Chapter 8 Media and Multilateralism in South America: How the International Matters to Domestic Media Reform

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Currently we are seeing major examples of media reform in several South American countries. But accounts of these ongoing processes focus primarily on political processes at the national level, particularly media’s place in the renegotiation of the social contract between state, capital and society. While these works provide important analysis of national political processes, they are limited by their tendency to overlook wider regional and international contexts, including regional integration processes such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), or the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). This is problematic because ultimately media reforms should enable more equitable development processes within global capitalist circuits, not merely greater recognition or representation at the national level. Since patterns of capitalist insertion are often negotiated and implemented at the regional level rather than the domestic level, voice within the domestic sphere may be insufficient to ensure the goal of redistribution. This oversight is particularly relevant given Latin America’s changing orientation vis-a-vis the global economy in an era of global power shift. Given the global financial crisis, China’s rise, and the decline of multilateralism within global trading relationships, South American states have stepped up their international diplomatic game, while at the same time opening themselves to increased dependency on natural resource extraction, producing new patterns of exploitation and resistance within processes of uneven globalization.

In this chapter, in an effort to move the media reform discussion more in the direction of international political economy concerns, I first discuss patterns of capitalist insertion and processes of media reform. I suggest three different models at work in Latin America: cordial complex interdependence and market-based media reforms (e.g. Brazil), counter hegemonic network management (e.g. Venezuela), and finally informational capitalism dependent development (e.g. the PPP corridor). I show that the fact of these different models highlights the significance of the relationship between management of capitalist insertion and patterns of media reform. I then go on to discuss, in very general terms, three implications of this international political economy reading of South American media reform: 1) Plurality of voices ultimately rests on successful distribution of resources which in turn requires a wider analysis of post-neoliberal developmental policies within global trade and production networks. 2) As a result, media reforms need to be strategically aligned with development processes at the national, regional and international levels. This includes careful consideration of policies to develop and regulate media distribution channels, commercial aspects of digital production and circulation, and industrial policy related to innovation and digital technologies. 3) These considerations have significant implications for the work of social movements in terms of medium, strategy, message and target. In particular, it is important not to let the current interest in enabling local media (e.g. community radio) displace or overshadow the work required to produce convergence around regional and transnational concerns.

Contemporary Approaches to Peripheral Capitalist Insertion
Latin American international political economy has a long tradition of theorizing the international from the perspective of ‘peripheral’ insertion into capitalism. The roots of this tradition can be found in the dependista scholarship of the 1970s (see Beigel 2006 for a comprehensive review of this literature). In this line of thinking, ‘One of the primary manifestations of dependency reveals itself at the level of the state, whose consolidation is constrained by the changing nature of capitalism’ (Tickner 2003: 329). In other words, domestic economic and political compromises are constrained to a large degree by external economic and political forces. With this in mind, the international matters to our understanding of media reform because reforms and their effects will result from social processes that are conditioned by capitalist insertion. This provides the theoretical backdrop for Schiller’s (1969) discussion of media imperialism, and in particular the observation that domestic media markets are shaped by international markets in ways that constrain the ability of states to establish autonomous media policy with implications for culture, education, production, politics, and so on.

However, older dependency frameworks are limited by their methodological focus on international structures to the exclusion of other processes, particularly at the domestic level (Merke 2011). Structural discourses leave little room for the generation of alternatives—by states or anyone else—especially within peripheral contexts, including through the pursuit of regional integration strategies. Furthermore, dependency theory treats capitalism as if it were something ‘out there’ to which the social processes ‘in here’ are subjected. While this approach may have made sense at a time when peripheral states were being actively incorporated into capitalism through highly uneven processes, today the situation is quite different given the global consolidation of capitalism. As a result, contemporary authors are more likely to speak of ‘variegated capitalism’ (Peck and Theodore 2007) or combined and uneven development, as a way to capture differing experiences with incorporation into what is now a fully global capitalist system, as well as the active role of states and other actors in ongoing processes of capitalist formation. For economic geographers, this can be understood in terms of the different geo-social processes that work to reproduce capitalism in different ways (Hudson 2004). This approach puts more emphasis on the social production of capitalism, and by extension, varieties of media systems corresponding to varieties of capitalism (Hallin and Mancini 2004) within a globalized system (Waisbord 2013). Thus Robinson argues ‘more determinant (of causal priority) in conceptualizing regions within the larger unity of the emerging global economy and society than uneven accumulation, while still important, is the distinct configurations of social forces and institutions that arise from these configurations’ (2011: 355).

