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## Limits and paradox of TeleSUR: the media as a political agent of regional (dis)integration

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### Abstract

In this article, we analyze the limits and paradox of TeleSUR's role in the process of regional (dis)integration and identity construction during the Chávez era. Our question is: how did TeleSUR promote regional, cultural and media integration? To demonstrate the influence of public and media diplomacy, this article was built upon studies on regionalism, media and culture, as well as the content analysis of speeches.

**Keywords:** TeleSUR; Regional Integration; Media; Culture; Public and Media Diplomacy.

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## Introduction

In International Relations, recognition of the media's importance has been manifested in repeated excursions to Communication studies, as can be observed in the use of concepts and theories established in media studies, such as: 'Agenda-Setting', 'CNN Effect', 'Al Jazeera Effect', 'Media Diplomacy' etc. (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Robinson 1999; Seib 2008). However, as Deibert (1995) suggests, the dialogue between Communication studies and International Relations is still incipient, and none of the major theoretical approaches of International Relations (limited to realism, liberalism and Marxism) has formulated a concept or theory to understand the meaning of communication in contemporary society. Therefore, Deibert (1995) considers that medium theory, which is based on the works of Innis and McLuhan, and bridges this gap, as it does not understand communication as an agent or actor, but an environment that has historically structured human societies.

Considering TeleSUR's political project as a medium theory, whose conception comes from Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, we understand that the broadcaster was capable of expressing anti-hegemonic positions in the region, even though its main goal was to promote Latin American integration. We also highlight that TeleSUR suffered political setbacks because of contingencies, limits, ambiguities and contradictions of the mediation between the particular and the universal, and regarding multiple groups that are part of Venezuelan and Latin American societies. In addition, we highlight that this multistate broadcaster underwent historical political-media processes in Latin America, whose structure is anchored in three main pillars: media political parallelism (Albuquerque 2017), patrimonialism (Faoro 2001, 871) and electronic *coronelismo* (Santos 2008, 224), all of which stemmed from the region's private power.

It is therefore within the framework of regional peculiarities, articulated to the international context, that we seek to reflect on three research problems: did the creation of TeleSUR aim solely at strengthening and achieving regional integration, as announced by Chávez? Or did it correspond to a political quest to strengthen and legitimize the counter hegemonic and anti-imperialist Chavist discourse in a worldwide sphere? Or, as its opponents suggest, did it legitimize and strengthen the Chávez government in Latin America and the world? Regarding these questions, our hypothesis is that the reasons for TeleSUR's creation and permanence correspond to a notorious anti-hegemonic discourse based on systematic criticism of all elements of US foreign policy, which strengthened the typical anti-imperialist discourse at the Chávez Era.

At the same time, we point out that the broadcaster paradoxically did not ensure the plurality of ideas, ideologies, cultures and sources interviewed. For many, the broadcaster thus (re)produced practices of silencing and exclusion, since Venezuela's democratic government, based on typical Latin American populism/authoritarianism, was contradictory. Multiple groups did not feel contemplated by the content produced by TeleSUR - therein lies the main criticism highlighted by Chávez's political opponents. Moreover, for many analysts and intellectuals, TeleSUR functioned as an element of public and media diplomacy, extolling and, in turn, spreading the Bolivarianist ideology, a constitutive pillar of the Chávez era foreign policy.

Finally, it is important to point out that, methodologically, this paper combines theoretical styles: Critical theory, Medium theory, Political Economy of Communication, Foreign Policy History/Analysis and studies on regional integration. Also, this study was carried out with a discourse content analysis of journalistic content generated by the broadcaster and disseminated through social networks.

## Media and politics: notes on Venezuela's press regulation, democracy and freedom

Since the publication of Walter Lippmann's 'Public Opinion' in 1922, it is clear that the milestones of communication policies relate to national objectives. In this sense, the balance

between defense of public interests and private sector's demands of profitability has been mediated by the state, in the name of national interest, and through interventions that include TV channels' concessions, standard setting processes, regulations, financing, *etc.* (Moraes 2016, 135).

In Venezuela, private capital's control of the communication system has contributed to decreasing the state's decision-making power – notably in the framework of its historical responsibilities. This is an important fact, which helps us understand the conduct of large Venezuelan media conglomerates in the political polarization that has divided the country since the election of Hugo Chávez in 1999. In converging with the political opposition agenda, the private communication system found in press freedom a powerful argument against any state policy or order.

The 'spectator democracy' (Chomsky 2013), espoused by Lippmann, relies on mainstream media for the construction of stereotypes as a means to form 'public opinion'. This 'spectator democracy' also represents the major factor of stability in liberal democracies, which fabricate 'political consensus'. In this sense, we understand Venezuelan ruling classes' feelings of insecurity derived from Chávez's announcement of a public policy formulation for the sector, and his devising of a Latin American TV channel that aimed to deepen integration and gain foreign support for his government.

The first Venezuelan communication system dates back to the military government of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-1958). In the framework of the developmentalist project called '*Nuevo Ideal Nacional*', Jiménez subsidized the agricultural, transportation and telecommunications sectors – in particular through the inauguration of the state-run television station *Nacional de Venezuela*, in 1952. In 1953, *Televisa* and *Radio Caracas de Televisión* were inaugurated. These were concessions to the private communication system that were only regulated in 1964.

However, in general, the criteria to media concessions in Venezuela were subordinated to the political-ideological orientations of successive governments which, according to Abuchaibe and Cedillo (2010), never opposed that the sector could be largely financed by US capital. For example, Braz and Haje (*apud* Saldiva and Algarra 2009, 195) point out that since 1961 the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) has owned about 20% of *C.A. Radio Caracas*. Also, until the 1970s, 35% of the Venezuelan population, which occupied 70% of the country's territory, received no TV signal.

