Conceptualizing the Bolivarian Revolution: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Chávez’s
Rhetorical Framing in Aló Presidente

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This thesis titled

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Conceptualizing the Bolivarian Revolution: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Chávez’s Rhetorical Framing in Aló Presidente

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This critical discourse analysis of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s time in office explores the rhetorical frames he employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution in his weekly television and radio show, Aló Presidente. After iterative readings of the transcripts of 40 Aló Presidente episodes that spanned almost the entire Chávez presidency, the study shows that the president employed historical, socioeconomic and religious rhetorical frames to define and promote the Bolivarian Revolution as a desirable governance manifesto. Chávez’s rhetorical framing presented the revolution as the only bastion of patriotism, ethical and Christian values in Venezuela, which resulted in the vilification of dissent and the legitimation of political discrimination. In summary, the findings indicate that President Chávez’s discursive practices and overall media strategy and dominance of the media landscape set the stage for the violation of Venezuelans’ right to access diverse information as well as their freedom of expression.
DEDICATION

A mi mamá, por mostrarme cómo se siente el amor verdadero

A mi papá, quien me enseñó a sonreírle (genuinamente) a la adversidad

A mi hermana, por cargar mi corazón y mostrarme el gran secreto que nadie conoce

A mi hermano, quien me hace creer en la generosidad del ser humano

A Sebastián, por darme nuevos propósitos

A Venezuela, a nuestro futuro

A ti
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I guess this is how an Oscar speech feels. After you struggled for so long, you finally find yourself in a fancy room where some of the most important people in your life and career have gathered to recognize your efforts and give you that big award. Although in my case the “fancy room” is my messy Athens bedroom and I am all alone, I feel the company and the cheers of my family, friends and mentors. I also visualize the award, my master’s degree, coming.

Many people put me in this position. Many people gave me hope when I lost it and made me believe in myself. I put my life in the hands of some of these individuals and fortunately they were generous enough to save me. The list is long and my gratitude, infinite. I hope I do justice to my beloved friends here.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study examined the mediated discourse of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in order to identify and analyze the rhetorical frames he employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution\(^1\) in his weekly television and radio show *Aló Presidente*. By focusing on the rhetorical dimension of Chávez’s speech, the study addressed the discursive and symbolic devices the president used to communicate certain attributes of the Bolivarian Revolution and persuade the public about its appropriateness and legitimacy.

While in office, the president used mass media extensively to advance his political agenda. Television and radio in particular, as the media with highest penetration rates in Venezuela\(^2\) (Weisbrot & Ruttenberg, 2010), were suitable instruments for Chávez to become a familiar leader. His ubiquitous presence on national broadcast media allowed him not only to connect emotionally with his followers but also to impose his narrative over the opinion of dissenting leaders who could not access mass media as easily. *Aló Presidente* (1999-2012) in particular worked in the president’s favor because it allowed Chávez to occupy a more privileged position in national media than his political counterparts, who obtained their share of media coverage by the means of press conferences, journalistic interviews or talk show appearances (Ekström, 2001).

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\(^1\) Chávez used the terms “Bolivarian Revolution” to identify his political movement. The word “Bolivarian” refers to Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), a Venezuelan hero who led the independence wars in Venezuela and other Latin American countries against the Spanish empire in the early 1800s. In Venezuela, he is deemed as the “Father of the Fatherland.”

\(^2\) Venezuela is on the northern coast of South America, and it covers an area of 353,841 miles\(^2\), slightly more than twice the size of California.
Aló Presidente was unique in that it featured a sitting head of state as its host for almost his entire presidency. The show evolved not only to normalize the presence of the president in broadcast media but also to be the mediated representation of his political vision and leadership style (Constantini, 2014). The Bolivarian Revolution, as a form of governance that promised to install a participatory democracy in Venezuela, saw its reflection in Aló Presidente, a phone-in show in which the citizens could engage in a “battle of ideas” with President Chávez and potentially have a role in the conduct of politics and policies.

The program became the cornerstone of Chávez’s political communications in a media environment that was mostly critical to his administration. In the show, the president sang, danced, told his stories of his youth, explained his ideology, showcased factories and housing complexes “made in Revolution,” confronted his domestic and international political enemies, hired and fired members of his Cabinet and even (almost) declared war against a neighboring country. Aló Presidente was not a typical show. It was a window to the government and it communicated more about Chávez’s presidency than any other outlet in Venezuela. The discourse the president produced every week on Aló Presidente is, therefore, of paramount importance to achieve a better understanding of his Bolivarian Revolution, which is the main objective of the present study.

Discourse, as a dynamic negotiation of meaning (Kopytowska & Kalyango, 2014) that manifests through the use of language, is relevant for politicians’ persuasive undertakings because the power of political rhetoric “derives significantly from the use of specific words and phrases which have the ability to elicit core value systems” (Iyengar,
2005, p. 4). Aló Presidente, as the main carrier of Chávez’s discourse, provided the president with a stage where he could develop and communicate his rhetoric as it evolved in response to national realities. Although the president claimed the show was meant to be a “classroom” in which the audience could learn about the “values of the Revolution” and remain informed about the administration’s projects (Chávez, 1999a), many scholars characterized Aló Presidente as a poorly-concealed instrument for government propaganda (Boas, 2005; Bisbal, 2006; González & Cañizález, 2011). The clear persuasive underpinnings that imbue the president’s discourse on the show make Aló Presidente a rich source of data that contains the key aspects of his rhetoric and shows how they evolved throughout his tenure as head of state.

The units of analysis the researcher has chosen to conduct this study, rhetorical frames, derive precisely from the aforementioned quote by Iyengar, which suggests a connection between rhetoric and framing theory. Frames influence people’s understanding about reality by evoking particular interpretative schemas people use to make sense of such reality (Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 2000; Entman, 2003). Considering that frames are constructed based on preexisting cultural systems of beliefs and connotations (Entman, 1993), the more frames resonate with those systems, the more they are deemed as legitimate explanations and interpretations of reality (Miller & Riecher, 2001). Consequently, frames have the potential to become rhetorical devices that speakers and politicians can use strategically to carry out their persuasive endeavors. Thus, this study undertakes the identification and analysis of the rhetorical frames
President Chávez employed in his discourse on *Aló Presidente* to characterize and promote the Bolivarian Revolution.

An examination of the president’s rhetorical framing is instrumental to comprehend how Chávez employed Venezuelans’ history, values, symbols and culture to persuade the audience about the legitimacy of the Bolivarian Revolution. Incorporating the Revolution into the people’s core cultural system was essential because it was a movement that departed from the political, economic and social structures that traditional ruling parties had put together to install a representative democracy in Venezuela (Urbaneja, 2007). To advance the deep transformations he had envisioned, President Chávez invested time and effort to anchor the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuelan history and culture through discourse (Constantini, 2014). Therefore, the analysis of the discourse that shaped the Bolivarian Revolution on the stage of *Aló Presidente* constitutes a useful approach to understand this political phenomenon.

Considering the relevance of the aforementioned theoretical framework to the study of the president’s discourse and political movement, the present study set out to examine which rhetorical frames President Chávez employed in *Aló Presidente* to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution. This broad research question provided the research with the necessary flexibility to let the themes and rhetorical frames emerge from the text as a product of the analysis and not as a reaffirmation of the researcher’s preconceived ideas, as a Venezuelan citizen who experienced the Bolivarian Revolution first-hand. The following section provides a brief outline of the research design and the method that guided this research.
Methodological Approach and Research Design

To conduct this study, the researcher employed the methodological and analytical tools of critical discourse analysis, CDA. Drawing from Van Dijk (1997), Wodak (2008) and Fairclough (1992), the study works under the general assumption that language—and thus discourse—is dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life. This way, discourse simultaneously affects and is affected by reality allowing researchers to “analyze relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control” through the study of texts (Wodak, 2001, p. 2).

The researcher retrieved the data for the study from the website www.alopresidente.gob.ve,\(^3\) which published the transcripts of the majority of the show’s episodes for free in Word or PDF format. These transcripts are written in Spanish and translated into English by a Spanish-speaking researcher for the excerpts of the show that appear throughout this thesis. In the methodology chapter, a description of the efforts taken to preserve the meanings and connotations of the Spanish text in the English translation is provided.

The transcripts of *Aló Presidente* were a convenient body of data to examine how President Chávez constructed over time an identity for the Bolivarian Revolution that let it replace representative democracy as the foundation of the government. Furthermore, the critical account of Chávez’s discourse goes beyond the mere description of the text. It assesses the political and social processes and structures that contributed to the

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\(^3\) *Aló Presidente*’s website is supported by the Venezuelan Ministry of Communications. The researcher, who is fluent in English and Spanish, acted as translator for this thesis.
production of such discourse and the examination of their implications in terms of use or abuse of power (Fairclough & Kress, 1993).

Iterative readings of the transcripts of 40 selected episodes of *Aló Presidente* allowed the researcher to identify the rhetorical frames the president used to define the Bolivarian Revolution. The first rhetorical frame established the historical foundations of the revolution and connected it to various historical events and heroes, particularly to Simón Bolívar (1783-1830), the most important Venezuelan war hero who led the coalitions of Latin American armies against the Spanish empire in the early 1800s to gain independence in the region. The second rhetorical frame defined the revolution in socioeconomic terms and provided the rationale and moral evaluations that justified the president’s embrace of socialism. Finally, the third rhetorical frame built upon religious symbolism and connotations to give a moral foundation to the Bolivarian Revolution.

**Literature about Chávez’s Discourse, the Bolivarian Revolution and Aló Presidente**

This study and its findings contribute to a body of research that has traditionally focused on the president’s discourse and the significance of his political movement in the region while neglecting to some degree the role of *Aló Presidente* in the construction and distribution of such discourse. In the field of political science, scholars have explored the historical and economic foundations of the Bolivarian Revolution (Gott, 2001) and how its core values depart from long-held conventions about the democratic system of government (Hawkins, 2010). Trinkunas (2006) examined how the Revolution carried out his hostile rhetoric against the United States and international capitalism, while Kozloff (2007) analyzed Chávez’s political influence in other Latin American countries.
The populist nature of Chávez’s leadership and discursive practice has also been addressed (Boas, 2005; Hawkins, 2009; Brading, 2012).

Other studies focused on the characteristics of the president’s discourse. Aponte Moreno (2008) and Chumaceiro (2002) delved into the key metaphors Chávez employed in his discourse and Erlich (2006) studied his digressions. In a different line of research, Erlich (2005) also explored how the president employed storytelling and humor to develop an affective relationship with his supporters. Romero (2002) and Bolivar (2005) have examined the president’s discursive strategies and argumentation. In these lines of research, Aló Presidente remains virtually unexplored as a media phenomenon relevant to President Chávez’s political communications.

Three studies have made Aló Presidente the main object of inquiry. Frajman (2014), the only one who has recently published a work about this show in a U.S. journal, conducted an exploratory study that addressed Aló Presidente’s compatibility with current neo-populist media practices in Latin America and described the show’s format changes over time. Ricardo Gualda (2012), from the University of Texas-Austin, developed for his doctoral dissertation a critical discourse analysis of eight episodes of the show to examine the discursive strategies the president used to connect with his audience and promote his administration. Lastly, Sunthai Constantini (2014), of the University of Kent, performed for her doctoral dissertation a discourse analysis of the transcripts of all Aló Presidente episodes and determined how the president’s discourse built the Bolivarian identity.
The scarce literature available about *Aló Presidente* elevates the relevance of studies such as this. The show constituted a unique media and political phenomenon that ultimately provided a “blueprint for the overall Bolivarian process” (Constantini, 2014, p. 60). Any research project that involves the evaluation of the Bolivarian Revolution benefits from examining *Aló Presidente* because it was instrumental for its development as a governance manifesto. Thus, this thesis embarks in the assessment of an understudied phenomenon to enhance the understanding of a presidency that changed Venezuela to the core.
CHAPTER 2: ALÓ PRESIDENTE IN VENEZUELA’S BROADCAST MEDIA &
POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In this chapter, the researcher locates *Aló Presidente* as part of the Venezuelan broadcast media landscape. A brief overview of the evolution of broadcast media in the country along with a description of the relationship between the Chávez administration and the media will allow the reader to get a better understanding of the technological, legal and political context in which this show developed. The chapter is also concerned with the report of the objectives and characteristics of the program, which suggest that *Aló Presidente* was a hybrid genre of radio and television show. Excerpts of the program’s audio transcripts will be provided in order to explain the kind of situations that took place in the show and to describe its most significant moments.

History of Venezuela’s Broadcast Media

Both radio and television made their entrance in Venezuela’s media landscape while the country was under the rule of military dictatorial regimes that had severely restricted the freedom of expression. The first Venezuelan radio station to air was the Broadcasting Central de Caracas, better known by its acronym AYRE. It first broadcast on May 23\(^{rd}\), 1926, during Juan Vicente Gómez’s dictatorship. Marcelino Bisbal (2007), media scholar who has developed most of the literature regarding Venezuela’s media history, reported that due to technical and economic difficulties, this radio station shut down in 1928.

It was not until 1930 when another venture in radio was able to provide the medium with solid ground for its development. The station Broadcasting Caracas,
YV1BC, still exists today under the name Radio Caracas Radio, RCR, and it was the first to implement a business model based on advertising revenues, a model that is also currently in force (Bisbal, 2007). Additionally, this radio station was the first to produce radiophonic melodramas, which were the precursors of today’s radio and television soap operas.

Radio grew rapidly in Venezuela. Bisbal (2007) said that in 1935 there were 13 fully operational radio stations in the country and, by 1945, 53 stations held broadcasting licenses. In the 1970s, 128 radio stations were on air and, with the introduction of frequency modulation in the end of the ‘80s, the number of radio stations spiked. According to a report from the National Commission of Telecommunications, CONATEL, there were 209 AM and 521 FM radio stations in Venezuela by 2005.

The first television channel was able to transmit in Venezuela in 1952, during the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez. This assured the country a place among the first nine nations to adopt television (Bisbal, 2005). This seminal experiment failed later that year, though. On January 1953, Televisora Nacional, a public and regional television station, broadcast for the first time. Private entrepreneurs started entering the television business in March that year, beginning with Televisa YVLV Channel 4, today’s Venevisión, the first private venture. Another private television station, Radio Caracas Televisión, RCTV, was founded on July 1953. The state broadcaster, Venezolana de Televisión Channel 8, better known as VTV, broadcast for the first time on 1964.

