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RECLAIMING “FREEDOM”: HOW PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS IN ECUADOR USE ONLINE MEDIA TO CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT AND CREATE A NEW HEGEMONY.

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INDEX

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... 1
INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1-2
THEORETICAL CHAPTER ............................................................................................... 3-7
  Journalism, Politics and Democracy ................................................................. 3-4
  New media, new journalism? ............................................................ 4-5
  Who owns the truth? ................................................................. 5-6
  ‘Phantom Public’ ................................................................. 6-7
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES ............................. 7-8
  Research question ..................................................................................................... 8
METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 9-14
  Methodology Rationale .................................................................................. 9-10
  Critical Discourse Analysis ........................................................................ 10
  Discourse Theory and Populist Theory ....................................................... 10-11
  Limitations .............................................................................................................. 11
  Reflexivity .................................................................................................................. 12
  Operationalisation .................................................................................................. 12
  Sampling .................................................................................................................... 12-13
  Thematic Analysis .................................................................................................. 14
RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION 14-21
  Professional Journalists ..................................................................................... 14-16
  Media and Symbolic Power ........................................................................... 16-17
  ‘Correístas’ versus ‘the people’ ......................................................................... 17-18
  Advocating for the return of a liberal model ................................................ 18-19
  Online Journalism ................................................................................................. 19-20
  ‘The Myth of Us’ ...................................................................................................... 20-21
CONCLUSIONS .............................................................................................................. 21-22
RECLAIMING “FREEDOM”: HOW PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS IN ECUADOR USE ONLINE MEDIA TO CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT AND CREATE A NEW HEGEMONY.

ABSTRACT

After 10 years of confrontations between media and the government in Ecuador and a series of regulations as well as lawsuits against journalists and media outlets, the traditional journalistic practices had to adapt to this new environment. A group of journalists with long trajectories that had to abandon the private media outlets in which they have worked almost for a life-time, now speak from online platforms to contest the governmental discourse, by discrediting it and advocating for the return of their ‘freedoms’ framed in a liberal model of media. Thus, the question to be answered in this dissertation is in which ways are they using new media to undermine the government and create a new hegemony?

The answer to this question will be shaped through the analysis of articles and descriptions of the online platforms created by some of these journalists. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will perform a textually-oriented assessment of the power relations between media and political actors and the specific socio-political context as well as the online realm. In addition, analytical concepts of Discourse Theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and Laclau’s Populist Theory (2007) will be used to evaluate the ‘antagonistic’ aspects in regimes of representation, the construction of a new account of ‘the people’ and the establishment of a new ‘hegemony’ based on liberal principles.

Concerning online media, it will be discussed as a form of public arena, permeated by mercantilist logics and organized under hierarchical structures already built in the offline world, with the function of contributing to the accomplishment of the objectives of the hegemonic discourse. Finally, within this struggle for power between elites, the voice of the citizens is deemed to be forgotten as well as the democratic promise relegated to a secondary place in the list of priorities.

This dissertation concludes that the antagonistic relations between media and politics as well as the disagreements about ethical perspectives of media practices have not changed with the emergence of digital platforms, as in the Latin American region, independently from ideological orientations, power structures remain top-down.
INTRODUCTION:

During the last decade, under the rule of ‘new leftist’ governments also called ‘post-neoliberals’ or neo-populists’ (Sader, 2008; Follari, 2010 in Ramos, 2012, p. 66), the media landscape in Ecuador and other countries in Latin America, has gone through dramatic transformations mainly due to the constant ‘media wars’ between these emergent governments and the private media (O’Shaughnessy, 2007). One example of this is the strong ‘media activism’ done by governments that includes direct communication practices and use of official media channels, as well as regulations of content and ownership in private media (Kitzberger, 2012; Dello Buono, 2010; Waisbord, 2012).

In Ecuador, the space of direct communication is called ‘Citizen Link’ created in 2007 as a space for governmental accountability (SECOM, 2016) has also been used to criticize the government’s opposition and it is especially characterised by constant verbal attacks from President Correa to journalists from private media and their practices (Reyes, 2011). Moreover, the communications law approved in 2013 brought about significant regulation issues. This caused a decisive rupture of the relations between politicians and the private media that used to be closely tied in the 1990’s when other ‘populist’ presidents in the region approached ‘the people’ through TV and radio in order to diffuse their discourses and official acts in a larger scale (De la Torre, 2000; Rincón, 2011).

In response to this sudden confrontation, in 2008, private media came together and launched a campaign for ‘press freedom’ and against governmental regulations, mainly regarding the application of the communications law, called a “gag law” by them (Waisbord, 2012, p. 443; Buckman, 2014, p. 194). They received firm support from international organizations promoting ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘human rights’ such as IACHR, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders (Ramos, 2012, p.76; Reyes, 2011). After three years of campaigning against this law, the private media association stopped, but some journalists and other public figures continued challenging the governmental position towards media regulation (Ramos, 2012, p. 71). On the other side, the government continued investing considerable sums in official propaganda, public media outlets, as well as in the maintenance of two former private channels confiscated from a financial group that went bankrupt and was accused of embezzlement in 2008 (Reyes, 2011, p.91; El Universo, 2008). Moreover, the regulations of
the communications council included economic and judicial sanctions\(^1\) that forced media to censor content and also provoked the expulsion or voluntary leave of some journalists mainly from press and television and several media outlets were closed down.

In the context of counter-hegemonic ruptures, a new debate about what real journalism is and its role in a democratic society has emerged. In the last 5 years, at least 8 former journalists with trajectories of 15 years in average in private media, have started using jointly or individually different online platforms to produce their own content, describing themselves as independent journalists, that have the goal of unveiling the ‘truth’ and fostering democracy. In this way, the debate is now transferred to the internet as a new promise of public sphere.

Scholarship about Latin American media in the last decade has focused mainly in the conflictual relations between media, journalists and the post-neoliberal governments of the region, however the consequences of these conflicts in individual journalists have not been studied thoroughly, that is why this paper seeks to fill that gap through the analysis of texts published on the online platforms of a group of Ecuadorian journalists with long trajectories in private media outlets. The ‘journalistic ideology’ and insights from the ‘liberal model’ of media democracy are the main notions used to understand their journalistic practices. Through online platforms, used as an ‘alternative’ to mainstream media they argue their main aim is to go back to the ‘good journalism’ and they also use them as the main site of struggle and contestation to governmental practices. Debates about ‘truth’ ownership and the definition of democratic values are at stake. The conflict between the ‘Correista’ system and these journalists constantly denouncing each other is more lively than ever. Finally, these online platforms help in the constitution of a new hegemony or truth regime, they end up having a populist and hegemonic position with liberal insights.

\(^1\) Prison sentences to journalists and fines of high amounts of money like the 40USD million fine imposed to the newspaper El Universo and journalist Palacio accused of slander (El Universo, 2015) became more common.
THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Journalism, Politics and Democracy

The relationship between media and politics has been historically complex in the region. During the 19th century the “modern press”, as we know it today, emerged as “a partisan platform for elite politics” but it soon attracted economic interests and by the beginning of 20th century it was completely transformed into a “market-oriented” business (Waisbord, 2012, p. 440). In the 1980’s with the advent of neoliberal practices and the recovery of constitutional governments in the region, media became permeated by western ideals of ‘press freedom’ (Harvey, 2006, pp. 150-151; Reyes, 2011, p. 85) and advocated for independence from “state coercion” (Waisboard, 2000; Cammaerts, 2009, p. 67). Likewise, standards of ethic journalism (Mcnair, p. 25) and democratic principles based on the ‘Anglo-American model’ also called ‘liberal’ or ‘professional model’ (Tuntall, 1977 in Schnell, 2016, p. 372) were highly influencing and are still present (Williams, 2006, p. 44) in most countries, including the ones in Latin America (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos , 2002, p. 177).

However, this tendency of marketization of the media in Latin America did not mean a separation from political elites, but rather a reinforcement of their relations intertwining the economic and political aspects with the media industry (Reyes, 2011, p. 81; Waisbord, 2012, p. 442). Therefore, it is easier to explain why media and journalists lost autonomy, some centuries ago, and why their trust has been constantly undermined (Waisbord, 2012, p. 441). Democracy and journalism are two entrenched concepts whose relationship in democratic societies has been widely debated and it has been commonly assumed that journalism has to be “practice[d] (...) on behalf of democracy” (Braw, 2014, p. 27) and for the “public good” (Fenton, 2010, p. 14).