Throughout Chávez's administration, a new cycle established state regulation over the communication system. In this case, television. It aimed at media democratization (Matos 2013) and included the possibility of controlling cross-ownership (Ramos and Santos 2007; Braz 2011). Many scholars credit this initiative to the coup suffered in 2002, which was widely articulated by the media. In this sense, Chávez would have decided to propose the *Resorte* Law – a Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, TV and Digital Media – in 2004, in force since 2005 and accompanied by the National Commission of Telecommunications (Conatel). In this context, the country started to benefit from wide national telecommunications coverage, with telephony, broadcasting, cable TV and internet services. However, in a short time, international supervision organizations based

in the United States and Europe began to question press freedom in Venezuela (Mancini 1977; Braz and Haje 2013, 186).

In the press, two major newspapers, *El Universal* and *El Nacional*, were strongly active in the 2002 Venezuelan coup, along with the main television channels, *Venevisión*, *Globovisión*, *RCTV* and *Univisión*, which, according to Simioni (2007), adopted the strategy of using “a timely and perverse confusion between journalism and entertainment for its anti-Chávez campaign.” However, Simioni indicates that since 2004, new alternative sources of information have been wholly or partly funded by the state, hence weekly and monthly newspapers are being distributed free of charge. With regard to television, the government decided to open concessions for open networks. In May 2007, the period of *Venevisión* concession’s renewal – which belongs to Venezuelan magnate Gustavo Cisneros – and also the period of renewal of *Radio Caracas de Televisión* concession, the government renewed *Venevisión*’s concession, since Cisneros was committed to a truce. *Rádío Caracas de Televisión*’s concession did not have the same destiny, and the open TV signal was transferred to *Televisora Venezolana Social*, which was integrated by many communitarian TVs. However, despite great popular support, “this decision became one more disputed topic between government and opposition” (Simioni 2007).

For Hernandez (2006), destabilizing Chávez’s government by supporting a systematic internal opposition was the path found by the United States in its attempt to achieve its economic objective: the privatization of the Venezuelan oil industry. In this endeavor, the political activism of the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” were unleashed (that was how Chávez called the private channels *Venevisión*, *RCTV*, *Televén* and *Globovisión*). According to Becerra and Manstrini (*apud* Braz and Haje 2013, 197), up to 2004, these channels held about 76.6% of Venezuela’s audience. *RCTV* controlled 33.90% and *Venevisión* 33.10%. And all four channels were coordinated between 2002 and 2004 in favor of the *coup d’état*, the oil strike and the referendum against Chávez’s rule.

However, these failed actions forced the adoption of other strategies still anchored in the involvement of the USA. In 2004, for example, a mediation held by former President Jimmy Carter was organized to promote a truce between Cisneros and Chávez. As a result, Cisneros committed to suspend its systematic opposition to the government and to recognize the outcome of the 2004 referendum. In return, *Venevisión* had its concession agreement renewed and still received a millionaire advertising aid from the former *RCTV*, its only competitor on the national level. Furthermore, in 2004, Chávez signed a contract for the construction of a binational gas pipeline with Colombia, sponsored by the Venezuelan government, but coordinated by US oil multinational Chevron Texaco. According to Chávez (*apud* Braz and Haje 2012, 199), this decision would not be a political inflection, but a “direct exit to that vast world that is the Asian market.”

From 2004 on, certain political stability in the petroleum market made the purchase of the Punta TV Channel by entrepreneurs and oil cargo ship owners possible (Braz and Haje *apud* Lopes 2009; 1999). In 2007, 78% of Venezuela’s VHF TV stations was private, compared to 22% belonging to the state. Private UHF broadcasters held 82%, community broadcasters, around 11%, and public broadcasters, 7%. In this very same period, private broadcasters held 85% of

media investments with production specifically linked to television content, which represented, on average, 80% of the production transmitted in the country.

## TeleSUR: a historical balance

Historically, the models adopted in Latin American media have transplanted the structures and the myths concerning the values of press independence and autonomy from the USA and Europe. The classic example of this myth is, especially for the public, the belief that the press acts as a ‘Watchdog’ or ‘Fourth Power’. Journalists, on the other hand, naturalize, normalize, and hierarchize the techniques of persuasion and deterrence, following a logic of exclusion-inclusion, both common in US and European practices – although, in this case, the US was a paramount structural model. Television politics in Latin America legitimized narratives anchored in the ideals of modernity and, more recently, of a global culture (Featherstone 1999). It therefore reproduced a dynamic routine in the center-periphery relationship, as it co-constituted the identity-difference relationship, and operated according to a political transnational parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Chakrabarty 2000; Albuquerque 2017).

It is not by chance that one of the greatest difficulties of TeleSUR stems from disputes between regional leaders regarding the conduct of regional policy processes, including the communication sphere – as inferred in Brazil’s choice to remain only as a contributing member of TeleSUR<sup>1</sup>. Nolte (2011) interprets the Brazilian government’s position as a political calculation to safeguard from possible constraints or associations likely to compromise its intended regional leadership (Ianni 2004). Other scholars have pointed out the question of representativeness and cultural identification – including different groups involved in channel programming format and content design and production – as a major obstacle to TeleSUR’s trajectory (Pieretti 2014).

As Zweig (2018) and Pieretti (2014) point out, we understand that Chávez’s government played a contradictory and limited role through TeleSUR, given that sometimes the broadcaster acted as a defender of the Latin American region (*i.e.*, as a counter-hegemonic movement) *vis-à-vis* the hierarchies promoted by the US (*i.e.*, imperialism/hegemony), and, at the same time, it reproduced practices of silencing and exclusion through its paradoxical democratic government, which was based on populism and authoritarianism. In this sense, Venezuelan population was not fully contemplated by the broadcaster’s content.