Venevisión and RCTV grew to become the stations with the largest penetration and audience share in Venezuela (Weisbrot & Ruttenberg, 2010). Both channels had
foreign shareholders, especially from the United States. Televisa’s main partner was the National Broadcasting Company, NBC, but the station’s financial problems forced NBC to sell its shares to Diego Cisneros, a Cuban-Venezuelan entrepreneur (Gibens, 2009). In 1961, the American Broadcasting Company, ABC, bought 42.95 percent of Televisa’s shares and the television channel changed its name to Venevisión. Pepsi-Cola International owned approximately 40 percent of Venevisión, leaving roughly 20 percent of the shares in hands of Cisneros.

On the other hand, 20 percent of RCTV’s shares belonged to the National Broadcasting Company, NBC, and the Phelps Group, who founded Radio Caracas Radio years earlier, owned the rest. Even the state-owned television station Venezolana de Televisión, VTV, had a partnership with CBS (Gibens, 2009). According to Bisbal (2005), the influence of these American media groups, as more experienced and affluent corporations, was significant in the development of the television industry in Venezuela.

Television expanded even more quickly than radio and became the most prominent medium in the country. In 1970, television penetration was set at 47 percent, and just eight years later, it was beyond 68 percent. By 2007, television had reached 98 percent of Venezuela’s territory and it accounted for 63.2 percent of advertising spent, while radio took 9 percent and the press, 20.3 percent (Bisbal, 2007). This way, television became a staple in Venezuela.

Private media led the expansion of television. State media were in a notoriously disadvantaged position compared with the more lucrative and technologically advanced private electronic media. In the 1990s, there were only two public television stations,
VTV and TVN-5⁴, one frequency modulation radio station and one amplitude modulation radio station. On the other hand, the private sector controlled three national stations — Venevisión, RCTV, Televen — all regional television channels, and 17 private radio circuits (Bisbal, 2007; Gómez Daza, 2014). Audience share measurements were also indicators of public media’s deficiency. In 2000, private television stations enjoyed 80.79 percent of audience share, while VTV had just 2.04 percent share, according to the media research company AGB Panamericana. The rest of the audience share belonged to pay television.

**Broadcast Media and the Political Climate**

The emergence and evolution of broadcast media, especially of television, coincided with the gestation and advent of democracy in Venezuela. Before 1958, only one president, Rómulo Gallegos,⁵ had taken office after the celebration of free yet not universal elections. Rebellions, coups, military governments and two harsh dictatorships had prevented the country from developing a stable democratic system. Therefore, when clandestine political parties Acción Democrática, COPEI and Unión Republicana Democrática were able to oust Pérez Jiménez on January 23rd, 1958 they signed a formal arrangement to ensure the establishment and survival of democracy in Venezuela. This would later be known as the Punto Fijo Pact, a document in which the aforementioned

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⁴ TVN-5 was available only in Caracas. It was sold to the Roman Catholic Church in 1991 and became Vale-TV, a channel dedicated exclusively to educational content (Gómez Daza, 2014).

⁵ Gallegos took office on February 1948. However, a military coup d'état led by Carlos Delgado Chalbaud, Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Luis Felipe Llovera Páez ousted him on November 1948. The three conspirators formed a military triumvirate to rule Venezuela. In 1952, the triumvirate dissolved and Pérez Jiménez took over, installing a right-wing dictatorship until January 23rd, 1958 when then-clandestine political parties AD, COPEI and URD put together another coup and overthrew him.
parties agreed to prioritize the integrity of the republic over their particular political ambitions by (1) holding periodical free elections whose results would always be respected, (2) including members of all parties in the presidential Cabinet and (3) honoring a national program whose elements and objectives would be the result of continuous negotiations among AD, COPEI and URD (Urbaneja, 2007). Avoiding confrontation among the parties was considered vital for the creation of a functional democracy.

The spirit of the Punto Fijo Pact might have permeated to the media. Teodoro Petkoff (2005), notorious leftist politician and editor in chief of the former daily Tal Cual, avered that there was an implicit non-aggression agreement between the media and the different AD and COPEI administrations that governed from 1958 to 1998. Petkoff argued that television in particular was instrumental to normalize and strengthen the bipartisan system that kept both parties sharing power for 40 years. In exchange for allowed limited criticism of politicians on the television screens, administrations kept media regulations to a minimum and permitted the media to influence policy-making by letting them have “their own parliamentary groups accessing the National Assembly through the official ways of the two traditional parties” (Petkoff, 2005, p. 104). This state of affairs made it impossible for alternative views to reach mainstream media exposure.

In the late 1980s, the increasingly corrupted bipartisan structure, the broadening gap between the rich and the poor and the complete neglect of the media toward the grievances of average Venezuelans started to crack the republic (Urbaneja, 2007). Carlos Andrés Pérez, AD leader, won the elections for the term 1988-1993 by promising to
restore the economic prosperity that characterized his first presidency. However, the irresponsible fiscal policies and extended government corruption that characterized Pérez’s first term had their roots in the deep economic crisis of the late 1980s.

[The economic crisis] had its origins in the high foreign debt contracted between 1975 and 1978, when the external debt increased from 6 billion to 31 billion, and the fall in oil revenues due to lower international oil prices since 1983. In 1973, a barrel of Venezuelan crude was worth $28.9. Then it decreased to $10.9 in 1986... Between 1972 and 1982, oil revenues accounted for 72 percent of total revenue. A consequence of the fall in international oil prices was the fiscal insolvency to pay the high debt incurred in previous years (Martínez, 2008).

President Pérez decided to apply harsh neoliberal measures and compromise with the International Monetary Fund in order to reduce the external public and private debt. The administration’s macroeconomic package led to the reduction of public spending and subsidies, the restriction of wage raises, the devaluation of the currency and dramatic increases of gas and staples prices (Urbaneja, 2007). People repudiated the measures as they hit the poorest sectors of the population the hardest while forgiving the debt of the enriched private sector.

There were also severe tensions between Pérez and AD because he neglected the party when appointing his Cabinet. The president chose to bring new blood to his administration: young and highly educated professionals filled key spots in the government that had traditionally belonged to party members. Although knowledgeable about the necessary steps to fix the economy, the so-called “technocrats” lacked political

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6 During Pérez’s first term between 1974 and 1979, Venezuela enjoyed an economic boom after the price of oil had quadrupled because of the Arab oil embargo. The nationalization of the oil industry on 1976 also raised oil revenues and the administration increased public spending significantly (Carlos Andrés Pérez, 2011). These were the times when the country was known as Saudi Venezuela.
acumen and failed to design comprehensive policies to help already impoverished Venezuelans (Rivero, 2010).

The generalized frustration exploded on February 27th, 1989 in Guarenas, an underprivileged suburb outside Caracas. That morning, commuters learned that bus fare had doubled overnight. Bus drivers were responding to the 100 percent increase of gas prices President Pérez had announced just days earlier. When people refused to pay the new rate and drivers denied them the ride, riots began and reached Caracas later that day (Rivero, 2010). Impoverished people from the shantytowns that surrounded the capital’s valley headed to the city, burned buses and looted convenience stores and supermarkets all over Caracas. The government declared a state of emergency and ordered the National Guard to bring the situation under control. Caracas was under curfew for two days as an alliance of police and military tried to restore order on the streets and get the rioters back into the shantytowns. This popular explosion would be later known as the Caracazo.7

The executive acknowledged, after much hesitation, there were 327 civilians killed and thousands injured. Estimates of national journalists and foreign correspondents, however, indicated more than 1,500 fatalities. A report by the Military Intelligence Division (DIM) to which we had access to talked of 2,227 deaths by firearms (Heinz Sonntag as cited in Martínez, 2008).

The brutality against civilians catalyzed a military conspiracy that had been gestating within the Armed Forces since 1982. The Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement, MBR-200, led by Lieutenant Hugo Chávez, had been reinterpreting history and following current events in Venezuela in search for an alternative that would revitalize and enhance democracy in the country (Gott, 2001). For Chávez and his partners, the bipartisan

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7 For a detailed analysis of the Caracazo and its implications, see López Maya (2003).
system had hijacked democracy in Venezuela, demobilizing and silencing the
disenfranchised majority to ensure the survival of the parties (González, 2014). After the
Caracazo, the conspirators accelerated their plans to topple President Pérez and
performed a coup d’état on February 4th, 1992. Chávez failed to capture the president in
Caracas, saw the entire plan in the capital crumble and surrendered to the authorities (for
a detailed description of the conspiracy and coup, see Gott, 2001).

To avoid a bloodshed, Chávez asked to address his fellow conspirators, who were
still fighting in Maracaibo and Valencia, on national television so that they would turn
themselves in as well. His appearance on television lasted less than two minutes.
“Comrades, unfortunately por ahora— for now— the objectives that we had set
ourselves have not been achieved in the capital… Before the country and before you, I
alone shoulder the responsibility of this Bolivarian uprising.” Despite its brevity, this
speech placed Chávez at the center of the national political arena and let him emerge as a
popular hero. Never before had Venezuelans seen a leader admit responsibility for
anything publicly and his phrase “por ahora” suggested his intentions to keep fighting for
a cause that many thought fair after decades under of corrupted administrations and
economic distress (Cannon, 2009). Despite losing militarily, Chávez definitely won in the
media. Mass media allowed him to mesmerize public opinion.

By 1992, there was generalized social unrest in Venezuela. Venezuelan historian,
Margarita López Maya (2005), found that between 1989 and 1998 there had been around
6,000 protests against the economic and political conditions in Venezuela. Mass media
started to reflect the public’s exasperation. Newspapers and television and radio
newscasts became increasingly critical toward the government (Petkoff, 2005). Even Chávez could take advantage of the media’s dread of the administration. Newspapers published his letters from jail and television and radio shows interviewed him on several occasions to broadcast his opinions. When President Caldera issued his pardon to the military conspirators in 1994, Chávez’s release was widely covered (Gott, 2001).

The new combative stance of national media was not only evident in their editorial lines. Political confrontation crossed the borders to the entertainment arena and its most acclaimed manifestation was *Por Estas Calles* (On These Streets). This soap opera by Ibsen Martínez premiered on March 1992 and stayed on RCTV’s primetime lineup until 1994. *Por Estas Calles* nurtured its scripts with national events reported in the news. The show made great efforts to stay in tune with national affairs and it even created characters to represent public figures (Hippolyte, 2004). The most famous was Don Chepe, a corrupt public official who impersonated not only Pérez but former infamous Venezuelan presidents, such as Jaime Lusinchi. When President Pérez broadcast his resignation on national television on 1993, Don Chepe appeared reading a similar speech to quit his position on that night’s episode. This way, national affairs were not only reported in the news but staged in *Por Estas Calles*, whose popularity contributed to the public’s frustration and mistrust against the government and the traditional political parties (Rivero, 2010).

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8 It was widely known that Lusinchi’s secretary and mistress Blanca Ibañez had the president’s ear and was behind many important state decisions (Urbaneja, 2007). In *Por Estas Calles*, Don Chepe’s wife, Lucha, had a striking resemblance to Ibañez and she manipulated him easily just as Ibañez was believed to do.
By 1998, Venezuelans were craving change. The majority did not feel represented by either AD or COPEI, who had made participation in government virtually impossible to those who were not affiliated with them (España & Ponce, 2008). Thus, when Hugo Chávez—who since 1994 had been touring the country harvesting support for his political party Fifth Republic Movement, MVR—announced his presidential candidacy, both the public and the media embraced him as the best alternative to the AD/COPEI hegemony (López Maya, 2005). Petkoff (2005) averred this was the first time Venezuelan media abandoned their alleged political neutrality to back a presidential candidate by executing overwhelmingly supportive coverage of Chávez’s campaign.

The advance of Chávez was concerning enough to forge an unlikely alliance between AD and COPEI. For the first time, both parties supported the same candidate, Henrique Salas Römer, in an attempt to prevent an independent’s raise to power (López Maya, 2005). The effort proved to be useless when the Supreme Electoral Council announced that Chávez won the elections with 56.2 percent of the popular vote, breaking the bipartisan system that had ruled Venezuela for exactly 40 years.

President Chávez and Broadcast Media

The relationship between Chávez and the media continued to strengthen during the first months of his presidency. After his investiture, the president appointed notorious media-related figures to his Cabinet, such as journalist Alfredo Peña, who served as secretary of state, and Carmen Ramia, who headed the ministry of information. The

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9 In 1999, Carmen Ramia was the director of the Ateneo de Caracas, one of the biggest cultural institutions of the country, and Miguel H. Otero’s wife. Miguel H. Otero is the owner and director of El Nacional daily. El Nacional is one of the newspapers with the largest readership and greatest tradition in Venezuela.
honeymoon did not last long, though. Once critics against the reform of the Constitution and the Bolivarian Revolution started to emerge in the media, Chávez felt the pressing need to confront the “lies private media present as information” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999a). Biographers Marcano and Barrera Tyszka (2007) noted that the president turned out to be “particularly sensitive” toward the media’s disparagement and that he worked quickly to create outlets to show his administration, his policies and himself under a positive light (p. 193). This way, Chávez set out to create a “communication hegemony” by reforming the legal framework for mass media and creating a strong state-owned communication apparatus. The president’s interest in the media was so intense that Venezuelan journalist Andrés Cañizález (2003) qualified it as an “obsession.”

For Bisbal (2006), Chávez’s handling of the media derived from his awareness about the “strategic relevance of mass media as a stage for political and ideological confrontation” (p. 62). It would have been impossible for Chávez to overlook the fact that the media turned him into a politically relevant figure after the 1992 coup. Before his “por ahora” speech, few knew who Chávez was or what he stood for. However, after that brief moment on national television, he became the symbol of the anti-establishment sentiment that would dismantle the AD/COPEI hegemony six years later (González, 2014). The media created Chávez and he knew how to use that persona to win the 1998 elections as well as push forward the Bolivarian Revolution throughout his presidency.

The media were also paramount for Chávez because of the populist nature of his leadership. The president was positioning himself as a grassroots trailblazer who would
bring a highly transformative and democratizing revolution to the country. According to Raby (2006), for a populist movement like this to be successful, it is necessary to have charismatic leaders deeply rooted in popular culture who are able to mobilize supporters and encourage political discussion in the public sphere. Chávez made his entrance to popular culture in 1992 through broadcast media, specifically television, and during his presidency he stayed on the airwaves through his weekly show Aló Presidente— which will be described in later sections— and other special broadcasts. Many scholars argue that it was his hegemonic approach to mass media that let him mobilize his followers on a national scale and influence political discussion (López Maya, 2005; Bisbal, 2006; Cañizález, 2007).