According to Deuze (2005), ‘journalistic ideology’ is a “system of beliefs characteristic of this group” that produces particular “meanings and ideas” that have influence (p. 447). ‘Objectivity’, for instance, is one of the five “ideal-typical values” (Deuze, 2005) that construct ‘professional identity’ of journalists, as well as ‘autonomy’, sense of ‘immediacy’, ‘ethics’ and provision of information as a ‘public service’ (p. 446-447). According to Waisbord (2003), information as a public service is embraced by the ‘watchdog’ role, which in South America is closely tied to investigative journalism and its basically focused on reporting “wrongdoing[s]”
that “parties want to keep hidden” (Schuttz’s, 1998 in Waisbord, 2003, p. xix). During the 1980’s and 1990’s this kind of journalism was acclaimed because of the achievements in unveiling corruption and encouraging transparency in governments that were not monitored properly by the official accountant institutions present in the region (p.243-250).

Therefore, ‘independent journalism’ and ‘press freedom’ are seen as the main characteristics of media as the democratic accountability instrument *par excellence* (Waisbord, 2003). Nonetheless, the watchdog practice has also been largely questioned in the region because of the long trajectory of protection of political or economic interests so distant from the interests of the general public (Street, 2011; Waisbord, 2000) and thus journalists are sometimes seen as ‘lapdogs’ or ‘guard dogs’ of particular interests (Street, 2011).

According to Niggemeier (2013), “journalists are politicians’ natural counterparts” as they also have the figure of “representatives of the public” (in Braw, 2014, p. 13) and their ‘voice’ usually has a “political identity” that is strongly present in different forms of “authored journalism” such as editorials or commentaries (McNair, 2011, p. 70). In accordance to Bordieu (1996), “the ‘journalistic field’ produces and imposes” a specific view of the ‘political field’ that steams from the “journalists’ interests” (p. 2).

The “political battles” between media and governments take place “in the name of democracy” (Rincón, 2011, p. 9), thus Waisbord (2012) has identified three models of ‘media democracy’ present in Latin America that are articulated in “conflictive” views about the appropriate relations between the state, civil society and the market (p. 506). He classifies them as: the ‘citizen democracy model’ with civil society at the centre, the ‘liberal model’ which prioritizes the market and the ‘populist model’ which places the state at the core, while it locates the market and the civil society as either “opposed or subjected” to its “designs” (p. 506).

The populist model discards the idea of journalism as an autonomous profession, seeing it instead as an “occupation fully dependent on political and economic forces” and claiming that the only valid journalism is the one that supports the government (p. 510). Professional journalists criticize this populist or ‘official’ journalism arguing that it is just another way of doing ‘governmental propaganda’ and an excuse to avoid the consequences of the ‘truth’ told by honest journalism (p.512). Thus, the populist and liberal models are seen as completely incompatible (p. 511).
New media, new journalism?

Online platforms and social media appear as “vehicle[s] of democracy” because their format can enable more horizontal communication and attract the participation of diverse groups (O’Reilly, 2004; Vicari, 2014) that are part of our “global network society” (Castells, 2009, 2013) where the potential of “enabl[ing] political action on new scales” is present (Castells, 2009 in Couldry, 2010, p. 141). These platforms are “alternative in relation to mainstream media”, and promote political involvement from “civil society”, as well as, “challenge established relations of authority and control” (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008, pp. 3-30).

However, as Couldry (2015) warns there is a “mythical discourse (…) emerging around digital networks” that states that there is an assumption in terms of what is being shown in social platforms is thought as typical of all ‘collectivities’ and “the special moments when those collectivities reach maximum intensity are [thought as] typical of the rest of everyday life”. Hence, he asserts that if research in new media does not detach from this ‘myth’, it is very likely that the way in which “social and political action” are framed by new media institutions, is not going to be perceived (p. 621). In this regard, Mejias (2011) states that technology and society are constantly “determin[ing] each other”, contrary to the debate that was posed before about ‘technological determinism’ versus ‘cultural materialism’ (Blog Ulises A. Mejias).

In a similar vein, the view of technology as constructing social outcomes by itself and the perception of the blogosphere as an implicit “Habermassian consensual public sphere” (Cammaerts, 2008, p. 373) can be problematic, because the Internet cannot be separated from the “economic, political and cultural realities of the offline world” as it is an integral part of it (Cammaerts, 2008, p. 373). Also, as Mansell (2004) explains, studies of new media with a political and economic perspective have to include the analysis of the “symbolic form, meaning and action as it is of structures of power and institutions” (p. 4).

One of the main critiques to the journalistic field is the question of ownership that permeates private media and that influences the editorial content and the ‘journalistic ideology’, however in new media, these issues are subtler and in some cases even invisible (Couldry, 2015). But some authors assert that online platforms follow global ‘capitalist patterns of production’ (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 20; Mejias, 2013, p. 21; Ampuja, 2011) and “mercantilist logics”
Likewise, issues as the ‘digital divide’ (Schradie, 2011) and “job insecurity” for journalists within this new field are not considered (Fenton, 2010, p. 15).

In the specific case of everyday journalism, Fenton (2010) emphasises that the “non-hierarchical” network and connectedness that has been talked about is utopic and that it does not have the ability to change the way of making news. For instance, independent bloggers, who start gaining respect and become mainstream, compete for “readership” with mainstream media (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zuniga, 2006 in Meraz, 2009, p. 682), as well as “generate areas of dense and highly conversational interactions or isolate unpopular topics” (Vicari, 2014, p. 1496). This practice has been identified by McNair (2011) as ‘online punditry whereby bloggers whose ‘new commentariat’ has become “influential in breaking political news stories” and in some cases they become “agenda-setters”, but in addition they have “grown in importance as political actors” (p. 73).

In this respect, Papacharissi (2002) claims that even though the internet facilitates spaces for more political discussion it is not necessarily more democratic or participatory, but instead that the online debate is led by those who already participate offline and have leadership positions in society (King, 2006; Norris, 2001 in Cammaerts, 2009). Atton (2004) states that even in the supposedly ‘highly democratized communication processes of new media’, there is a “hierarchical control over symbolic resources” (p. 62), asserting that "counter-discourses" of those alternative practices become mainstream in the "dominant public sphere" and make use of "mainstream forms of discourse" (Atton, 2004, p. 63). Cammaerts (2009) raises the point of the use of blogs by counter-publics that can be double-faced as it can enable spaces for new voices to express themselves without any coercion but it can also be an opportunity for radical counter-voices to spread “hate speech” or other forms of intolerant discourse, spreading division rather than democratic principles (p.7).

Therefore, digital platforms or ‘blogging’ are not always used for expressing ideas and connecting people, but as a producer of symbolic content it also has the power of “controlling and excluding” (O'Neil, 2005, p. 1), as well as adopting “the processes of differentiation, hierarchization and control” that take part of offline interaction (p.2).
Who owns the truth?

In the liberal model, as part of their role to inform and maintain their status of ‘truth speakers’ or ‘truth-reporters’ (Deuze, 2005), journalists—mainly from the investigative field—try to “unveil secrets” produced in the political realm (Thompson, 2000, p. 94) to provoke ‘political scandals’ or in other words “struggles over symbolic power in which reputation and trust are at stake” (p. 98). This symbolic power permeates both “institutional practices” and the “idiosyncratic dimensions” of “individual journalists” and “generally presupposes privileged access to socially valued resources, such as wealth, income, knowledge, or status” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 10). The strong notion of ‘symbolic power’ presented by Bordieu (1990a) as the “power of constructing [social] reality” (p. 166 in Couldry, 2003, p. 4) is useful to understand the amount of power that media holds in order to naturalize discourse and “generate the very categories through which the social world is perceived” (Couldry, 2003, p. 17).

Media as institution reinforces ‘accepted forms of knowledge’ and ‘truth’ that ‘constitute power’ according to Foucault (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, pp. 51-75). Reyes (2011) asserts that in Ecuador, Correa and the media are disputing each other the “exclusive ownership of ‘the truth’” (p. 92). Thus power holders aim to establish a ‘regime of truth’ in the hegemonic discourse (Foucault, 1986 in Smart, 1994). Additionally, the power of ‘surveillance’ also contributes to shaping a regime of power/knowledge where the ‘subject’ is constructed in a specific way (Bevir, 1999).

In this struggle of positioning a unique ‘regime of truth’, both sides “exercise (…) symbolic power through representational practices” to maintain the “symbolic order” by setting up “symbolic frontiers” between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ practices using the ‘us/them’ distinction (Hall, 1997a, pp. 258-259).

