been defined by British scholar J. Oliver Boyd-Barrett as "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries, without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected".⁸⁴ Ownership of mass media for the Latin American audience has been concentrated among the wealthiest and most conservative sectors in society. Jorge Botero, *Telesur's* Director of Information, has argued that "the world's unipolarity, everyone looking to the north in an act of veneration that borders on servitude, has to be broken. To us, there are many horizons other than those viewed from Washington and that is why our channel's motto is *Our North is the South*."⁸⁵

The concept of media imperialism is closely related to the concept of cultural imperialism. Both forms of imperialism are theorized as attempts to dominate, invade or subvert the 'cultural space' of others. Both concepts suggest a degree of coercion between the dominant and the dominated element. They are usually used to refer to the transmission of western values to a non-western audience, especially values of individualism, secularism, and materialism. Media imperialism is a complex mediation of the cultural experience, it is about

⁸³ Fejes, *Media, Culture and Society*, p. 281.

⁸⁴ Oliver Boyd-Barrett quoted in White, "Reconsidering cultural imperialism theory".

⁸⁵ Copley, "Telesur is constructing another view".

a dominant ideology which is intended to be transmitted; it is not simply a set of media images.

Dependency theory is also related to the media imperialism concept, since it stresses the way in which formerly colonial countries remain dependent on the west.⁸⁶ Tomlinson argues that perhaps the key to the media imperialism concept is the integrated and systematic nature of modern capitalism. The multinational and transnational corporations are of central importance in this approach, since they represent the most significant element in the system of global capitalism. They have an enormous economic power (in many cases greater than nation-states), and are interested in exploiting markets, natural resources, and labor forces. For this reason, says Tomlinson, they have come to represent the high point of capitalist development and the major determinant of the economies of the Third World.⁸⁷ Schiller has argued that the multinational media corporations are focused to provide an ideologically supportive informational infrastructure of the modern world system's core. They promote, protect, and extend the capitalist system.⁸⁸ This is confirmed in the case of Latin America. The elites in underdeveloped countries usually have strong ties with central and more developed countries and are most of the times ideologically aligned with them. In the specific case of Latin America, Miami is an important centre of the mass media target to a Latin American audience. Fred Fejes has stated that "underdeveloped countries are seen as being polarized between the urban sector, whose interests are often allied with the developed countries, and the rural sector which exists in an exploitative relationship to the urban sector."⁸⁹ One thus sees a multi-stage centre-periphery relation stretching from America via Miami, to elites in Latin American cities, and thence outwards into the countryside. This structure affects media relations. Marx has stated that "ideas do not exist

⁸⁶ Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A critical introduction*, p. 37.

⁸⁷ Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A critical introduction*, p. 37.

⁸⁸ Schiller, *Communication and Cultural Domination*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ Fejes, *Media, Culture and Society*, p. 283.

in an ethereal medium of their own but are always conditioned by social and historical factors.”⁹⁰ Similarly, Chomsky has stated that “neoliberal initiatives of the past thirty years have been designed to restrict [the public arena], leaving basic decision-making within largely unaccountable private tyrannies, linked closely to one another and to a few powerful states”.⁹¹

Throughout the history of mass media in Latin America there has been a strong pattern of dependency mainly on the United States. Latin America has played a peripheral role in mass media, as well as in politics. The origination and production of media products occurs in one country (centre region), while its distribution goes everywhere (central and peripheral countries); that is how the ‘North’ often relates to the ‘South’ in media terms. In this case, the production occurs mainly in the United States, and its destination among other regions is Latin America. The media dependency model portrays conditions of multiple dependencies in the flow of communication from more to less developed countries. Developing countries’ media are usually controlled by the originating country. This global media pattern has been explained by Galtung in terms of a ‘centre-periphery’ model, in which the world’s nations can be classified as either central and dominant or peripheral and dependant, with a predominant flow from the former towards the latter.⁹² More ‘central’ countries generate news and media content and distribute it to their own satellites. Media multinationals have affected the media flows in the world, since the periphery production, services, and markets are mostly controlled by the hegemonic centers.⁹³ This model also states that there is only a limited flow between peripheral countries themselves; instead peripheral countries receive their media contents mainly from central and dominant countries. Nation states are becoming less significant as a unit of analysis; multinational production and marketing in

⁹⁰ Karl Marx quoted in Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical social theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, p. 51.

⁹¹ Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, p. 6.

⁹² Johan Galtung cited in McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*, p. 254.

⁹³ Aharonian, “Democratizar la información: McBride y el nuevo orden, 26 años después” in *Telesur*.

the control of large corporations and multilateral media flows establish their own patterns of dominance and dependency.⁹⁴ This dependency has been taking place in Latin America since the U.S. developed its perception of Latin America as its backyard. U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney stated back in 1895 that 'the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition.'⁹⁵ Latin America has had a peripheral role, economically, politically and culturally, towards the United States. However, with the election of leftist governments in the region there has been an attempt to reorganize media flows. This attempt has included the creation of national and regional media, such as *Telesur*, which provides a non-corporate regional perspective in media content.

The existence of capitalist media conglomerates in Southern regions have helped to shape a consumerist and capitalist ideology in these regions, which has increased gradually. Western media have exported Western values to other societies, especially to peripheral societies. Peripheral regions have become more dependent on central regions or countries; these have introduced Western values in periphery regions to an audience that has adopted them as if they were a progressive answer to social questions. These ideologies have been adopted by receptive audiences as if they were their own, in an attempt from the Western world to homogenize ideas and values as the message with the one-truth.

According to the media imperialism thesis, these are the four effects of globalization in media:⁹⁶

- Global media promote relations of dependency rather than economic growth

⁹⁴ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 254.

⁹⁵ Herman and McChesney, *The global media: the new missionaries of global capitalism*, p. 162.

⁹⁶ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 256.

- The imbalance in the flow of mass media content undermines cultural autonomy or holds back its development
- The unequal relationship in the flow of news increases the relative global power of large and wealthy news-producing countries and hinders the growth of an appropriate national identity and self-image
- Global media flows give rise to a state of cultural homogenization or synchronization, leading to a dominant form of culture that has no specific connection with real experience for most people

Journalism is a super-structural element that represents and defends the interests of the socio-economical system from where it emerges, says Hernán Uribe, Chilean journalist and current president of the Investigative Commission of Attempts to Journalists (CIAP).⁹⁷ All media are conceived in a different social, political, cultural situation, which makes them subjective in relation to this environment in which they emerge. Because of this, there is the assumption that media are biased according to the ideology in which they are brought up. Media activity is not an exact science, but the product of subjectivity. Sharon Waxman, a staff writer of *The Washington Post*, argues that every news organization is a product of the native culture in which it was conceived. She explains that "American-based news networks, for example, make the unspoken assumption that the state of Israel has the right to exist and that Osama bin Laden is evil; in the Arab world that looks like bias."⁹⁸ This relativity is built into all media, but where media flows are dominated by the west, the result is that a particular western perspective is projected as global; it becomes a "global-local" instead of one perspective among many. This implicit claim to a global status for perspectives which

⁹⁷ Uribe, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 489. CIAP refers to Comisión Investigativa de Atentados a Periodistas.

⁹⁸ Sharon Waxman quoted in El-Nawawy and Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: the story of the network that is rattling governments and redefining modern journalism*, p. 54.

are particularly western is the core of what can be termed media hegemony. Against western media hegemony, one can articulate the idea of dissident media as 'counter-hegemonic', meaning that they break down the identification of the global scale with western perspectives.⁹⁹

2.2 Americanization/Westernization of mass media

The theory of media imperialism is based on an account of historical developments. After World War II, mass media flowed from the developed or capitalist West to less developed countries as a tool in combating the alternative model of modernization based on socialism, planning and government control. The kind of media used for this included ordinary entertainment which was intended to portray a successful and prosperous way of life and the social institutions of liberal democracy at work.¹⁰⁰ The world, especially the periphery, and specifically Latin America, since then has been flooded with American mass media, which have portrayed the American way of life to most the world. This way of life has been portrayed as a model and an ideal of modernization in ostensibly more traditional or non-Western societies. The Western media model has been presented to developing societies as a model of a supposed freedom of speech, modernization and economic and cultural progress. McQuail has argued that "the new 'media imperialism' seemed to be carried out at the willing request of the mass audience for popular culture and was thus much more likely to succeed."¹⁰¹ Freedom of speech has been associated with private media industries, but what if these private hands have the same ideology and the same interests? Then, it will not represent the plurality of a society. Ernesto Carmona, Chilean journalist, has argued that the big mass media industry brainwash our (Latin American) fellow citizens making them

⁹⁹ Carroll, "Hegemony and Counter-hegemony in a global field", p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 255.