Indeed, in Latin America social responses to neoliberal globalization have given rise to a variety of new institutional arrangements that have resulted not only in a renegotiation of democratic social compromises (Cameron 2009) but also in new patterns of capitalist insertion. After the debt crisis, decades of IFI-mandated structural adjustment gave rise to mounting social pressure throughout the region, from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the Piqueteros in Argentina. Meanwhile, throughout the 1990s, newly emergent left-wing political parties created regional spaces for reflection and exchange such as the Global Progress Foundation and Foro de São Paulo as they worked to achieve electoral success (Regalado 2007). Both social movements and political parties found inspiration in municipal democratic experimentation under the PT in Porto

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1 The word peripheral in this context is meant to indicate a contextually dependent and relative power differential between states when they enter into negotiations over economic or political issues. In this sense it is important to always attribute relativity to the word ‘dependent’ and avoid any temptation to make dependency an absolute condition.
Alegre, Brazil, and the FA in Montevideo, Uruguay, as well as in various failures in the neoliberal model and flashpoints of points of struggle, such as occurred in Ecuador and Venezuela in 1997, in Argentina in 1999, and in Peru in 2000. After 2001, social forces began to come together regularly at the World Social Forum, which first took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Under pressure from these and many other social forces, the neoliberal compromise began to shift in the region, and we began to see major upheavals in the status quo, including the election of left-leaning political leaders at the federal level. This post-neoliberal moment has come with increased state interventions in the economy, reforms to democratic institutions, and several new processes of regional integration, including ALBA and UNASUR.

However, while these new institutional arrangements came in response to a common set of forces, they have differed in their manifestations across the region. Given that the renegotiation of the social contract at the domestic level in Latin America relies on successful insertion into the global capitalist economy, state management of flows of power and resources—cultural, ideological, informational, physical—both their own and that of others, becomes an important determinant of capitalist formation. It is with this in mind that Merke (2011) suggests shifting the focus away from structural constraints and towards the locus of power driven decision-making processes at the border between the state system and domestic comparative politics. This can be understood as a ‘reintroduction of the state’ into international theorizing (Tickner 2008), but with some caveats. First, the post-neoliberal moment opened up new possibilities for autonomous state management of capitalist insertion. For example, Leiva (2008) observes that Latin America’s emerging economic model seeks ways to balance fiscal responsibility with social democratic reforms that can contribute to greater equality. But he concludes that achieving this goal will require innovations in the model of social incorporation that address power relations at both the domestic and international levels. Second, therefore, recognizing that national ability to manage international flows is constrained, states pursue regional integration projects as a strategy for improving capitalist insertion. Since states offer differing analysis of the best way to pursue management of international flows we have seen different processes of regional integration emerge in South America since the millennium. And finally, insofar as global power shift changes the context for global governance, it opens windows of political opportunity that savvy leaders can use to advance the interests of peripheral nations. For example, where Venezuela has defaulted on international loans, it has simply borrowed from China against future deliveries of petroleum.

**Three Models of Capitalist Insertion and Media Reform**

In sum, while Latin American states have become more active in their management of capitalist insertion, and pursue projects that will allow them to better manage these processes, they are still subject to the challenges of peripheral insertion into global capitalist flows. With this in mind, we can identify three broad models of capitalist insertion in the region today, which correspond, I will argue, to differing visions of media reform.

The first is a model of cordial complex interdependence, which draws inspiration from Keohane and Nye (1977), as well as the realist-institutionalist thinking of the English School of international relations theory (Buzan 2004). In this view states can best enhance their position by influencing norms of collaboration within international institutions. In other words, managing capitalist insertion rests on managing relationships—what Russell and Tokatlian call ‘relational autonomy’ (2003). Brazil has emerged as the iconic case of this approach in South America,
especially as a result of its part in reshaping integration processes. In particular, Brazil played a leadership role in challenging the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) process, has been active in restructuring the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and is the driving force behind South America’s UNASUR regional integration process. According to Celso Lafer, where once Brazil sought to build autonomy by distancing itself from the world, today the autonomy that underlies domestic democracy and development ‘can only be built through active participation in the creation of norms and guidelines of conduct for the management of global order’ (2001: 117; cited in Vidigal 2010). Norms that shape processes of accumulation emerge through what Cervo has dubbed ‘Cordial Power’ (2008), defined as ‘informal dialogue, fluid personal relationships with great international authorities and diplomatic discourse that was sympathetic to social, environmental and peace causes’ (Vidigal 2010: 34).

Brazil may rely on cordial power to smooth integration processes and influence global norms, but its weight within international political circles rests on the size and maturity of its economy, and the conversations it enters into are similarly oriented towards questions of capitalist management. Here we begin to find evidence of how international integration can shape domestic media reforms. The UNASUR process (which encompasses all of South America except French Guiana) advances in part because other South American states want access to Brazil’s markets, and benefit from Brazil’s leadership on certain international issues. In turn, the weight of UNASUR’s backing gives Brazil additional heft on the international stage. This means that maintaining the strength of the economy is key to Brazil’s strategy for capitalist insertion, and therefore, Brazil’s approach to economic management has been pro-business even as it has worked to distribute greater social benefits to citizens. This is why both the Lula and Rousseff administrations have supported policy reforms that reduce the cost of basic services such as electricity and telecommunications: cost reductions simultaneously increase business competitiveness, reduce costs to consumers, and increase the size of markets for services, since services become more accessible to a wider swath of the marketplace.

This, in turn, is the logic behind a Brazilian-driven UNASUR project, advanced within the South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN), to build a fiber optic ring around South America (Zibechi 2012a). The new infrastructure will relieve South American dependency on private commercial broadband links, which are both very expensive (contributing up to 50% of the end-user cost to connectivity in the region) and also pass through data centers in the United States (which poses a security threat). The benefits are apparent for all participating states, but the ring is being financed by Brazil’s BNDES development bank, and the regional scope of the initiative will help ensure its financial viability. (Also, the ring will have international linkages to Africa, Europe and America, all running off of Brazil’s coast, which gives Brazil a certain measure of geopolitical control over the infrastructure.)