Television and radio were instrumental in creating a solid connection between the president and his supporters due to their unique ability to establish “intimacy at a distance” (Thompson, 1995, p. 126). Broadcast media are able to reduce the time and space separating individuals by reproducing symbols and moments that allow people to experience a world that is not within their grasp. The presence of Chávez in broadcast media, which with time became ubiquitous, let him become a familiar figure in virtually every Venezuelan home (Bisbal, 2006). His charisma made the rest, turning him into a relatable leader whom many people trusted (González & Cañizález, 2011). Considering the Chávez administration’s tendency to organize elections and referendums\(^\text{10}\) to decide on policy and ratify elected officials, the president needed to keep in touch with the

\(^{10}\) During Chávez’s 14-year presidency there were 14 elections and referendums. The administration lost only one of those ballots: In 2007, the government did a referendum to pass a reform of the 1999 Constitution but 50.7 percent of the voters rejected it.
people to harvest their support in the back-to-back polls. Radio and television were vital for a president who seemed to be campaigning all the time.

*Building the Revolution’s Communication Hegemony*

It took time and effort to adapt broadcast media to Chávez’s communication needs. Gómez Daza (2014) argues that these changes took place at different levels, which were undertaken in sequential periods. From 2000 to 2006, the modifications focused on the *legislative* level, which derived in the passing of a set of regulatory laws for electronic media. From 2006 on, the *structural* level of the broadcast media system entered a period of “instability” marked by the disappearance of RCTV and the emergence of more state-owned and community media.

Two laws were instrumental for the legislative shift: The Telecommunications Organic Law (LOTEL), sanctioned in 2000, and the Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law, approved in 2004. Government officials argued that these laws were necessary to enhance media content’s quality and educational value, which had been undermined by the commercial interests of private broadcasters (Morales & González, 2005). The democratization of media was another major goal set by the new legislation, which prohibited media mergers and acquisitions, and established mechanisms—primarily government funding—to support the initiatives of independent producers of radio and television content.

These laws are a good starting point to understand the increasingly conflicted relationship between the media and the government. According to LOTEL, the National Commission of Telecommunications, CONATEL, the entity in charge of frequency
allocation, could suspend a medium’s broadcasting license for “security reasons, the introduction of new technologies and services, the handling of interference issues and the re-allocation of ranges and frequencies” (art. 74). Gómez Daza (2014) noted that previous legislation contained more precise language to define the circumstances in which CONATEL could withdraw a broadcasting license. LOTEL’s vague language was—and still is—problematic because it allowed CONATEL to arbitrarily define the criteria for frequency allocation. Furthermore, not only CONATEL had such powers. The most controversial modification to the telecommunications legislation gave the president extraordinary powers to single-handedly revoke broadcasting licenses and to expropriate media carriers’ properties if “grave circumstances regarding national security” emerged (art. 108 of LOTEL).

The Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law proved to be even more concerning than LOTEL as it expanded the government’s prerogative to control broadcast media content. The bill, which was better known as Ley Mordaza—Gag Law—allowed CONATEL to evaluate the “degrees of language, health, sex and violence” in broadcast programming to regulate its quality as well as the schedules of national radio and television channels. The law also included a clause that allowed the chief of the executive to broadcast for up to 15 minutes a day on all broadcast media. A reform of the Criminal Code in 2005 complemented these bills making “defamation, mockery or insult” of members of Parliament, the Moral Power, the National Electoral Council and the High Military Command punishable with fines and up to four years of
prison. “The intensity of the charge will be proportional to the hierarchy of the functionary” (art. 442 of the Criminal Code).

Venezuelan private media and some international organizations considered the new legislation a strike against the freedom of expression and information. Vague language was often cited as a major problem because it left a lot of room for interpretation in the hands of the government (Gómez Daza, 2014). CONATEL and the executive were in the end the only entities defining what was defamation, mockery or insult and determining the appropriate punishment for it. In its 2012 World Report, Human Rights Watch noted that the media laws passed by the National Assembly encouraged self-censorship.

These restrictive laws did not emerge in a vacuum, though. For Bisbal (2007), the bills were a reaction to national broadcasters’ stance during the ill-fated coup d’état against the Chávez administration on April 11th, 2002.11 For the president, the media had been inciting national destabilization by providing extensive and supportive coverage of the protests against the government that had been ongoing since November 2001 (Villegas, 2012). Back then, Chávez had single-handedly sanctioned into law a package of 49 decrees using the temporary legislative powers the National Assembly had awarded him a year before. On April 11th, the opposition organized a massive march that was allegedly the largest protest ever seen in Caracas (Nelson, 2007). While the march was

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11 A recount of the 2002 coup is beyond the scope and objectives of this section. For a detailed explanation of the context, causes and consequences of the coup see Cannon, 2004.
taking place, President Chávez decided to make a *cadena*, a broadcast required to be aired by all radio and television channels.

The government often used special broadcasts as a way to censor the media: by law, all the networks had to broadcast official government announcements. . . . In the previous 24 hours [before the coup], as the national strike wore on and the pressure against Chávez mounted, the government had held 35 special broadcasts, taking up 15 hours of broadcasting time on more than 300 radio and TV stations (Nelson, 2007, p. 154).

The three main television channels, Venevisión, RCTV and Televen, divided their screens during the *cadena* on April 11th to show what was going on in the streets of Caracas, although they were obliged by law to not do so. At that time, the National Guard and the Armed Forces were repressing the protest. Members of the Bolivarian Circles, pro-government civil organizations, were also confronting the marchers with firearms (Olivares, 2012).

The president said he ordered the Armed Forces to intervene in order to prevent a clash between the opposition march, which had gone off course and headed for Miraflores, the presidential palace, and a group of government supporters who were already in the palace. Pro-government journalist Ernesto Villegas (2012) averred that the media coverage of these events suggested that instead of protecting the people, the president was brutally oppressing the opposition so that the unrest would intensify. A group of officials of the Armed Forces removed Chávez from office that evening. During

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12 *Cadenas* are public addresses that all national television and radio broadcasters are obliged to transmit by law. They were designed “to ensure the timely diffusion of information in case of natural disasters or to broadcast [a] rare state ceremony” (Toro, 2012). However, Chávez was very liberal in his use of *cadenas*, interrupting regular programming quite often. AGB Nielsen reported that from the time the president took office in 1999 until February 2007, he had appeared in more than 1,500 *cadenas*, which added up to almost 900 hours of on-air time (Cañizález, 2007).
the two days Chávez was away, private television broadcasters continuously showed cartoons and movies instead of the demonstrations of government supporters, who were asking to have Chávez brought back (Villegas, 2012).

When the president returned to power, he showed a conciliatory attitude and said he would engage in a national dialogue with all sectors of society to ensure peace and governability (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2002b). By then, however, Chávez had had an upsetting realization: the state’s mass communication capacities, especially on the airwaves, were significantly inferior to those of the private media, which left him impotent and in complete isolation in critical moments during the coup (Bisbal, 2007). As a result, Bisbal (2007) argued, the president set out to build the *Estado-comunicador*—communication state—to make the government even more visible in the media and confront his political enemies before Venezuelans’ eyes.

The pressure over broadcasters was intense in the aftermath of the coup. The president was not afraid to use the Radio and Television Social Responsibility Law and the reformed Criminal Code as instruments to “tame media terrorists” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2004a) who, according to the administration, were still trying to sabotage the Bolivarian Revolution. Some private broadcasters made efforts to comply with the government’s requirements in order to keep their licenses. For instance, Venevisión’s legal department created self-censorship mechanisms to ensure the channels’ content did not violate the laws. Acosta-Alzuru (2014) described how from 2002 onward the network even checked the scripts of its telenovelas so that their content would not evoke “the government’s wrath” (p. 214). The telenovela *Cosita Rica* (Little Sweetheart, 2003-2004)
was particularly under scrutiny because it mixed reality with fiction in a fashion similar
to *Por Estas Calles*.

The author [Leonardo Padrón] developed his thesis through the character Olegario and
his performance as president of the fictitious Consorcio Luján, a metaphor of
Venezuela. Olegario evoked Chávez’s personality and history. The character
lacked formal management training and experience, was resentful, autocratic and
charismatic. Authoritarian and with a larger-than-life personality, Olegario was
obsessed with power. He abused it on a daily basis and alienated those who did
not agree with him. Olegario was a president who talked a lot but did very little.
He was a big spender without planning. Olegario was, undoubtedly, an

When the opposition activated the process to initiate a recall referendum in hopes
to deposing Chávez in 2004, a similar process unfolded in *Cosita Rica*: employees in
Consorcio Luján would vote to decide whether they kept Olegario as president. The
government did not turn a blind eye to the telenovela’s plot twist. Minister of Information
Víctor Ferreres visited Venevisión and demanded that Olegario’s referendum could not
happen before Chávez’s (Acosta-Alzuru, 2014). The network obeyed without questioning
and aired Olegario’s victory after the president was ratified in office.

The president’s constant threats regarding the withdrawal of broadcasting licenses
never dissipated, though. The tension got under the skin of media mogul Gustavo
Cisneros, owner of Venevisión. In 2004, Jimmy Carter arranged a meeting between
Cisneros and Chávez in which they reached a non-aggression pact. The network
compromised its critical editorial line so that it could stay on air.

Executives replaced morning talk shows with astrology programs and gave
priority to nightly soap operas over critical news programs. By the time of the
presidential election last December [2006], the shift was an about face from
Venevisión’s previous coverage. Venevisión devoted 84 percent of its political
coverage to Mr. Chávez’s positions and only 16 percent to the opposition,
according to a European Union report on the elections (Romero, 2007).
Broadcasters who did not fall in line with the government felt the consequences soon enough. In 2006, invoking the law of social responsibility, President Chávez expressed his intentions to not renew RCTV’s broadcasting license, which expired on May 27th, 2007. He argued that RCTV was a national security liability as it had clearly incited violence during the 2002 coup and had not stop its continuing attempts to destabilize the government (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2007a). Other government officials highlighted the administration’s intention to free RCTV airwaves to favor state-sponsored community media (Constantini, 2014). The network’s equipment was seized and given to government television channel Tves. None of RCTV’s legal appeals was successful.

Later in 2009, CONATEL shut down 61 opposition-leaning radio stations and two regional television stations due to “irregularities” in the management of their broadcasting licenses. Finally, CONATEL charged Globovisión with US$2.16 million for covering a riot that caused more than 20 deaths in state prisons of El Rodeo I and II in June 2011. The fine represented 7.5 percent of the channel’s gross income for 2010, so it put Globovisión on the verge of bankruptcy (“Venezuela fines independent broadcaster,” 2011).

All these legal actions and especially the disappearance of RCTV and radio stations allowed the government to expand its communication potential and change the structure of the national broadcast media system (Gómez Daza, 2014). The administration went from having only two television stations in 2000 to owning seven
television channels: VTV, Vive TV, Tves, Telesur, ANTV, Ávila TV, and 123 TV.\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, community media run by independent producers also expanded, founding 243 radio stations and 37 local television stations.

The president’s efforts to create his communication hegemony went beyond increasing the number of state-owned media.\textsuperscript{14} Bisbal (2006) notes that Chávez strove to dominate the news and opinion agenda by making his presence ubiquitous in radio and television. To do so, the president made extensive use of the \textit{cadenas} and hosted \textit{Aló Presidente}, a radio and television talk show, every Sunday. The latter grew to become the pillar of the government’s political communication strategy as it allowed the president to ritualize his presence in the media, which helped him push his own political agenda forward, strengthen his relationship with his supporters and present himself as a relatable leader (Frajman, 2014). The Venezuelan journalist Alonso Moleiro expressed the significance of \textit{Aló Presidente} in the following terms:

\begin{quote}
We do not know . . . if there is somewhere else in the world a media phenomenon so eloquent, obsessive, relentless, preachy and self-centered; with the same impact on the masses; with the same influence on the course of public opinion. Every Monday, though, we [journalists] know how high the tide will come in the week after finding out [what President Chávez said in] \textit{Aló Presidente} (Moleiro, 2005).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Each state channel had its particular purposes. Tves replaced RCTV in 2007 and it is a variety channel. Telesur broadcasts for the members of UNASUR and it is specialized in cultural content. ANTV, as the National Assembly channel, broadcasts all parliamentary debates. Ávila TV is mainly for entertainment and it broadcasts in Caracas only, while 123 TV targets children with educational content.

\textsuperscript{14} It is important to note that, although there was a generalized belief that Chávez and state media dominated Venezuelan broadcast media landscape, the overall audience share of public media was only 5.13 percent in 2010 (Weisbrot & Ruttenberg, 2010).
Aló Presidente, the Cornerstone of Chávez’s Political Communications

This section introduces Aló Presidente in its broad lines and describes its objectives, structure and most significant moments. The researcher will present excerpts of the show that highlight its unique characteristics, which have led some authors to define Aló Presidente as a hybrid genre of political show that mixes the features of talk and pundit shows, reality television and public service broadcasting (Cañizález, 2007; Constantini, 2014). The idea is to provide a broad picture of what took place on the program so that the reader can become familiarized with Hugo Chávez’s main communication venue.

On May 23rd, 1999 the newly elected President Chávez premiered Aló Presidente, a one-hour radio show anchored by the president himself and a couple of panelists. Radio Nacional Venezuela, RNV, was the only medium broadcasting the program until August 21st, 2000 when Aló Presidente made its national television debut on state-owned Venezolana de Televisión, VTV. The transition to television allowed the producers to vary the shooting location of the show, which was never chosen at random. After choosing and researching the topic of a given episode, the production team of Aló Presidente looked for a location relevant to the topic (Constantini, 2014). This way the audience could witness the inauguration of schools, factories and housing complexes all across the country if the president was discussing issues of education, production or housing, see historical landmarks pertinent to national holidays or follow Chávez on his campaign trail during elections.
There was also complete flexibility regarding the duration of the show after it started to broadcast on television. The show’s website, www.alopresidente.gob.ve, reports the program broke national duration records twice. First, episode 289 lasted 7 hours and 41 minutes, and then episode 295 went on for 8 hours and 7 minutes. The average duration of each *Aló Presidente* episode was approximately six hours and, after 13 years and 378 episodes, it reached 1,696 hours and 44 minutes on air, according to the Venezuelan Ministry of Information (2012). President Chávez decided the show’s duration on the spot. *Aló Presidente* had no commercial breaks and ended when the president said so, departing from all conventions that limit the extension of radio and television shows in commercial media.