Schiller (2018) questions the silences and exclusions regarding certain groups in Venezuela and the Latin American region. Considering the interaction between the media and the state, Schiller (2018, 17) points out that the existence of Catia TVe – a community media that was born on the outskirts of multiple neighborhoods in Caracas, and aimed to engage in a revolutionary dynamic

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible to say that Brazil’s non-adherence is due to a dispute for regional leadership. In addition, Brazil has its own broadcaster (EBC / TV Brasil Internacional), which was considered by many policymakers as a broadcaster that would be responsible for cultural and media integration. Further research on this case requires deeper analysis, which is not possible in this article.

through Venezuela's already existing liberal capitalist state institutions. In this sense, "Catia TVe producers' everyday forms of resistance included their efforts to develop radical interdependencies with, rather than absolute autonomy from, state institutions" (Schiller 2018, 17). Also, according to the author, Catia TVe aimed at substantial transformations and popular leadership.

It is important to highlight that, although it is not the object of this article, we look at Catia TVe considering how it questioned the formation of a Venezuelan state apart from civil society, and its intersection with the media, promoting, in turn, multiple definitions of the state. As Mallen and García-Gaudilla (2016, 20) suggests, we understand that during the Chávez era there was a media war between politicians/owners of the private sector media, the public sector and community communication. The private sector specifically accused Chavism of ideologically rigging the media and asphyxiating democracy through practices seen as authoritarian/populist. Therefore, any possibility of debate in Chavist governments was rendered impossible.

The rejection of Chávez's<sup>2</sup> figure and his 21<sup>st</sup> century socialist project was the last unfavorable argument for the acceptance of TeleSUR – mainly raised by the conservative sectors inside and outside Venezuela. Zweig (2018, 3350) states that to think of the media during Chávez's governments is to think of the idiosyncrasies that have historically come from the beginning and even from the end of the *Punto Fijo* Pact, in the so-called "spectacular modernity ideology," whose origins date back to the mid-twentieth century. According to him, one can reflect upon the nexus/dialectic authoritarianism/populism, both from the right and the left, regarding their competitive forces. According to the author (2018, 3349), when we consider the case of TeleSUR and many other Venezuelan media, we observe and question the *media caudillismo*, bearing in mind the revenues from Petrostate (Zweig 2018; Carvalho 1997; Teles 2015).

TeleSUR's first transmission happened on July 24, 2005, Simon Bolivar's birthday (Seabra 2010). According to the Observatory of Public Broadcasting in Latin America, initially, the station was 100% financed by state resources.

Regarding its legal nature, TeleSUR had a public administration, which aimed to ensure a greater interaction with diverse publics. Besides, it became a multistate property shared by four countries: Venezuela, Argentina<sup>3</sup>, Uruguay and Cuba. As an initial investment, TeleSUR received US\$ 10 million. Venezuela contributed with 51% of this sum, mainly for information and communication technology. The other members invested in other technologies and media devices: Argentina contributed with 20%, Cuba with 19% and Uruguay with 10%. Only in 2007, after the entry of new members, Nicaragua and Ecuador, the investment in TeleSUR underwent changes. Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and Venezuela maintained their investment percentages, but

<sup>2</sup> According to his opponents, Chávez would pose a threat to the political order in that moment - due to his role in two coup attempts in 1992 against Carlos Andrés Pérez's elected government. In this sense, he was often associated with the threat of military dictatorships' return on the continent. He was also projected as an authoritarian leader of a socialist regime like Cuba. In both cases, he was accused of curtailing press freedom and threatening democracy.

<sup>3</sup> In April 2016, Argentina suspended TeleSUR's signal due to a decision by President Mauricio Macri. An editorial produced by TeleSUR strongly criticized this outcome. "Repudian salida de la señal de TeleSUR en Argentina." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MuIDwLx5sw>. Access on December 19, 2016.

Bolivia contributed to 5%, Ecuador to 10%, and Nicaragua to 10%. In 2016, TeleSUR started to carry out a campaign entitled '*Ciudadano TeleSUR*' (TeleSUR Citizen, in English) to increase the collection of funds (Santos and Fontes 2018).

According to Beto Almeida, a Brazilian journalist who took part in TeleSUR's conception, among the countries that encouraged the TeleSUR project, Cuba offered the greatest support, not only providing technical and specialized labor, but also opening doors for the inauguration of a station branch on the island with access to the entire collection of programs and documentaries produced in the country (Moraes 2015; Maringoni 2009).

Unlike Cuba, countries like Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador did not contribute financially at first, but benefited from equipment for TeleSUR's future transmissions. In contrast, part of the newscast was produced in the Andean part of Ecuador. These differences in participation and intensity in the creation and operation of TeleSUR correspond, to a certain extent, to the asymmetries between Latin American countries. However, at the same time, they also point out the priorities of cooperation between the participants of the Latin American integration project, and the political disputes between them.

It is also worth noting that the participation of each TeleSUR member aimed to respect other members' political, social, economic and legislative characteristics. Because of its elites' low level of political engagement with the Latin American communication project, it was difficult for Uruguay to achieve a formal adhesion. The country had to carry out reforms in the communications sector through parliament, by negotiating with the conservative parties. At the time, President Tabaré Vazquez (2005-2010) even yielded to the pressure of opposition forces submitting the TeleSUR treaty signing for congressional consideration. Only in 2006, through *Frente Amplio*, did the Senate approve the document, which was sent to the Chamber of Deputies and waited for about three years until it was voted (Moraes 2015, 158).

Argentina also faced internal resistance to the document and in its participation as a founding member of TeleSUR. According to Moraes (2015), the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner were sometimes silent with regard to public communication policies. Even after Argentina's adhesion, during the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007), access to the station was very restricted because only DirecTV subscribers were allowed to watch the TeleSUR channel. Audience was around 6%.