In Brazil’s view, states need to work through regional bodies such as UNASUR to build this type of fundamental infrastructure, using state-financial backing and oversight as required. But once the backbone is built, and national broadband infrastructure is extended out to sub-regional centers, end-user pricing should be ensured through competition among local service providers. Ultimately this means that the market will be the guiding principle for the regulation of broadband infrastructure in the region. It also means, interestingly, that the market will be a guiding principle for the regulation of the media sphere, at least in Brazil. Early on in its tenure, the Lula administration touched on the media reform discussions that have been happening in the country since the 1988 Constitution, but discovered that resistance from powerful media players,
such as Globo, posed a political challenge (Matos 2008). So, rather than subsidies or regulations, increased competition has emerged as a key strategy for managing incumbent media powers. Fiber optic will allow for the introduction of broadband services, including digital mobile, into the Brazilian media sphere. This, in turn, will allow transnationals such as Spain’s Telefónica to compete with Brazil’s traditional TV and print-based media powers, through, for example, emerging Spanish-language apps like the TuEnti mobile social networking platform, recently purchased by Telefónica. Pro-business reforms like these offer left-leaning governments a quiet way to address the entrenched political influence of media oligarchies while also securing strategic regional interdependencies. This market-oriented approach to media reform allows Brazil to maintain its ‘cordial power’ image on the international scene while also addressing domestic power asymmetries.

But Brazil is clearly uniquely positioned to advance a strategy of cordial complex interdependence at the regional and international levels given the size of its economy. This has led some authors to suggest that Brazil is engaged in a process of regional imperialism within South America (Zibechi 2012b); Latin American states may benefit from Brazil’s leadership, but they are also subject to Brazil’s processes of political-economic expansion, as well as the assumptions and discourses that surround those processes. This opens the door to a second perspective on capitalist insertion which argues that the hierarchical distribution of power between states, plus inequalities within international institutions, leave peripheral nations, at best only relatively autonomous, and at worst, absolutely dependent (Jaguaribe 1979; Puig 1980; Tickner 2003).

It is with this in mind that the autonomist tradition recommends fostering domestic economic strengths and new political competencies that will allow for the eventual defiance of dependent relationships. But whereas in the past autonomists recommended autarkic self-sufficiency, the goal of today’s autonomists is counter-hegemonic network management. Here the idea is to influence channels of interdependence in ways that reduce subjection to powerful actors or powerful norms. Castells’ idea of network power is useful here. We can think of counter-hegemonic network management as leveraging ‘the power resulting from the standards required to coordinate social interaction’ (2011: 773) to both take advantage of and shape international interconnections in ways that create alternatives. It is for this reason that we see the most autonomist countries in South America, such as Venezuela, pursuing international partnerships in spaces like UNASUR, even as they work to create the foundations for socialist development models through spaces like ALBA. Unlike UNASUR, ALBA prioritizes trade integration as a strategy of alternative development rather than as a means to pursue profit-driven trade integration.

This very different approach to capitalist insertion has a strong influence over the types of media reforms we see emerging in autonomist South American states. Venezuela, for example, is a supporter of the fiber optic ring being advanced by Brazil through UNASUR because of the cost reductions and security benefits it will bring. But according to the Venezuelan Minister of Communication the broadband project is merely a first step in creating regional informational autonomy. Once the ring is complete, Venezuela envisions state-run or sponsored data hubs as well as a regional Internet search engine that will reorganize flows of information throughout South America (Prensa Latina 2012). Venezuela is more concerned with ensuring the ability to set autonomous policy around the production and movement of ideas, than creating a market for access to services. In this sense, we can see clear analogies between the UNASUR broadband project and Venezuela’s two satellites, Bolivar, which is uses to broadcast the state television
channel Telesur ‘free to air’ throughout the hemisphere, and Miranda, which is used for planning, security and scientific observation. What is important in these projects is not the regulation of a market for secure satellite transmissions, but rather creating a platform that will enhance national or regional abilities to coordinate social interactions in ways that will contribute to social development in the long run.

As a result, in autonomist countries there is much greater sympathy for state-funded or not-for-profit access to broadband backbones as a way to provide local communications services. Local broadband services could, for example, prioritize last-mile service provision over cost reductions in order to facilitate locally produced, culturally relevant and non-commercial media content. Indeed, the more autonomist countries of the region have expressed concern over private-sector involvement in UNASUR’s regional broadband service provision project (Business News America 2012). If competition fails as a means to drive price reductions at the local level, then there is a risk that a small number of powerful big-data players could emerge and put pressure on key states like Brazil or Chile to reduce net neutrality. Since the proposed fiber optic ring circles the region, changes in one country could have domino effects on pricing throughout the region. This is the struggle that autonomist media policy must deal with in the face of Brazilian leadership on regional infrastructure.

