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Political economy of communication, Human security and development:
The first 100 days of Evo Morales's Government in Bolivia

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Introduction

Bolivia is South America's poorest country with 70% of its 9.2 million inhabitants living in poverty (Chavez, 2005). Its indigenous population, over 50% of the total, are among the nation's poorest (www.latinamericabureau.org/?lid=1992). According to the UN, 14.4% of the Bolivian population lives on less than US$ 1 a day (www.un.org/esa/population/.../bolivia.pdf). Political instability and civil disorder has characterised Bolivia's history; the country has had 188 coups d'etat in 157 years - between independence in 1825 and 1982 (www.latinamericabureau.org/?lid=1992). Bolivia has been historically governed by elites (descendants of Europeans), the influentials "who get the most of what there is to get" (Lasswell 1950, 3). Nevertheless, on December 18th, 2005, things changed: Evo Morales was elected as the first indigenous President in Bolivia's history, giving the masses (indigenes, less influential) a voice. He won with 54% of the popular vote.

His discourse was incendiary, rejecting "neoliberalism" and "imperialism" as well as corruption (Buckley 2006, 54). His campaign slogans pledged nationalization of oil and gas reserves - which he achieved recently on May 1st - the "recuperation" of natural resources for Bolivians and a renewed respect for *campesinos* (peasants) and workers (Eviatar 2006, 13).

Bolivia is the world's third largest drug supplier, after Colombia and Peru (Chavez, 2005). The United States has tried unsuccessfully to eradicate the illegal production of *coca* in Bolivia. The speech of Morales - a former *coca* grower - has been going directly against the States and his fierce opposition has revived his popularity.

This essay will examine the following statement:

> "…means of communication is a dangerous weapon to be placed in the hands of private institutions driven by profit interests as much as it is in when placed in the hands of monopoly state power" (Wilkin 2001, 134).

In doing so, the first 100 days of Evo Morales' government (January 22nd to May 1st, 2006) will be analysed with respect to three elements. Firstly, the essay will consider the political economy of communication and development. Secondly, it will look over how poverty, lack of education and low access to information undermine human security. Thirdly, it will briefly discuss aspects of the civil society at levels of global-local social organisation, the role of and media ownership and control in civil society, and the role of different types of actors in civil society.

The inquiry - which will be undertaken through basic approaches to discourse analysis in the media - will be focused on the values President Evo Morales has been promoting among his

voters before and after his election, and examining from a critical point of view if his measures are contributing to enhance human security during his 100 first days of government.

Literature Review

According to Thomas (2000, 6), human security describes a condition of existence in which basic material needs are met. Mosco (1996, 27) says that political economy is the study of "control and survival in social life". In his words, communication is a "social process of exchange whose product is the mark or embodiment of a social relationship" (ibid, 72). From Thomas's (2000, 34) point of view, the orthodox concept of development can be referred to as the change from a traditional subsistence economy to a modern industrial economy. Therefore, human security, development and communication are strongly tied.

The dominant approach to development and therefore the promotion of human security is "more deeply rooted in neoliberal values and policies than ever before" (ibid, 51). Neoliberalism is promoted as "the mechanism to allow global trading that would see all nations prospering and developing fairly and equitably" (Shah, 2000). However, this model fails in addressing how economic and political life are not simply shaped by rational actors seeking to perfect market efficiency, but by "expressions of social power and interest that in turn reflect factors such as class, patriarchy and nationalism" (Wilkin 2001, 46). Human autonomy and free society are central features of human security and "they are the bases for our ability to make rational choices about social, political and economic life" (Wilkin 2001, 2). Consequently, freedom - which implicitly means participation and a notion of democracy - is a central issue for human security. According to Thomas (2000, 6), its qualitative aspect is about the achievement of human dignity which incorporates personal autonomy, control over one's life and unhindered participation in the life of the community. Both statements highlight that access to communication is a key point for the human being to legitimately decide on her/his future.

Education and literacy are crucial to human security "as tools of intellectual self-defence and development" (Wilkin 2001, 2), which means the possibility of progress, connected to social justice. In traditional societies, there is a strong link between education and level of income. Low income and inequality contribute to human insecurity. Lack of money, access and power make the working, living and social environments of the poor "extremely insecure" and "severely limit" the options to improve their lives (www.unescap.org/.../urban_poverty.htm). Hence, it is highly important to encourage an environment with choices in order to alleviate poverty.

In a political economy there are those who make decisions and those who have less access to power. "Human insecurity results directly from existing power structures that determine who enjoys the entitlement to security and who does not" (Thomas 2000, 4). From Wilkin's (2001, 15) point of view, "power is not simply a destructive capacity that people and states possess", but is equally a constructive force which enables them to acquire knowledge and build better communities. Lasswell (1950, 3) suggests - from the political point of view - that elite and mass can be differentiated in a society through values, which are deference, income and safety. Those who enjoy more deference, income and safety have more power.

From Wilkin's (2001, 134) point of view, too much power in public hands (monopoly) can be as dangerous as in private institutions (profit interests). In his opinion, private elites are mainly interested in profit and maintenance of their own position and power in society, and therefore this "reinforces the tyranny of the minority at the expense of the public good" (ibid, 121). As a consequence, he says, the public sphere is further eroded and becomes a realm structured and controlled by the interests of private power. However, Wilkin's position seems too radical. Bagdikian (1983, 226) points out that the answer is not the elimination of private enterprise in the media, but "equitable distribution of power". The diversity of private media is a key tool in any society, allowing a critical view on any state or political manipulation attempt on information. Profit is a key issue for the private media to survive, but this does not necessarily mean they

neither solely serve their own interests with respect to information and communication nor necessarily undermine the public service.