¹⁰¹ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 255.

believe that they live in the best of all possible worlds, in a reality that does not accept changes, with a representative electoral democracy, which is the same as market freedom, of a so-called political freedom, and a mythic informational freedom.¹⁰² Critical cultural theory points out that:¹⁰³

- Mass culture is a debased form in capitalist society
- Mass culture is designed to produce false consciousness
- Commodification is the central process
- Mass culture embodies a hegemonic ideology
- Ideology can be decoded differentially and even reversed
- Popular culture can be distinguished from mass culture

Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart analyzed in 1971, while living in Chile during Allende's revolutionary socialist government, the political and social content of the Donald Duck comics. They realized a disparity between the reality they were living in and the values Donald Duck pursued. David Kunzle, in his introduction to *How to read Donald Duck: imperialist ideology in the Disney comic*, has stated that important sectors of the intelligentsia in the U.S. and Disney have a silent complicity, because, according to him, they both share the same basic values and see the broad public as enjoying the same cultural privileges. He has argued that "this complicity becomes positively criminal when their common ideology is imposed upon non-capitalist, underdeveloped countries, ignoring the grotesque disparity between the Disney dreams of wealth and leisure, and the *real* needs in the Third World."¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, there have been media critics who have stated that the Americanization of world culture has been part of the cultural taste the world has acquired through modernization.

¹⁰² Carmona, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 47.

¹⁰³ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁴ Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to read Donald Duck: Imperialist ideology in the Disney comic*, p. 11.

Ithiel de Sola Pool, defender of the free market in global communications, has claimed that it has been wrongly deplored, and that it might better be described as the discovery of what world cultural tastes actually are.¹⁰⁵ This Americanization or Westernization in world culture has been an indirect and at times smooth imposition, disguised with daily routines, since it is cheaper for peripheral countries' media industries to transmit foreign reruns directed to masses than to produce their own. McQuail says that it is not the audience making a direct choice, but domestic media firms choosing on their behalf, for economic rather than ideological reasons.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Thompson argues that the new ideology of the culture industry lies in the very absence of independence. He says that "the products of the culture industry are molded to fit and reflect a social reality which is reproduced without the need of an explicit and quasi-independent justification or defense, since the very process of consuming the products of the culture industry induces individuals to identify with the prevailing social norms and to continue to be as they already are."¹⁰⁷

There is a high level of penetration, especially in respect of American films and television drama nearly everywhere. The high cost of media production does not allow peripheral countries to fully develop their local productions, and instead they have to resort to cheap and already made productions, which are usually from central countries.

2.3 Does ownership matter?

Media has been traditionally shaped by states and/or private interests.¹⁰⁸ There are theories which suggest that there are always interests behind news coverage, for example, Schiller proposes that ownership matters. He has argued that the corporate owners of mass

¹⁰⁵ Ithiel de Sola Pool quoted in Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A critical introduction*, p. 53

¹⁰⁶ McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, p. 255.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical social theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ Fox and Waisbord, *Latin Politics, Global Media*, p. ix.

communications media do actually use it (both consciously and unconsciously) for their own purposes, which are domination and control.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, media critic Mark Hudson has stated that “one of the great triumphs of neoliberal ideology has been to convince so many of us that it does not matter, that the media are ideologically neutral and above social conflict, and that the concentration of media ownership in a few private hands is natural, inevitable and perhaps even beneficial.”¹¹⁰

Other theories have suggested that coverage results from “news values”, which is an attribute of a news event that transforms it into an interesting ‘story’ for an audience, and organizational pressures. ‘News values’ influences the selection of news. Galtung and Ruge have indicated that there are three main types of factor for this selection: organizational, genre-related, and socio-cultural.¹¹¹ The primary ‘news values’ in Western media, according to McQuail, are: large scale of events, closeness to home, clarity of meaning, short time scale, relevance, consonance, personification, negativity, significance, and drama and action.¹¹² Bagdikian has claimed that ‘objectivity’ has tended to keep news superficial because too deep a pursuit of a single subject might bore or offend some of the audience.¹¹³ Other theories have also suggested that media use depends on the perceived satisfactions, needs, wishes, or motives of the prospective audience, as the ‘uses and gratifications approach’ states.¹¹⁴ In order to apply these three theories to a Latin American experience, it will be exposed the relation of the biggest media firms for the Latin American audience, and a claim Chávez has made about private media not presenting his achievements. Two of the biggest media corporations which are target to a Latin American audience are owned by

¹⁰⁹ Schiller cited in Hudson, “Understanding Information Media in the Age of Neoliberalism: The Contributions of Herbert Schiller”.

¹¹⁰ Hudson, “Understanding Information Media in the Age of Neoliberalism: The Contributions of Herbert Schiller”.

¹¹¹ Galtung and Ruge quoted in McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*, p. 310.

¹¹² McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*, p. 310.

¹¹³ Bagdikian, “Democracy and the Media”, p. 180.

¹¹⁴ McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory*, p. 423.

American media conglomerates, such as is the case of *Telemundo* and *Univisión*. These two channels are two of the most influential channels in the region. Other media corporations such as *Televisa* or *Venevisión* are owned by local tycoons whose media firms have strong ties with *Telemundo* and *Univisión*. Chávez has argued that no private media has told the audience about the achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution, such as the decrease in illiteracy, the arrival of doctors to poor areas, and the inclusion in society of those who were once invisible.¹¹⁵ Everything the media decide is publishable and should be popularly spread, conditions the political agenda, furthermore, media language usually stigmatizes poverty, opposes social, labor union, and indigenous struggles, and in general, silences progressive ideas, says Carmona.¹¹⁶ If the 'news values' theory was applicable to this case, these media stations would have mentioned about 'the success of the Bolivarian Revolution' Chávez is claiming, since they are happening in the target audience's place, it has happened recently, although it's not negative rather positive so according to the theory it will not match to be news. The media firms do not. These media firms are corporate driven which will not include as news populist policies. The evidence suggests that there are interests behind news coverage.

Media owners are mainly interested in gaining profit, therefore will spread the news with a particular point of view. For example, in the U.S., FOX News, a mainstream network, works as propaganda for the most conservative and right-wing interests in the U.S. Murdoch, FOX News's owner, willingly subsidizes the right-wing *Weekly Standard* to see that those views get constantly promoted to the political elite.¹¹⁷ Chuck Ross says that Murdoch would be willing to keep FOX News Channel on the air even if it was not profitable because, according to him, Murdoch wants the political leverage he can get out of being a major network.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Chávez on Bartley and O'Briain, *The revolution will not be televised*.

¹¹⁶ Carmona, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*, p. 62.

¹¹⁸ Chuck Ross cited in McChesney, *Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times*, p. 62.

Shoemaker and Reese have argued that the influences at the organizational level have a "pervasive, if not readily identifiable, effect on media content".¹¹⁹ They have noted that organization charts of the major media outlets show that those charged with editorial quality goals eventually report to someone charged with economic goals. Hence, ownership does matter; this theory is more noticeable in the Latin American case.

2.4 Alternative theories of the media

Two further types of criticism of theories of cultural and media imperialism should be considered. Firstly, there is a school of interpretation based on studies of audience reception of media images, which suggests that the audience is active in the reception process. This problematizes the view that audiences are dominated through the media. For instance, Ien Ang's classic study suggests that readings of the soap opera *Dallas* across the world are mediated by local assumptions and cultures, and Morley's study of the reception of documentary series *Nationwide* suggested that audiences directly produced negotiated and even critical readings, and did not simply absorb the message presented.¹²⁰

Secondly, and closely related to this approach, there is a growing concern in cultural studies and postcolonial theory with processes of creolisation, "glocalism" and hybridity, through which western constructions are problematised and subverted. For instance, Armand Mattelart, one of the founders of the theory of media imperialism, has more recently proposed that transnational cultural flows and 'national' cultures in the Third World become 'hybridized', or 'creolized', and not 'homogenized'.¹²¹ He says that the people on the

¹¹⁹ Shoemaker and Reese quoted in Williams, "Synergy bias: conglomerates and promotion in the news".

¹²⁰ Brundson and Morley, "What do people do with the media; 'uses, gratifications, meanings'", p. 134; Ang and Couling, "Dallas and the ideology of mass culture", p. 102.

¹²¹ Mattelart, *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, and Culture*, p. 230.

periphery are subjected more and more to imported meanings and forms from which local cultures will hardly distinguish themselves to the point of blending with them; as a result, peripheral culture becomes a mixture of the modern and the traditional. This echoes the broader approach to culture put forward by authors such as Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai.¹²²

On a similar note, Fejes has argued that if media imperialism lacks of a theory delineating the bounds of explanation, there is the danger of becoming a pseudo-concept, something which can be used to explain everything in general about the media in developing countries and hence nothing in particular.¹²³ Its theory tends to focus on the operation of transnational agents, either transnational corporations or transnational media industries, and their role in the structuring and flow of media products at an international level. The weaknesses that have been identified by various critics of the cultural imperialism thesis include:¹²⁴

- the theory lacks explanatory power and needs to be advanced beyond the level of pure description;
- the economic component of media imperialism may be expressed in statistics, but the cultural component is much more difficult to measure;
- the theory lacks conceptual precision;
- the theory does not acknowledge an audience's ability to process information and interpret messages differently based on their individual background; and
- the theory does not hold true in all situations of the phenomenon that it attempts to explain.

¹²² Bhabha, "Signs taken for wonders", p. 158; Appadurai, "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy", p. 28.

¹²³ Fejes, *Media, Culture and Society*, p. 282.

¹²⁴ White, "Reconsidering cultural imperialism theory".