Brazil and Venezuela’s differing economic models have attracted the majority share of intellectual attention in recent discussions about Latin America. But there is yet a third perspective on international insertion to consider, which draws inspiration from the peripheral realism perspective put forward by Carlos Escudé (1995). Both the interdependence and autonomy frameworks can sometimes overestimate the scope for independent action available to peripheral nations. Countries like Venezuela, Ecuador or Bolivia can leverage exports of primary resources to finance alternative development schemes, while the economic weight of countries like Mexico and Brazil gives them a place within diplomatic circles. But the same is not true of all Latin American countries, which find that they are by necessity ‘rule takers’ rather than ‘rule makers.’ This being the case, autonomist actions may, in some cases, undermine the functioning of domestic democratic institutions, offering a justification for powerful states to further reduce the sovereignty of peripheral nations, potentially with negative economic implications. Recent events in Honduras uphold this vision. In Peripheral Realism’s more pragmatic approach, foreign policy should avoid actions that might move powerful neighbors to action, particularly insofar as these actions undermine the achievement of pragmatic economic policies.

As such, it is perhaps not surprising that over the past 10 years, some countries in Latin America have offered, in comparison with their neighbors, significantly less evidence of media reform. Given the 2006 CAFTA agreement, for example, Central American states find themselves suspended in transnational production networks that oblige deep structural relations with capitalist circuits. In the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) corridor countries, national economies are tied to ‘efficiency-seeking investments in the industrial sector’ related to low labour costs and geographical proximity to consumer markets (King et al 2012: 159). These relationships rest not only on political agreements that structure the price of imports and exports, but also on long-term investments in infrastructure that facilitate the movement of physical goods, as well as complex networked systems of production that tie domestic labour to corporate decision-making in other countries. In these countries, where national development continues to rely on insertion into global commodity chains driven by transnational capitalists (Castells 1998), post-neoliberal or post-democratic reforms are not on the table in any serious way. There just is not a context for the implementation of comprehensive media reforms. So, while disappointing, it is not at all
surprising to find strong oligarchic patterns of media ownership and state management in
countries that are subject to this form of capitalist insertion.

In sum, the fact of these different models highlights the significance of the relationship between
capitalist insertion and media reform. Contemporary media reforms are not just an upshot of the
renegotiation of the social contract at the domestic level, but also take place within particular
patterns of capitalist insertion under the guidance of interventionist states. Given that many Latin
American states are working from peripheral locations, they use the levers of foreign relations to
negotiate the context for their domestic development, including the context for communication’s
role in development. The combination of economic strategy and media reform policies will have
important implications for the domestic political, economic and social sphere. Given this, in
what follows I discuss three broad and general implications of this international political
economy reading of Latin American media reform.

**Plurality and Equality**

The first implication of looking at media reforms in international relief is simply this: That the
real impacts of media reforms on people’s specific daily experiences will be constrained by state-
led patterns of capitalist insertion. It is extensively argued that the media reforms taking place in
Latin America have the potential to increase media diversity, improve democratic accountability,
and create spaces through which to imagine alternative (non-neoliberal) development
trajectories. These are all great objectives. However, students of democracy have long
recognized that it is one thing to access to the right to vote; it is quite another to have access to
the freedom and opportunity that comes with economic autonomy. Similarly, it is one thing to
have access to the means to communicate. It is quite another thing to have the sort of economic
autonomy that allows you to produce independent media, or use that media to achieve economic
autonomy. With this in mind, the success of media reform needs to be measured not only in
terms of improved representation (voice) and recognition (identity), but also in terms of the
quality and extent of redistribution (equality). Here we run up against some interesting truths.

Clearly ‘rule taker’ status within global commodity chains has a strong influence on the
emphasis of media reforms within some countries. Take for example the case of El Salvador,
where the left came to power in 2009 under the leadership of Mauricio Funes. Here current
processes of media reform are focused on re-regulating *public* media (specifically Canal 10 and
Radio National) to ensure, on the one hand, that they will not be used for partisan purposes, and
on the other hand, that they will be used to ‘promote ideological, political and cultural plurality,
social inclusion, human rights, a culture of peace, national identity, historical memory, citizen
participation and the construction of citizenship, which commercial media does not provide
because it does not generate profits’ (Diario Co Latino 2013). In addition, the new law
contemplates expanding the reach of El Salvador’s public media through international television
and radio stations (el Nuevo Herald 2013). This project is clearly oriented towards consolidation
of the state, plus the maintenance of Salvador’s connections with its large ex-patriot community
abroad, which is a major source of remittances, investment, and political and economic
opportunities for the tiny economy.

Meanwhile, other media continues to be regulated by El Salvador’s neoliberal
Telecommunications Law established in 1997 by Salvador’s right wing political party, ARENA.
This auction-based system of spectrum allocation effectively guarantees that many community
media outlets operate illegally in the country, something that El Salvador’s Association of Participatory Radios and Programs (ARPAS) is currently trying to rectify through a proposed ‘Law for Community Radio-Diffusion’ (ALER 2013). The point of the example is this: the priority for media reform in El Salvador is not decentralization but rather re-organization of centralized channels. Even if ARPAS is successful in their bid to ‘democratize’ El Salvador’s media, this will be a kind of democratization within limits. We would not be able to fully understand the democratization of media in El Salvador without also making reference to a larger media context that focuses largely on consolidating and securing Salvador’s position as a peripheral economy within global commodity chains. Community media will operate in a context very different from the community media of, say, Venezuela.