Another difficulty faced by Argentina was the cable television press pool's refusal to transmit TeleSUR content, even though the station was free of charge and authorized. Controlled by large signal providers linked to two large transnational communications conglomerates, *Cablevisión* and *Multicanal*, market verticalization envisaged elimination of the competition through control of the communications system's different instances. The expansion of TeleSUR's signal was only authorized in Cristina Kirchner's government (2008-2015), when the president assumed a national media democratization policy (Moraes 2015). In 2010, after several battles between government, Congress and communications conglomerates, and because of the migration from analog to digital broadcasting, subsidized by Cristina Kirchner's administration, TeleSUR could finally expand its signal through digital transmission.

The evolution of TeleSUR broadcasts amidst member states was equally slow in Ecuador, since only in 2011 was the broadcast service available in Quito and Guayaquil. In Cuba, the open signal dates back to 2013.

As of 2009, TeleSUR began to be transmitted via open signal in Caracas, Valencia, Barquisimeto and Puerto La Cruz. For Nogueira (2012), the station's operation was important so as to reflect Latin American identity strengthening, in opposition to 'American imperialism' perceived in patronage systems and represented by the communications conglomerates magnates (Tunstall and Palmer 1991; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002).

From TeleSUR's point of view, guaranteeing space for Latin American 'plurality of voices' would represent a revolutionary counterpoint to the use of the usual 'single discourse' perceived in major communication chains and international news agencies interested in global cultural diffusion (Cañizález and Lugo 2007). Therefore, the use of culture and communication, allied to a single vehicle, would seek to strengthen different local and regional identity ties in a new and challenging possibility to increase regional integration (Steinberger 2005; Santos and Fontes 2018).

## Identities and cultures in Latin American regional integration

Since the beginning, TeleSUR was conceived to bring together culture and communication as two sides of the same coin. The station presented itself as another battle front striving for regional integration. It also aimed at strengthening the Latin American community, based on its different identities, which faced globalization challenges and the 'strategic submission of the regional bourgeoisie' to foreign capital (Santos 2000, 36). At the beginning of the 21st century, when the realignment of regional progressive forces sought to overcome Latin America's traditional dependent insertion in the periphery of capitalism, Chávez believed that the inclusion of a Latin American broadcasting service would strengthen the regional integration project.

As was said by Sarti (2011), "It is worth emphasizing that it is due to the attempt to overcome its peripheral condition that integration is postulated in South America." Bearing in mind its formation proposal and the idea of an inter-American confederation of states, we can say that this integration goes back to Bolivarian ideals. Also, it strives above all to remove past experiences that did not contemplate such emancipating reach. In this sense, as Sarti points out (2011, 180) from her readings of Quijano (2005), it is necessary to take into account that "integration is a category present in the imaginary which aims at overcoming the coloniality that has settled on the continent."

As for Venezuela, after Chávez's election, the government signaled the end of the liberal agenda adopted by previous governments. In its place, Chávez proposed a notably national-developmental agenda which had the cultural factor as one of its cornerstones<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, in reforming cultural

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, as Bolaño (2014, 84) emphasizes in rescuing Celso Furtado's thought, it is important to consider that 'The concept of cultural dependence, elaborated by Furtado, is at the origin of dependency theories [... and that] in the Furtadian formulation, cultural dependence is not determined by technical and productive dependence, but rather the contrary'.



politics, Chávez simultaneously tried to promote the representation of different Venezuelan ethnicities. He aimed to promote an inclusive, multiple and renewed national identity under the ideals of his *21<sup>st</sup> century socialism*, and also under the Bolivarian regional integration ideals, which he perceived as an effective response to external challenges.

In this context, TeleSUR's creation was key to the viability of Chávez's political project at national, regional and international levels (Fontes and Lessa 2019). This is especially true, as Beyhaut (1994, 189) observed, since cultural diversity, in its linguistic diversity, constituted an obstacle to integration (if there were no new forms of communication such as television), to contribute to overcoming language barriers in the region.

In addition to his commitment to the regional integration process, Chávez has made efforts to bring the Group of 15, the G-77, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Rio Group together in order to strengthen his objections and to promote their renewal, in view of the norms imposed by the architecture of the International System hegemony (Blanco 2005; Fontes 2017). Therefore, through the National Economic and Social Development Plan of 2001-2007 (Jácome 2007), Chávez strengthened Venezuela's regional and international integration with initiatives such as PetroAmérica, Petrosul, Petrocaribe, PetroAndina, the development of the 'New MERCOSUR' (2006), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUL), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and TeleSUR (Kfuri and Flores 2009; Valente 2012).

In the context of Chávez's government projection, TeleSUR quickly presented itself as a key instrument to exercise public and media diplomacy<sup>5</sup>. Since Chávez understood that Venezuelan cultural policy and a regional integration proposal should be TeleSUR's priorities, he conceived a single set of actions to disseminate images of regional integration and to spread Venezuelan culture. Chávez was also concerned with the diffusion of his image as a nationalist, a developmentalist leader and an opponent to US hegemony. In this sense, his project brought a cultural policy innovation, which encouraged and fostered the production of Venezuelan cinema, creating film schools and promoting exchanges of television content (Fontes and Lessa 2019).