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985a), the practice of ‘othering’ defines ‘political frontiers’ which are given by the centrality of “the category of antagonism” (pp. 127-134 in Norval, 1996, p. 65). The struggle for the ownership of truth as a means to achieve symbolic power would make no sense without popular support, thus the definition of ‘antagonistic’ counterparts as ‘political frontiers’ naturally allow the emergence of a ‘people’ as it is sustained by the Populist Theory of Laclau (2005, 2007).
In spite of being a theory based on post-Marxism (Arditi, 2010), populism promotes an “anti-status-quo discourse” in the “struggle over hegemony and power” (Panizza, 2005, p. 3) so the emergence of ‘right-wing populism’ is also possible. According to Mouffe (2005) this type of populism has been created due to “the lack of effective democratic debate about possible alternatives” and that is why those “political parties claiming to be the ‘voice of the people’” are the successful ones (p. 51).

In populism ‘the people’ is constituted “by establishing chains of equivalence and difference” (Phelan and Dahlberg, 2011, p. 19 in León, 2014, p. 14). In respect to chains of difference, the process of “establishing who the enemies of the people are” will establish also who “the people itself” are (Panizza, 2005, p. 3). Or in terms of equivalence, a “process of popular identification that constructs ‘the people’ as a collective actor” that challenges the current regime and demands changes (Laclau, 2005 in Arditi, 2010, p. 489). These changes are the unfulfilled social demands of ‘the people’, which are now represented all in an “empty signifier” (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 50). To represent the people, this ‘empty signifier’ will be embodied by the ‘plebs’ that is the part which represents the whole or ‘populus’ (Arditi, 2010, pp. 492-493). The “particularity” to which an ‘empty signifier’ is assigned and that represents ‘the people’ universally will lead to the creation of a new hegemony (Laclau, 2007, p. 70), and hegemony articulates the social (Mouffe, 2006 in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006, p. 4).

**Phantom Public**

As it has been discussed, new media is also permeated by the political, thus by conflict (Mouffe in Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006, p. 10) and with the recognition of professional journalists as the main influencers of the ‘political field’ (Bordieu, 1996). Furthermore, as Couldry (2015) affirms, these “new media institutions” with high concentrations of ‘symbolic power’ claim that they “speak for ‘us’” (p. 619) and therefore the use of digital networks has not resulted in long-term political change but instead it has propagated “short-term loyalties and less stability in political socialization” (p. 608). In turn, this “short-term political action” can be seen as ‘counter-democratic’ (Rosanvallon, 2008 in Couldry, 2015, p. 610).

By considering the way in which the constitution of ‘the people’ by a ‘plebs’ and a ‘populus’ is explained by populist theory, the notion of the ‘semi-sovereing public’ as depicted by Schattschneider (1975) will help describe how the system is not “representative of the whole
community” but instead is "skewed, loaded and unbalanced in favour of a fraction of a minority” (p. 35) composed by “business or upper-class bias” (p. 31). Also, he affirms that “the role of people in the political system is determined largely by the conflict system” and he adds that this idea of involvement by “contagion of conflict” is not coincident with the “classical definition of democracy as ‘government by the people’” (p. 126). In the same way, Lippmann (1927) claims that there is no participation of all the citizens thus “the public is a mere phantom” and only those who are interested in specific public affairs “can affect [politics] only by supporting or opposing” already positioned elites (p. 77).

In Mouffe’s (2006) view, conflicts and confrontations are necessary for pluralism and democracy, however, she specifies that “radical democracy” can just be achieved through ‘agonistic’ relations between ‘adversaries’ rather than ‘antagonistic’ ones between ‘enemies’ (Mouffe in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, pp. 9-10). According to Curran (1999) a ‘democratic media system’ should represent the interests of society as a whole by contributing to the “public debate” and giving “input[s] into the framing of public policy” (p. 30 in Ruiz, 2014, p.64). But instead, the representation of the people is made in relation to the economic structure of media and of how “power is organized within the political system” (Curran, 2002, pp. 227-232), forgetting about the ‘voice’ of ‘the people’ which is necessary for the ‘democracy’ they advocate for. The combination of a subject without voice and the symbolic power media has, “reveals the asymmetries of mediation” (Madianou, 2013, p. 179).

But regardless of this top-down, non-participatory and antagonistic reality, conceptions of ‘media ethics’ can improve the way of doing journalism and representing the ‘other’, as Silverstone (2002) proposed: “preserve the other through difference as well as through shared identity” (p.770 in Chouliaraki & Orgad , 2011, p. 343). Along this line, Couldry (2010) presents a model that considers all the actors involved in the process of media production and consumption, but that is also based on values that can be applied globally without forgetting differences and avoiding the imposition of Western values, on the contrary, it acknowledges diversity, thus just a ‘minimum normative framework’ would be applied. Through a neo-Aristotelian approach, he urges society to see media as a human practice (p. 67) and circulation of information as a contributor to “successful individual and collective life” that in turn promotes a ‘peaceable’ environment where “conflicting values, interests and understandings” are still acknowledged (p. 68).
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main aspects of the body of theory presented in the previous chapter and in which the project will be based are, in the first place, ‘journalistic ideology’ (Deuze, 2005) and the insights of the liberal model of journalism, including ‘objectivity’ and the ‘watchdog role’ (Waisbord, 2003), that reaffirm the status quo of ‘professional journalists’.

Professional journalists hold a privileged position and have access to sources of ‘symbolic power’, (Van Djk, 1995) such as knowledge, so they can exert control over the audience and thus influence public opinion. Moreover, their affirmations of being protectors of ‘truth’ and ‘democracy’ will shed light on the similarities they share with the political elite. Both groups are constantly striving for the establishment of a ‘regime of truth’ as explained by Foucault (1976).

New media as ‘vehicle of democracy’ and its capacity to open up opportunities for a different type of journalism will be discussed further in the next section, where it is argued that in spite of being a new discursive arena, ‘digital networks’ (Castells, 2009) reproduce offline hierarchies and old power relations including the same ‘voices’ that already hold leadership positions in society. Moreover, there is a lack of transparency in the economic framework of digital media which is described by many authors as a medium that follows the ‘patterns of global capitalism’ (Mejias, 2013; Papacharissi, 2002; Morozov, 2015). The presence of mainstream political bloggers that can set agendas reproduce the hegemonic and top-down practices of ‘professional journalism’ (Fenton, 2010).

The communicational realm is the battlefield of the two groups because it is the place where political meanings are constructed and therefore, the main site of ‘discursive struggle’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The ‘symbolic power’ of media and their ‘regimes of representations’ includes the ‘us/them’ distinction between the government and the opposition to maintain ‘symbolic frontiers’ (Hall, 1997a).

In this context, two ‘models of media democracy’ (Waisbord, 2012): the liberal and the populist are competing as the medium to establish a discourse with fixity of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). It will be demonstrated that even though ‘professional journalists’ fit in the liberal model, the ‘antagonistic’ relations between both groups and the aim of satisfying the
people’s demands in order to get their support to challenge the government, will produce ‘populist’ accounts (Laclau, 2007). And finally, this new configuration of ‘the people’ will bring about the reconstruction of a new hegemony, that is opposed to the current political power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Finally, the ‘myth of us’ (Couldry, 2015) as an account of the exclusion of ‘voices’ in digital platforms is compared with the notions of ‘phantom public’ (Lippmann, 1927) and the ‘semi-sovereign’ public of Schattschneider (1975) in traditional elite democracy theories.

Having mentioned the most relevant theories in which the analysis will sit, this research examines the uses of new media by journalists that come from traditional private media and that are influenced by their own ‘occupational ideology’ (Deuze, 2005), which includes a privileged role in society and will argue that just the spaces change but the content remains the same. Through these texts and their practices that include challenging and discrediting the government and the current political project in Ecuador, it studies the ‘antagonistic’ relations between these journalist-bloggers and politicians, both struggling for the establishment of a ‘truth regime’. Their advocacy for democracy and for satisfying the demands of ‘the people’ also fit in a ‘populist’ framework and, therefore, their intention of constructing a new hegemonic order becomes real. Finally, it will be evidenced that these journalists, in spite of speaking from new media, create a top-down discourse, based on antagonistic relations with the political elite, while the public is a passive subject and democracy an illusion.

With the methodological support of CDA, drawing from Discourse Theory (DT) and the Populist Theory of Laclau, the exploration based on the theoretical framework presented will unfold in the textual, discursive and social examinations of the content of the online platforms of former journalists from private media and will answer the following research questions:

**Research question:**

In what ways do professional journalists, from private media in Ecuador, use online platforms to challenge and undermine the government, and configure a new hegemonic order?