Where governments take a market-based approach to media regulation, as in the case of Brazil, the focus on cost reductions for telecommunications services risks expanding the market for consumption of media commodities at the cost of fostering local and/or autonomous media production. This is particularly so given that one of the primary drivers of broadband infrastructure in Brazil is the desire to tap its massive market for digital mobile technologies (Barros et al. 2012). This puts the openness of the internet at risk by prioritizing ‘bundled’ online services (Mansell 2013a). In this sense, despite the fact that broadband will enable more people to ‘get online,’ the vast majority of users are likely to access the internet as prosumers and sources of personal data, rather than as autonomous producers of pluralistic media.

There are also questions about how broadband access will be extended to remote or less-profitable communities in Brazil once the new South American fiber optic ring is built, and domestic fiber optic cables are extended out to the regions (InfoDev/Jensen 2011). It is not clear whether non-commercial groups such as municipal governments or community organizations will be granted rights to service provision, and the state will surely face heavy pressure from big-data players who see non-commercial or subsidized service provision contracts as a form of unfair competition. So all together, while the price reductions and business opportunities fostered by telecommunications modernization in Brazil can enable greater market competition, they may do so at the cost of developing local and/or autonomous media.

Finally, the governments that have made the greatest headway in spectrum reform in South America (Venezuela, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador) rely heavily on a narrow range of primary resource exports to finance domestic social reforms. These countries have also made slow progress with digital upgrading in manufacturing sectors. In this sense, while spectrum reformers in South America are winning the battle, they may be losing the war. China’s gains in the area of high-technology production are eroding Latin America’s gains in the same area (Gallagher and Porzecanski 2010). Latin American high tech exports have remained low-wage and low-skilled whereas China’s exports have steadily diversified into higher-wage, high-skill and high-value-added consumer products, and 95% of all high-tech exports from Latin America are under threat from Chinese competition (ibid: page 8). Meanwhile, Latin American economies have been strongly influenced by China’s demand for raw material exports. Latin American exports to China grew by 370% from the year 2000, and of this 74% were primary commodities (ibid: page 37). This is troubling, because in a globalized capitalist economy, the health of the economy, and ergo, the ability to redistribute economic resources in ways that sustain media autonomy, is intimately tied to patterns of capitalist insertion. Carlo Vercellone explains it this way:
A development policy based in low value added industrial sectors is a short term policy that cannot be sustained in the long term. What this teaches us is that cognitive capitalism is investment of human beings in human beings. … In this sense, cognitive capitalism signals that need to develop collective institutions and services that both satisfy essential needs and allow for investment in those human capacities that will be an essential condition for development in the long run. (Miguez 2012)

Instead of this, the combination of media reform, deindustrialization and over-reliance on primary commodity exports puts autonomist states at risk of clientelistic battles over media messaging. When a narrow band of natural resources form the primary centre of capitalist accumulation in a domestic economy, control of the state becomes a primary avenue for control over the means of accumulation. Even with diversified media ownership, polarized messaging can become a tool to fight for control over the state apparatus. In this sense, an undiversified economy is a risk factor for media autonomy and diversity.

In all three cases, simple media reforms, such as spectrum reallocations or market interventions, are not enough: plurality of voices rests on communicative autonomy, which in turn requires strong redistributive policies that provide access not just to infrastructure and media spectrum, but also autonomy and capacity to leverage resources in diverse ways. Strong redistributive policies, require, in turn, strong economic management. With this in mind, we need to look not only at national processes but also at patterns of regional integration that condition domestic redistribution.

For example, depending on how it is regulated at the domestic level, the construction of a regional fiber optic ring has the potential to pass cost savings on to consumers, or may be leveraged by states to facilitate community access points that are free or low cost. But at the same time, the development of the fiber optic ring is part of the economic development plan being pushed forward by UNASUR that prioritizes accumulation through resource extraction. One of UNASUR’s most active portfolios, COSIPLAN, has been developing a wide range of regional infrastructure projects. Some of these projects position Brazil as a regional imperialist power by using Brazilian investment resources to finance infrastructure projects, opening up opportunities for Brazilian companies to do the work, and providing resources needed to fuel the further development of the Brazilian economy (Zibechi 2012b). Meanwhile, these projects reinforce overreliance on exports of natural resources as a foundation for economic productivity in other countries.

These larger patterns of regional economic integration put into question the assumption that media reforms will necessarily result in improved representation and recognition within national spheres of decision-making. Regional patterns of economic integration, pursued by

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2Original text as follows: “…una política de desarrollo basada en los sectores de menor valor agregado de la industria es una política de corto plazo que no puede ser sustentable en el largo plazo. Lo que nos enseña el capitalismo cognitivo es la inversión del hombre para el hombre… En este sentido, el capitalismo cognitivo señala la necesidad de desarrollar las instituciones y los servicios colectivos que permitan, al mismo tiempo, satisfacer las necesidades esenciales y que corresponden a una inversión en estas capacidades humanas que serán la condición esencial para un desarrollo a largo plazo.” (Miguez 2012)
states as a way to manage capitalist insertion, establish conditions for redistribution that condition the impacts of media reform processes.

**Industrial Policy and Media Reform**

Given that the impacts of media reform are related to the social production of capitalism, a second implication of an international political economy reading is that domestic media reforms need to be studied in relation to larger processes of economic management. The relationship between media reform and representation (voice) or media reform and recognition (identity) is obvious. But what is the relationship between media reform and redistribution? How do regional patterns articulate with national processes?