## Innovation, logistics and networks: TeleSUR's search of regional integration in the Digital Age

Sarti (2017) suggests the need to reflect on regional integration processes. To do so, we should bear in mind new theoretical contributions and new analysis tools, since current theoretical models are inadequate and/or outdated to comprehend multiple ongoing integration processes, especially in the case of Latin America. In this sense, we would like to point out the discussion about the

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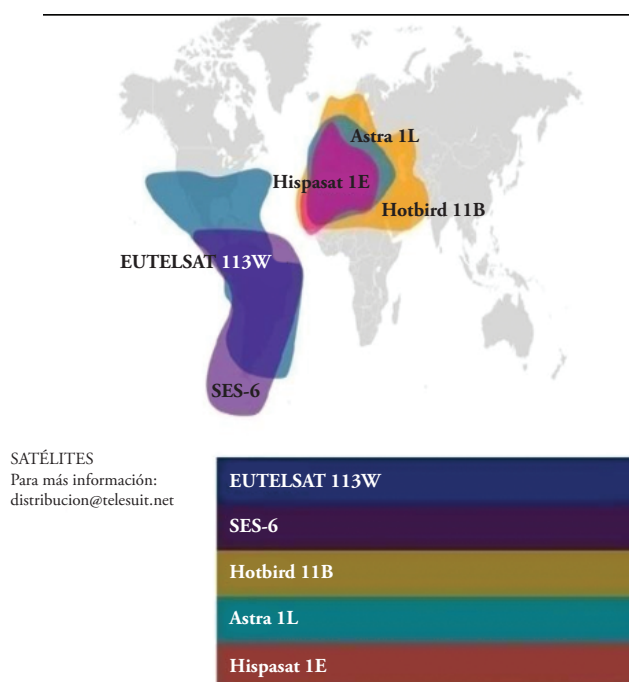
<sup>5</sup> Gilboa (2001, 1) identifies, in the information age, three types of diplomatic action through the media: public diplomacy ("where state and nonstate actors use the media and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies"), media diplomacy ("where officials use the media to communicate with actors to promote conflict resolution"), media-broker diplomacy ("where journalists temporarily assume the role of diplomats and serve as mediators in international negotiations").

role played by the media and culture in the development of regional integration. Mainly, as pointed out by MacMillan (2004), who recovers Cox (1986; 1994) and Hoffman (1987), we can highlight the media's influence on social forces, as well as on the architecture and legal-political order of world politics.

TeleSUR's initial investments ensured the hiring of approximately 100 correspondents in charge of covering several Latin American cities. They were also responsible for producing news and reports in two languages, that is, Spanish and Portuguese (Santoro and Valente 2007; Nogueira and Ribeiro 2013). In addition, according to its president, Patrícia Villegas, TeleSUR also hires temporary professionals or freelancers to cover those regions around the world without TeleSUR branches. With regard to partnerships, more than 30 contracts, aimed to promote regional access, were signed with communication companies. Furthermore, more than 160 professionals work in several countries, such as technicians and journalists, and there are currently 12 branches in several capitals: Washington, Havana, Buenos Aires, Quito, Montevideo and Brasilia<sup>6</sup> (Santoro and Valente 2007).

As for satellite television coverage, it is free of charge and distributed to public, private, educational and community broadcasters. Hotbird13B satellite has been programmed to cover almost all over Europe, part of the Middle East and North Africa. Astra 1L satellite broadens the signal reception in Europe and North Africa, with the aid of satellite Hispasat 1E. Likewise, Eutelsat 113W and SES-6 satellites expand signal reception in Latin America.

**Figure 1. TeleSUR Map**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

<sup>6</sup> According to Fontes (*apud* Almeida 2017), Brasilia's branch no longer operates.

Another means for expansion and technological innovation produced by TeleSUR took place through social networks (Recuero 2009, 135). In this sense, TeleSUR was launched as a broadcaster. At the same time, a news portal, which produced reports, materials and specific content, was created, and both continued and reinforced what was already being produced in order to institute a multiplatform communication (Santos and Fontes 2018).

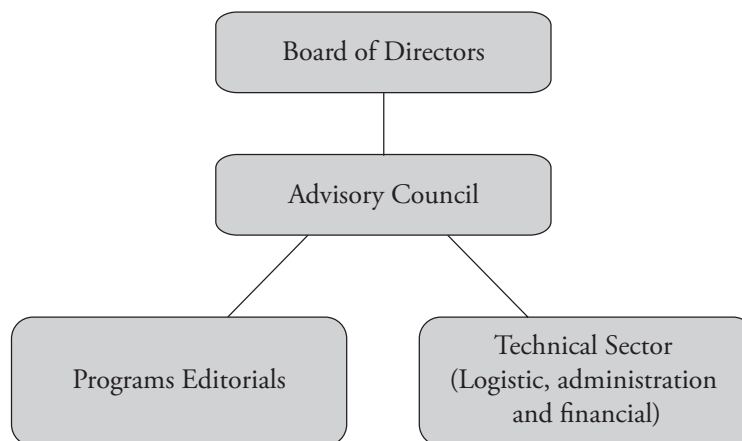
**Figure 2. Social Network of TeleSUR**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

As for its organization chart, TeleSUR has a Board of Directors, which is composed of States' representatives and (co)owners appointed by the governments, totaling an average of 7 people. It also has an Advisory Council which consists of about 30 intellectuals and activists from Latin America and the world's left, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, journalist Ignacio Ramonet, writer and historian Eduardo Galeano (up until his death in 2015), filmmaker Walter Salles Jr, Silvio Rodríguez, Tariq Ali, among others (Moraes 2015). The Board of Directors is responsible for dealing with editorial, economic, and political decisions; for ensuring the station's presidential rotation every 5 years; and for defining the annual technological investments (Fontes *apud* Almeida 2017).

**Figure 3. Organization Chart of TeleSUR**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

Another effort made by TeleSUR was the incorporation of new media, such as the RSS system, which allows users to access information first hand. On June 2007, a YouTube channel was created. It has about 159,795 subscribers, 144,908,910 views and more than 100 thousand videos in Spanish. Other station channels were opened. They provided content in English (31,702 videos) and Portuguese (11,446 videos). Since 2009, Twitter has also been integrated into the multistate system, with about 1,250,000 followers. In 2012, a Facebook page was launched. In 2013, an Instagram account was also incorporated, and it has approximately 2,740 photographs and 46 thousand followers. Other social networks have also been used by TeleSUR in recent years, such as Google+, Pinterest and Paper-Li. There are also Blogs on the network’s website, with about 43 journalists.