In responding to these criticisms, I would argue that they point to a need for caution in using media imperialism theory, but that they do not undermine the theory entirely. I would maintain that, in the light of the extraordinary concentration of media ownership and the persistence of pro-western bias in the Latin American mass media, the idea of media imperialism maintains crucial explanatory significance. While creative audiences may indeed be able to "see through", reinterpret or place critical readings on hegemonic texts – a process which may, indeed, have been necessary for the likes of Chávez to emerge in spite of concentrated media ownership – this does not reduce the case for counter-hegemonic media in which such sideways reading may be less necessary. Counter-hegemonic media can be credited with providing the global media space with a greater diversity of perspectives and images for the audience to appropriate and interpret. This can only further empower the active interpreter. In addition, I would question whether the existence of interpretations of the kind discussed by Morley and Ang rules out the possibility of cultural imperialism. To begin with, the images produced and reinterpreted may be creolized, but remain a creolization of western rather than truly global images. Secondly, not all the audience will be primed to produce critical or hybrid readings; some will be mobilized as a political opposition. Thirdly, political agents working through the media are doubtless well aware of audience affects, and make careful use of psychological forces such as fear, so as to reduce audience autonomy. To a media warrior, audience interpretation is a matter of "noise" interfering with the transmission of the message. Hence, propaganda will be designed to minimize such "noise" as far as possible. While the diachronic process of audience reading may interfere with the functioning of the dominant structure, this does not preclude recognizing and analyzing the existence and operation of this synchronic structure, at least as a project or tendency.

Similarly, in relation to the postcolonial critique, it offers qualifications rather than an outright rebuttal of the dependency model. It introduces complexities in terms of the functioning of the periphery, which dependency theory needs to take into account. There has to be an understanding of several aspects in order to understand how the dependency model, from which media imperialism takes part, works differently in every situation. These aspects include: to understand the historical context, since the relationships of dependency can only be understood in the context of concrete historical situations, and, the role of extra-national forces and factors that create and support the maintenance of underdevelopment in peripheral countries.

2.5 UNESCO : McBride Report

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Educational Organization (UNESCO) published in 1980 a publication about the reorganization needed in the global media flows. This publication was titled "Many Voices, One World", which is also came to be known as the McBride Report. It is a UNESCO publication written by the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems. It stated that global media flows were monopolized by the Western world, and aimed to contribute to media plurality. UNESCO aimed to demonstrate and legitimate the reports made in 1973 in Algiers by the Non-Aligned Movement. They reported that imperialist action has not limited itself to political and economic domains, but has also include cultural and social domains, in this way imposing an ideological domination alien to people in developing countries.¹²⁵ The report was accepted by UNESCO, but during its gestation process it led to friction among the countries which approved it and those which did not because it attempted to promote national media

¹²⁵ Aharonian, "Democratizar la información: McBride y el nuevo orden, 26 años después" in *Telesur*.

policies; this led to the American and British withdrawal from the UNESCO, although they rejoined later. The McBride Report states that:

"It is essential that all men and women, in all social and cultural environments, should be given the opportunity of joining in the process of collective thinking thus initiated, for new ideas must be developed and more positive measures must be taken to shake off the prevailing inertia."¹²⁶

The Third World demanded a new world order of information, consisting of "the four D's":¹²⁷

- *Democratization* of the flow of information between countries
- *Decolonization* – cultural identity, independence, self-determination
- *Demonopolization*, restrictions of the transnational communication companies' activities
- *Development*, regional cooperation, education, development of infrastructures

The MacBride Report emerged from the inequality between developed and developing countries in mass media. Three-quarters of the global population live in Southern countries, and they only produce less than half of the total newspapers in the world. In Africa there are eight countries or territories which do not have a single daily newspaper, while in the Arab world there are three countries, and the South only has 5% of the computer capacity in the world.¹²⁸ The McBride Report stated five aspects of global media flows: one-sidedness of communications, transnationalization, vertical and horizontal concentration, information alignment, and democratization. The Report points out the need to take effective legislative action in order to limit monopolization in media flows, to make transnational companies follow national development policies, to reduce the influence of publicity-seeking in journalism, and to improve the models which allow the strengthening of media

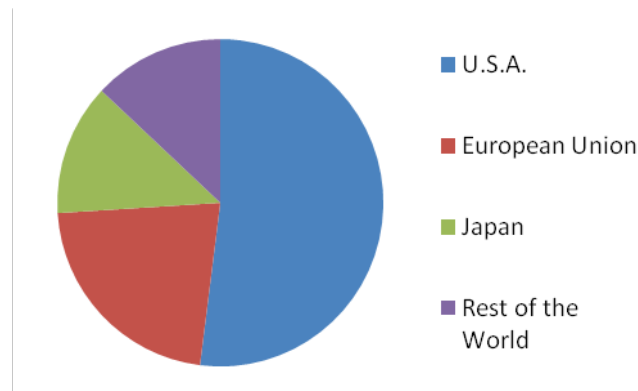
¹²⁶ UNESCO, "One World, Many Voices".

¹²⁷ Salo and Terenius, "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study", p. 22.

¹²⁸ Aharonian, "Democratizar la información: McBride y el nuevo orden, 26 años después" in *Telesur*.

independence.¹²⁹ The McBride commission report finished in 1980 due to protests from Western countries, and by 1989, the media was again ruled by the free flow of information.

Figure 2. Profits obtained from cultural goods production



Source: Aharonian, Aram. 2007. "Democratizar la información: McBride y el nuevo orden, 26 años después" in *Telesur*. Statistics are approximated.

Telesur was born as a reaction to Western, hegemonic media imposed on non-Western and non-hegemonic countries. It promotes pan-Latin American integrations and anti-imperialism. Galeano argues that while the developed and the developing countries keep having relations without conditions, as free trade, the pattern of dependency of the periphery in relation to the centre will never be broken. That relation will allow the centre to keep control of the periphery. He says that "our unity makes *their* strength, in the way that countries, not breaking previously with underdevelopment and dependency patterns, integrate their respective servitudes."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Aharonian, "Democratizar la información: McBride y el nuevo orden, 26 años después" in *Telesur*.

¹³⁰ Galeano, *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, p. 420. Original Spanish version: "Nuestra unión hace su fuerza, en la medida en que los países, al no romper previamente con los moldes del subdesarrollo y de la dependencia, integran sus respectivas servidumbres."

To conclude, the emergence of *Telesur* has taken place in a region which has endured colonialism, and after that has taken part of a center-periphery relationship, as periphery, with dominant nations. The region has depended of central countries to fulfill their cultural industries demands, which has led to an Americanization or Westernization of its mass media. Peripheral audiences have seen a media bombardment of images, lifestyles, and ideologies which are alien to them. These have melted with the local ones, creating 'hybridization', as Mattelart has stated. I think that furthermore to 'hybridization', there are other two factions from peripheral audiences, those who resist media and cultural imperialism and those who want to assimilate completely, in other words, the 'hybridization' has different nuances in the peripheral audience. According to the critical cultural theory, mass culture embodies a hegemonic ideology, which is the one presented as ordinary and acceptable to the world mass audience. Those in the world mass audience that aims to assimilate to the dominant ideology will likely suffer from identity conflicts since what it is portray in the media does not relate with what is live in the street. Multinational and transnational corporations have played a fundamental role in promoting Western culture to a non-Western audience, but this has not occurred the other way around, which has affected the media flows throughout the world since only one perspective and one ideology, is portrayed by mass media, the dominant ideology.

CHAPTER III

The emergence of *Telesur* as a counter to private media in the Latin American media market

3.1 Historical political moment in Latin America in which *Telesur* is conceived

Latin America's *Telesur* was conceived in a particular historical moment, regionally and internationally. Regionally, since the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 many Latin American countries have changed their political course, electing leftist leaders. However, all these governments coincide in their support of Latin American sovereignty and integration. The election of leftist governments in the region has given voice to people who were ignored before, and who did not have the self confidence to stand and speak from their perspective because they were never heard. However, these governments' inclusive policies do not coincide with what the elite private media is used to in the region. They have been in control over public opinion since informational monopolies were created in each of these countries; therefore, they have been the first ones to oppose these governments' policies, together with other big businesses. Media conglomerates in Latin America have had a media war against these leftist governments in countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. Particularly, in these three countries an intense media war has been taking place since the election of their current leaders. The private media in each of these three countries is vehemently against their leaders, and have performed an intense campaign using their media resources against them. Bolivia and Venezuela provide the liveliest examples of confrontation between government and press.¹³¹ The presidents of both nations have accused private media of aligning with opposition forces, acting as the government's opposition. Former Argentinean President Néstor Kirchner and Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez had referred to them as the *unelected political opposition*.¹³² The best example of this was the 2002 coup against Chávez; Venezuelan private media, such as *Venevisión* and *RCTV* (Radio Caracas Television), were key actors before and during the coup. *RCTV* is the most notorious case internationally, since the Chávez government did not renew its license

¹³¹ Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media".