There are different ways of modeling this connection. For example, a cultural industries approach looks at media as a productive sector, which contributes to the economy both directly and indirectly, and can also benefit from state interventions. A knowledge economy approach, on the other hand, considers the nature of the relationship between circulation (patterns of nodes, ties and flows) and production, as well as how infrastructure, technology, processes, policy or ideas mediate that relationship. Clearly the later conditions the former, since the nature of circulation will affect the production of culture. But in the real world of policy, these different areas are often addressed separately, especially since cultural policy tends to focus on content, while infrastructure and spectrum policy focus on structure.

Within UNASUR, cultural industries were, until recently, addressed by the Working Group on Culture within the South American Council on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Innovation (COSECCTI). So far this group has focused on compiling information about the state of culture industries in South America, noting in a 2012 report that ‘at the level of various countries, there are more and more examples of transversal efforts that try to guarantee both economic development and cultural development, where the goal is to use the promotion of cultural industries to support integral sustainable development’ (COSECCTI-UNASUR 2012; translation mine). The group has since been hived off into its own South American Council on Culture (CSC). The newly formed South American Council on Science, Technology and Innovation (COSUCTI) plans to focus its energies on the formation of South American researcher networks, a fund for researcher exchanges, and regional trade fairs (Colciencias 2013). In both cases, regional integration is seen as an opportunity to expand the potential for economic returns on creative or innovative work by strengthening regional markets.

These policies articulate in challenging ways with spectrum reform policies taking place at the domestic level across the region. Drawing on Latin America’s long history of land reform struggles, spectrum is often framed as part of the national patrimony, which should be leveraged as a way to redistribute economic benefits. Thus, media reform discourses parallel modernist and developmentalist projects that position productive inputs as nationalized resources. Even if we accept this approach, it remains unclear how best to leverage these resources. Should spectrum be treated like land, which should be redistributed to create a foundation for autonomous cultural production? Or should it be treated like an oil well, the benefits of which should be socialized under state control? Out of these debates emerge policies that appropriate spectrum for ‘national’ use (as in the case of Telesur, for example), as well as policies that redistribute spectrum to communities (as in the case of spectrum reform (Light 2011). There then remains the question of how redistribution of spectrum articulates with regional efforts to promote linkages between cultural development and economic development. At what point can
community radio form the bases of new cultural industries, for example? If a community radio station produces a documentary, can it make a return on its investment through distribution to other broadcasters in the region?

Meanwhile, these considerations are largely dealt with in isolation from information age industrial policy (i.e. knowledge economy concerns). The key debate unfolding here is between those who believe that the benefits of the information age are best ensured through commercial competition between technology and service suppliers, and those who believe that cooperation and collaboration should be prioritized as a foundation for information age production. At present, the ‘bias is toward the dominant model favoring market-led development and focusing on information exchange, information scarcity secured through copyright, and rapid technology innovation and mastery’ (Mansell 2013b). It is for this reason, for example, that we continue to see spectrum treated like a resource, the ownership of which can be imparted by the state. This is in ‘contrast with alternative models which favour a widening of the information commons to foster information sharing, information abundance, and generative innovation from the bottom up’ (ibid). So, for example, we don’t see spectrum being regulated as an ‘open resource’ that, given emerging cognitive radio technologies, could be used more efficiently by sharing white spaces between various different users and uses (radio, wifi, cell, etc.). The latter offers a way of thinking about media reform and economic management that is more ecological in its approach to resource management, and also treats the economic and social value of cultural production very differently.

In the case of Brazil, for example, where debates are currently ongoing about how to manage the ‘digital dividend’ of unused spectrum resources that has been opened up by the switch to digital TV, incumbent television providers are in a battle with incoming digital mobile providers for control over this space. This has the effect of squeezing out consideration of alternative models or uses of the resource that might create foundations for differing forms of production. This is further complicated by Brazil’s leadership role in the region. As leader with regards to telecommunications policy, the decisions made by Brazil often influence policy choices made elsewhere in the region. For example, in the case of Brazil’s adoption of a new standard for digital television, not only did discussions on technical issues evolve in ways that ‘displaced discussion of the political-communal-public to the technical-normative-private’ but also the adoption of technical norms was converted into a geopolitical strategy for ‘economic and cultural integration of the region’ (Baccaro, Maglieri & Manchini 2012: 228). Specifically, Brazil chose to adopt the Japanese standard as a base for the development of a digital television standard (ISDB) over the American ATSC or European DVB standards. It then modified this standard by upgrading it to MPEG-4 technology, and developed a new middleware software solution called Ginga. In so doing, Brazil reiterated its dominant policy approach by guaranteeing access to services while turning a blind eye to the fact that these services are dominated by a highly concentrated media sector (ibid: 228). The resulting Brazilian standard (called ISDB-Tb) has since been extended to most countries in South America, providing a market for compliant TV sets and set-top boxes, transmitters and other peripherals produced in Brazil. As a result, the Brazilian tendency to favor market-led development is de facto exported throughout the region.