Investing in digital media has become a means to increase relevance and come close to the audience. By using IOS or Android systems, the user can download the TeleSUR application, either in English or Spanish, as well as access the broadcaster’s entire content. One of its latest releases is the application ‘*Esta Historia se llama Chávez*’ which is about former President Hugo Chávez’s legacy and history.

**Figure 4. Digital Media**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

## The content analysis: TeleSUR's legacies and ambivalences

In content analysis, one can observe sociospatial influences in the economic, social, cultural and political context in which certain discourses are inserted (Bardin 2011). Not only does this methodology present the content of the speeches, but it also shows quantitative data, which can be analyzed in a qualitative way (Hermann 2008). In this sense, we analyzed videos from 25 television programs produced by TeleSUR and exported to its YouTube channel between 2005 and 2016. We observed that until 2009, TeleSUR did not have a web portal, therefore, many of the videos released between 2005 and 2007 were not found. Regarding the themes chosen in this analysis, we selected the following key words: identity, regional integration, nationalism, national identity, culture, Latin America, South America.

**Figure 5. TeleSUR Programs 2017**

<b>TeleSUR Programs 2017</b>	
TeleSUR Noticias	Guia tu cuerpo
The Empire files with Abby Martin	En Juego
Los Nuestros	Nuestra América Deportiva
Es Noticia	Entrevista con Jorge Gestoso
Edición Central	Congénero
Reportajes TeleSUR – Fidel y Chávez	El puente em La i
Prisma	Vidas
Temos	Cruce de Palabras
Impacto Económico	The World Today with Tariq Ali
Deportes TeleSUR	Reporte 360
TeleSUR Noticias Lenguaje de Señas	Entre Fronteras
Zona Verde	Agenda Abierta
Conexión Global	

Source: own elaboration (2017)

We also highlight that the analysis contemplated playlists (sorted by countries) created by the station on YouTube, considering the programs that were on at that time, but not only them. In addition, in this article we emphasize that some playlists were filled by more than one country, since the content was related to two or more nations. It is also worth noting that, among the limitations of this article, there are no graphs with the content of each program, nor comparisons between them. However, we bear in mind that the broadcaster has currently diversified and (re) structured its content on YouTube, changing, to a certain extent, its visual identity, organization and the systematization of the content disseminated on social networks.

This choice was determined by the project that intended to construct a social classification system related to Latin American national states' history, with an emphasis on identity, which is

the most common content produced by the broadcaster under nationalist discourse. The purpose of these discourses was to offer a homogenous, or classificatory, view of the different Latin American groups. This perspective suggests an asymmetry with the history of European nation states' formation, which means the internalization of a colonialist vision that resembles everything and is subject to its own image.

On the other hand, programs about member states are significantly lower in number when compared to those about Venezuela, for the latter is presented as the main publicized symbol. Countries like Cuba and Uruguay have a limited number of videos available on YouTube. However, Venezuelan videos about other countries discuss subjects such as identity, history and regional integration.

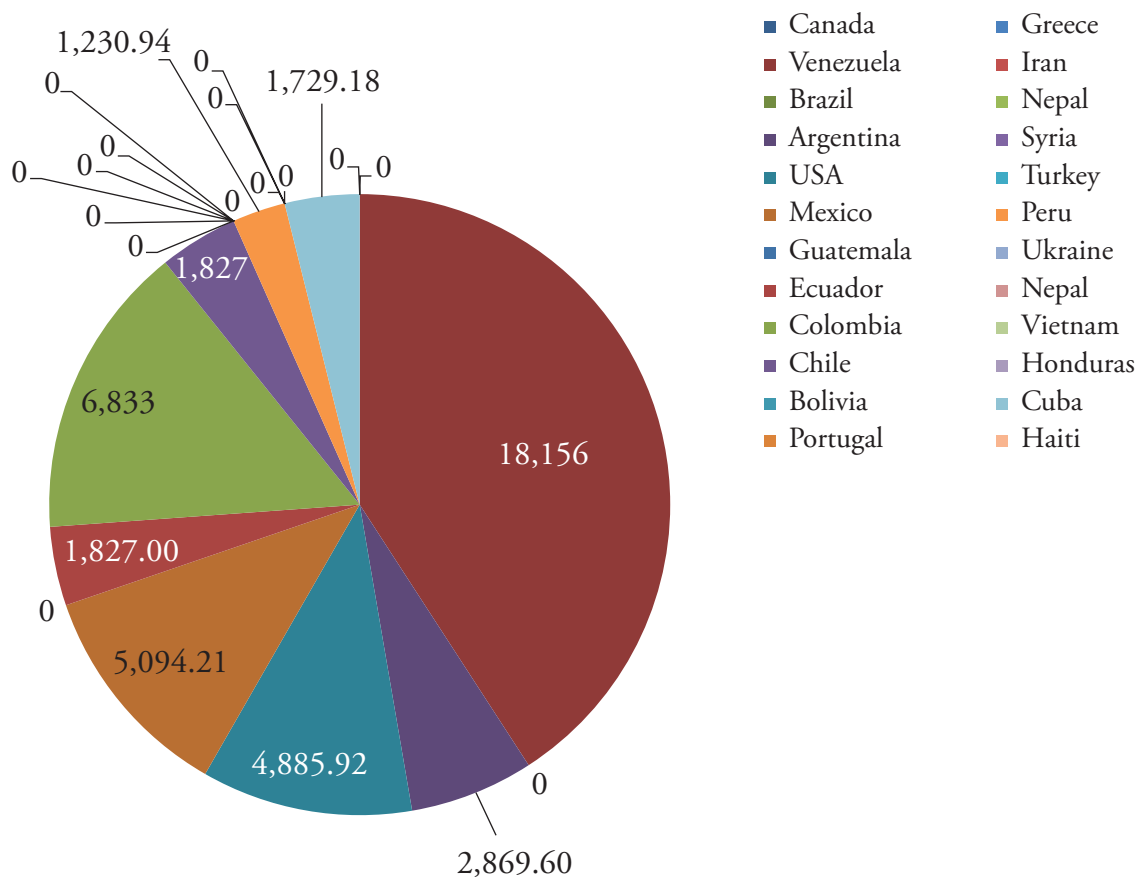
According to TeleSUR's representatives, in general, the reports produced sought to encompass and respect cultural differences. However, Pieretti (2014) observes that many minority groups, called "*mestizos*," made up of black and indigenous people, do not feel represented or recognized by TeleSUR's cultural-media policy. Since they were interested in greater representation, participation and recognition in Venezuelan political and cultural-media life, *mestizos* began to distance themselves and even question the broadcaster's content. This debate seems to have been unsatisfactorily conducted by Chávez's government, for it produced increasing desertions. The dissatisfied and resentful *mestizos* find in online social networks a channel to oppose the lack of representation that is common in different spheres of Chávez's government, TeleSUR included. In this movement, they formed another opposition group to the government, making Chávez's position more complex, especially when building his leadership on a counter-hegemonic movement that he tried to promote in the region on several fronts and means (Rupert 2005; Pieretti 2014; Castells 2017).