How many hours has this been? It’s been almost four hours and we’re only dealing with the second topic of the day. How about that? This location is beautiful, it is the kind of place where *Aló Presidente* can last for twenty hours, we can be here until midnight (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2005b).\(^{15}\)

The president’s schedule dictated the regularity of the show. Sometimes an episode of a given week would be canceled because of an official trip abroad or more than one episode would be broadcast in the same week on special occasions. For instance, the tenth anniversary episode of *Aló Presidente* was divided into four chapters and broadcast for four days in a row. The show only took leave of the program schedule twice. The first hiatus took place from October 24\(^{th}\), 2004 to January 9\(^{th}\), 2005 and, according to Constantini (2014), it was part of a “communication strategy aimed at strengthening the State media” (p. 33). Later, *Aló Presidente* went off the air on June

\(^{15}\) All quotes from the show are translated from Spanish.
2011 because of Chávez’s diagnosis and treatment for cancer.\footnote{The first report on Chávez’s illness was released on June 10, 2011 (Alpert, 2013). A government spokesperson announced the president was in La Havana, Cuba, undergoing a surgery for a “pelvic abscess.” Twenty days later, on a recorded message broadcast by VTV, Chávez said he had cancer. Its location and type are still unknown. After almost two years of repeated rounds of surgery and chemotherapy, the president died on March 5, 2013.} The program resumed on January 2012, but it was canceled again after a month when Chávez presented more health complications. The president’s death on March 2012 marked the official end of the show.

One of the most innovative features of Aló Presidente was that it was the only outlet in which citizens had the opportunity to talk directly to the president in a somewhat informal setting. According to the show’s website, anyone could call or attend the live shows without being vetted so that all citizens had an equal chance to participate. There also seemed to be no boundaries limiting the topics the audience could bring up on the show. People could talk to the president about any grievance ranging from issues with employers or housing to policy ideas.

Such interactions between the president and the people spoke volumes about the identity Chávez was creating as a leader. Blanca Eekhout, who was minister for communication and information from 2009 to 2010, defined Aló Presidente as “a space for dialogue and proximity that breaks with the traditional state of isolation of Venezuelan leaders. It is a horizontal model, an affective model, a battle of ideas” (Eekhout as cited in Constantini, 2014, p. 15). This statement is remarkably helpful to understand key aspects of this show and how they reflected the way Chávez conducted his administration. Aló Presidente was the mediated representation of a new distribution
of powers in Venezuela that would allow citizens to engage in a “battle of ideas” with the president himself and potentially contribute to the nation’s progress. This way, the show became a huge metaphor of Chávez’s grassroots approach to politics, representing the advent of the so-called “participatory democracy,” a concept that will be discussed on a later chapter.

As Eekhout said, Aló Presidente was also an “affective model” of political communication. Every episode gave the president the opportunity to praise Venezuelans for their history, efforts and culture while broadcasting exchanges with average citizens that would always unfold under very familiar and warm terms. “Chávez used Aló Presidente as a ritual to periodically raise the emotional intensity of his following and strengthen the mystical link between himself and his supporters” (Frajman, 2014, p. 510).

The president’s natural charm was the key of his popularity and, to Marcano and Barrera Tyszka (2007), his friendly and amusing personality fueled his followers’ loyalty. His spontaneity and unsophisticated ways along with his appreciation of Venezuelan folklore made him look as if he were a man of the people, the ultimate relatable leader of the impoverished and disenfranchised, who by 1999 were the majority of Venezuelans (España & Ponce, 2008).

In a society that has traditionally been under the rule of elites who systematically neglected the poor, Chávez’s leadership style seemed bound to succeed. Apathy toward democratic systems and politics in general often derives from politicians’ lack of connection with the bases and their focus on rational argumentation. Richards (2004) calls this “emotional deficit,” a phenomenon that gradually distances political leaders
from their constituencies. After running a campaign in which he distanced himself from old and corrupted elites and targeted the poor, Chávez used *Aló Presidente* to keep acknowledging the emotional and everyday needs of the electorate (Constantini, 2014). For example, on September 19th, 2004 Claudia Espiño called the show to bring to the president’s attention a variety of issues that encompassed several programs of the administration. She was also hoping Chávez could help her with her housing problem.

Claudia Espiño: I wouldn’t want to criticize, I know that the [Bolivarian] process is long and that there are many things and people to take care of, and that it slows down the [Bolivarian] process, but I will be quite honest: the paperwork [to be assigned a house] is very complicated; the requests are practically impossible; and there is nothing in my council. I work, I am single, and when I manage to find the time to go to the offices, there is either no one there, or no paper left in the printer, no forms, etc. So, yes there is a housing program, but I think that in the end, it won’t make any difference for me.

President Chávez: Claudia, listen, I still have faith in the Bolivarian process, and with the new stages of the Revolution we will improve efficiency. That is why, “mi reina” (my queen), I created the Ministry for Housing aimed at enhancing efficacy not at increasing bureaucracy like the opposition say. No, no, no. So, I will give your number to the Minister of Housing, Julio Montes, and he will take care of your case (as cited in Maniglia, 2004c).

On the show, the president’s agency seemed almost omnipotent. He had an answer to every question and a solution to every problem. Occasionally, Chávez even promised to mind the caller’s issues personally. Participants often said the president was their last hope to solve their problems. This way, the stage was set to nurture the audience’s trust in the head of state (Gualda, 2012).

The emotional connection between the president and the public was not only developed by having Chávez listen to and solve the problems of the people, though. Audience participation in *Aló Presidente* significantly decreased over time (Frajman,
2014; Constantini, 2014) as the president became the central figure of the show and members of his Cabinet and party replaced citizen interventions. The bond was also based on the president’s capacity to humanize his own figure in front of the cameras by sharing his own life experiences (Constantini, 2014). No anecdote of his childhood, marriage or work seemed too personal. As a token, on August 3rd, 2008 Chávez told on *Aló Presidente* the story of how he got diarrhea during a previous *cadena*. “I had diarrhea! I am a human being as anybody else. Sometimes people forget that… There I was sweating and squeezing down there, you know…” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2008c). The story went on for five minutes and the audience was blasting in laughter.

This kind of humor, although not so presidential, resembled the humor of the average Venezuelan. Chávez embodied middle- and working-class Venezuelans: he was spontaneous, witty and, yes, sometimes vulgar. People *liked* the president’s persona even if they did not agree with his policies. In 1999, his approval rates were around 90 percent and in 2013 they were approximately 57 percent, according to Gallup (Dugan, 2013). Paradoxically, the popularity of the president decreased as his control over broadcast media— and the government overall— increased. As the relationship among Chávez, critical media and the opposition became more hostile, reaching a climax during the strikes and the coup in 2002, the president might have felt the need to tighten his grasp on his own administration and the media (Bisbal, 2007). The passing of legislation and the execution of policies that threatened freedom of information and speech, eventually took its toll on Chávez’s approval rates, even though opposition leaders gradually lost ground on national mass media. Additionally, programs and participatory organizations the
government created were inherently discriminatory, as only those pledging alliance to the administration could benefit from the social programs. Some of these discriminatory elements are outlined in chapter three. President Chávez’s rhetoric also encouraged confrontation and political discrimination (“A Decade under Chávez,” 2008), creating a conflictive political climate that progressively enlarged and ostracized the opposition while radicalizing government supporters.

Although the president’s popularity decreased over time, Chávez enjoyed solid popular support throughout his entire presidency. The president and his administration won with broad margins in all but one national election. Chavistas—followers of Chávez—were so invested in their virtual relationship with the president that after Chávez’s passing they massively congregated around the Military Hospital in Caracas, where he was receiving treatment, to mourn for a week. In those days they coined and repeated the slogan Yo soy Chávez— I am Chávez.

The success of Aló Presidente as a television and radio show is difficult to assess, though. According to Chávez, Aló Presidente was the most-watched Sunday show in Venezuela. On the first installation of the show’s tenth anniversary episode, broadcast on May 28th, 2009, the president reported the results of a national telephone survey the team of Aló Presidente requested to the company Observatorio Público. The survey assessed the attitudes of 3,200 citizens toward the show and the administration.

61 percent of respondents said they see or hear Aló Presidente... [while] 39 said no. 83 percent of that 61 percent said they saw or heard [the show] on television, 17 percent [heard on] radio. 63 percent of respondents said they fully agreed and agreed with the President is doing this program. 14 [percent] said they did not want the show. . . . 55 percent of respondents said Aló was very good and good. 12 percent said [Aló Presidente was] bad or very bad and 20 percent [said Aló
Presidente is] just okay... 67 percent said they agree and completely agree with Aló Presidente staying in the lineup. 16 percent said ‘out . . .’ 32 percent said they would not change anything in the program. 30 percent said they would change the duration. It must be that they feel it is very short (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009a).

Apart from the polls requested and distributed by the government and the qualitative assessments that make a case around Aló Presidente’s high popularity, there is no independent data available to allow researchers to establish a connection between the president’s unprecedented media practices and their impact on public opinion. Official data about the show’s ratings and budget is also out of reach. Sunthai Constantini, whose dissertation assessed how Aló Presidente helped configure the “Bolivarian identity,” described her experience looking for official data in Venezuela as follows:

As part of the consequences of the overall antagonistic climate, access to information was limited to confirmed partisans of the regime. In spite of many Freedom of Information Act requests, applied according to Art.51 of the Constitution, no answer was received from MINCI (Ministry for Information), Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), Vive TV, alopresidente.gob.ve, or Prensa Presidencial. Most of these requests were aimed at obtaining information about the budget of the programme and its ratings, as well as the number of phone calls, their selection, follow-up, and management. Additionally, I contacted the producers of Aló Presidente on numerous occasions with the aim of attending an episode of the show or gaining information regarding its production without much success (Constantini, 2015, pp. 97-98).

Constantini’s experience is not unusual in Venezuela. Another doctoral candidate from the University of Texas, who analyzed three Aló Presidente episodes—278, 288 and 298—for his dissertation, had to purchase rating data from the independent agency Nielsen Venezuela. The data indicated that an average of 1.2 percent of the Venezuelan audience watched the episodes he analyzed (Gualda, 2012). The unavailability of official information reflects the Chávez administration’s reluctance to provide public data to
citizens, researchers and journalists who were not affiliated with the government or state-owned media. Tamoa Calzadilla, a prominent Venezuelan investigative journalist, described the situation in the following terms:

In Venezuela, we face a fierce obscurantism, which worsened from the second year of the government of Hugo Chávez. When criticism against the Bolivarian Revolution started to emerge, the administration initiated the practice of secrecy with the press: they hogged documents, prevented free access to public information and public servants... employees of national schools and municipal hospitals and any public agency received gag orders (some of which filtered) and it became increasingly more difficult to find evidence to support any investigation (Calzadilla, 2014).

*Aló Presidente* became the cornerstone of Chávez’s political communications and the means through which he periodically shared his views and projects with the nation. President Chávez rarely held press conferences or question time after his addresses because of his conflictive relationship with independent media. He hardly attended interviews and he did not accept invitations from private television or radio stations, whose editorial lines were mostly critical against the government. As the president gradually monopolized discourse in the show— the panelists were eliminated and the participation of citizens decreased—, *Aló Presidente* turned into an exclusive outlet for the president to communicate his opinions and orders to his Cabinet and supporters.

Globovisión, an opposition-leaning news channel, reacted to the existence of *Aló Presidente* by creating its counterpart, *Aló Ciudadano*— Hello, Citizen. The first episode of *Aló Ciudadano* was broadcast on September 27th, 2002, and it mirrored the features of the early installations of *Aló Presidente*: it was a live radio and television call-in show in which a group of panelists and a moderator, in this case lawyer and journalist Leopoldo Castillo, commented about current affairs. *Aló Ciudadano* broadcast on Sunday evenings,
right after *Aló Presidente*, so that citizens and panelists could discuss what the president had said during his show. Castillo said in a seminar (Casa América, 2013) that Globovisión noticed that Chávez had eliminated the people’s questions from his show and, therefore, Globovisión created *Aló Ciudadano* so citizens could ask experts about the viability and implications of the president’s promises. *Aló Ciudadano* was so successful that before its first year it started to broadcast for three hours every day but Saturdays. The show was eliminated from Globovisión’s prime-time lineup after entrepreneurs affiliated with the Maduro administration bought the network in April 2013 (Muñoz, 2013).

It is important to note that *Aló Ciudadano* emerged after the 2002 coup d’état against Chávez, when the relations between the president and private broadcasters started to become exponentially more hostile. As the government expanded its control over broadcast media and encouraged self-censorship, Globovisión was for the most part left alone.\(^{17}\) Chávez often used Globovisión as an example of his tolerance of criticism in the media and his respect to the freedom of expression. Moisés Naím, an economist and prominent intellectual in Venezuela who hosted an opinion show in Globovisión before it changed hands, argued that the Chávez administration had put together a strategy to “repress independent media while simultaneously striving to keep up a façade of freedom of expression” (Naím as cited in Muñoz, 2013). Keeping Globovisión—a relatively

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\(^{17}\) Compared to RCTV, a national broadcaster that, like Globovisión, did not soften its critical stance against the government, Globovisión survived the pressure from the administration. However, the network could not resist the financial attacks of the government—i.e. the 2009 fine—and the owners, who protected the channel’s editorial independence, were forced to sell their shares in 2013. Globovisión has not criticized the administration ever since (Muñoz, 2013).
small outlet that reached only the capital and a couple of other cities—on air despite its clear opposition to the administration was, to Naím, part of said strategy. However, as noted before, national and more influential broadcasters such as RCTV and Venevisión faced more severe treatment from the administration than Globovisión and their criticism was effectively silenced in later years.

*Decision-making in Aló Presidente*

As the president started to make state decisions on the set of the show, the program increased its relevance and newsworthiness. “Chávez governs from *Aló Presidente*. It is on this show that ministers find out if they have been fired or hired; it is here where mayors and governors are reprimanded for anything they have done wrong” (Arturo Serrano as cited in Carroll, 2007).

Some official announcements had immense repercussions. On April 7th, 2002 after the constant protests of the opposition and the general strike in December 2001 calling for the president’s resignation, Chávez ordered the removal of seven executives of the state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, PDVSA, live on *Aló Presidente*. The executives had allegedly taken active part in the organization of the strike and protests against the administration.