¹³² Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media".

after the coup, accusing the station of being coup plotters and, in Chávez's words, "injecting poison" in Venezuelans.¹³³ According to the opposition, this was an example of the lack of freedom of speech predominant under the Chávez government, while for the government it was the sanction for manipulating information to Venezuelans portraying news that were not true, for instigating violence among citizens, and for supporting an illegitimate government for two days. The private media was one of the main directors of the coup, which was also the result of a conspiracy between anti-Chávez factions in Venezuela and in the United States (mainly Miami-based).¹³⁴ The Venezuelan private media has manipulated its information since Chávez's arrival to power in order to discredit Chávez's supporters and victimise the opposition. It is worth stressing, that the vast majority of Venezuela's media are in private hands, and it is constitutionally protected, uncensored, and dominated by the opposition.¹³⁵ The same is currently happening to Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia; local private media has tried constantly to destabilise their governments using media manipulation.

This situation confirms the "propaganda model" advanced by Chomsky. He has argued that if the public escapes its marginalization and passivity, we face what is termed a "crisis of democracy" that elites insist must be overcome in part through measures to discipline the institutions responsible for the "indoctrination of the young" – such as school, universities, churches and mass media.¹³⁶ On the other hand, it could also be overcome through a deepening of democracy at the expense of elite control of such institutions, a strategy referred to as counter-hegemony. *Telesur* was born in the middle of this early 21st century media crisis in Latin America, specifically in the heart of it, Caracas.

¹³³ Hugo Chávez interviewed by *Agenda del Sur* (Telesur).

¹³⁴ Bartley and O'Brian, *The revolution will not be televised*.

¹³⁵ McChesney and Weisbrot, "Venezuela and the media: fact and fictions" in *Common dreams news center*.

¹³⁶ Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival*, p. 7.

3.1.i Media War in Venezuela since Chávez came to power

Venezuela, where *Telesur* was conceived and from which it is broadcast, has experimented with political and economical changes since Chávez's election in 1998. The mass media were not sympathetic to Chávez's candidature in 1998, but their hostility against the elected President increased gradually together with his nationalization, pro-sovereignty, and anti-American policies. As was shown earlier, Venezuelan politics and private media were traditionally intertwined; the government protected big corporations' interests, therefore media supported them, or at least were much less hostile. They had a symbiotic relationship until Chávez came to power. Since 1998, the media has been gradually taking the lead in opposition to Chávez as President. They have been the most important faction of the opposition in Venezuela, because of their influence on public opinion, nationally and internationally.

In addition to hostile opposition media in Venezuela, *Telesur* also addresses a situation of international media hostility. Just as during the U.S. campaign against the democratically elected President of Chile, Salvador Allende, in the early 1970s, the U.S. media widely circulates a set of myths about modern Venezuela.¹³⁷ Venezuela has been living in a constant media war for the past years. Private media in Venezuela, as discussed before, are owned by wealthy families with serious financial stakes in defeating Chávez.¹³⁸ *Venevisión*, *RCTV*, *Globovisión* and *Televen*, the four main private television stations in the country and called by Chávez "the four horsemen of the apocalypse", played a protagonist role in the 2002 coup against him. They were among very few in Venezuelan society, along with businessmen and the American government, who accepted the new self-proclaimed leader as legitimate. During the coup, they broadcasted Pedro Carmona's taking office as the new

¹³⁷ James, "U.S. intervention in Venezuela: a clear and present danger".

¹³⁸ Klein, "Venezuela's media coup" in *The Nation*.

leader, and portrayed *chavistas* as the ones who were inciting violence among citizens. Meanwhile, independent journalists showed the active participation of these private media in the coup, and how they manipulated information to the audience in order to discredit the government's supporters.¹³⁹ There have been many instances in which these stations have presented something alien to reality in order to discredit the government, and they have also tried to spread fear to society as a weapon against the government's supporters.¹⁴⁰

"The media war that have been taking place has done so much violence to truthful information on the national airwaves that the four private TV stations have effectively forfeited their right to broadcast", says Andrés Izarra, *Telesur's* president and former Informational Minister of Venezuela.¹⁴¹ Indeed, *RCTV's* license was revoked in 2007, five years after the coup. Izarra has argued that the threat posed to democracy came when the media decided to abandon journalism and pour all their persuasive powers into winning a war being waged over oil.¹⁴² According to him, these ideas have come from "la gusanera de Miami"¹⁴³ that have invented stories against Venezuela, against Cuba, and against every sovereign country in Latin America, he says.¹⁴⁴ Izarra has emphasized that before the coup, *The Miami Herald* stated that Venezuela was a war threat to the region, and since that, they have tried to recruit supporters in public opinion in order to justify an intervention against Venezuela, which later came to be the coup. Media terrorism is the spark to the imperialist interventionism doctrine, he says.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Bartley and O'Briain, *The revolution will not be televised*.

¹⁴⁰ "Telesur repasa manipulaciones de los grandes medios en torno al caso RCTV" in *Agenda del Sur* (Telesur).

¹⁴¹ Klein, "Venezuela's media coup" in *The Nation*.

¹⁴² Klein, "Venezuela's media coup" in *The Nation*.

¹⁴³ Term used by Fidel Castro in reference to Cuban-Americans in Miami, and commonly used by leftists in Latin America. Nowadays, also implies counter-revolutionaries from other countries, not only Cuba, who settles in Miami. Literally means "Miami worms".

¹⁴⁴ Izarra, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Izarra, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 19.

The coup was orchestrated mainly by the Venezuelan oligarchy such as media owners and businessmen with help of American government factions. Declassified C.I.A. documents have showed that State Department and White House officials knew that the Venezuelan opposition was planning a coup. A C.I.A. Senior Intelligence Brief from April 6, 2002, reads: "Dissident military factions, including some disgruntled senior officers and a group of radical junior officers, are stepping up efforts to organize a coup against President Chávez, possibly as early as this month... To provoke military action, plotters may try to exploit unrest stemming from opposition demonstrations slated for later this month or ongoing strikes at the state-owned oil company PDVSA."¹⁴⁶ Izarra says that governments and states are not the only victims of media terrorism, which is articulated from the empire, but also the individuals who are victims of these media bombardments.¹⁴⁷ Everyone in the society has felt the media bombardments from both factions, but mainly one-sidedly from the opposition. This is because 90% of the TV market is in the hands of the four television stations named before, which have been openly anti-*chavista*, usually in an infantile and demagogic way. *Venevisión*, Gustavo Cisneros's television station, is known for its furious opposition to Chávez, and its ceaseless denunciation of his supporters as 'mobs' and 'monkeys'.¹⁴⁸ This concentration of media property is an attempt to restrict speech, opinion, and information freedom, according to critic Ernesto Carmona.¹⁴⁹

The media environment in Venezuela when *Telesur* emerged was politically polarized. Privately-owned media had positioned themselves at times as the political opposition of the country, and as radically anti-*chavista*.¹⁵⁰ According to Ernesto Carmona, the media apparatus "guides" government policy; it decides which laws are beneficial and which are

¹⁴⁶ CIA Senior Intelligence Brief.

¹⁴⁷ Izarra, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ Gott, Richard. *New Left Review* 39, May-June 2006. "Venezuela's Murdoch", p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Carmona, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁰ Painter, James. 2007. "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur", p. 11.

not, it questions state initiatives that would be detrimental to powerful hidden interests, and manipulate the political nuances of public opinion.¹⁵¹ The media base their broadcasts on their interests, which they want to spread to the audience. The private media, whether owned by a single company or a conglomerate, are businesses interested in profits for the owners; therefore, there is an economic interest from the owners to preserve governments which allow them to accumulate capital. The key to achieving democratic standards in media is to have a plurality of ideas; media can't be monopolized in the same hands.

The time prior to 2006 in Venezuela has been described by James Painter, executive editor for the Americas at the BBC World, as "one generally free for open disagreement, but one in which journalistic standards of balance, impartiality and independence had been eclipsed by partisan coverage."¹⁵² The opposition has blamed Chávez for everything, including the weather.¹⁵³ After the recall referendum in 2004 until 2007, Chávez passed restrictive laws on media and founded state-funded media in order, according to him, to neutralise ferocious and sometimes irrational attacks from private media against his policies, himself, and everything or everyone aligned with him. The opposition have said that the purpose of these restrictive laws is to criminalize criticism of the government in the media. According to Chávez, private television networks are "using publicly-owned airspace to attack 'the people' and divide Venezuela."¹⁵⁴ These measures have been denounced by opposition leaders as forms of censorship, but Andrés Izarra argues that "[the opposition] speak out every morning, they have their shows every day, and they speak constantly against the government."¹⁵⁵ Venezuelan historian, Margarita López Maya, concurs; she says that

¹⁵¹ Carmona, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 92.

¹⁵² Painter, "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur".

¹⁵³ Pilger, *War on Democracy*. Interview to Venezuelan businessman Martin Schoffel, minute 17.

¹⁵⁴ Gunson, "Venezuela's media in a Bolivarian storm".

¹⁵⁵ Pilger, *War on Democracy*. Interview to Andrés Izarra, minute 16.