To what extent has Latin American cultural diversity influenced the trajectory so far covered by TeleSUR? Or, as Taylor (1998) highlighted in a seminal text on multiculturalism and the politics of recognition: how to solve the problematic relationship between the recognition of collective identities, the individual authenticity ideal and the survival of cultures?

In this sense, we understand that issues of identity, multiculturalism and recognition policies are phenomena that transcend TeleSUR. But we also observe that several impasses remain within the broadcaster's journalistic production, whose main theoretical reference is the colonial inheritance internalized as civilizational processes which are only superficially questioned. This thus reveals the continuity of the impacts caused by assimilation and colonial annihilation (Todorov 1999; Inayatullah and Blaney 2004). TeleSUR was therefore confronted by different 'minority' groups and accused of contributing to a homogenized pre-Columbian history view that excludes the history and cosmologies of groups that hold other ontological referents and resulted from several diasporas. But how do we deal with the globalization challenges? How do we deal with modernity gaps and failures, if a broadcaster like TeleSUR reproduces, in its narratives, a reduced and consolidated identity-difference relation according to fixed and centralized categories?

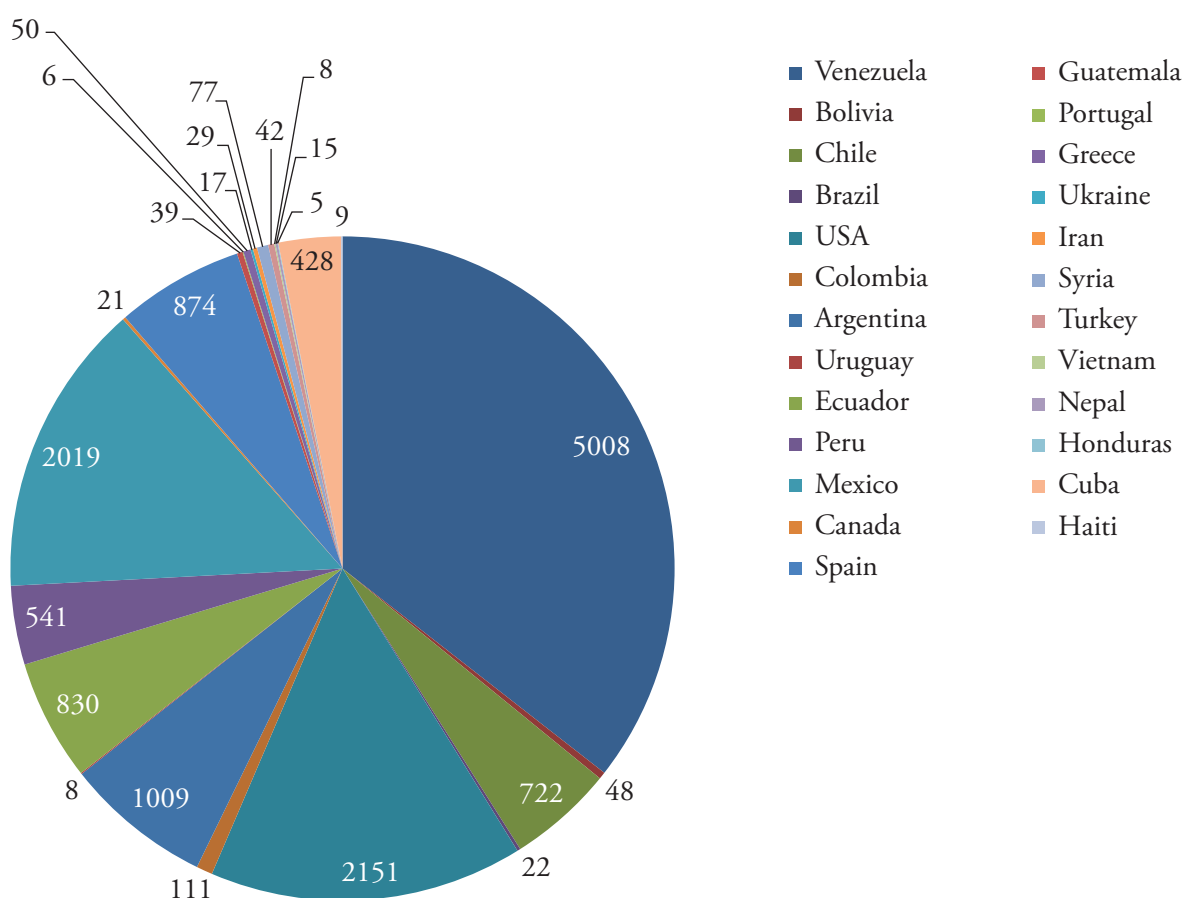
By not displacing, or decentralizing, discourses routinely articulated through chain of discourses based on modernity, TeleSUR reproduces, albeit involuntarily, the national state system structures whose foundations were marked by the homogenization of communities (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Bhabha 2014). Criticism of minority groups like the ‘mestizos’ regarding TeleSUR’s homogenizing content can be broadly evaluated by the 100 thousand videos available on YouTube between 2007 and 2016. We observed that from these 100 thousand videos, about 50,000 were about Venezuela, 21,000 about the USA and 20,000 about Mexico. As for the relation between content and transmission time, we observed that 18,000 minutes of video have Venezuela as its core topic, 6,800 minutes are dedicated to Colombia, 5,000 minutes to Mexico and 4,800 minutes to the USA. With regard to Venezuela and Colombia’s playlist, there are several videos that cover both countries, probably due to different political issues – considering multiple historical aspects characterized by rivalry dating from the colonial period (Gran Colombia project), especially those related to the border between the countries.