The sub-questions that will be guided the main research question are:

- What role does journalistic ideology have in the construction of a new hegemonic order?
How do online media as infrastructure normalize the discourse of the liberal model of media democracy?

How can populism be accounted in the journalistic field?

**METHODOLOGY**

**Methodology Rationale**

The aim of the present work is to answer the research questions through the analysis of the texts taken from the online platforms of former journalists in private media who confront and are confronted by the government in order to understand their discourses and elements such as ideology, representation, symbolic power and power relations that take place in a specific socio-political context as well as in the online realm. For this purpose, the analytical framework that is going to be used will be based in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on the three dimensions proposed by Fairclough: “text, discursive practice and social practice” (Fairclough, 1993 in Rear & Jones, 2013, p. 378) and Discourse Theory (DT) from Laclau and Mouffe (1985), as well as Populist Theory (Laclau, 2007) as the best way to explain the constitution of ‘the people’ in the journalistic discourse and to explore how ‘hegemony’ is formed.

In spite of the fundamental differences in the assumptions made by CDA and DT, in regards to how “social reality is seen (…), some of the analytical constructs introduced by Laclau and Mouffe are compatible with Fairclough’s” method (Rear & Jones, 2013, p. 6) specially in the way in which “discursive struggle and hegemony” are theorised in DT (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999 in Rear & Jones, 2013, p. 7).

The versatility given by the use of language in discourse and the contextual analysis connected with the “circumstances of [media] production” (Fürsich, 2009, p. 242), as well as the interpretation of hegemony as a ‘temporary closure’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 113 in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 28), are the main reasons why these methodological choices are used as opposed to a quantitative research method such as content analysis, which “count[s] the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of text” (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998, p. 95). The fact of counting words to quantify them implies treating them “as
discrete categories” which in turn produces “their isolation from a context” and brings about the “assumption (…) that language mirrors objects in the world” as opposed to the social constructivist approach of discourse analysis (Fierke, 2004, p. 36).

Limitations

The epistemological differences between CDA and DT can be seen as a limitation as it was mentioned previously. But there are also individual limitations of both methods, for example the critical approach of CDA can be seen in a “simply negative sense of the word” (Scollon, 2001, p. 3), to what Gill (1996) answers that this can be due to a considerable “body of work” with CDA that focused on “ideological critique” (p. 148) and affirms that explaining the construction of a text does not mean “attacking or undermining it” (p. 149). And in the case of ‘post-Althusserian theorists’ such as Laclau and Mouffe with DT, the problem, as Hall (1980a) points out, is that “turning everything into discourse” can be seen as a “reductionist practice” (p. 68 in Slack, 1996, p. 23).

Some scholars still affirm that there are “issues of power and ideology in the analysis” of the texts (Carvalho, 2008, p. 162) and that in several occasions it is more “interpretation” than analysis (Widdowson, 1995 and Stubbs, 1997 in Carvalho, 2008, p. 162) because it is biased by the analyst’s “knowledge and beliefs” (Widdowson, 2004 in Tenorio, 2011, p. 195). However, Van Dijk (2001) affirms that this social constructivist accounts of discourse analysis need to take a clear “socio-political position” (p. 96). For this reason, Gill (1996) calls for reflexivity as she affirms that the analyst is producing its own version of which elements are more relevant and “constructing the context as an object” (p. 146).

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge my position towards the conflict between media and the government in Ecuador. As Ecuadorian and former journalism student in the country I must admit that my position was always ‘in favour’ of journalists and ‘in opposition’ to the government, therefore I even supported the media campaign in 2008 against the Communications Law. Despite the view has changed in some respects, the bias can still permeate the analysis, thus I have worked to raise a personal awareness and take a step back to look at the texts with the aim of finding patterns in the discourse being constructed.
Furthermore, this analysis is limited to a part of the journalists that produce content online and that worked specifically in written press. It has not included those journalists from TV that also had long trajectories, confront with the government and have YouTube channels\(^2\). This was due to the dimension of the analysis and the limited amount of time available to include an additional assessment of audiovisual material. Finally, it has to be recognised that this will be a limited-scope analysis as it does not include interviews to listen directly from the journalist’s voice and an examination of the comments from the audience either.

**Operationalisation:**

A previous pilot study, in which CDA was applied in three texts of two of the currently selected online platforms, was useful to understand the flaws of this methodological application especially in its theoretical base. In order to improve this, Discourse Theory from Laclau’s and Mouffe’s (1985) as well as Laclau’s Populist Theory were also implemented in order to shed light onto ‘hegemonic’ accounts embedded in the texts. Moreover, the pilot just considered blogs in general and the ‘journalistic ideology’ was not taken in account in the previous version.

So, in order to deploy the methodology, four steps were followed: 1) select the online platforms from former journalists through a purposive sampling and maximum variation techniques, 2) apply thematic analysis to find patterns in themes from which the texts had to be selected, and 3) perform CDA to analyse the text in the linguistic, discursive as well as the social context. 4) Finally, to understand the accounts of ‘the people’ and the construction of a new hegemonic order, DT was employed jointly with the main notions of Populist Theory.

**Sampling:**

The sampling technique used to select the texts was “purposeful” sampling, as opposed to a random one, in order to “develop an understanding of more complex issues” presented in texts and by which the selection is done “actively” so as to answer the research question as well as to draw from the theoretical framework (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). A type of purposeful

\(^2\) Two broadcast journalists with more than 20 years of trajectory such as Carlos Vera and Jorge Ortiz have their interview programs in YouTube channels embedded in two online newspapers.
sampling is “maximum variation” that aims to achieve “representativeness or comparability” so that the texts to be sampled have to comply with a list of conditions or characteristics (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 81).

In this sense, the requirements to apply ‘maximum variation’ in order to select the online platforms were three: 1) they had to be created by Ecuadorian journalists 2) with long trajectories in private media outlets and 3) that had experienced confrontations with the government. With these considerations the platforms chosen were: ‘4 pelagatos’; ‘Ubica TV’/‘Iguana Libertad’ and ‘Plan V’.

The analysis will consist in two types of texts. First, the presentations of the online platform in which their raison d’être is described. Second, articles selected from each of the platforms, for which three filters were applied:

1) The initial filter was the time span in which these were published: from June 16 to July 16, a one-month period with relevant events including an economic crisis worsened by a recent earthquake and oil prices as well as a frantic political climate due to the next presidential elections in 2017.

2) As the articles are classified in sections on the platforms such as ‘informative’ and/or ‘investigative’, ‘cultural’, ‘international’, etc., for the purpose of the analysis, the selected ones will be from the: ‘informative’ or ‘investigative’ sections, mainly focused on the socio-political and economic issues in Ecuador.

3) The authorship of the articles is divided between: head journalists/founders; other journalists; external columnists and the editorial teams. For this particular research, the attention will be put on the ones produced by the head journalists or editorial teams, because they represent the editorial line of the platform.

From the selected period of time and the criteria applied with the sampling strategy, a total of 33 articles matched (Appendix 1). However, for the purpose of an in-depth analysis and as

3 Authors: Martín Pallares, former Digital Contents’ Director of the newspaper ‘El Comercio’, fired after 13 years of work due to ‘his comments in Twitter’ (La República, 2015). Roberto Aguilar was General Editor of the newspaper ‘Diario Hoy’ and José Hernández, Sub-Director of the same newspaper which was closed in 2014 due to economic regulations form the government (El Comercio, 2014).

4 Author/Director: Emilio Palacio, former Head Editor of the newspaper ‘El Universo’ left the country after being sued for slander by President Correa (La República, 2011). In this case the presentation was taken from his personal blog ‘Iguana Libertad’ and the news article from the digital platform ‘Ubica TV’ founded by him.

5 Director: Juan Carlos Calderón, former Director of the investigative magazine ‘Vanguardia’ closed and equipment seizure for supposed debts to the Ministry of Employment (El Comercio, 2012).
Fairclough (2003) affirms smaller “samples of research material” are more effective “than large bodies of text” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 6), thus with thematic analysis, the final articles were carefully chosen.

**Thematic Analysis:**

The thematic analysis was performed in order to “identify and analys[e] patterns” in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013) and to find common themes. Thus, after a classification and revision of the material, the most recurrent topics across the three platforms were: 1) pre-electoral period, 2) corruption and 3) bad governmental management (Appendix 2).

Therefore, after applying the filters, considering the theoretical insights and performing thematic analysis, 6 texts fit in the analysis, divided in two groups: the 3 presentations of the platforms and 3 articles (1 per platform) within the selected themes (1 per theme).