"anybody that comes to Venezuela and spends two days looking at these channels knows that there's no censorship."¹⁵⁶

3.2 Criticism

Telesur has been created in the middle of a media war. This political polarization in mass media has played a role socially and culturally; because according to Gary Marx, instead of portraying "fluffy reports about American pop stars or news pieces on distant lands, *Telesur* focus its lens closer to home, broadcasting weighty documentaries on subjects ranging from the struggles for indigenous rights in Bolivia to the destruction of the Amazon rain forest".¹⁵⁷ This can lead to accusations of elitism from countries where what has predominated in media has been banality and sensationalism. Some critics have also claimed that *Telesur's* information is directed to a specific stratum of people, particularly those who agree with Chávez and other leftist leaders, rather than all Latin Americans as it claims.¹⁵⁸ Venezuelan sociologist, Tulio Hernández, says about *Telesur*: "It seems to be designed for the elites. They talk about integration but the channel is not alive, is not near the people. Rather than a vehicle or massive communication, it seems more of an evangelical channel, designed to preach to the converted, to please an elite: the anti-imperialistic left."¹⁵⁹

Carlos Lauría, America's Program Coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), has said that the leaders of Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador (all leftist reformist presidents in Latin America) share an intolerance towards critical press.¹⁶⁰ Intolerance towards critics of the state has been

¹⁵⁶ Pilger, *War on Democracy*. Interview to Margarita Lopez Maya, minute 16.

¹⁵⁷ Marx, "Will truth go south to Latin America on Telesur news?" in *Chicago Tribune*.

¹⁵⁸ Coronel, "Telesur integration or disintegration and confrontations?"

¹⁵⁹ Coronel, "Telesur integration or disintegration and confrontations?"

¹⁶⁰ Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media."

common in Latin American history since the authoritarian military regimes. According to Carlos Lauría, it is still alive in many Latin American democracies, right-wings or left-wings, in which, the critic has been seen as the “enemy”.¹⁶¹ Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, has said that it is not intolerance to critical press, but a reaction against the “incestuous” relationship between mass media and financial capital and that he will not tolerate informational abuse from these financial groups.¹⁶²

Gloria Cuenca, Venezuelan journalist and opposition militant has stated that “the channel (*Telesur*) was politicized, polarized, ideologized since its conception, and its goal is definitely to do political propaganda. It has become part of the philosophical line that has been outlined as the *Castro-Chavista*”.¹⁶³ The Venezuelan political opposition has seen the launching of *Telesur* as Chávez political propaganda, since it has strong ties with the governments of the region, and especially the Venezuelan government. *Telesur* has been criticised as politically biased due to its ownership; it was funded by the oil money of the ‘21st century socialist’ government of Venezuela. It is financed by the leftist governments in the region, although they say they are not offering propaganda or anti-Americanism, but are in favour of Latin American integration and the reflection of Latin America’s diversity.¹⁶⁴ *Telesur*’s attachment to these governments has been seen as a motive for critique. Some intellectuals have claimed that because of this, it has worked as political propaganda in favour of them. According to some Venezuelan intellectuals interviewed by Gustavo Coronel, *Telesur* needs to be independent from any government in order to retain credibility of the audience, especially in a region where public-funded media have lacked credibility.¹⁶⁵ This

¹⁶¹ Lauría, “Leftists lean on the Latin American media”.

¹⁶² Diaz-Rangel, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*. P. 147.

¹⁶³ Interview Gloria Cuenca. “El Nacional”. Spanish original version: “El canal nace politizado, polarizado, ideologizado, y definitivamente la finalidad del canal es hacer propaganda política. Adhesión a ese esquema que se va perfilando como el esquema del *Castro-Chavista*.”

¹⁶⁴ Painter, “The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of *Telesur*”.

¹⁶⁵ Coronel, “*Telesur* integration or disintegration and confrontations?”

tradition of distrusting information that comes from the government does not help *Telesur* in achieving trust among the audience not politically aligned with these governments. In order to be completely unbiased, or at least at some degree unbiased, these critics propose that *Telesur* would have to cut its ties with governments. It has been also argued that *Telesur's* president, Andrés Izarra, was also the Minister of Communication and Information in the Chávez government while being *Telesur's* president. For the first three years since *Telesur's* launching Izarra served in both capacities. In May 2008, he renounced to his position as Minister of Communication and Information, ostensibly in order to focus on *Telesur* and disassociate it from the Venezuelan Government. Another fact that associates *Telesur* with the Venezuelan government is that *Telesur's* headquarters are at Venezuela's state-run television station, Channel 8, which supports the Chávez government.¹⁶⁶

I would disagree that there is a case against *Telesur* on grounds of bias given the pervasiveness of pro-system bias in earlier private media in Venezuela and elsewhere.

Although critics see *Telesur* as biased, therefore not neutral, I would argue that media is not neutral, and rather subjective, since it assumes positions. "There is nothing wrong with a media outlet having a position of empathy or opposition toward a government, but it is wrong to adjust the reality of the information to a certain ideological profile" says Nelson Castro, Argentinean journalist.¹⁶⁷ Unlike the private media, *Telesur* has been honest in declaring its subjective position. *Telesur* "will indeed be biased, towards promoting Latin American integration, diversity and plurality, and against the uniform point of view imposed through the privately owned media's control of information", says Humberto Márquez, Venezuelan journalist.¹⁶⁸ This perspectival bias does not make *Telesur* a simple propaganda

¹⁶⁶ Marx, "Will truth go south to Latin America on Telesur news?" in *Chicago Tribune*.

¹⁶⁷ Lauría, "Leftists lean on the Latin American media".

¹⁶⁸ Márquez, "Media-Latin America: new regional network of the south is born" in Inter Press Service News Agency.

channel. According to *Telesur's* structures on its website, the governments which finance *Telesur* encourage state independence to the channel, which render its services to Latin American and world citizens, just like a commercial company. *Telesur's* directive reiterates that its management is made independently from governments.¹⁶⁹ Aram Aharonian says: "*Telesur* will have complete editorial independence from any government and its only agenda is furthering Latin American unity. The only censor it has is the viewer. They can just click and change the channel."¹⁷⁰ The different perspective offered by *Telesur* is thus not a threat to freedom of the media. Rather, I would speculate that it is the threat of diversity of voices which frightens the opposition. Hernán Uribe says that what bothers to the opposition is that with the creation of *Telesur*, their old media monopoly will diminish.¹⁷¹

In Freja Salo and Elisabeth Terenius' paper "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study" this can be perceived. They analyzed how many times Venezuela is presented in the news in comparison with other countries. Their conclusion is that Venezuela is presented more times than any other country. They also analyzed how many times the news coverage is about Hugo Chávez in comparison with other leaders. They also found out that Hugo Chávez was mentioned more often in the programming than any other leader in the region. Although most of the reporting in *CNN in Spanish* is about life in the U.S., and about American national and international politics, and it is still mainstream media. *CNN in Spanish* aims to be for a pan-Latin American but it represents in many of its coverage the country from where it is produced. The same happens to *Telesur*, both have a specific ideology which they are representing. Now, instead of having one of point of view there are two.

¹⁶⁹ Telesur's webpage.

¹⁷⁰ Marx, "Will truth go south to Latin America on Telesur news?" in *Chicago Tribune*.

¹⁷¹ Uribe, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 488.

Telesur is still in an experimental stage since its launch, but is constantly increasing its viewers and expanding its membership, recently adding Paraguay, with Honduras also showing interest. It will definitely need independence from governments in order to fulfill its aim and unify the region, because governments change sooner or later. A news station cannot have strong ties to governments because this would mean, first, a biased and partisan perspective in their reporting, and second, that it will only last for the time the government launching it remains in power. In order to make lasting media alternatives in the region, government ties should not be the main ties, and instead there should be communicational self-management of the people. Time will tell what will happen to *Telesur*'s government ties, but for the moment it is a "wonderful communication disorder"¹⁷², as Izarra has stated.

3.3 *Telesur*'s Coverage

Telesur's slogan *Nuestro Norte es el Sur* (Our North is the South) suggests a broader identity, which does not represent national borders, but cultural and historical identities.

Aram Arahonian, general director of *Telesur*, says that:

"*Telesur*'s goal is to develop and implement a hemispheric televised communications strategy, of worldwide reach to promote and consolidate the progression of change and regional integration, as a tool in the battle of ideas against the hegemonic process of globalization. From the North they see us in black and white – mostly in black: we only appear in the news when a calamity occurs – and in reality, we are a continent in Technicolor".¹⁷³

Telesur mixes news, documentaries, round-table discussions, films and cultural programmes. Its programme includes documentaries about Latin American culture, music, traditions, history, and so on, which aim to provide understanding of the complexities of the

¹⁷² Izarra, *Encuentro latinoamericano vs. Terrorismo mediático*, p. 22.