What all of this suggests, once again, is that the impacts of domestic media reforms on redistribution will be constrained by patterns of economic management that are being established through either regional integration or regional policy contagion. It is not enough to ask for reforms to legalize community radio. It is also necessary to think through how access to
community radio can be leveraged as a productive resource given particular patterns of capitalist insertion. In particular, there is a common assumption that media reform will strengthen identity and voice, and this will serve as a tool to make states accountable to citizen needs. But policies established at the regional level within bodies such as UNASUR, or policy contagion that happens as a result of the leadership of dominant players, will condition the possible impacts of media decentralization at the domestic level. When states engage in processes of capitalist insertion, or participate in regionalization processes as a management strategy, this can constrain the potential of media reforms to achieve truly autonomous media, and undermine the potential of media to serve as a mechanism of representation or recognition.

Articulating Grassroots work with Regional Policy Advocacy

Finally, as was made clear by the previous discussion, many of the decisions that implement new approaches to media regulation and economic development are being made through transnational processes. These processes are often beyond the reach of local voices, or happen through processes of contagion that are not adequately captured by the metaphor of the state system. This gives rise to a third upshot of a global political economy analysis of capitalist insertion and media reform, which is that it is important to reconsider the relationship between media reform and processes of advocacy or resistance. In particular, these processes need to orient their work more towards the ways in which regional and/or international processes affect media’s contributions to redistribution.

In the 1990s, given Latin America’s dual context of national democratization and global neoliberal multilateralism, internet was the communications medium of choice for an emerging group of ‘global civil society’ actors (Leon et al 2001; Johnston & Almeida 2006). But by the millennium, globalization was being actively rejected, as was the idea of global civil society, and its use of Internet to form professional policy advocacy networks (see for example Edelman 2003). Latin Americans had become disillusioned with their 'democracies with no options' and came to realize that change would require widespread grassroots mobilization both to discredit the status quo and to bring new leaders into power. As post-democracy began to emerge in the region, radio experienced a renaissance. Calls for spectrum reform became part of efforts to create spaces of grassroots deliberation, and to forge stronger connections between the grassroots and the state apparatus. In addition, in order to gain electoral victories and prevent coups against left wing leaders, there needed to be a sustained process of grassroots mobilization. It wasn't that the Internet was being tossed aside, but groups like AMARC and ALER saw greater purpose in using it as a platform to reinvigorate community media, particularly community radio, by facilitating news distribution between community radio stations (Leon et al. 2005). As a result, the transnational became a space of information sharing and solidarity in ways that were oriented principally around local identity & class formation for new waves of national democratization.

Today, with post-democracy well advanced in the region, the situation is quite different. In particular, the region’s neo-extractivist developmental economies finance social spending by exporting natural resources with the support of regional infrastructure programs such as COSIPLAN. But these processes are not driven forward at the national level within the context of reinvigorated domestic democratic institutionality. Rather, they are being driven forward at the regional and international levels, through trade deals and integration processes that are often beyond the reach of grassroots accountability. While these projects may be to the benefit of some communities, they are often in direct contradiction to the interests of others, particularly
rural campesino and indigenous communities that suffer the immediate consequences of extractive industries.

The current communicative strategies of social movements are often poorly aligned with this new, emerging reality. Community media processes are often positioned within the logic of economic development for regional autonomy being advanced by the likes of ALBA and Telesur. The membership of these networks is aligned around their desire for social-democratic economic development, or in other words, the capitalization of national resources to finance social spending. This means that community radio networks often find themselves in simpatico with the logic of economic development for regional autonomy being advanced by left-wing governments in the region. This form of class-consciousness has sometimes come at the cost of a decline in the critical capacity of media (see for example Urribarri 2007). Of particular concern, community media may lack the critical capacity to analyze the linkages between regional development patterns, national distributive policies, and autonomous cultural production.

Regional alternative media networks are also poorly aligned with regional indigenous communications networks such as CLACPI or Abya Yala (personal interviews). In these latter cases, media is seen as a right to be exercised autonomously in order to advance multiculturalism, cultural preservation, and identity formation. But communicative practices also form part of a strategic battle for territory, dignity and integrity. In particular, for indigenous communities, the fight for cultural autonomy depends on the fight for territorial autonomy, especially given the close links that exist between land and culture in many cases, and this means that extractive industries work to reverse the autonomy of these groups, regardless of their access to the media.

In any case, neither community radio nor indigenous communications networks are well positioned to leverage media to deal with regional integration processes. Neither of them constitute, for example, part of a South American civil society counterweight to regional governance. There is, in fact, a Citizen Participation Forum for UNASUR, but in a recent letter this group outlined a series of considerations necessary to ensure the integrity of the space, including the autonomy of the civil society organization representatives, guaranteed indigenous participation, and ‘making a commitment to real institutionalization, formalization and legitimization of participation through the creation of consensual mechanisms for civil society participation in UNASUR and COSIPLAN’ (translation mine). This points to a vacuum in civil society accountability mechanisms with regards to regional integration efforts.

Recently, however, regional communications networks have begun to rethink their focus on grassroots autonomy and to move more in the direction of strategic integration. For example, Radio Mundo Real (RMR), which emerged in 2003 as a response to the World Trade Organization’s Fifth Ministerial Conference has become an important expression of ‘communication in resistance’ in Latin America. Drawing on ten years of experience, in a recent retrospective, RMR journalist Ignacio Cirio observed that:

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3 Though efforts have proceeded apace to counteract these tendencies. See for example: [http://www.aporrea.org/medios/a22656.html](http://www.aporrea.org/medios/a22656.html).