The PDVSA elite stepped over the line. We have tried to dialogue, to negotiate, to show good intentions, but they are going too far and I have decided to dismiss them. I announce the dismissal of the following people: Eddy Ramírez, Managing Director of Palmaven until today, you’re out… Mr. Juan Fernández, Manager of Planning and Finance Control, thank you for your services, you are fired from Petróleos de Venezuela… These people have been sabotaging a company that belongs to all Venezuelans… My instructions are clear: from now on, any member of PDVSA calling for the strike will be automatically fired from the oil industry (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2002a).
As a result, the opposition organized another series of manifestations, including the march of April 11th, which set the stage for the coup d’état that separated Chávez from power for two days. Years later, the president admitted that firing these executives on national television in such an “inhumane” way had been one of the worst mistakes he had made in the course of his presidency (Villegas, 2012).

Another iconic moment in Aló Presidente took place after the Colombian Armed Forces killed Raúl Reyes, second in command of guerrilla group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, in Ecuador without Ecuador’s knowledge on March 1st, 2008. That weekend on the show, President Chávez condemned Colombia for its military activities in Ecuador. He referred to Reyes as a “good revolutionary,” and asked for a minute of silence in Reyes’ honor. Chávez continued criticizing Colombian President Uribe and suddenly uttered serious threats.

President Correa has informed me that he is withdrawing his ambassador from Bogota, and that he is sending troops toward the North. I told him “count on Venezuela for anything you need, under any circumstances.” Minister of Defense: move ten battalions to the border with Colombia, immediately… Deploy the air force. We don’t want a war, but we won’t allow the North American empire and its puppet President Uribe, with the Colombian oligarchy, to weaken us… I am also ordering the immediate withdrawal of any personnel that remains in our embassy in Bogotá. Our embassy is closed. Mister Chancellor Maduro: close the Venezuelan embassy in Bogotá (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2008b).

Both the minister of defense and the chancellor, who were sitting in the audience, looked surprised when the president addressed them. It seemed as if they did not know the president would make his decision public so soon or they did not about his decision at all. The impasse involving Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela was solved a week later in the Rio Summit, which gathered 13 Latin American presidents to discuss the conflict.
Evidently, what happened on *Aló Presidente* had direct implications on national and even international politics. The president emphasized the political and strategic functions of the show on its tenth anniversary by saying that *Aló Presidente* was one of the main vehicles through which he conveyed his ideological and administrative guidelines. He encouraged the members of his Cabinet and party to watch the show so that they could be aware of Chávez’s latest strategic objectives and come up with ways to apply the president’s ideas.

I once said to someone who occupied a position of great importance, several years ago, “Look, are you not aware of this, and this and this?” “No” [he said]. “But, hey, you don’t see *Aló Presidente*?” [the president asked]. “No, that is that on Sundays and I rest [on Sundays].” “Well, okay, but you have to have someone make you a summary, then. Because your high office requires you to be aware of what I’m saying. Do you know how many things I say, instructions I give and reflections I make in four or five hours? You have to take notes, process [it] and gather all the managers and deputy ministers on Monday mornings... to discuss it” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009a).

In her *New York Times* column about the show, Rachel Nolan noted that *Aló Presidente* was the “most real reality TV” she had ever seen because it not only reflected but affected reality (Nolan, 2012). Venezuelan journalist Andrés Cañizález (2007) agrees with Nolan in that the program was some kind of hyper-real reality show, but he also categorizes it as a variety show due to its entertainment value. Identifying this program’s genre is, however, a complex task because of its eclectic nature. In the following section, the researcher delves into the characteristics of *Aló Presidente* as a hybrid show.

*The Genre of Aló Presidente*

The wide range of activities that took place on *Aló Presidente* makes it difficult to place it within any traditional genre category of radio and television programming or
political communications. Constantini (2014) argued that the show presented characteristics of four genres: talk show, pundit show, reality television and public service broadcasting. First, Aló Presidente could be considered a talk show because it featured a host, a panel of guests and a live audience discussing everyday life concerns and current affairs (Ilie, 2006). The program, at least in its early stages, was “constructed around the active participation of the audience” (Constantini, 2014, p. 39), who could call or be on the set of the show to talk to the president. The issue-oriented nature of the program as well as its phone-in format also contribute to its categorization as a talk show.

The premise of Aló Presidente gravitated around the idea of engaging the people in a conversation with the president that could range from matters of national and international affairs to home economics to personal issues (Constantini, 2014). The focus was on the talk itself or the “dialogue,” as the president preferred to call it. The interactions with the audience either by phone or in the show’s set allowed the president to discuss issues in quite an informal and conversational manner, abiding to the characteristics of traditional talk shows (Timberg & Erler, 2010). However, President Chávez’s increasing prominence in the show limited audience participation to a minimum and took his role as a host to a different level: an expert.

By holding an expert position in the program, the head of state took Aló Presidente to the field of pundit talk shows in which individuals with “insider” knowledge analyzed events in order to inform or educate the public (Jones, 2005). Chávez shared the stage with a panel of journalists and political commentators until episode 82, when he became the only host of the show. From then on, he invited
members of his Cabinet and party, governors, mayors and even foreign presidents and public figures to exchange ideas on Aló Presidente. The guests and the president in this context played the role of pundits who were believed to possess the necessary knowledge to explain to the audience how to interpret public affairs.

Constantini (2014) found that the pundit-show treatment, especially the pedagogic rhetoric, became more prominent in Aló Presidente after Chávez announced in 2005 that his Bolivarian Revolution was a socialist one. On episode 214 broadcast on February 27th, 2005, the president brought in two experts from Argentina and Chile to discuss the strategies and mechanisms through which socialism can spur development.

At this point in my life, at 51, after six years of presidency... after so many readings, debates, discussions, travels around the world, I am convinced... that the path for a new, better and possible world is not capitalism but socialism... I also think we need to invent a new socialism, the socialism of the 21st century. Let’s invent it, let’s discuss it, let’s not be afraid of ideas... Sunkel offers a neo-structuralist synthesis and makes a strategic proposal: development from within... What is the strategy? It is about endogenous development... We start by establishing the industries that are considered to be the fundamental pillars of the process of industrialization... from this initial impulse come the industry of iron and steel, metallurgical and electrical industries, then basis chemical, energy, transport and communications based on natural resources and the articulation of the territory and the national market... All aspects must be combined... This is why we cannot allow [basic industries] to export most of their production... Empires from around the world have forced us for 500 years to produce and export raw materials. At this point we need to turn this all around and change direction (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2005a).

In many occasions, President Chávez said Aló Presidente was a “pedagogic endeavor” in which he could share knowledge with the people and construct the ideological foundations of the Bolivarian Revolution and the socialism of the 21st century. A transition to a more pundit-like format explains the absence of genuine debate in Aló Presidente. Because pundit shows are more about establishing what issues matter
most and how they should be interpreted, there is no space to engage in a “battle of ideas.” Constantini (2014) noted that, although the show’s website claims that producers did not screen callers before they talked to the president, the participants’ grievances usually “espoused” the topics of each show so the discussion of the items that were already in the agenda passed as “seemingly spontaneous discussion” (p. 120). This way, the interventions of the audience did not contribute as much to an open and diverse debate of ideas. They turned into another form of reinforcement of the arguments of the president.

The serious pundit tone was not prominent most of the time in Aló Presidente. Chávez always found ways to keep himself relatable and non-condescending. Storytelling and humor were keys to keep the balance between the ideological functions of the show and Chávez’s efforts to connect with the audience (Constantini, 2014). Aló Presidente was ultimately entertaining. The president’s ability to keep people’s attention was remarkable. In the show Chávez sang, danced, operated machinery, told stories of his childhood, his marriage and his work and more. This, along with the state decisions the president made on air, turned the show into a voyeuristic experience (Nolan, 2012). Watching Aló Presidente was like getting a sneak peek of the president’s life while seeing the government in action from the inside.

These characteristics gave the show the underpinnings of reality television without transforming it into an actual reality show. Nabi et al. (2003) argued that reality television is a genre that portrays people as they live out events as events occur in the protagonists’ real living or working environment. Being a staged show following a
somewhat loose script, *Aló Presidente* lacked the kind of realness Nabi et al. (2003) described. However, as the show positioned itself as a weekly ritual, it became part of the working environment of the president from which he engaged in actual government duties. The authenticity Chávez was able to convey on air along with the implications of the decisions he made on the show, prompted scholars such as Cañizález (2007) and Constantini (2014) to include reality television characteristics in the mix of elements that define *Aló Presidente* in terms of its genre.

Finally, *Aló Presidente* also presented characteristics of public service broadcasting (PSB) programs. To Constantini (2014), the educational undertones and informative aspects of the show are the main features that relate it to programming typical of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the United States. “In many instances, the space of *Aló Presidente* was a time for explanations; the opportunity to shed light onto topics that were of civic relevance and social welfare” (Constantini, 2014, p. 45).

For instance, on June 10th, 2001, the president took time to explain the objectives and reach of a new form of civic organization the government was promoting, the Bolivarian Circles. These groups were supposed to have regular meetings to educate themselves about the Bolivarian Revolution and discuss the problems their communities were facing. The Circles were meant to communicate with the government officials in order to work on development of community projects. On the show, Chávez provided the contact information of the government agencies so that the citizens could start organizing the Circles.

I have here the phone and fax numbers so that you start sending the list of the Bolivarian Circles and their members… We will organize the Circles in networks
and plan meetings... I will go wherever I see there are enough organizations, enough Circles, to begin reviewing neighborhoods, visiting schools and camps to speak directly with the organized people (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001b).

All the aforementioned elements make it impossible to place *Aló Presidente* in a single category of television programing. The show was a hybrid that combined the characteristics of various broadcast genres in order to make itself more appealing to the audience and effective in the achievement of its political objectives (Constantini, 2014). The conversational format and the president’s tendency to disclose details about his personal and professional life allowed him to become a familiar and friendly figure while the pundit underpinnings of the show solidified his position as an authority. The reality television elements provided at least the illusion of transparency and proximity, which were essential to boost the show and Chávez’s popularity, as the PBS aspects of *Aló Presidente* increased its newsworthiness and educational value.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is concerned with the theoretical foundations that guide the present study. In the first section, the researcher reviews pertinent literature about framing theory and how it is relevant to the study of rhetoric. Once rhetorical frames are established as the study’s unit of analysis, the researcher presents the research questions that guided the study. Then, the chapter moves on to provide an outline of the rhetorical frames President Chávez employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution. The main goal of this latter group of sections is to get the reader acquainted with the historical references and cultural systems these rhetorical frames resonate with as they are specific to Venezuela. This way, the analysis of the president’s rhetorical framing developed in chapters five and six will fit in its proper context.

Framing Theory

Framing theory provides a convenient theoretical foundation to study the way President Chávez presented his worldview to influence Venezuelans’ opinions about the Bolivarian Revolution. The theory offers insights about the nuances in wording and syntax that public figures can strategically employ in discourse to advance their own political agendas and contest their adversaries’ views (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). The strategic component in the construction of frames makes the examination of framing relevant to the field of rhetoric, which is concerned with the mechanisms through which discourse becomes persuasive (Leach, 2000).

Robert Entman coined one of the most-cited definitions of framing. He said that framing involves selecting aspects of a perceived reality and making them salient in order
to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Gamson and Modigliani (1987) proposed that a frame, as a unit of analysis, is a “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (p. 143). These concepts have been widely applied in empirical studies of media discourse that assess the ways in which news media cover issues and evaluate their causes (Huang, 1995; Evans, 2010) and how news frames influence public opinion (Zhou & Moy, 2007) and attitude formation (Chong & Druckman, 2010). However, the aforementioned notions of framing and frames have been criticized in recent scholarship for being all-encompassing and, thus, misleading.

Scheufele (2000) notes that framing draws from the theoretical premises of attribution theory, which assumes that human beings are unable to apprehend reality in all its complexity and, therefore, infer causal relations from sensory information. These causal relations are deemed as attributions (Heider as cited in Scheufele, 2000). Goffman (1974) in his sociological studies, considered that people’s inability to understand the world led them to actively create “primary frameworks” (p. 24), which are interpretation schemes that categorize experiences to facilitate sense-making processes. Primary frameworks allow individuals to read events as consequences of natural causes or intentional human action. Goffman (1974) found that this interpretative distinction influenced people’s response to events. These assumptions about human beings’ cognitive limitations and the means they use to classify information to make sense of reality are at the core of framing and define it as theory concerned with how preexisting
frameworks influence the interpretation of new experiences. Consequently, unlike Entman said in his early studies, framing is not a matter of salience, which concerns other theories such as agenda setting and priming. Instead it is a matter of attribution (Scheufele, 2000).

Psychological approaches contributed to the examination of frames as tools for information processing and to the assessment of mass media’s role in said process. Experimental studies in the field on prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) have found that the presentation of a decision-making situation affects individuals’ perceptions about the outcomes attached to the options that were offered (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). In other words, people’s interpretations of situations depend on the way those situations have been contextualized or framed in the first place. This way, the characteristics of the information people receive from mass media—i.e. syntax, grammar, wording, tone, visuals, etc.—became relevant to the study of framing.

Considering the theoretical premises and the contributions of attribution and prospect theory, framing encompasses the study of how “variations in the mode of presentation for a given piece of information” impact people’s information processing and attitude formation (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012, p. 11). However, the effects of frames on people’s sense-making processes develop on a very specific level. “Framing influences how audiences think about issues . . . by invoking interpretative schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information” (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309). Although the present study is not concerned with the effects of President Chávez’s framing on media discourse or public opinion, Scheufele and Iyengar’s clarifications allow the
researcher to ignore theoretically unrelated elements, such as salience, and focus the investigation on how the description the president offered about the Bolivarian Revolution resonated with schemas already imbued in Venezuelans’ minds.

Interpretative schemas are anchored in people’s history, culture, values and belief systems (Goffman, 1974). Those schemas manifest through the presence of keywords, stock phrases and stereotyped images in discourse (Entman, 1993). Syntax, grammar and metaphors also communicate these underlying schemas (Wodak, 2008). Studies have found that frames that make use of more culturally resonant elements are more likely to influence people’s perceptions and evaluations of issues (Snow & Benford, 1988; Miller & Riecher, 2001). Therefore, in the configuration of any type of discourse, speakers and writers employ frames to invoke schemas that will allow them to influence the way people understand and assess issues. If successful in shaping how people think about problems, speakers and writers can take a step forward and influence how people react or respond to these issues (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

In their examination of U.S. media and government discourse in the aftermath of 9/11, Steuter and Wills (2008) focused on the role metaphors played in ensuring the public’s support for the military intervention in Iraq and for passage of legislation, such as the Patriot Act. The authors noted that then-President George W. Bush, with the help of mass media, was able to characterize the 9/11 attack as an act of war and Arabs and Muslims as enemies, which allowed him to justify and legitimize a military response to the attack and discriminatory practices against the aforementioned groups. Steuter and Wills argued that the use of other metaphors would have framed the 9/11 attack
differently, which would have allowed the government and the public to consider alternative solutions. For instance, the characterization of the attack as an international criminal act, the scholars said, could have led to an international investigation and to the search, prosecution and incarceration of those responsible. However, the war frame promoted by the Bush administration showed a military action as the only plausible response to 9/11.