**Figure 6. Content of TeleSUR by time of transmission (2007-2016) on YouTube**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

**Figure 7. Content of TeleSUR by time of transmission (2007-2016)**



Source: own elaboration (2017)

As mentioned above, Venezuela is the most represented country when it comes to TeleSUR’s content production. However, many of these videos, as in the case of Colombia, also encompass other countries. For example, the USA appears in Venezuelan videos that cover the issue of Venezuelan national oil producer, PDVSA. It is important to highlight that many videos have been deleted from TeleSUR’s YouTube channel. This way, it affects all countries. Bolivia, however, does not have a playlist on TeleSUR’s YouTube channel; there are only scattered videos in other playlists. As for Brazil, a channel in Portuguese was set up in 2011. By January 2017 it had 11,446 videos, 2,477 subscribers and 870,413 views.

Argentina does not have all of its videos in TeleSUR’s playlist on YouTube; also, two videos concerning the country were deleted. Cuba, also a founding member, has its own playlist; however, some of its videos are not associated with a main lineup where, for example, the death of former president Fidel Castro had a section specially created for it. Mexico, a non-member state, only had one video deleted from its playlist. Another noteworthy issue is that videos about the USA and Venezuela have a specific playlist.

In general, content of TeleSUR videos deals with diverse subjects that range from economic to cultural dimensions. We emphasize, however, that much of the content produced, edited and



published by the broadcaster (through reports, documentaries, etc.) mainly attempts to break with hegemonic discourses articulated between the media, the elites and the public opinion that operate transnationally.

In this sense, we verified, through content analysis, that the speeches extracted from TeleSUR's YouTube channel reinforce our hypotheses that TeleSUR acted as a tool of Chávez's public and media diplomacy, for the videos transmitted about Venezuela, and mainly about Hugo Chávez, were numerically superior to those of other countries. In addition, this material privileged angles, narratives and content always favorable to the figure of former President Chávez, since they explored, above all, his articulation, negotiation and political mediation abilities when facing several conflicts experienced in Venezuela and Latin America under the influence of USA and European hegemonic politics.

Videos that explore and/or are related to President Chávez's image mostly refer to his legacy as a leader and to his personal trajectory. The application '*Esta Historia se llama Chávez*' displays interviews, documentaries, images and special content that contribute to the diffusion of Chávez's public and media diplomacy, reinforcing, once again, our hypothesis that TeleSUR did not include topics and agendas of other countries in the region and that this strategy operated in favor of Venezuela.

## Conclusion

Chávez faced dispute and opposition to his government, which led him to strategies with limited and paradoxical outcomes. As for the communication field, he was confronted with private media, which, despite their press freedom denunciations, remained in control of most of that market and its audience. Investments in official communication and advertising, and especially in the creation of TeleSUR, also resulted in mitigated triumphs over the credibility of his government or in support of his larger projects: the construction of Bolivarian socialism, supported by an emancipating regional integration project. The local and regional 'bourgeoisie strategic submission' to foreign capital remained unbreakable in its opposition to Chávez's socialist and nationalistic progressiveness.

By questioning the political parallels, cross-ownership systems, and media influence on Venezuelan and Latin American public opinion, which acted in favor of their respective political and economic conveniences, Chávez faced a daily crossfire. The media conglomerates reacted according to a local-global intersection of former media monopolies that form powerful *coronelistas* networks and groups linked to local-global (transnational) elites.

In turn, the data analyzed demonstrate that Venezuela effectively holds an equal percentage and/or more than 50% of videos and transmission time when compared to all the other member states. Thus, we confirm the thesis that the station served mainly as a powerful tool of Chávez's public and media diplomacy. The content and the applications created by TeleSUR's project

reinforce the image of the commander as one who is able to exercise mediation, negotiation and objection processes in world politics. This personalistic approach, and the notably anti-USA rhetoric, is one of the reasons for Brazil's limited engagement in TeleSUR's project.

That said, it is important to consider the difficult task that Chávez himself assigned to TeleSUR: to deepen and broaden regional integration in conducting an anti-hegemonic struggle through its public and media diplomacy. The result was an incomplete and contradictory mission. The multi-station, a symbol of regional integration, has translated images in ambivalent and hybrid ways through symbols/representations of the colonial heritage and the nation's positive narratives (Bhabha 2014). In this sense, it sought to ensure an identity ideal among multiple populations, at the same time reproducing negative discourses that erase the ancestry and cosmologies of the very same multiple populations of Latin America, by reproducing cultural and media values originated from the ideals of Modernity.

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