Once the texts are selected, CDA and DT as well as Populist Theory notions will develop the analysis.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

CDA will be used to explain the socio-political context and the digital realm, as well as, how ‘journalistic ideology’ informs the texts linguistically and the power relations detected in the discursive aspects of the articles as a “means of addressing problems of social change” (Scollon, 2001). Furthermore, this paper is especially concerned with the voices accounted, therefore the application of ‘intertextuality’ or ‘interdiscursivity’ is crucial as it constitutes the text “from diverse discourses and genres” by reporting or echoing other texts (Fairclough, 2003, p. 218). CDA will also account for “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk T., 2001, p. 353).

**Discourse Theory and Populist Theory**

On the other hand, Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) DT will perform the analysis of ‘antagonisms’, using notions of ‘chains of equivalence and difference’, ‘empty signifiers’ and the process of
‘naming’ (Panizza, 2005); and along with Laclau’s Populist Theory, the construction of ‘the people’ will lead to the explanation of the formation of a new ‘hegemonic’ project (Arditi, 2010). Discourse Theory will also address the ‘discursive struggle’ between different representations of “particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world” that strive for the fixation of meanings (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, pp. 6-7) using its ‘articulatory practice’ through the construction of “‘nodal points’ that partially fix meaning” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 113 in Howarth, 2000, p. 102).

Moreover, the relevance of the political in the present work and its entrenched relation to hegemonic practices, has made the use of ‘populist theory’ (Laclau, 2007) essential. As Simons (2011) asserts, with the notion of ‘populism’, “the ontological constitution of the political” and “the construction of ‘the people’” will be clearly understood (pp. 67, 153). Moreover, in the Latin American context the populist account of Laclau (1978, 2005) is the most suitable to understand the relationship between “journalism, democracy, and populism” (Waisbord, 2012, p. 4).

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Profesional Journalists

In Latin America, the principles of ‘journalistic ideology’ are drawn mainly from the liberal or Anglo-American model of journalism that advocates for ‘freedom’ principles and independent media (Tuntall, 1977 in Schnell, 2016; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). This information is relevant as a form of historical account called ‘genealogy’ by Foucault (1978) that will ease the understanding of how “knowledge, discourses, fields of objects” and the identity of subjects are constituted (p. 32 in Jäger, 2001, p. 7) by acknowledging their history.

The group of journalists that now write on online platforms, were part of private media which followed the liberal model. In addition, the fact that they went through similar situations when leaving their previous jobs as a consequence of governmental regulations and constant attacks to their work, can also influence in a common vision. Moreover, the scholarship about ‘professional journalism’ and ‘journalistic ideology’ as a “system of beliefs” (Deuze, 2005) that is constructed on a set of “specific articulations of signifiers” (Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2006, p. 1) is highly compatible with the way in which they describe themselves and their job
with expressions such as: “independent”; “professional and free journalism” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016) and more directly with phrases as:

“The project (...) is a bet for the freedom of information and of thought” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

In the case of ‘Iguana Libertad’, whose author is Emilio Palacio, the presentation of his site is done through the format of autobiography, which makes an account of his personal life but also his trajectory in journalism and his beliefs in the form of statements. This format also has a specific connotation as the journalist is seen as part of an intellectual and cultural elite (Bordieu, 2005).

In addition, a characteristic of professional journalists is that it is not clear if what they write fits in the genre of news or opinion, thus the line between information and comment is blurry (McNair, 2011). In the case of Plan V, the article is more informative and includes factual information, while 4 Pelagatos and Ubica TV are full of ‘epistemological assumptions’ (Fairclough, 2003) made by the journalists.

This ‘enlightenment’ influence of the liberal model where “dissemination of information is the lifeblood of democratic life” (Waisbord, 2003, p. 243). These affirmations are also closely tied to the Habermassian public sphere that is ‘rational’:

“…and contribute, with the support of the most lucid minds to anticipate and design [society’s] future” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

and ‘deliberative’:

“We do not do opposition; we do journalism (...) under any circumstance.” (About Us, Plan V, 2013); “...good journalism, beyond the ups and downs of any government” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

Moreover, the aim of ‘truth-seeking’ and democratic advocacy are also related with tensions in the counter-hegemonic discourse that affirms that they look for truth and democracy as opposed to what the current power is providing: “I believe in the pursuit of truth” (About Emilio Palacio, Iguana Libertad, 2014).
The ‘pursuit of truth’ is strongly related to the role of ‘watchdog’ especially present in investigative journalism and ‘free press’ in South America where it is basically understood as a denunciation of ‘wrongdoings’ mainly in two aspects: officialism corruption and ‘human rights violations (Waisbord, 2003). This accountability is detected in the following extracts from their statements:

“We are interested in more balanced powers and that economic and political powers do not interfere with people’s rights” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

And they also make reference to democracy, the pivotal point in the watchdog discourse:

“...to contribute with the construction of a society with solid democratic values, critic and vigilant” (About Us, Plan V, 2013) as well as 4 Pelagatos by asserting they are a “democratic space” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

Likewise, it is present in the article of 4 Pelagatos where they respond to a Member of the National Assembly accused of misuse of public resources:

“our article was written to report your indelicacy and lack of scruples”; an “article of public interest about your behaviour” (4 Pelagatos, 2016).

As well as in Palacios’ statement:

“I believe that the state and the market are necessary but dangerous, thus it is essential to build mechanisms to regulate them” (Palacio, 2014, Iguana Libertad) but the author does not acknowledge a regulation of media.

In the article of Plan V, the function of surveillance is presented in the form of an overview of the ‘legislative agenda’, as they present a summary of “twelve laws” utilising factual information through the voice of an accountant institution that is the “Legislative Observatory”, a civil society organization that monitors the activity of the National Assembly.

Most of the ‘power relations’ in the articles are acknowledged in the form of conflicts and contradictions. For example, in the article about the visit of the Ministry of Defence to members
of the Army in ‘Ubica TV’ presents the conflict between the two entities through their ‘competing’ worldviews (Gill, 1996): the one from the Army member versus the official account from the Ministry. The version of the Army is prioritized by using direct quotes when they speak as opposed to the quoted speech or explanations given when the voice of the Ministry appears, and in a stronger linguistic account, a testimonial of a member of the army addressed as a ‘witness’ is cited from a tweet in Palacios’ official Twitter account. This again shows traits of the ‘watchdog’ style in journalism and presents the journalist as the main source of information.

The Symbolic Power of Media

The strong notion of ‘symbolic power’ claims that media in its function of representing and as a source of knowledge has “the power of creating [social] reality” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 17 in Couldry, 2003, p. 4).

In its representational function, these online platforms portray the subjects mentioned in their articles and place their voices in asymmetric places, such as showed in the previous example of Army and the Ministry of Defence where the voice of the former is premised. Also, in Plan V, the article about the ‘legislative agenda’ includes the contrasting representation of Members of the National Assembly that are classified in two groups: those who are from the official party and the ones that are not, labelled as ‘political opposition’ (Plan V, 2016). In regards to the power relations accounted in the article, the group of opposition is portrayed as constrained with limited participation and victim of oppression and subjugation from both the official party members and the government, but also the official group is shown as submissive to the orders dictated by the President.

In the case of the article from ‘4 Pelagatos’ the genre of the letter allows a direct confrontation between the journalists and Aguiñaga, Member of the National Assembly that belongs to the official party, to whom it is directed. She is described as a “shameless” person and by making use of declarative questions and statements the text make assumption of lack of knowledge by affirming that someone else writes the articles for her, that she has not read a report from the Attorney General’s Office and that she has a “puny vision of public policies” (4 Pelagatos, 2016). The fact that all the writers are male and are talking to a woman also influences in the way they position her as a ‘subaltern’ (Spivak, 1994).
In addition, the denunciation of “misuse or abuse of political power” is framed in what Thompson (2000) characterises as ‘power scandal’ which is according to him the “purest form of political scandal” and because of its relevance this is seen as having a great “significance within the political field” (p. 196) and as a triumph of the journalistic role as ‘fourth state’. In this conflictive situation, the use of intertextuality, drawing from her previous answer and their own letter, as well as from past events that contribute to a negative image of the subject, facilitates the identification of asymmetries in power relations, where the account of knowledge/power between the journalists and Aguiñaga, is clearly differentiated.

‘Correistas’ versus ‘the people’

When the previous analysis of individual articles is put in perspective, a similarity is found in all of the representations: a clear ‘us/them’ distinction between members of the government or the official party and all those who disagree with them (Hall, 1997a, pp. 258-259) including: army members, political opposition and journalists.