4 See for example the Declaration from the Abya Yala Continental Summit on Indigenous Communication available at: [http://avi-noticias.blogspot.ca/p/declaracion-de-la-cumbre-continental-de.html](http://avi-noticias.blogspot.ca/p/declaracion-de-la-cumbre-continental-de.html).

The current era is evolving and is characterized by the need for a methodological shift that can account for the challenges of the moment. We see this new methodological growth in terms of convergence. … Given that the methodology of dispersion, which was characteristic of the cycle of World Social Forums and their corresponding approach to communications, is exhausted, we believe that complementarization and collaboration between communications collectives are essential to confront the singular and inescapable discourse of capital as a the guiding principle for the co-evolution of humanity and the planet. And we have discovered that in order to achieve this, communicators should take on the roll of political actor, and enter into debate on the political plain in order to create agreements and join forces. (Cirio 2013)

ALAI has also signaled a movement in this direction, as is evidenced by a recent publication entitled *Democratizing the Word: Movements Converging in Communication* (Leon 2012). But which themes and topics will these media-oriented groups converge around as they begin to consider their response to regional integration, capitalist insertion, and the processes that take place at the borders between the state system and domestic comparative politics? There seems to be an emerging consensus about the need to move past 'legacy community media' as alternative media (interviews), which suggests that careful thinking needs to be done about the meaning of alternative media.

Meanwhile, the analysis presented here suggests that alternative media needs to be built on a foundation of regional analytical capacity, development of greater capacity for reporting, and upgrading of social movement communications abilities. Just as it isn’t enough to have spectrum reform without concrete processes of economic redistribution, it also isn’t enough to have community media without concrete processes of local critical analysis of the conditions of economic production, both nationally and regionally. It will be interesting to see how this agenda develops. For academics, these shifts push us to reconsider our approaches to studying media reform in the region.

**Conclusions: Shifting the focus of Media Reform Research**

Latin America has moved into a post-global and post-democratic moment. But just because states have become more (or perhaps differently) active in processes of capitalist formation does not mean that we should become state-bound in our analysis of media reform in Latin America. Indeed, if the full arc of thinking about globalization taught us anything, it is that many different spaces inhere and shift in the layered production, reproduction, and transformation of the social, cultural, economic, and political. The post neoliberal moment in Latin America has given rise to new institutional arrangements driven forward by new social forces. For critical political economy, these processes do not take place in a container, but rather are driven forward by actors that play significant roles in shaping processes of capitalist insertion at the border between the state system and comparative politics. In this chapter I have suggested that communications scholars need to pay much more attention to these processes, because the nature of capitalist insertion will condition the constitution of justice and democracy. The types of media reforms pursued, and also the implications, sustainability and impact of those reforms, will depend on these larger questions.
To the extent that academics can support the search for answers to such questions (Santos 2011), it would be helpful to imagine new approaches that can address the shifting balance between post-democratic processes directed at localized processes of media reform, and new regionalized processes of convergence. This is a tricky proposition. If left-leaning governments have gone to the regional level to pursue policies that are against the interests of local actors, can it still be argued (as is suggested by the work of Otero 2004) that the best strategy for communities is to use community media to mobilize their local class interests in ways that place democratic constraints on the integration policies of the state? The analysis presented in this chapter would suggest that localized efforts are insufficient. But then where should energies be directed? While regional integration is positioned as a means to create regional economic and political autonomy, in truth the spaces of transnational capitalist accumulation and the spaces of regional political integration do not map onto each other. Just look at the role of Canadian mining corporations in Latin-American natural resource extraction throughout the Americas, or the influence of Asian resource markets on South American regional political processes.

I do not pretend to have a good answer, but by way of a closing thought, perhaps one possible response would be to approach media formulations as themselves variegated processes of capitalist formation within a combined capitalist system. This in turn begs the question of what frameworks would be appropriate for academic work in this area. I think that this formulation pushes as to re-think the idea of media environments. That is, rather than thinking of media environments as contexts that structure human experience (see for example Mattoni 2009 as cited in della Porta 2011), they should be thought of as the products of uneven capitalist processes. Using this kind of metaphor we can ask questions such as whether and how different kinds of media interact in the formation of spaces and processes; how private, public and citizen media constitute changing media publics in the region; whether media publics can be conceived of at a regional level; and how media publics interact with processes of class formation (Hesketh 2012; Wolfson & Funke 2013) within either political or economic contexts (which as I mentioned above, are not necessarily overlapping). These types of processes need to be studied vis-à-vis Brazilian neo-imperialism, Chinese economic influences, the fate of ALBA given Chavez’ death, and the emerging Pacific Rim Alliance between the more conservative countries along the Pacific coast of the Americas, given how these different processes are re-shaping the regional context. Finally work needs to be done to better understand the alignment of different spaces: spaces of accumulation, spaces of discursive circulation, and spaces of political articulation. This kind of geopolitical analysis, it seems to me, can provide an effective foundation for reflection and change.
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