According to Mosco (1996, 72), communication and society are mutually constituted, and therefore it is necessary to think about how communication practices construct society. This idea is reinforced by Wilkin (2001, 117), who says that the communication industry is the primary source of information about social, economic and political life for the majority of people. From Bagdikian´s (1983, 226) point of view, "giving citizens a choice in ideas and information is as important as giving them a choice in politics". However, actors in civil society do not have equal access to information and communication and therefore their autonomy, levels of participation and capacity to produce change can be very uneven.

Case Study

The research methodology applied in this case was a basic approach to media discourse. In doing this, the main statements of President Morales were analysed in journals and news available on the Internet from his election until May 1st, including his inauguration discourse (January 22nd). Morales focused on three main areas: indigenous identity (rejecting the neoliberal economic model), nationalization of energy resources, and the defence of *coca* leaf cultivation.

The most important measure he announced during his first 100 days of government (May 1st, 2006) was the placement of the hydrocarbon energy under state control. "The pillage of our natural resources by foreign companies is over" (Morales 2006a, cited in news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/…/1210487.stm). It is highly probable that this measure will isolate Bolivia economically.

Morales criticized the current economic model without giving an alternative. "We need to solve the social problems, the economic problems of the majority, changing those economic models which blocked the development of the Bolivian population" (Morales 2006c, cited in www.esmas.com/.../498591.html). "In Bolivia, the neoliberal model does not go anymore" (Morales 2006b).

In his opinion, the indigenous population has been "marginalised, humiliated, hated, despised and condemned to extinction" (ibid). "We want autonomy with solidarity, reciprocity, but mainly in the redistribution of wealth and natural resources" (Morales 2006d, cited in news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/...4546928.stm).

Although he is against drug trafficking, he announced he was going to legalize the cultivation of *coca* leaf - the basis for cocaine - which is produced by poor peasants. "Long life to the *coca* and death to *yanquies* (American government)", he used to say before his election (Morales, cited in Oppenheimer 2005).

In spite of his radical ideas, he supports the concept of doing business. "Only producing we will overcome poverty. It is important to do business, good business for Bolivia" (Morales 2006b). However, he is not precise about his concept of business, even as he attacks the neoliberal economic model.

Discussion and Conclusion

Indigenous people, the majority of the Bolivian population, had the chance to vote last December for their leader, Evo Morales, accomplishing in this way one of the most important and relevant issues in human security: freedom, participation and consequently bringing on democracy. Hence, they had the chance to make rational decisions, on the basis of human dignity, personal autonomy, and deciding on the life of the community.

The triumph of an indigenous candidate swept away the feeling that these minorities - in terms of power - have been "under the table" for a long time, and that they have been commanded by elites without Indian roots. According to Corr (2006, 32), in Latin America, and especially in Bolivia, "to define oneself as Indian includes a rebellious sense of having been dominated and exploited for centuries, up to and including today". In his opinion, "resentment and revenge against the perceived dominating class, especially traditional political elites, is part of one's Indian identity" (ibid). Therefore, Morales's discourse has been trying to recover indigenous dignity and identity, but through the antagonism and rhetoric of a revolutionary past.

Unequal safety seems not to be such an irritating value as unequal distribution of deference and income, strongly linked to education levels, and therefore to human security. The illiteracy rate is 13.3% of the adult population (www.bolpress.com/...=2006030101). Last March, Morales launched a literacy campaign, which will benefit 720,000 Bolivians by 2008 (ibid), a good start to reduce the breach in human security.

Development - conceived as a change from a traditional subsistence economy to a modern industrial economy - has been strongly based on neoliberal roots, which Morales has been rejecting from the start. On the one hand he defends the fact of doing good business for Bolivia, but on the other hand he changes the rules for foreign investment, and defends _coca_ cultivation (subsistence farming). Both measures are enhancing the concept of identity, but they are not helping to reduce poverty and going along the path of development. If Evo Morales does not help market expansion (economic element) and cannot avoid any social unrest (political element) in the future, then improving human happiness will become very difficult.

Before the 1980´s, media mainly belonged to the state, small private companies, unions, and the Catholic Church (Cajias, 1999), "which allowed Bolivians to listen to multiple points of view". After the economic changes in 1985, there was an explosion of private media and its further concentration by populist politicians, wealthy entrepreneurs coming from other economic areas (Mr. Raul Garafulic), and religious leaders (ibid). The "Garafulic empire" (main television channels and influential newspapers) is considered a threat (ibid) by different types of actors in civil society, regarding independence and political as well as social pressures. This fact reinforces Wilkin's point of view that private elites are interested in keeping their position and power in society.

High illiteracy rates in Bolivia give the radio a huge importance. The Catholic Church has the largest number of media. While its Radio Fides has the highest ratings, Radio San Gabriel is strong in rural areas. "Some analysts believe this concentration is an advantage, because it allows an independent version of the political and economic power and from a very critical point of view" (Cajias, 1999). This statement highlights Bagdikian's opinion that the answer to media ownership is not the elimination of private enterprise in the media, but "equitable distribution of power" (1983, 226).

According to Corr (2006, 34), the challenge for President Morales and for the Bolivian leaders should be focused on including the excluded, "bringing indigenous and disadvantaged people more fully into Bolivian society and politics with greater participation in the decisions that affect their lives and opportunities to share more fully and equitably in the country's economy, politics and governance".

In this process and especially in satisfying communication needs (education, information and communication), means of communication have a key role to play, but the control and ownership as well as the power they have, must be balanced. To help enhance human security, Bolivia should really think about reinforcing development and building a more equitable distribution of social and economic power, thereby reducing the big gap existing between the elites and the masses.

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