They have represented the ‘other’ as a whole unit: the ‘Correistas’ defined with characteristics such as: lack of knowledge, oppression towards the opposition groups and corruption. The characterisation of the ‘other’ is essential in the constitution of the ‘self’ (Hall, 1997a), therefore by delegitimising and criticising these ‘others’ with the use of pejorative words and phrases, they have also built a positive image of themselves seen as the ‘binary opposition’ of what the ‘others’ are: good instead of bad, knowledgeable rather than ignorant and truth-tellers as opposed to liars, reflected in one of their principles:

“Disobedience to reject what any world force would impose on a clean spirit: serve the lie” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

In fact, in all the descriptions of their online projects, they presented themselves as having a dual position. In the first place journalists and media are described as victims of a governmental persecution and oppression:

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6 The word ‘Correístas’ is commonly used in jargon to refer to those who are part of the government of Correa or that support it.
“Journalism is nowadays, more than ever, an impossible occupation in Ecuador”; “[it] has been declared illegitimate by the current political power” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

“Today journalism faces difficult times and more so investigative journalism” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

This strategy is also used to persuade the reader about their position with the use of “rhetorical protection” understood as way of defending the speaker’s position (Gill, 1996, p. 150). They also talk about themselves as agents of change with their profession and, in the case of ‘4 Pelagatos’, also as dissidents through their identification with Albert Camus’ statements: “lucidity, disobedience, irony and obstinacy” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

Besides identifying the ‘antagonistic’ relations between the two groups, and therefore the definition of ‘political frontiers’ in their discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985 in Howarth, 2000, p. 106), they also aim to enhance their position of authority, for example in this phrase: “these ‘pelagatos’ are just concerned with public policies” “when you ask to what political interest we respond (...) To the public interest...” (4 Pelagatos, 2016). These affirmations of serving the public interest are in turn portrayed as the desire to solve the people’s needs through what they are willing to do in favour of them for what they use semantic relations of ‘purpose’ such as:

“...back the expansion of minority rights” and “propose cohabitation with more equity” (Manifesto, 4 Pelagatos, 2016).

“...our journalistic exercise will be the vehicle to clarify facts that affect cohabitation and generate conflicts” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

Both the antagonistic relations between the two groups and the desire of satisfying social needs of ‘the people’ that are not satisfied by the current hegemonic power are constitutive characteristics of Laclau’s ‘populist’ theory (Arditi, 2010, p. 489). In Laclau’s (2007) account, ‘the people’ is constructed by ‘chains of difference’ (Phelan and Dahlberg, 2011, p. 19 in León, 2014, p.14), thus identifying the ‘other’ is crucial and it will be identified by “the process of naming” (Panizza, 2005, p. 3). In the articles analysed the ‘other’ is portrayed in all the

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7 The meaning in the dictionary is: “Insignificant or mediocre person” (RAE, 2016). President Correa used the expression ‘4 pelagatos’ to refer to the opposition as a reduced number of people in the country.
supporters of the official ideological project: including the Ministry of Defence and its authorities, the members of the ruling political party, President Correa and other civil servants. For instance, in Palacios’ autobiography, there is a constitution of his own identity as an ‘empty signifier’ through the differentiation with the ‘other’ that is President Correa described as his main adversary in the section ‘9 years of conflict’ (About Emilio Palacio, Iguana Libertad, 2014).

In the case of ‘chains of equivalence’ a “heterogeneous” group is composed by members of the Army, the political opposition in the National Assembly and journalists as ‘the people’ counterparts. In addition to this, the linkage of “different identities and political forces into a common project” (Howarth, 2000, p. 109) is done through the professional journalists as the ‘nodal points’ that temporarily assume the challenge of fulfilling all the social demands and call for a change in the current regime (Arditi, 2010, p. 489).

**Advocating for the return of the liberal model of media**

When the leftist government of Correa came to power in Ecuador 10 years ago, it was presented as a “new ideological project” that had to struggle with the ‘sedimented’ discourse (Laclau 1990, p. 34 in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 36) of neoliberalism that had prevailed in the country during the past decades, this political project problematized the natural way in which social relations, especially between politicians and the press, were organised in the country (Ibid., 2002, p.36).

However, as power is “productive” because it comes from everywhere (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, pp. 51-75). and as the “objective” can become “political” again (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 37) the governmental discourse of Correa and the official party is now being strongly contested. As the backbone of this government as other ‘post-neoliberal’ ones in the region was communication (Dello Buono, 2010; Waisbord, 2012), their main contestants are professional journalists who reclaim their ‘freedoms’ and their previous authority as ‘fourth state’ (Ramos, 2012; Reyes, 2011).

With the erosion of governmental institutions, the undermining of the reputation of important political figures and the failure to fulfil demands promised to ‘the people’ during the campaign
and the first years of government, the hegemonic discourse of the “citizen revolution” is inevitably in decline. Therefore, the ‘empty signifier’ placed in the figure of Correa, as the leader of the process is now being displaced (León, 2014, p. 27) and the journalistic discourse is aiming to fill it with their own meanings to start a process of reconstruction of a new hegemony. According to Laclau (2000) “representation is constitutive of the hegemonic relation” (p. 57) and that is precisely the strength of these journalists that have the power of representation and thus of constructing meanings that constantly circulate.

In consequence, these counter-hegemonic accounts of the journalists went from being ‘political conflict’ to be ‘objectivity’ through their ‘hegemonic interventions’; this objectivity in discourse is equivalent to ‘ideology’ (Laclau, 1990, p. 89 in Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 51). As it was previously described, the ‘journalistic ideology’ as a ‘system of beliefs’ draws from the liberal model of media and the ideals of ‘freedom of press and information’, giving the market a central role in the system as opposed to the government (Waisbord, 2012):

“The constant threats from the political power has produced that media owners and editorialists step back to compliant positions” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

“Independent journalistic enterprises are harassed or directly persecuted due to an unconstitucional Communications Law that pretends to turn information in propaganda, punishes dissident thought, ignores international agreements and keeps away investment in that sector” (Manifesto, 4 Pelagatos, 2016).

Thus, it can be said that a new ‘ideological project’, based on the return to the neoliberal principles that permeated the region for a long time, is triumphing over the ‘post-neoliberal’ ideals by which the country has been ruled during the last ten years, affirming that journalism was better in the past:

“Anyway, [4 Pelagatos] wants to go back to journalism, to good journalism, in spite of the ups and downs of any government” (Manifesto, 4 Pelagatos, 2016).

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8 ‘Citizen Revolution’ is the name that Correa’s government uses to call itself as to explain that their politics are participatory.
Online Journalism

The main tool for constructing a new hegemonic discourse and establishing a new regime of truth (Foucault, 1976) are the online platforms run by the professional journalists. The use of new media is permeated by a discourse of connectivity that presents digital platforms as an ‘alternative’ medium with a strong democratizing potential where civil society’s political participation is encouraged. Within, these texts, especially in the presentation of the platforms, new media is seen as a “mere tool of ideological action” (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 204) when they claim:

“This medium wants to be part of the tools that are used for society and the powers look at themselves without auto-indulgences” (Manifesto, 4 Pelagatos, 2016).

“The access of information in virtual platforms is increasing more and more” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

On the other hand, in regards to ownership issues that reassure transparency and independent production without the intervention of political and economic interests, any kind of financial information is presented in the portals, but they still affirm their independence:

“Therefore, sustaining journalist teams independent from economic and political powers is fundamental” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

On the other hand, in regards to ownership issues that reassure transparency and independent production without the intervention of political and economic interests, any kind of financial information is presented in the portals, with the exception of ‘Ubica TV’ that has the option of receiving donations, but they still assure their independence:

“Therefore, sustaining journalist teams independent from economic and political powers is fundamental” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

In this respect, academics assure that the Internet itself is permeated by ‘capitalistic patterns’ and ‘mercantilistic logics’ (Papacharissi, 2002; Mejias, 2013; Ampuja, 2011; Morozov, 2015). In addition, as it has been demonstrated through the analysis, their ‘journalistic practices’
remain unchanged from their previous practices, following the model of professional journalism with a high tendency to denunciation of political wrongdoing and embedded in the liberal media system for which they worked. Also, their articles share the agenda with the mainstream media. For example, the article by ‘4 Pelagatos’ about the supposed misuse of resources by Aguiñaga, that was analysed for this work, the two private media portals with highest readership in the country: ‘El Comercio’ and ‘El Universo’; the same happened with the article published about the Ministry of Defence by Palacio in ‘Ubica TV’.