As Steuter and Wills’ (2008) research exemplifies, framing plays a major role in political communications as it contributes to set the boundaries of public debate and fosters specific understandings, evaluations and responses in the audience. Politicians use frames in their messages in a strategic fashion in order to shape people’s perceptions of political issues, which can potentially encourage the public to endorse their policies and discard competing propositions (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This way, frames can be understood as *rhetorical devices* that assist political actors in persuading the public and gaining supporters (Payne, 2001; Charteris-Black, 2011). It has been widely discussed that all forms of discourse are inherently rhetorical because they are constructed to convince interlocutors of the appropriateness of the communicator’s ideas (Gill, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2006). However, political discourse is *intentionally* articulated to be compelling and persuasive. Consequently, researchers can focus on how the rhetorical features of political discourse work more easily.

Rhetoric is mainly focused on the ways in which persuasion is undertaken in discourse (Charteris-Black, 2011), which is one of the main interests of this research. Kuypers (2009) argued that framing and rhetoric are somewhat theoretically intertwined
because they are both concerned with how language and symbolism are employed to induce certain interpretations of reality. There are, however, key differences between these frameworks. On one hand, framing sees interpretative reconstructions of reality as necessary cognitive means to facilitate information processing. On the other hand, rhetoric considers that such constructions are elements strategically built in discourse to persuade others to interpret issues in a certain way. When strategy is a defining factor in the configuration of frames, framing and rhetoric collide and, from this intersection, the researcher derived the unit of analysis for this study. Rhetorical frames are defined here as strategically constructed interpretative schemas that are embedded in discourse to induce a particular characterization of a wide range of elements, such as events, issues, people, ideologies, etc.

The present study focused on how a media phenomenon—Aló Presidente, as a representation of President Chávez’s political discourse—defined and shaped over time a political phenomenon, the Bolivarian Revolution. Considering that the president’s discourse on Aló Presidente has been considered propagandistic (Bisbal, 2006; Cañizález, 2007; Gualda, 2012; Constantini, 2014; Frajman, 2014), the researcher assumed that the speeches were strategically configured to provide a particular depiction of the Bolivarian Revolution so that the audience formed favorable evaluations about this governance manifesto. Therefore, the present research set out to answer the following research question:

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18 A governance manifesto is the governmental “pattern or structure that emerges in a socio-political system as ‘common’ result or outcome of the interacting intervention of all involved actors” (Kooiman, 1999, p. 73). Rhodes (1996) argues that a governance manifesto defines the ways in which government and non-
**RQ1**: What rhetorical frames did President Chávez use to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution in the discourses he pronounced on the show *Aló Presidente*?

Apart from identifying and describing these rhetorical frames, the researcher was interested in determining what attributes the President attached to the Bolivarian Revolution through the use of these rhetorical frames. The goal was to assess how the president’s discourse invoked preexisting interpretative schemas imbued in Venezuelans’ culture to make his governance manifesto *appealing* to the masses. Consequently, a second research question was posited:

**RQ2**: What qualities did the rhetorical frames embedded in President Chávez’s discourse attribute to the Bolivarian Revolution?

The analysis of the president’s rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution offers a thorough description of what the revolution was in the eyes of its creator. Furthermore, this approach exposes the underlying schemas that contributed to the discursive construction of the Bolivarian Revolution’s identity. This way, readers are able to assess this governance manifesto within its historical, political and cultural context. In the following section, the researcher provides an outline of the rhetorical frames that she identified during a pilot study of President Chávez’s discourse on *Aló Presidente*.

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state actors work together to run a country. The Bolivarian Revolution was the overarching concept Chávez used to define how his political ideas translated into his governing. Therefore, the Bolivarian Revolution will be considered here as a governance manifesto.
Rhetorical Framing of the Bolivarian Revolution

The overarching proposition of this study is that President Chávez employed rhetorical frames to attach a series of attributes to the revolution and provide it with an identity that appealed to Venezuelans. The researcher examined how these frames resonated with established interpretative schemas so that the people could understand what the Bolivarian Revolution was and form positive evaluations about it. Now, scholars and opinion leaders have noted that the Bolivarian Revolution as a political movement is not easy to define.

Petkoff (2005) had characterized the revolution as a “mezcolanza ideológica”—an ideological mixture. López Padrino (2011), Tal Cual columnist, took a step further and said that the Bolivarian Revolution was an “ideological trickery” that loosely connected Marxism, Bolivarianism, socialism, state capitalism, nationalism and even fascism to justify totalitarianism. Ernesto Villegas (2012) said the revolution was a process that incorporated the principles of Christianity and socialism to the Bolivarian thinking in order to achieve social justice. President Chávez did not provide a clear definition of the Bolivarian Revolution either. He agreed with Villegas in that the revolution was a process, and specifically a transformative process. “The revolution is . . . the social transformation in structures, economic transformation, political transformation and moral transformation” (Chávez as cited in Susi-Sarfati, 2011, p. 180). The goals of the revolution, however, were spelled out by government officials and the president on numerous occasions and the objectives encompassed social equality, fair distribution of
wealth, cultural and economic independence, people’s participation in the government, among others.

*Aló Presidente* was the space Chávez chose to communicate “the ideas, values, aims and victories of the revolution” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2011c). Therefore, the show allowed the researcher to elucidate how the president characterized the Bolivarian Revolution throughout his presidency. After a preliminary reading of the transcripts of ten episodes of *Aló Presidente*, the researcher identified three rhetorical frames that President Chávez employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution: historical, socioeconomic and religious. The first rhetorical frame invoked historical events and national heroes to provide context and various qualities to the president’s governance manifesto and his policies. The second rhetorical frame drew from the socioeconomic stances of President Chávez to define the revolution as a people’s movement that was anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist and, after 2005, overtly socialist. Finally, the third rhetorical frame presented the revolution as a movement guided by the moral standards promoted by the Roman Catholic religion and Jesus Christ. The following sections provide insight and contextual information about the historical and cultural systems that are at the foundation of these rhetorical frames.

*Historical Rhetorical Frame*

The historical rhetorical frame evokes collective memory for the sake of persuasion. In their accounts of history, politicians choose which stories from the past

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19 The transcripts of the episodes of *Aló Presidente* are available for free on the website www.alopresidente.gob.ve. For more information about this website, the characteristics of the data employed in this study and details about this research’s step-by-step process, see chapter four.
they want to tell, and how they will tell them. Therefore, when speaking about events and people from the past and their relevance in modern times, politicians offer a “rhetorical construction” of history (Bostdorff & Goldzwig, 2005, p. 662) based on arguments about the current relevance of those narratives.

The relevance of past events is not disconnected from the political objectives of the politicians who incorporate historical elements to their speeches. Bostdorff and Goldzwig (2005) argued that historical accounts can influence audience perception about public policy. Consequently, when speakers draw from the past in their discourse, they also reshape the past to make it more useful to their political endeavors (Gronbeck, 1998).

In the case of Hugo Chávez, references to Simón Bolívar and the independence war were frequently used to connect the Bolivarian Revolution to the country’s heroic past. Simón Bolívar is the most celebrated Venezuelan hero and his involvement in the independence wars all across South America has secured him a privileged place in the history of other Latin American countries. Bolívar was born in an aristocratic creole family in 1783 and was educated in Europe, where he had access to the thoughts of Enlightenment philosophers. The ideas he harvested abroad inspired him to join and lead the independence movement in Venezuela at his return in 1807 (Pino Iturrieta, 2003). Bolívar’s victories over the Spanish empire resulted in the independence of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia and gave him the name Libertador—liberator. However, Bolívar died in disgrace in 1830 after he tried to unify the aforementioned countries under his rule and failed.
Bolivar gained prominence in history for much more than his military victories, though. In their compilation of the Liberator’s writings, Franco and Graham (2003) praise Bolívar’s insightful analysis of the region’s fundamental struggles during the independence period and his ideas on political organization and continental integration. Texts by Bolívar, such as the Cartagena Manifesto, the Jamaica Letter and the Angostura Address, are still relevant in Latin American education and politics. Many historians have characterized the admiration of Bolívar in the region and especially in Venezuela as a cult or civic religion (Pino Iturrieta, 2003; Langue, 2009; Carrera Damas, 2012).

Langue (2011) said that the Bolivarian cult emerged during President Antonio Guzmán Blanco’s first administration (1870-1877). Guzmán Blanco organized a series of commemorations that elevated Bolívar like never before. Four big events marked the start of the cult: (1) The exhibition of Bolívar’s possessions in 1872, (2) the inauguration of Bolívar’s equestrian statue in the center of Caracas in 1874, (3) the transfer of the Liberator’s remains to the National Pantheon and (4) the celebration of the centenary of his birth in 1883. This last commemoration took place during the second term of Guzmán Blanco.

The Guzmán Blanco administration set a precedent for the following Venezuelan presidents, who also celebrated Bolivar’s accomplishments with different degrees of

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20 The Cartagena Manifesto, dated on December 15th, 1812, is one of the first public documents Bolivar wrote. It delves into the causes of the disintegration of Venezuela’s First Republic (1811-1812). Bolivar wrote the Jamaica Letter on September 6th, 1815 as he exchanged correspondence with the governor of Jamaica Edward John Eyre. In the document, the Liberator analyzed the fall of Venezuela’s Second Republic (1813-1814). On August 15th, 1819, Bolivar pronounced the Angostura Address at the second constitutional Congress of Venezuela, which set out to write the country’s first Constitution. The Congress named Bolivar president of the republic and gave him the title of Libertador. See Franco and Graham (2003) to read these and other documents by Bolivar.
devotion (Pino Iturrieta, 2003). Every Venezuelan government has used Bolívar as a
political and moral referent because the Liberator has a remarkable unifying effect in the
country (Langue, 2009). All Venezuelans stand on a common ground when it comes to
admiring Simón Bolívar’s valor, leadership and vision.

Although Venezuelan political circles and the society at large have a long
tradition in following the Bolivarian cult, Chávez took this civic religion to a higher level.
Not long after being elected president in 1998, Chávez called for a reform of the
Constitution of 1961 in order to adapt it to the “new times.” When the Constitution was
reformed in 1999, the country’s name was changed from Republic of Venezuela to
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Furthermore, for the first time in history, an explicit
reference to the Liberator was included in the Constitution:

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is irrevocably free and independent, basing
its moral property and values of freedom, equality, justice and international peace
on the doctrine of Simón Bolívar, the Liberator (Bolivarian Republic of
Venezuela Const. art. 1).

The “doctrine of Simón Bolívar” was never defined in the Constitution, though.
Even in the text that represents the country’s supreme law, Bolívar functions more as a
moral referent than an actual legal foundation. The figure of the hero here serves as a
argued that the Bolivarian Revolution does not actually follow the doctrine of Simón
Bolívar. She posits that the references to the hero are nothing but “discursive strategies
that serve the itinerant political project” (p. 78). In short, the myth of Bolívar is part of
President Chávez’s rhetoric, a strategy to gain Venezuelans’ approval.
Bolivarianism—at least in its symbolic dimension—continued to expand during Chávez’s administration. The president usually said in his numerous public addresses that the Liberator was not dead and that “his sword” was still walking around Latin America. “Bolívar is not just a man; he is much more. He is a concept. More than an idea, he is a group of ideas that unify politics and society and justice,” said Chávez (as cited in Maniglia, 2000c).

The Bolivarian cult during Chávez’s presidency was more than an exercise of remembrance or national reassurance. For Langue (2009), the Bolivarian Revolution was framed as a movement that descends from the independence movement. According to Chávez and his supporters, the independence war was still being fought in Venezuela, especially against the United States, which was the modern embodiment of imperialism. Although Venezuela was a self-governing country, the president noted in many Aló Presidente episodes that economic and cultural independence were still at risk because of the hegemonic and interventionist tendencies of the United States.

The independence war as a major historical event that became a symbol of Venezuela’s heroism and regional leadership. The Venezuelan historian Elías Pino Iturrieta referred to the independence war as the first national epic tale. “At one point [the independence war] became an unlikely story,” Pino Iturrieta said in an interview for El Nacional daily. “The more gigantic the efforts and the enemy, the more we are able to reflect ourselves in an Olympic mirror. There is nothing better for a society than being regarded as the daughter of Zeus” (Fermín, 2012).
After being under the Spanish rule since the 1490s, Venezuela declared its independence unilaterally on July 5th, 1811. The independence endeavor constituted an armed conflict between Spaniards and the Venezuelan patriots that lasted from 1810 to 1830 (Rodríguez, 1996). The patriots were led by members of the creole aristocracy, native-born families with Spanish ancestry who aspired to seize power in Venezuela (Pino Iturrieta, 2003). Political and economic independence from international rule were the patriots’ ultimate goals, as they manifested in Venezuela’s Act of Independence:

On behalf of and with the will and authority we have among the virtuous people of Venezuela, [we] solemnly declare to the world that its United Provinces are and should be today, in fact and law, free, sovereign and independent States and they are absolved from all submission and dependence on the Crown of Spain or those who identify themselves as their agents or representatives, and that as a free and independent state [Venezuela] has full power to take the form of government that conforms to the general will of their peoples, declare war, make peace, form alliances, arrange trade, borders and navigation agreements, and do and perform all other acts that make and execute free and independent nations (Independence Act, 1811).

Independence has always been at the core of Venezuela’s national values. As it can be noted in the Constitution’s first article, independence is still a major goal in Venezuela, even when the Spanish rule in the continent was ousted more than 200 years ago. The quoted words of the Constitution that emphasize Venezuela’s sovereignty were not incorporated in the 1999 reform. Freedom and independence have always been included as a paramount value in the first article of the Constitution, showing the nation’s reticence in submitting ever again to the rule of a foreign state. During his time in office, President Chávez referred to independence as a heroic but ultimately unfinished endeavor. In a public address, he said that “We are on our way to definite independence. The war against imperialism is not over in Venezuela nor in Latin America. . .. But we
are winning and we will win” (Chávez, 2011). In the analysis of the historical rhetorical frame, the researcher assessed how President Chávez employed the aforementioned and other historical events and figures to define the Bolivarian Revolution. Furthermore, the implications of such use of history in the conduction of politics in Venezuela are also addressed.