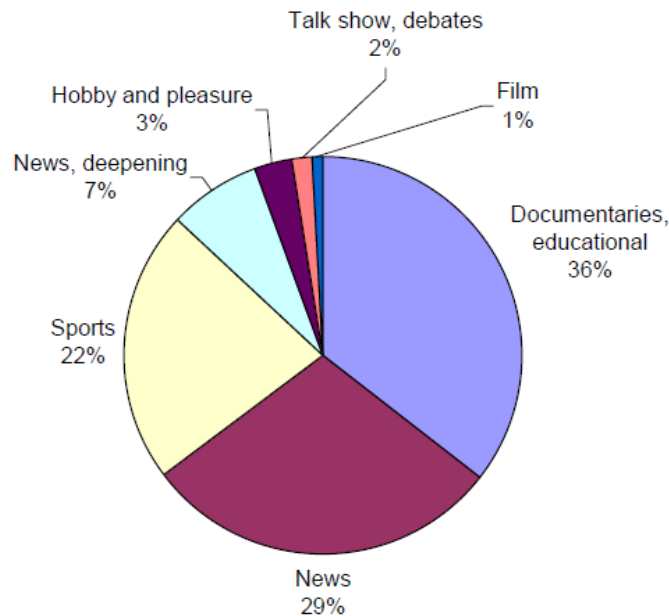
¹⁷³ Salo and Terenius, "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study", p. 33.

region to the audience. It includes programs dedicated to interviewing different personalities in the Latin American spectrum, as well as providing information about social movements that are taking place now. *Telesur* presents a program called “*Nojolivud*”, which is the phonetic Spanish of No Hollywood, which presents movies from outside the Hollywood mainstream productions.¹⁷⁴

Telesur’s broadcasts are mainly documentaries, news, and sports, these three being around 87% of the channel’s programming, according to a study made by Freja Salo and Elisabeth Terenius. The rest of its programming is divided between deepening of the news, hobby and pleasure, talk shows, debates, and films. The two most broadcasted programmes are *Noticias desde el SUR* (News from the South) and *Deportes del SUR* (Sports from the South). These two programs are the heavyweights in the *Telesur* chart. The channel has a strongly educative character, with documentaries and educational programs the most broadcast. *Telesur* has no soap operas, nor children programmes. *Destino Latinoamericano* is the only program that fit in the hobby and pleasure genre; it is a travelling show which presents different parts of Latin America.

¹⁷⁴ Lauría, “Leftists lean on the Latin American media”.

Figure 3. Telesur's programs divided into genre.

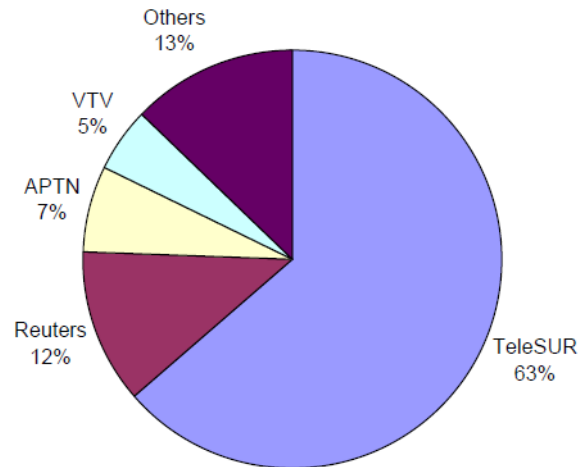


Source: Adapted from Figure 3 in Salo and Terenius "Telesur- 'Telechávez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study".

Salo and Terenius concluded that *Telesur's* programming is highly political, since the two main topics are politics (36%) and international politics (15%). *Telesur's* news features are 43% domestic (meaning individual Latin American countries), 48% international, and 9% regional. Their study also concluded that *Telesur's* international news were 48% about Asia, and 34% about Europe.

In *Telesur's* regional and domestic coverage, the channel uses its own sources of information 63% of the time, while for international coverage it uses 23%. Other sources of information they use are APTN (Associated Press Television News), Reuters, and *al-Jazeera*, mainly for international news. For domestic news they use other independent sources, but also Reuters, APTN, and VTV (a Venezuelan public channel).

Figure 4. The usage of bureau material vs. *Telesur*'s own material for regional and domestic coverage.



Source: Adapted from Figure 3 in Salo and Terenius, "Telesur- 'Telechavez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study".

Telesur's coverage aims to broadcast an alternative to mainstream private media, since these have spread a monolithic message that has helped promote conservative interests in political processes. For example, the graphic below presents a treatment of news between *CNN in Spanish* and *Telesur* about the elections in Nicaragua in 2006. *Telesur* went beyond simply describing the electoral process; they portrayed the candidates' profiles and provided the audience with a socio-economic context.

Figure 5. *CNN* compared to *Telesur* on 5 November 2006 (treatment of the news)

Percentage of Coverage		
Nicaragua's elections 2006:		
	<i>CNN</i>	<i>Telesur</i>
How voting went, irregularities:	100%	15%
Foreign Interference		6%
Legacy of former president		8%
Candidate profiles		27%
Socio-economic context*		42%
Other		2%
Total	100%	100%

* This includes the situation of young people, illiteracy, malnutrition, electricity shortages, remittances and inequality

Source: Adapted from Painter, "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of *Telesur*".

The news agenda between *Telesur* and *CNN in Spanish* is similar, they both treat topics that are relevant and are considered important in the development of the region, the difference between them is their focus, and the importance they give to the events that take place. Each of the news channels has the authority to give more air time to an event that is more important according to their ideology.

3.3.i Example of coverage: Bolivia's referendum on September 2008

During 2008, there has taken place in Bolivia a conflict between the political opposition and the Bolivian government. The opposition, who governed what is called the *media luna*, which is the lowland part of Bolivia including the wealthiest provinces in the country, were asking for autonomy from the Morales government. *Media luna* is a strong political opposition bastion in Bolivia. The private media in Bolivia, as in Venezuela, is controlled by an affluent political opposition. This friction between government and opposition has created a political and media war in that country for the last year, especially in August and

September 2008. Private Bolivian media with private and economical interests have tried to demonize Morales through their reporting, in order to discredit his image in national and international public opinion. During the first two weeks of September 2008, it was collected media data from *CNN in Spanish* and *Telesur*, in order to compare the media projection about this conflict from both news stations. The data collected was from their respective internet sites, and included written articles and video reports. Government and independent nonprofit media have portrayed the events in a different way; the conflict was portrayed with a different connotation depending which media presented it. These are some of *CNN* titles of its coverage about the conflictive situation in Bolivia: "Morales struggling to control Bolivia", "Bolivian state of siege declared", "Peace Corps temporarily out of Bolivia", "At least 16 dead in Bolivia fighting", "Two more states in Bolivia vote for autonomy", "Thousands rally for autonomy in Bolivia"¹⁷⁵. These are headlines which produce a sensation of fear and of political instability. While *CNN* stresses that Morales is struggling to control Bolivia, *Telesur*, on the other hand, portray as a headline "Far-right groups violently take government and state-media in Bolivia". It's worth stressing that not all *CNN* headlines and articles were in favor of the opposition autonomy movements, but most of them have portrayed Bolivia as going through a political and violent crisis for which Morales appears to be mainly responsible. While reporting from Bolivia, *CNN* reporter Gloria Carrasco stood in front of a graffiti which read "Evo asesino", which means "Evo murderer". Some *CNN* headlines read as follows: "Pro-government peasant groups were blamed for burning dozens of ballot boxes in Santa Cruz, but the state's Provincial Governor Rubén Costas described the violence as isolated incidents."¹⁷⁶ Another *CNN* article read the following: "The provinces are seeking greater autonomy from Morales' leftist government and are insisting he cancel a December 7 referendum on a new constitution that would help him centralize power, run for

¹⁷⁵ CNN's webpage.

¹⁷⁶ Arostegui, Carrasco and Ariosto, "Exit Polls: Bolivian state backs autonomy" in *CNN*.

a second consecutive term and transfer fallow terrain to landless peasants."¹⁷⁷ These headlines and in general, the tone of the articles, reflects an urgency to replace Morales.

Telesur, on the other hand, which has the Bolivian government as a state-member, titled some of its coverage about the same autonomic conflict as: "Bolivians are mobilized against oppositional autonomic referendums", "Bolivian indigenous groups protested against separatist statutes", "Bolivia reiterates its denunciation against illegal referendums which attempt to destabilize the country",¹⁷⁸ etc. Both news stations have focused in different aspects of the conflict and have presented the story with a different perspective. *Telesur* has a tendency to incline towards its country-members, while private media with profits interests has a tendency to incline towards financial groups.

During these events, Evo Morales declared the U.S. Ambassador in Bolivia *persona non grata*, accusing him of conspiracy against the government, incitement to destabilize the country, and of trying to create factional divisions in Bolivian society. This event was portrayed differently depending the source. According to *CNN*, what was important about the action carried out by Morales was that Bolivia could be penalized through the withdrawal of an incentive from the U.S. to combat drug traffic.

"At stake now is the fate of U.S. tariff preferences that Bolivia receives as an incentive to fight against narcotrafficking that are slated to expire at the end of the year."¹⁷⁹

In contrast, *Telesur* reported:

"It was denounced that the American ambassador in Bolivia develops a political agenda in the country rather than a diplomatic one, and that agenda is linked with the opposition against the current government."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ *CNN*, "Morales struggling to control Bolivia".

¹⁷⁸ *Telesur's* webpage.

¹⁷⁹ *CNN*, "U.S. envoy: I didn't incite Bolivian violence".

In this different interpretations about the firing of the U.S. Ambassador in Bolivia, *CNN* has focused on the future economic outcomes of this decision, while *Telesur* has focused on the official reasons given by the Bolivian government.