In the same line, it is argued that the counter-voices in the digital realm can even become counter-democratic, mainly for two reasons, first because as Cammaerts (2009) asserts, when they are used as ‘hate speech’ they undermine democracy and second, that the immediacy of the medium will produce as Couldry (2015) affirms will only allow short-term political involvement. In this respect, Mouffe’s (2006) affirmation is very suitable as she states that when there is a situation of coercion and some tendencies such as right-wing populism cannot “be expressed through traditional parties”, they are “not going to disappear” but rather to “come in even more dangerous ways for democracy” (Mouffe in Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, p. 11).

‘The Myth of Us’

When democracy, understood classically as ‘government by the people’, is undermined and its derived from political conflict (Schattschneider, 1975, p. 126), it becomes less participatory. All the voices that form part of the conflicts in the construction of the journalist’s discourse, are part of elites already constituted in society and therefore have power in different realms. And even though, in their ‘populist’ accounts of ‘the people’ the journalists advocate for the fulfilment of their demands, the voice of ‘the people’ itself is marginal and it is mainly represented as a passive receiver of ‘public policy’ and in need of ‘good journalism’ to become knowledgeable and free, for instance portrayed in these statements:

“Our believe in the formation of a critical audience (…)” (About Us, Plan V, 2013).

“Any mature and democratic society cannot dispense without an independent journalism...” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

“...and contribute with the support of the most lucid minds to anticipate and design [society’s] future” (Manifesto, 4 pelagatos, 2016).

The idea of independent media is directly related to the ‘watchdog’ as the main function of media in the conception of ‘democratic elitist theory’ (Benson, 2010, p. 198) and in these exercise of monitoring mainly political elites as it is evidenced in the themes of the articles produced in a one-month period (Appendix 1). Consequently, the participation and inclusion of the audience goes below in the list of priorities (Waisbord, 2003; Curran, 2002, p. 219).

Therefore, the struggle of power between both elites to gain power turn ‘the people’ into a “semi-sovereign public” that is represented by this minority that holds power (Schattschneider, 1975) and that has to choose between being ‘correista’ or part of the ‘opposition’, thus turning participation and democracy into illusion and the public becoming ‘a phantom’ (Lippmann, 1927, p. 77).

This is especially evident in online platforms where there is less participation than it is claimed to be and it is coincident with what Couldry (2015) defines as ‘the myth of us’ where the content producers affirm they speak for the people. In the light of Laclau’s (2007) populist theory, the constitution of ‘the people’ is given when the ‘plebs’ (the part) that claims to be the legitimate ‘populous’ (the whole) and thus to represent it, such as in the analysed texts where ‘the people’ and their needs are represented by just a few elites that oppose the government (Arditi, 2010, pp. 489-493).

This is especially evident in online platforms where there is less participation than it is claimed to be and it is coincident with what Couldry (2015) defines as ‘the myth of us’ where the content producers affirm they speak for the people. In the light of Laclau’s (2007) populist theory, the media elite becomes the ‘plebs’ (the part) that claims to be the legitimate ‘populous’ (the whole) and thus to represent it and that is how ‘the people’ is constituted (Arditi, 2010, pp. 489-493). Therefore, in this context of ‘antagonistic’ relations between journalists and politicians from the official line ‘radical democracy’ (Mouffe, 2006) cannot be performed and the real necessities of the ‘people’ cannot be fulfilled.
Nevertheless, the application of ‘media ethics’ based on neo-Aristotelian values (Couldry, 2010, 2012) to the journalistic exercise, considering the media “consumers and producers” can make individual collective life more ‘peaceable’ (Couldry, 2010) and the way to ‘agonistic’ relations less problematic (Mouffe, 2006). For example, when media is seen as a ‘human practice’ (Couldry, 2010) positive changes can be done and as Waisbord (2003) asserts, some features of ‘watchdog’ journalism in South America are positive as they are one of the few institutions in charge of monitoring other powers in contrast to ‘manipulated judiciary systems’ and hence they have raised awareness in the importance of ‘transparency’ in governments (p. 246-247).

However, this discourse is contradictory at some point as they turn a blind eye to corruption in markets and in their own media organisations (Ibid., p. 246-247) as it is seen through the themes of the articles, mainly based on governmental issues, with the exception of ‘Plan V’ that presents more varied topics. Furthermore, there are no agreements in how ‘media ethics’ should be performed as some affirm that there is not “one single model of desirable ethics unanimously considered best-suited for democratic goals” (Waisbord, 2012, p. 14) and thus it is not possible to have a ‘minimum normative framework’ as it will not lead to a good journalistic practice automatically (Wright, 2014).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The objective of this dissertation was to assess the ways in which Ecuadorian professional journalists that previously worked in private media make use of their online platforms to challenge and discredit the post-leftist government of Rafael Correa and how, from these spaces they aim to build a new hegemonic order.

Through a Critical Discourse Analysis in Fairclough’s version as well as Discourse Theory from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and supported by accounts of the Populist Theory of Laclau (2005, 2007), this research has identified at least three implications in the practices of these journalists. In the first place, it has been argued that the ‘journalistic ideology’ and the ‘liberal model’ of media permeate the discourse of professional journalists even though they do not work for private media anymore and that this identity has become even stronger as it is a way of defending this type of journalism from the attacks of the government.
Then, it has been found that the symbolic power of media and the way in which they represent the ‘correístas’ as the ‘other’ and themselves as the opposition, intensify the ‘antagonistic’ relations between both groups, therefore democracy is undermined. Through the acknowledgment of binary oppositions by using ‘chains of difference’ and ‘equivalence’ as well as insisting in a failure of the current political regime in fulfilling social demands, a new notion of ‘the people’ is constituted. And this in turn, leads to the constitution of a new hegemony that aims to go back to a liberal system where ‘freedoms’ are returned to journalists and media owners.

Furthermore, it is suggested that digital platforms are instrumentalised in favour of the reconstruction of this hegemonic project. And that even though online media is supposed to allow a more horizontal structure, in this case is less participatory and has not produced changes in journalistic practices nor achieved independence from political and economic powers. And finally, it is stated that the audience is treated as a ‘phantom’ and thus democratic participation becomes an illusion that is even worsened in the digital spaces where journalists claim to speak for the people.

In 1982, the Argentinian politician José Nun, wrote:

“In Latin America, in general, the literature about the mass media is committed to demonstrating their indisputable role as oligarchical, imperialist instruments of ideological penetration (José Nun, 1982, p. 40 in Martín-Barbero, 1993, p.229).

The fact that this was written by Nun more than 30 years ago and that my work has focused on the power of journalists and the creation of a new hegemony is not a coincidence and it can be explained in two ways. First, because counter-hegemonic struggles between the political and media elites, regardless of coming from left or right wing tendencies, are maintained in the region after three decades and are still exclusionary. And second, because it seems that looking for the ‘truth’ and hoping to live in a ‘democratic’ has always been expected by ‘the people’.

Therefore, future research can complement this study in three ways. First, an analysis of the readers’ comments would be crucial to better understand their expectations and the influence that the journalistic discourse have on them as well as their perception in terms of participation in these platforms. Second, a comparative analysis between what has been analysed through
the texts and what the journalists have to say through interviews would broaden the understanding of their position in relation to their practices in the digital realm and their intentions in advocating for democracy, the ‘common good’ and more freedoms. Finally, as it was previously mentioned, more research about how universal and particular accounts of ‘media ethics’ can be applied has to be done to facilitate ‘agonistic’ relations between elites and to encourage more inclusionary, bottom-up practices in traditional and digital media.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Articles:


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the LSE Media Department for showing me a whole new perspective in media studies, as well as to all the friends and professors I have met during this fascinating year.

Thanks to my parents and my brothers for inspiring me and being my main support during this year and always.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Online platforms selected through maximum variation requirements:

1) Founded by Ecuadorian journalists 2) that worked previously in private media outlets with long trajectories and 3) that experienced confrontations with the government.

And the list of articles considering the filters: dates of publication, section (informative/investigation), authorship.

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4 PELAGATOS

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44
APPENDIX 3:
Samples of analysed material.

1) Manifesto-4 Pelagatos

http://4pelagatos.com/manifesto/

20/08/2016
Nadie puede hacérselo sin reconocer y celebrar las diferencias, sin depurar respetuosamente y sin repudiar cualquier tipo de consulta. No hay esfera pública saludable sin ciudadanos activos y sin un pensamiento genuinamente preocupado por el interés general. Su práctica diaria así lo debe demostrar.

El Peligroso quiere ser un espacio democrático con muchos espacios y...
Una agenda legislativa marcada por la crisis

Un vistazo a la agenda legislativa del último año evidencia como doce leyes, la mayoría de ellas, remitidas por el Ejecutivo, fueron aprobadas por la Asamblea Nacional ecuatoriana. Las implicaciones de estas normas y su trámite fueron seguidas de cerca por el Observatorio Legislativo. La crisis económica y la incertidumbre política marcaron los temas que se debaten en el Legislativo.