Socioeconomic Rhetorical Frame

The socioeconomic rhetorical frame characterizes the Bolivarian Revolution in terms of President Chávez’s approach to the economic and social systems in Venezuela. After reading the transcripts of the ten episodes selected for the pilot study, the researcher noted that, for the president, social and economic issues were tightly intertwined. Therefore, remarks about social and economic matters are analyzed jointly within the socioeconomic rhetorical frame.

At the beginning of his presidency, Chávez made clear that his administration would implement an economic model that departed from neoliberalism. In a television interview with prominent journalist Oscar Yanes (1999), the president held past neoliberal administrations responsible for the soaring inflation and unemployment rates and the low oil prices. Chávez averred that he would improve the economy by supporting small businesses, controlling imports and taking a leadership position in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, OPEC, to increase oil revenues. Apart from stating that his policies were an alternative to “savage neoliberalism” (Chávez in Yanes, 1999), the president did not specify which economic model his administration was applying.
On 2005, the president took a hard— and some say startling— turn to the left and his revolution began to be deemed not only as Bolivarian but socialist. As time passed, both terms grew to become interchangeable as Socialist Revolution turned into another identifier for Chávez’s governance manifesto. *Patria, Socialismo o Muerte*— Fatherland, Socialism or Death— became the motto of the government and the armed forces as verbal attacks against international capitalism and imperialism, embodied in the United States, increased in frequency and intensity (Lebowitz, 2007).

President Chávez manifested his adherence to socialism for the first time at the fifth World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil on January 2005. He said at the conference that the socialism of the 21st century should be “a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything.” This was an unexpected shift for some of the president’s close advisers. In an interview with *BBC Mundo*, Heinz Dieterich, professor who coined the concept of socialism of the 21st century, said that he and Chávez discussed socialism frequently because the president was “looking for a model of government” (Dieterich as cited in Pérez, 2013). However, Dieterich said it was unexpected to hear the Venezuelan president declare himself a socialist in the aforementioned forum. “It was a surprise,” Dieterich said. “But it had a repercussion *del carajo*.”

Hugo Chávez had privileged access to Dieterich’s ideas from the beginning of his presidency. In 1999, Alí Rodríguez Araque, then Venezuelan energy minister, introduced

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21 *Del carajo* is a Spanish slang expression. It roughly means that something is impressive or goes beyond expectations.
the president to the writer and they got along immediately. Dieterich said that Chávez’s learning skills where impressive. “He had a dialectic way of thinking. He listened. A system like this inevitably modifies its own software. His learning process was fast” (Dieterich as cited in Pérez, 2013). The president’s ability to incorporate new information and to commit to diverse ideology was also noted by biographer Mike González (2014), who compared Chávez to a sponge willing to absorb, process and apply any ideology he deemed useful for the achievement of his political goals.

Dieterich’s propositions originated from a critical evaluation of contemporary representative democracy. He argued that representative democracy became a farce in which elected delegates, instead of representing, substituted and usurped the power of the people to pursue their own interests and the interests of the ruling elite. The author blamed “the structural deficiencies of global capitalism” for the decay of representative democracy (Dieterich, 2003, p. 15). These deficiencies included capitalism’s inability to meet the needs of the people and to encourage solidarity instead of personal ambition. Dieterich (2003) did not offer any concrete evidence to support the claim that capitalism was in crisis apart from the existence of social inequality. The author focused on the “immorality inherent to the capitalist system” (p. 20), which allows it to foster social inequality via the exploitation of the majorities in favor of the elites who own the means of production.

What appealed to Chávez about the socialism of the 21st century was its alleged capacity to achieve a democratic system truly run by the people. The “real or participatory democracy,” Dieterich (2005) said, removes social and political hierarchies
so that every citizen develops a higher sense of responsibility over the future of collective society. Once social alienation is eliminated from the heart of the state and national culture, socialism would rise as the new form of social organization (Dieterich, 2003). To Monedero (2012), the main characteristic of this type of socialism is that it encouraged “radical empathy” among the members of a community, a kind of generosity that disregards reciprocity. This way, the goal of becoming a completely egalitarian society propelled mostly by generalized selflessness was at the core of the propositions of the intellectuals who shaped the concept of the socialism of the 21st century.

This new socialism allegedly departed from its 20th century predecessors in that it was supposed to eliminate not only social but also political alienation. Monedero (2012) noted that the dictatorship of the proletariat model as applied in the Soviet Union and China proved to be problematic when it came to guaranteeing citizens’ right to dissent and creating a stable and prosperous economic system. In these cases, the author said, instead of guiding the nation toward a real democracy, the socialist regimes estranged dissenters and once-powerful elites while annihilating the economy. Capitalist ambitions and greed deeply ingrained in the minds of those first socialist leaders were held responsible for the totalitarian practices of the Soviet Union and communist China (Dieterich, 2005; Monedero, 2012). For other scholars, imposing socialism top-down, from the state, instead of allowing it to emerge from the popular sectors was the cause of these regimes’ failure (Burbach & Piñeiro, 2007; Raby, 2006).

The Chávez administration took a different approach from the socialist and communist regimes of the 20th century and executed policy to transfer political power to
the people and reform the state. In the 1999 Constitution there were already stipulations inspired in the ideas of Dieterich about participatory democracy. Article 62 of the Constitution declared that the people had the right to freely participate in all matters of public life and that “the participation of the people in the creation, execution and control of public affairs is the required means to achieve the protagonismo—roughly, giving a protagonist role to the people—that guarantees their complete development, both as individuals and as a collective.” After the new Constitution was enforced, the government started creating a series of civic organizations to encourage popular participation in a variety of areas, such as health and community development. In the following table, Hawkins (2010) summarized the participatory initiatives of the administration:

### Table 1. Participatory initiatives of the Chávez administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Year of Legal Recognition/Creation</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Number of Participants (by 2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivarian Circles</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Community improvement and defense of the Bolivarian Revolution</td>
<td>2.2 million members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Committees</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Serving of Barrio Adentro clinics</td>
<td>6,500 committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperatives</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>Economic development through alternative forms of business enterprise</td>
<td>200,000 cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Land Committees</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Identity and legal entitlement of shanty towns</td>
<td>2-2.5 million members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Councils</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Consolidation and administration of community development projects and municipal governance</td>
<td>8 million members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As legally recognized entities, the cooperatives predate the Chávez government by many years.

The most relevant—and controversial—organizations the government created were the Bolivarian Circles and the Communal Councils. The Bolivarian Circles were associations of volunteers whose members had “sworn to defend the Constitution, be faithful to the ideals of Simón Bolívar, and serve the interests of their community” (Hawkins, 2010). The circles were key electoral campaign activists for the administration, and they organized the popular response to the 2002 coup attempt against Chávez (Villegas, 2012). Opposition leaders and members of the military claimed that the government had created these organizations as paramilitary groups and denounced the circles as having received weapons and military training from Cuban officials (Vinogradoff, 2002). Nevertheless, the government always denied that the circles had an armed component.

In 2005, the Law of Communal Councils created the consejos comunales—communal councils— which were citizen organizations that would function as self-governance bodies. The law established that the communal councils would be the building blocks of the new democratic, self-managed socialist state. Inspired by Hungarian Marxist philosopher István Mészáros, Chávez wanted to reinvent socialism by creating an economic system based on the exchange of activities instead of the exchange of things (Lebowitz, 2007). The ultimate goal was that every council would determine what its members needed to live with dignity and reach out to other communities and councils to find out their needs. Once necessities were established, the councils would agree on a fair trade of labor. No exchange of money or goods would be involved. A

22 For a more detailed description of the other associations, see Hawkins, 2010.
network of active citizens would take care of each other’s necessities in the name of cooperation (Lebowitz, 2007).

In January 2007, after winning the presidential elections, Chávez allocated $18 million for the creation of the first communal councils (González, 2014). Each council was supposed to incorporate between 200 and 400 families who would elect a leadership and take care of the community’s issues independently from the municipalities, state and national governments. The administration claimed these councils embodied a new form of decentralization and that federations of communal councils would eventually redefine the existing regional and local governments (Hawkins, 2010).

The councils are empowered to undertake any kind of activities such as housing, education, sports, or communications projects, forming cooperatives, or supervising health care facilities. In addition, the councils can also set policing and criminal policies for delinquency, and drug and family abuse (Burbach & Piñeiro, 2007, p. 187).

The councils were set to be independent citizen organizations that did not answer to municipal, state or regional institutions. What Chávez called the communal power would work alongside the constituted power—traditional bureaucracies and government institutions—to create a participatory democracy (Denis, 2006). Opposition leaders feared, however, the lack of legal controls constraining the councils. The Law of Communal Councils did not spell out the mechanisms through which the state or any other government entity could (1) supervise processes such as financial allocation and project completion or (2) prosecute members of the councils who participated in corrupt practices (Burbach & Piñeiro, 2007). Political clientelism became a visible problem with the councils. “There is a tacit agreement [between the government and the councils],” El
Universal quoted Víctor González, comptroller of a communal council in Caracas, as saying. “I [the government] turn a blind eye at the management of the money on the condition that you [council members] vote for me in the elections. It is a perverse system” (González as cited in Brassesco, 2012).

More transformations in the apparatus of the state were under way. On January 2007, Chávez announced that a presidential commission was in session to reform the Constitution. The goal was to modify those articles the president considered key “to open another stage in this process of building the socialist and Bolivarian Venezuela” (Chávez, 2007). The commission submitted a draft of the reform, which modified 69 articles from the Constitution, to the National Assembly on August 15th, 2007 and a referendum was scheduled in December to decide whether Venezuelans approved the changes.

The reform proposed profound transformations in the structure of the state. For instance, the reform declared Venezuela to be a socialist state and constituted the communal power as a parallel power to local governments, assigning the communal councils responsibilities that had been traditionally the purview of the states and municipalities, such as road maintenance and security (Brewer-Carias, 2008). Other changes included the extension of the presidential term to seven years, from six, with an unlimited option for reelection. The reform was rejected by popular vote on December.23 After the referendum, Venezuelans heard again the phrase that had made President

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23 The National Electoral Council, CNE, designed the election so that citizens could vote for two different blocks of the reforms separately. The block A of the reform was rejected by 50.7 percent of the votes while block B was rejected by 51.05 percent of the ballots.
Chávez famous after his ill-fated coup in 1992: “We have not achieved our goals . . . por ahora.”

These electoral results were supposed to make the reforms unenforceable for the rest of Chávez’s presidential term, which after his reelection in 2006 would last until 2012. However, some of the reform articles were included in a later amendment of the Constitution, approved in the 2009 referendum, and others were passed gradually as presidential decrees—Habilitante Laws. Therefore, Chávez was not only able to ensure his presidential candidacy for 2012 but also to put in place other legal instruments to continue “building the socialism of the 21st century” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2012).

In the analysis of the socioeconomic rhetorical frame, the researcher focused on how socioeconomic rationales defined the Bolivarian Revolution. The socialism of the 21st century in particular was key in the analysis of this rhetorical frame as it became as prominent as Bolivarianism within the president’s political movement. In the next section, the researcher provides an outline of the religious rhetorical frame before moving on to the explanation of the study’s methodology on chapter four.

**Religious Rhetorical Frame**

The religious rhetorical frame was constructed by language and symbolism that attached religious connotations to the Bolivarian Revolution. Religious language, symbolism and metaphors were commonplace in President Chávez’s discourse. On one level, the president’s own faith might have guided such an extensive use of religious connotations. “I am an avowed and practicing Catholic. I believe in God and Jesus Christ profoundly,” Chávez said on the 24th episode of *Aló Presidente*. On another level, the
incorporation of Roman Catholic notions in political discourse is not surprising in Venezuela as it is a Roman Catholic majority country. A Pew Research Center (Bell & Sahgal, 2014) study estimated that 73 percent of Venezuelans are Roman Catholic. According to the CIA World Fact Book (2016), however, Roman Catholics account for 96 percent of the population. The Roman Catholic tradition has been deeply rooted in Venezuelan culture since the Spanish colonization, which spanned from the 15th to the 19th century. Although Venezuela is a secular state and its population is not as religious as those of other Latin American nations, such as Mexico, the average citizen is familiar with Roman Catholic beliefs, values and rituals.

In his analysis of Habermas’ approach to the relationships between political and religious speech, Mardones (1998) explained that the use of religious references continues to be extended in political discourse because the expressive/symbolic power of religious language has not been fully “translated” into secular terms. Therefore, when it comes to political discourse, expressions with religious origins are re-framed as values or moral goals inherent to the leader or political process in question (Rojas, 2012). Religious speech is then secularized and stripped from its original references to God, Heaven or faith to become more appealing to modern audiences.

However, Rojas (2012) noted that President Chávez departed from this trend in contemporary politics by emphasizing instead of hiding religious connotations in his discourse. Furthermore, the author said, the president constantly related his political movement and his policies to values considered Christian by the Roman Catholic religion and the Bible, such as unconditional love for the fellow man, generosity and honesty. For
Rojas, Christian values were sources of legitimacy as well as basis for the president’s authority. It was commonplace to hear President Chávez say that it was God who led the Bolivarian Revolution and that Chávez was following God’s commands. The religious language in Chávez’s discourse, Rojas concluded, targeted devoted Roman Catholics and facilitated the emergence of a spiritual-like connection between the president and his supporters.

In this study, the religious rhetorical frame encompassed more than the quotes from the Bible or religious language and symbolism that President Chávez consistently incorporated in his discourse on Aló Presidente. This responds to the relationship that exists between the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America and the penetration of Marxism and socialism in the region. Venezuelan historian Margarita López Maya (2014) argued that the president’s stance on socioeconomic issues, socialism and participatory democracy were influenced by the Theology of Liberation, a movement within the Roman Catholic Church that emerged in the 1960s as the clergy response to the broadening social inequality in developing countries.

The Theology of Liberation is a branch of theology that was influenced by Marx’s materialist approach to historical processes. Marx argued that history was the consequence of human action, not of human thought as idealists suggested (Lorimer, 1999). Therefore, in its understanding of faith, the Theology of Liberation considers that human beings have a role in the advent of the Kingdom of God on earth as they can only
exercise their communion with the Lord through charity, the ultimate act of love for one’s fellow man (Gutiérrez, 1988). In this context, poverty, oppression and discrimination were considered sinful acts as they were not the result of a historical process, but a process per se in which some groups dominated others to maintain their privilege (Míguez-Bonino, 1972). This way, the Roman Catholic Church explained Marx’s notion of exploitation of the man by the man in theological terms and targeted capitalism as the system that institutionalized exploitative practices.