The different portrayals of the same conflict are an issue of focus. Different ideologies are being portrayed now, in a region that was used to one ideology in the mass media. *Telesur* has portrayed social and indigenous movements that have taken place during the conflict, in a way many private media have failed to do. The hegemonic media did not present these mass movements in an effective way, but gave a lot of importance to those movements which are in accordance with their interests.

To conclude, the historical political moment in which *Telesur* was conceived was crucial for its existence. *Telesur* which aims to present an anti-imperialistic and anti-hegemonic perspective would not have emerged without the complicity of leaders in the region. These leaders aim for a sovereign continent where foreign and capitalist interests do not prevail over national interests. Private media have played the role of the opposition in most of the member-countries of *Telesur*. On many occasions, these media have manipulated or distorted facts with a particular twist that serves their interests in order to discredit leftists. The information presented to the audience is selectively chosen in order to move public opinion towards what is beneficial for these private media. Through the manipulation of information, they have created a sense of instability and insecurity in the audience. These sentiments have been perceived nationally and internationally, in this way creating a sceptical sentiment about these governments in the international audience. *Telesur*

¹⁸⁰ *Telesur*, "Sectores sociales bolivianos acusan a EEUU de encubrir actos ilegales de la extrema derecha". Spanish original version: "Rada denunció que el diplomático estadounidense desarrolla una agenda política antes que diplomática en Bolivia y esa agenda está vinculada con acciones opositoras en contra del gobierno actual."

emerged to present an alternative viewpoint, and has succeeded in creating an alternative framing of news events.

CHAPTER IV

**Latin America's *Telesur* as part of state-funded counter-hegemonic media boom in
early 21st century**

Latin America's *Telesur* as part of state-funded counter-hegemonic media boom in early 21st century

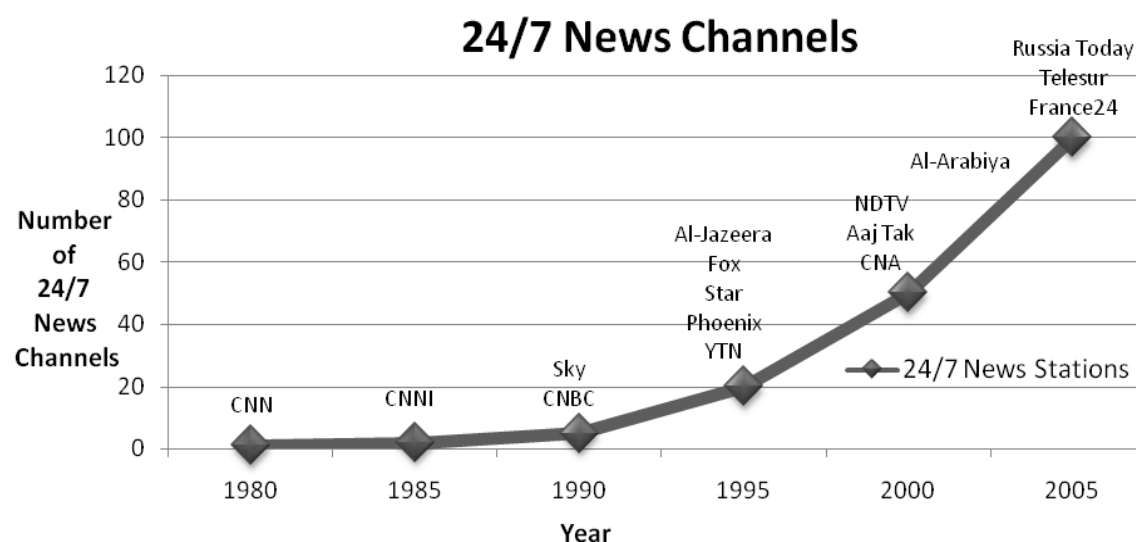
Latin America's *Telesur* has been part of an international tendency among countries which are dissatisfied by the way hegemonic media has treated issues regarding their regions and countries. These countries, which have launched counter-hegemonic news stations, include Qatar, Russia, France, and Iran, which along with Venezuela, are aiming to provide, according to them, a better understanding of their region and their policies. All these countries have launched state-funded 24-hour news stations as part of a boom in counter-hegemonic news stations in early 21st century. Since *al-Jazeera's* international exposure, there has been a trend of forming such stations. The earlier mass media have concentrated on a Western, and particularly Anglo-Saxon, and corporate way of understanding the processes occurring around the world; therefore, these new media aim to explain from their perspective the most important issues occurring in their countries and regions. These new counter-hegemonic news stations are backed up by high professionalism and generous funding from their states. All of them are state-funded, and some of these states have had friction with Western states, especially with the United States; specifically, Iran, Venezuela, and Russia. They all aim to challenge hegemonic international news stations.

The creation of 24/7 news channels is a definite process of globalization and is a foundation for the creation of a 'global public sphere'. Rai and Cottle have argued that these channels are the latest expansion of Western-led corporate interests and vehicles of cultural imperialism, which propagate news flows from the West to the rest.¹⁸¹ Through these channels an ideology is proposed, one which is not always matched with that of the audience in the sense that sometimes what is portrayed does not relate with the news

¹⁸¹ Rai and Cottle, "Global mediations: On the changing ecology of satellite television news".

receiver's perception. In this way an informational conflict can occur between the receiver and the emissary. Ingrid Volkmer argues from a notion of a 'global village' that the ability of satellite news channels to simultaneously broadcast around the world and bring audiences together during key moments of 'breaking news' is engendering the emergence of a genuinely 'global public sphere' and laying cosmopolitan foundations of citizenship.¹⁸² The growth in 24/7 news channels, private-funded and state-funded, is shown below.

Figure 6. The growth in 24/7 news channels, 1980-2006



Source: Adapted from Chart 3.1 in Painter, "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur". The number of channels are approximate.

4.1 Qatar's *al-Jazeera*

Al-Jazeera, a Qatar-based news station, gained prominence in the world when together with *CNN* it covered the Afghanistan War in 2001; it was competing and rubbing shoulders with *CNN*, professionally and technologically. It was launched in 1996 by Hamad bin Khalifa, Emir of Qatar. Its aim was primarily to provide pluralistic reporting, and it had editorial

¹⁸² Ingrid Volkmer cited in Rai and Cottle, "Global mediations: On the changing ecology of satellite television news".

independence from the emirate.¹⁸³ It has also worked as a unifying news station for the Arab and Muslim audience. *Al-Jazeera* claims to be the only politically independent television station in the Middle East, stating that they “are not a governmental entity but a transnational and pan-Arab network that focuses on news and politics from the Arab world and for the Arab world.”¹⁸⁴ State sponsorship of *al-Jazeera* clearly impacts the objectivity of its coverage of political developments within the Emirate, “though not as much as one might expect” says Gary Gambill.¹⁸⁵ In order to become a major network and earn credibility, it will need to address the critical issues in Qatar on the air.

Al-Jazeera’s success and growth were earned by legitimacy and viewing figures along with its confidence to approach conflict and war from a different perspective.¹⁸⁶ No Arab media had covered war before the way *Al-Jazeera* has done it, using its own correspondents and resources. Most Arab media outlets used to rely on the *BBC* or other Western media outlets for news feeds. In an analysis made by Amy Jasperson and Mansour el-Khikha, it was found that one of the main contrasts between *al-Jazeera* and *CNN* is *al-Jazeera’s* humanistic portrayal of the consequences of war.¹⁸⁷ In the same study, it was also concluded that media coverage of events in the Middle East has changed since the U.S. war in Afghanistan started. *Al-Jazeera* has made U.S. and European media services developed a more balanced reporting of events. Arab journalist Hazem Saghih also claims that what is seen in Arab-satellite media does not coincide with reality either; he says that they depict an exaggeration and caricatured impression of reality. He says that: “such extreme phenomena as war and conflict, the sanctification of “martyrs”, images of corpses, emotive scenes and the necrophiliac celebration of death and funerals are all much more common on

¹⁸³ Painter, “The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur”.

¹⁸⁴ Jasperson and El-Kikhia, *Framing terrorism: the news media, the government, and the public*. P. 84.

¹⁸⁵ Gambill, “Qatar’s Al-Jazeera TV: The power of free speech” in *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*.

¹⁸⁶ Jasperson and el-Kikhia, *Framing terrorism: the news media, the government, and the public*. P. 131.

¹⁸⁷ Jasperson and El-Kikhia, *Framing terrorism: the news media, the government, and the public*. P. 129.

Arabic satellite channels than they are in the day-to-day life of most Arabs.”¹⁸⁸ Some positive aspects *Al-Jazeera* has brought to the Arab world, according to Saghie, are that the Western news monopoly in the region has been broken, Arab television reporters are covering conflicts in similar ways as their Western counterparts, sometimes encountering problems with Arab authorities, and this has helped the until recently colonized Arab society improve their collective morale and self-belief.¹⁸⁹

Al-Jazeera and *Telesur* are both financed by the oil and natural gas revenues in their respective countries. Qatar and Venezuela are both considered developing countries, but with a substantial wealth based on these minerals; they are ranked in the top twenty producers of these in the world.¹⁹⁰ Both are countries with substantial natural wealth, and therefore are key countries for economic purposes. Qatar’s emirate is a crucial American ally in the Persian Gulf, where it provides a military base and warm support for American policies, although American relations with Qatar have been strained because of the emirate’s sponsorship of *al-Jazeera*.¹⁹¹

There are three factors, according to Hazem Saghie, that explain the current vigorous growth of the television industry in the Arab world, therefore the necessity of the creation and the subsequent success of Qatar’s news station *al-Jazeera*. The first factor he explains is the rapid development in audio-visual technology; this was demonstrated during the Kuwait War in 1991. Arabs were spectators in this conflict, in which the media hegemony was CNN’s. Now Arabs have entered the field as active participants. A second factor, according to Saghie, is that television industry has found an appropriate and lucrative way

¹⁸⁸ Saghie, “Al-Jazeera: the world through Arab eyes”.