Un informe del Observatorio Legislativo desmiente la agenda de la Asamblea Nacional ecuatoriana entre mayo de 2013 y mayo de 2016.

Según el estudio, la gran mayoría de las leyes aprobadas por el Ejecutivo ecuatoriano han sido propuestas por el Gobierno, cuya mayoría en la Asamblea ha mantenido el partido de Hidalgos desde 2013. En efecto, de los 12 proyectos legislativos, 10 son de la línea parlamentaria de Hidalgos, los demás fueron aprobados por el bloque de Alianza PAIS.

Mientras tanto, el Ejecutivo fue sometido a un intenso "bullying" político por haberse obstinado en votar en el caos de las enmiendas constitucionales, al igual que Cuenca, mientras que el oficialismo buscaba una reforma para su provincia, Galápagos, a pesar de su escasez.

Pero la agenda ha estado marcada por dos aspectos: en primer lugar, las preocupaciones económicas del régimen, que, con la caída del precio del petróleo, en primer lugar, y los efectos del terremoto que sacudió principalmente a las provincias de Manabí y Esmeraldas, se vio obligado a tomar medidas económicas que requerían de reformas legales. En segundo lugar, las...
El 63% de los proyectos aprobados por el Legislativo corresponden a iniciativas del Presidente de la República, frente al 24% que tuvieron su origen en iniciativas de los diputados.

La Asamblea destaca el Observatorio Legislativo de la Generalitat, que ha realizado un estudio sobre la situación de los partidos políticos en el Parlamento y ha concluido que la mayoría de los proyectos presentados por los diputados son de naturaleza constitucional y no se corresponden con las necesidades del país.

Por otro lado, la Ley Orgánica de Tierras Rurales y Territorios Ancestrales establece nuevas condiciones para el uso y acceso de la propiedad de la tierra rural, mejorando la seguridad jurídica de los agricultores y garantizando su derecho de propiedad. La ley crea un Registro Nacional de la Propiedad Rústica para facilitar el trámite de traspasos y garantizar la transparencia en el mercado de la tierra.

En el campo de la educación, la ley establece un nuevo sistema de becas para estudiantes de escasos recursos, con la finalidad de garantizar la igualdad de oportunidades y el acceso a la educación superior para todos los estudiantes. La ley crea un Fondo Nacional de Becas para financiar estos programas y asegurar su sostenibilidad en el largo plazo.

El gobierno también ha anunciado medidas para modernizar el sistema de salud, con la creación de nuevas unidades de salud en zonas rurales y la inversión en infraestructuras médicas. La ley establece nuevas normas para la atención primaria de la salud, con el objetivo de mejorar la cobertura y la calidad de los servicios.

En el ámbito de las infraestructuras, la ley favorece la construcción de nuevas carreteras y el desarrollo de infraestructuras de transporte público, con el objetivo de mejorar la movilidad y reducir la dependencia de los coches privados. La ley establece nuevas normas para la gestión de los caminos y la planificación de las infraestructuras, con el objetivo de garantizar su sostenibilidad y equidad en el uso.

La ley establece medidas para la protección del medio ambiente, con la creación de nuevas zonas naturales protegidas y la regulación de la actividad extractiva. La ley establece nuevas normas para la gestión del agua y la preservación de la biodiversidad, con el objetivo de garantizar la sostenibilidad y la calidad de los recursos naturales.

En el campo económico, la ley establece medidas para la regulación de los mercados financieros y la protección de los consumidores. La ley establece nuevas normas para la regulación de las instituciones financieras y la protección de los intereses de los inversores. La ley establece nuevas medidas para la fomentación del comercio externo y la promoción de la inversión extranjera.

En el campo del empleo, la ley establece medidas para la promoción del empleo y la creación de nuevas oportunidades laborales. La ley establece nuevas normas para la regulación del mercado laboral y la protección de los derechos de los trabajadores. La ley establece nuevas medidas para la promoción de la formación profesional y la inserción laboral de los jóvenes.

En el campo social, la ley establece medidas para la protección de los derechos sociales y la mejora de la calidad de vida de los ciudadanos. La ley establece nuevas normas para la regulación de los servicios sociales y la protección de los derechos de los ciudadanos. La ley establece nuevas medidas para la promoción de la igualdad de oportunidades y la protección de los derechos de los colectivos vulnerables.
Otras dos normas de reciente aprobación fueron la Ley Orgánica de Gestión y Uso del Suelo y la Ley Solidaria y de Co-responsabilidad Ciudadana.

La primera norma creó una Superintendencia de Ordenamiento Territorial, la que fue cuestionada por algunos alcaldes, que estimaron que les quitaba a los municipios sus atribuciones para regular el uso del suelo en sus cantones.

La segunda, en cambio, se aprobó con ocasión del terremoto del 16 de abril en Manabi y Esmeraldas, y básicamente dispuso el aumento del IVA al 14% por un año, donaciones de sueldos en función del ingreso y nuevos incentivos sobre el uso del dinero electrónico, lo que sectores de oposición denunciaron como una mala forma de crear una nueva moneda y salir de la colonización.

Declaraciones de bienes por Internet

Una aprobación que provocó críticas fue la de la Ley para la Presentación y Control de las declaración patrimoniales juradas. Si bien se presentarán ante un notario lo que permitía, en teoría, enquadrar por por qué quienes declararon falsedades en su patrimonio, se pasó a un sistema de internet de una declaración a la Contraloría General del Estado, con una serie de blindajes, pues no se podrá conocer las resultados del examen al final de la gestión del funcionario o si es que hay diferencias en los valores declarados.

ALTOS EN PLAN V

Columnado a muerte por sedición

Los imperdibles en Plan V

| La DAC mintió sobre los sueños del Guayllabamba |
| El paquetazo constitucional |
| El Banco BCRS, un giro estratégico |
| Las respuestas de la embajadora de EEUU sobre el caso |

Aborta un debate pendiente

Medicamentos: el contrato del estribo

- Keyword: crisis, government, lack of autonomy, government, derivative.
- Genre: informative ➔ legal.
- Semantic relations:
  ➔ Interrogative
  ➔ Adjective
  ➔ Assumptions
  ➔ Statements
  ➔ Discourse: governmental failure, crisis in lack of autonomy assembly, opposition limited.
  ➔ Conflicts and contradictions within text, use of past - present relation.

Sin comentarios.

Inicia el debate...
APPENDIX 4: Translated article.

Manifiesto

Journalism is today, more than ever, an impossible job in Ecuador. Independent media companies are directly harassed or persecuted because of an unconstitutional Communications Law that aims to turn information into propaganda, punishes dissident thought, ignores international agreements and discourages investment in this sector.

Any mature and democratic society can do without independent journalism. And without a professional and free journalism there is no open and deliberative society. In Ecuador, this kind of journalism has been declared illegitimate by the current political power.

However, a journalist, as Albert Camus said in his manifesto from 1939, does not despair in the face of adversity and “fights for what he/she believes is true as if his/her action could influence the course of the events”.

A group of journalists and other citizens that believe in this way of doing their job have come together to enliven this information platform, inspired by the principles that Camus prescribed: lucidity, disobedience, irony and stubbornness.

Lucidity to resist the calls of hatred and the cult of misfortune.

Disobedience to reject what any force in the world could impose to a clean spirit, serve the lie.

Irony to have no illusions about the intelligence of the oppressors.

Obstinacy to face the most daunting features of any power, especially the most despotic: its perseverance in nonsenses, its organized cowardice, its aggressive stupidity.

Pelagatos did not choose the circumstances in which it is originated. The journalists who founded it, will do the journalism that we have always practiced: honestly describe and investigate the reality of society and contribute, with the support of the most lucid minds in all fields, to anticipate and design their future. This medium intends to be part of the tools used so that society and the powers look themselves without self-indulgences.

No one can do it without acknowledging and celebrating differences, without debating respectfully and without repudiating any kind of censorship. There is no healthy public sphere without active citizens without journalism genuinely concerned about the general interest. Its daily practice should prove this.
Pelagatos wants to be a democratic space with many partners and without any owner. It wants to take its readers as its interlocutors. To call those that shape our time and understand it best. To provide essential data for each subject. To choose the most appropriate network. To laugh even about ourselves. To back the expansion of minority rights. To rummage into new ways of thinking. To propose more equitable coexistence ... In short, it wants to return to journalism, to good journalism, beyond the ups and downs of any government.