¹⁸⁹ Saghie, “Al-Jazeera: the world through Arab eyes”.

¹⁹⁰ Oil Industry Statistics from Gibson Consulting.

¹⁹¹ Weisman, “Under pressure, Qatar may sell *Al-Jazeera* station” in *The New York Times*.

to fuel Arab nationalist sentiment and hostility against the outsider, especially the American outsider, bound in a common cause. The third factor he proposes is the disintegration of intermediate institutions able to connect the individual citizen, the state, and the society confronted, creating a space for the television industry as the necessary intermediate institution.¹⁹² These three factors have contributed to the success in television industry this past decade in the Arab world, especially the phenomenon *al-Jazeera*.

4.2 France's *France 24*

In December 2006, France launched *France 24*. France has been one of the most recent countries in joining the counter-hegemonic media boom. France as a Western and powerful nation has wanted to compete with countries that have international news channels¹⁹³, and therefore to be in media vanguard. Their idea was to spread the French "art de vivre", or way of life¹⁹⁴, and their perspective on current affairs. Their intention was originally to portray a French perspective to the international audience rather than to the French; it was initially broadcast in New York "because the city is home to diplomats and the United Nations."¹⁹⁵ It was Jacques Chirac's idea since his prime ministerial mandate in late 1980s, and was one of his promises for the presidential elections in 2002.¹⁹⁶ The idea of creating a French counter-hegemonic news station was in part a response to the latent "marginalization" of the French point of view¹⁹⁷ felt by the French government in the existing international networks dominated by the Anglo-Saxon perspective, such as *BBC* and *CNN*. According to James Painter, Chirac's conception of *France 24* "was in part due to his

¹⁹² Saghiagh, "Al-Jazeera: the world through Arab eyes".

¹⁹³ Chrisafis, "The News through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on Anglo-Saxon imperialism" in *The Guardian*.

¹⁹⁴ Chrisafis, "The News through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on Anglo-Saxon imperialism" in *The Guardian*.

¹⁹⁵ Carvajal, "Paris's version of CNN won't be for France".

¹⁹⁶ Chrisafis, "The News through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on Anglo-Saxon imperialism" in *The Guardian*.

¹⁹⁷ Randall, "Chirac revives plan for 'French CNN'" in *The Telegraph*.

anger at the way the French government's policy was misrepresented in the run-up to the second Gulf War¹⁹⁸. It is equally financed, in a fifty-fifty deal, by a partnership involving state-run French television and the private *TF1*, one of Europe's largest private TV channels¹⁹⁹. French broadcasting analysts have remained sceptical about Chirac's project, naming it a 'disastrous experiment'²⁰⁰. The union for *RFI*, France's international radio station, has called the French international news channel "a parody of a news channel"²⁰¹. They have questioned its credibility since it was ideologically conceived by the state, alleging that the news station's funding is dependent on good relations with the government. Bernard Brochand, mayor of Cannes and a French member of Parliament has insisted that in order for the channel to develop credibility, it needs to be independent from the state.²⁰² "Let's face it, you're either a journalist or a functionary of the foreign minister, not both"²⁰³ said a French government critic interviewed by *CNN*. At present, *France 24* is broadcasted in French, English, and Arabic; but that will change soon since incoming president Nicolas Sarkozy has announced a reduction in programming²⁰⁴. The original idea under Chirac's government was to increase the languages in which the news was broadcast, in order to reach a broader audience. Spanish, Mandarin, and German were the next languages selected to be broadcast. Sarkozy in contrast has said that "a public French channel can only speak French"²⁰⁵. *France 24* is experimenting changes at the moment, and therefore Chirac's experiment as well. The idea of a 'CNN a la francaise' is now falling apart, and if it is only broadcast in French then it will become a news station for French-speakers, and therefore will move away from its original aim, to provide a French perspective on world

¹⁹⁸ Painter, "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur".

¹⁹⁹ Chrisafis, "The News through French eyes: Chirac TV takes on Anglo-Saxon imperialism" in *The Guardian*.

²⁰⁰ Randall, "Chirac revives plan for a French CNN" in *The Telegraph*.

²⁰¹ Carvajal, "Paris's version of CNN won't be for France".

²⁰² Carvajal, "Paris's version of CNN won't be for France".

²⁰³ Graff, "France's view of world news".

²⁰⁴ *BBC*, "Sarkozy says 'non' to France 24".

²⁰⁵ *BBC*, "Sarkozy says 'non' to France 24".

events in an international network. Public channels are subject to change in programming and even in their original targets depending on the rotating government.

In conclusion, these counter-hegemonic news stations were launched as reactions from their governments to hegemonic international media; they represent an alternative and local approach to the issues that are of most concern to non-hegemonic audiences. They have a desire to explain their most important issues in their own words and with their own images. They have had an ideological battle with stations such as *CNN* and *BBC*. They all present a contemporary social model of their regions and countries which adapts to their cultures and religions, which is politically moderate and economically successful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there was a space in the Latin American mass media that was urgently in need of an alternative voice, rather than *Televisa's* soap operas, or Miami-produced television programs. *Telesur* is a channel with an educative purpose that tries to create a historic consciousness, rather than the banality and sensationalism of most of the private mass media in the region. It still has strong ties with the governments since they are funding it, but if an alternative voice wants to compete efficiently with giant media conglomerates, it has to come from founders that are economically capable of maintaining it. This alternative to private hegemonic media was necessary since mass media in Latin America have been ideologically monopolized and most of the media corporations have been politically positioned as right-wing and pro-American. It can be concluded that media ownership matters, and that media is biased according to the ideology in which they are brought up, as an example there is the study made for this thesis about the coverage of Bolivia during its referendum on September 2008. Both news stations, *Telesur* and *CNN in Spanish*, emphasized different aspects of the Bolivian situation at the time, their headlines, the vocabulary used by their journalists, and the images selected to be presented along with their articles or video reports, are key factors to decipher the media political alignment.

Telesur emerged in a specific historical time in which there has been complicity from several leaders to unify the region, economically and politically. The idea of *Telesur* came from Castro's words, but at that time nothing could be made since Cuba was politically isolated. Times have changed, and now Chávez since he himself was having problems with the private media in his country, has attempted to counter the corporations media monopoly and ideology.

Latin America, as a peripheral region, has been a victim of colonialism and imperialism by dominant forces, which has included the projection of media in relation to former colonized and peripheral regions. There has taken place an economic emergence and also a sense of sovereignty in Latin America. Leaders have come to power who have promoted economic independence from dominant countries; these policies have not suited big media corporations which have had historically strong ties with dominant countries. Freja Salo and Elisabeth Terenius have argued that it has been unfortunate that *Telesur* combines anti-imperialism and integration in its agenda, since by implying that many of the potential viewers will not watch it. For the author of this thesis, this is a misunderstanding of the historical context of the region, which has been subjugated by dominant powers from its 'discovery' to the present.²⁰⁶ *Telesur* was not created with a commercial purpose; its purpose was to create an alternative view, to give the audience an opportunity to watch something else rather than soap operas or light entertainment programs. *Telesur* has essentially differentiated itself from mainstream media in its content, ideology, and analysis. James Painter points out that regional government responses to events in Latin America get far more attention on *Telesur* than on *CNN in Spanish*, for example, which shows a greater propensity to include the perspective from Washington.²⁰⁷

In 1980 the McBride Report was published by UNESCO, in an attempt to democratize media flows between Western countries and Third World countries, which ended in an outcry from the U.S. and Britain that led them to withdraw from UNESCO. By 1989, media was again ruled by the free flow of information, due to the protests from Western and dominant countries against the McBride Report. This, together with the examples presented in this dissertation about some reactions of the private media shows that when the question of

²⁰⁶ Salo, Freja and Terenius, Elisabeth. "Telesur- 'Telechavez' or the public service of Latin America: a case study". P. 53.

²⁰⁷ Painter, "The Boom in counter-hegemonic news channels: a case study of Telesur", p. 54.

media reform is about balancing flows of any kind, those who have benefited from unbalanced flows will react negatively to its being raised.

The attempt to challenge hegemonic media has not been exclusive to *Telesur*. Other news stations, as the examples presented of *Al-Jazeera* and *France 24*, have wanted to present their own version and images of events and particularly events that concerned them. They have wanted to provide their perspective about news to their audience and to an audience who is sceptical about what is broadcast. It is not necessarily an anti-Western attempt, but an attempt to affirm other identities. Time will tell what will happen to *Telesur*, but so far it has been a necessary voice and has disrupted the communicational order that was dominated by one point of view.

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