Liberation expresses the aspirations of oppressed peoples and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspect of the economic, social and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressive classes. . . . Liberation can be applied to an understanding of history. Humankind is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for its own destiny (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 24).

The Theology of the Liberation had a greater impact in Latin America in the 1960s than in many parts of the world, as the region was torn by armed conflicts and poverty. In 1968, the Latin American Episcopal Conference met in Medellin, Colombia, to analyze the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the perpetuation of the status quo that allowed the oppression of the poor. At the conference, the bishops decided to turn the church into an “instrument of salvation” by developing participative programs to empower communities and transform society (Míguez-Bonino, 1985).

In Venezuela, the universities and schools run by religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Lasallians and Benedictines, trained social activists to work with the poor, and

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24 The term “charity,” as a selfless act in the benefit of others, came to represent the concrete behaviors and actions that were supposed to characterize Christianity. The Theology of Liberation strived to prove the presence of the Spirit in the performance of good deeds as a way to inspire Christians to take an active role in the praxis of religion (Gutiérrez, 1988).
the Gumilla Center— a Jesuit research center— created cooperatives in impoverished communities of Caracas, Portuguesa and Lara (López Maya, 2014). In the 1970s, the social Christian party COPEI organized seminaries around the concept of participatory democracy in which members of the party advocated for (1) the creation of mechanisms so that the civic society could directly contribute to governance and (2) the rejection of liberalism as it encouraged individualism and disregarded the rights of the collective (Carnevali de Toro, 1992).

The Theology of Liberation was part of President Chávez’s discourse regarding socialism and the Bolivarian Revolution, as it proposed the implementation of socialism in order to achieve definite social transformation and thus ensure the advent of the Kingdom of God on earth. “In the word of Christ, there is a vast theoretical foundation . . . to build the socialist project. This is the path: Christianity for the Liberation, the Theology of Liberation” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2011b). The researcher addressed this overlap between the socioeconomic and religious rhetorical frame in the findings. However, these rhetorical frames are still analyzed separately.

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25 In the 1970s leaders of COPEI believed that the political parties did not provide enough venues for citizens to participate in decision-making. During the Jaime Lusinchi administration (1984-1989), COPEI from the opposition could pressure the Acción Democrática regime to create a Commission for the Reform of the State. However, COPEI failed to include the creation of participatory civil organizations in the reforms (López Maya, 2014).
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the method chosen to assess the rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution in the speeches President Hugo Chávez gave in his weekly show Aló Presidente. On the first section, the researcher reviews literature about discourse in general and political discourse in particular, and how those concepts apply to Chávez’s communication practices in the aforementioned show. The second section assesses the key features of critical discourse analysis as well as the rationale behind the selection of CDA as an appropriate method to conduct the study and analyze the data. Finally, the researcher provides a detailed description of the data that was selected for the study.

Considerations about Discourse

A review of literature regarding discourse could be disheartening to the researcher that looks for a straightforward definition of the term. Scholars who are considered to be authorities in the study of discourse note that the concept significantly changes as it is assessed by different academic cultures and even by individual researchers (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Teun van Dijk (1997) characterizes discourse as an “essentially fuzzy” notion (p. 1). There is such diversity regarding the concept of discourse that it is necessary for researchers to spell out the theoretical views that inform their particular approach to the study of discourse. Therefore, this section sets out to describe the notions that guide the present study in the assessment of President Chávez’s rhetorical framing.

In the area of linguistics, Schiffrin (1994) suggests that there are two approaches to the definition of discourse: the formal or structuralist and the functionalist. The first
approach takes interest in the abstract form of discourse. The emphasis here is on discourse’s structure and organization as a language system defined by its syntax, grammar, semantics, phonology, etc. On the other hand, the functionalist approach explores how discourse serves communicative purposes, characterizing discourse as a motivated endeavor, an action people perform in order to do something. The functionalist approach, Cameron (2001) argues, allows researchers to place discourse within its context and thus to assess how discourse simultaneously communicates and influences the social, historic and cultural schemas that inform people’s understanding of reality. This way, discourse is understood as much more than a communicative event whose meaning can be retrieved by just evaluating its inner structure.

Discourse, when described as an action performed by language users within a specific social and cultural situation, is understood as a social practice and thus becomes an interest of other academic disciplines, such as social and political science (Van Dijk, 1997a). In this field, discourse becomes the product of a dialectic process in which individuals, situations, institutions, ideologies, history and many other factors work together to produce a unique form of text—either in speech or in writing—which, once uttered and/or distributed, influences the same social and structural factors that shaped it in the first place (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) outline the social role and significance of discourse as follows:

Discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned— it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).
This notion of discourse emphasizes the complex ways in which language use is connected to its context. Therefore, in order to analyze discourse and assess its long-reaching implications, researchers ought to make visible the relationships between context and discourse, weighing how language use constitutes, expresses and legitimizes phenomena such as power, domination, discrimination and identity formation (Wodak, 2008).

In his approach to discourse studies, Theo van Leeuwen makes a relevant observation about the relationship between discourse and context. Drawing from Michel Foucault, he defines discourse as a *recontextualization* of reality, a social practice that provides “context-specific frameworks for making sense of things” (van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 144). This way, discourse cannot be understood as an exact representation of realities, actions or individuals as it is at all times the construction of an agent who is interested in a particular outcome. Van Leeuwen (2008) notes that discourse changes as different social actors and institutions set out to create narratives about their activities, views and goals, which will always be shaped in order to legitimize these agents’ position.

Considering that the present study took interest in a mediated communicative event that stars a head of state, it is key to situate the talk and text produced in *Aló Presidente* in the aforementioned notions of discourse and, more specifically, approach them as forms of political discourse. The Chávez administration prioritized the creation of a large, state-owned communication apparatus that, along with other media policies, made the president’s presence ubiquitous on Venezuelan broadcast media. *Aló Presidente*, being the centerpiece of the government media strategy, was the main outlet
Chávez employed to show and promote the achievements of his administration, explain his policies, connect with the audience and confront his political adversaries. Moreover, the president occasionally made major state decisions live on the show. As they took place on a mediated space and manifested as talk and text, the aforementioned political activities were mainly discursive (van Dijk, 1997b). Therefore, the speeches pronounced in *Aló Presidente* can be considered a large corpus of discourse that, by definition, communicated and shaped the identity, interests, positions and ideas of the Bolivarian Revolution and the president himself throughout almost 12 years.

Drawing from van Leeuwen (2009), it can be assumed that President Chávez crafted his discourse in a way that allowed him to represent the Bolivarian Revolution under a positive and legitimizing light while embellishing or suppressing those aspects that could tarnish the image of his administration. This assumption works in tandem with the theoretical foundations the researcher set to conduct this study, which combine framing theory and rhetoric in order to assess Chávez’s own definition of the Bolivarian Revolution. Discourse on *Aló Presidente* becomes, therefore, a valuable resource to examine the Venezuelan president’s rhetorical framing of the revolution and analyze the implications of said framing.

To better address the implication of the discourse produced on *Aló Presidente*, it is necessary to make an additional observation regarding the nature of such discourse. As a form of communication produced by a politician that had political functions and repercussions, the speeches on *Aló Presidente* meet the most basic criteria that define *political* discourse, according to Teun van Dijk (1997). The scholar notes that political
discourse is mostly defined contextually because this type of discourse is not exclusive to politicians and often delves into topics that do not belong to the formal domain of politics, which encompasses political processes, systems, ideologies and relations (see more in Van Dijk, 1997b, pp. 15-19).

A multidisciplinary approach that evaluates context as well as discourse itself is essential to analyze the meanings and implications political discourse yields because social, economic and cultural factors influence the practice of politics (Van Dijk, 1997b; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Consequently, the present study related the president’s utterances with their pertinent social, economic and cultural context in order to provide a meaningful analysis of this particular discourse. In the following section, the researcher delves into critical discourse analysis as the method chosen to examine President Chávez’s discourse in *Aló Presidente* and describes the steps that were taken to conduct the analysis.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical discourse analysis builds upon four epistemological principles that guide all forms of discourse analysis. Gill (2000) summarizes the four basic epistemological positions of discourse analysis as follows: (1) the method encourages a skeptical approach toward taken-for-granted knowledge, (2) discourse analysis recognizes that human understanding of phenomena is always relative to culture and history, (3) the method supports the conviction that knowledge is socially constructed, and (4) discourse analysis explores how ideas and the language that communicate them are connected to actions.
The first principle emphasizes that language is everything but trivial and that there is a complex system of meaning involved in the production of every piece of text. Such a stance informs the present study’s attempts to discover the underlying connotations that shape Hugo Chávez’s use of language and other figures of speech to describe the Bolivarian Revolution. The second principle clarifies that discourse occurs within a spatiotemporal context, which determines to an important degree how people refer to and interpret events. Consequently, this study keeps track of the events that unfolded around the time in which the examined speeches were broadcast in order to get a deeper understanding of the discourse itself and its implications.

The third epistemological principle characterizes discourse as the vehicle through which individuals and societies represent the world and establish relationships between events, people, etc. As outlined in chapter three, discourse is able to form such representations of the world through frames. Consequently, an analysis of Chávez’s rhetorical framing leads to the assessment of the representations of reality he endorsed to promote the Bolivarian Revolution.

Finally, the fourth epistemological principle acknowledges texts as actions themselves and as rhetorical vehicles that motivate action. In short, language users engage in discourse to accomplish social acts (Van Dijk, 1997a). This is particularly relevant for political discourse taking place in democratic systems because speakers are highly motivated to persuade audiences by nonviolent means in order to increase their popularity and advance policy (Kuypers, 2009). Considering Chávez’s interest in broadcast media and the range of political activities that took place on Aló Presidente, it
could be argued that the president relied heavily on mediated discourse to accomplish his political objectives, which makes his speeches of special interest to discourse analysts.

Although sharing the same epistemological principles, critical discourse analysis departs from discourse analysis in that it takes a problem-oriented approach to discourse as a complex social phenomenon and a normative stance toward the implications of language use (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The problem-oriented approach derives from CDA’s scholars focus on the role of discourse in the “(re)production and challenge of social dominance” which results in various forms of social inequality (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249). This way, critical discourse analysis is concerned mostly with the relations between discursive structures and power structures (Wodak, 2009).

To properly assess these relations through the analysis of discourse, Fairclough (1992) proposes to examine discourse through three dimensions: as text, as discursive practice and as social practice. The first dimension is concerned with the “linguistic features and organization of concrete instances of discourse” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). At this level, researchers look for patterns in vocabulary, grammar and text structure that characterize a particular body of discourse. The identification and analysis of metaphors, similes and metonyms are also part of this textual dimension. The researcher drew mainly from Lafoff and Johnson (1980) to assess the metaphors in Chávez’s discourse. On the discursive practice dimension, the focus is on coherence and intertextuality, elements that determine how the speech represents its own context and how it uses other discourses to build its own statements. Finally, at the social practice
dimension, the ideological features of discourse are examined, assessing how it reinforces or challenges existing systems of beliefs and values that guide the evaluations and actions of members of a particular social group (for more about ideology see Van Dijk, 2011).

This study organized the examination of President Chávez’s discourse following the analytical framework proposed by Fairclough (1992). When assessing discourse as text, the researcher evaluated linguistic elements, such as word choice, metaphors and the use of passive verb forms. On the discursive practice dimension, the links between the text and its context were addressed by making visible how the president’s discourse represents current and historical affairs and other bodies of discourse—i.e. speeches and texts by Simón Bolívar. Finally, on the social practice dimension, the researcher made a critical account of how the aforementioned discourse dimensions (re)produce power relations and ideologies about the Bolivarian Revolution. The last dimension of analysis was separated from the others and stands as the discussion section of this thesis.

In the following section, the researcher breaks down the steps she took to conduct the analysis of President Chávez’s discourse. Although there are no formulas to apply critical discourse analysis, Reisigl (2008) presented an “idealized outline” of the stages involved in the critical examination of political rhetoric, which informed the present study’s method (p. 99). These steps, instead of being a set of instructions rigidly followed, served as orientation in the processes of data collection, analysis and critique.

**Study Design**

Qualitative research constitutes a dialectic process in which the researcher is constantly questioning his/her stances toward the research questions, the data and the
interpretations that emerge from said data. In the absence of statistical tests to guide and support data interpretations, the qualitative researcher must make decisions based on “intuition and complex reasoning” (Brennen, 2013, p. 22). Considering this study constitutes a qualitative approach to President Chávez’s discourse about the Bolivarian Revolution, a certain degree of “scientific creativity” (Reisigl, 2008, p. 100) and experiential knowledge26 informed the decisions made in the course of data collection and analysis. However, the sequence of steps Reisigl (2008) provided to guide the study of political discourse and political rhetoric helped the researcher break down the study to more manageable and systematic tasks. Reisigl’s (2008) research design involves the following eight steps and derived in the activities outlined below:

1. Identification of a social and political problem that possesses linguistic aspects:

   The political phenomenon that concerned the present study was the Bolivarian Revolution, a governance manifesto that intended to replace representative democracy as a system of government. Hugo Chávez, as head of state and leader of the revolution, extensively employed mediated discourse to communicate and shape the ideological foundations of the Bolivarian Revolution. This body of text and talk constitutes the “linguistic aspect” Reisigl requires as a starting point to conduct the critical assessment of a political phenomenon.

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26 The researcher is a Venezuelan citizen who experienced the Chávez regime first-hand. She was eight years old when President Chávez was first elected, so he is the only head of state she fully remembers. For the sake of disclosure, the researcher clarifies that she opposed the Chávez administration. She participated in a few protests in Caracas, including the march of April 11th, 2002. However, she did not get involved with any political parties or organizations that actively and antagonized the president.
2. Collection of discursive data for analysis: At this stage, researchers consult previous knowledge about the topic and contextual information to select specific discourses, political actors, communication genres, time period, etc. (Reisigl, 2008). During this exploratory literature review, the researcher became interested specifically in *Aló Presidente*, a show that aired consistently throughout Chávez’s presidency. Previous research argued that this show was the centerpiece of the president’s communication strategy and that, as such, it had a central role in national politics (Bisbal, 2006; González & Cañizález, 2011; Gualda, 2012; Constantini, 2014; Frajman, 2014). Therefore, the researcher picked the discourses the president had pronounced on *Aló Presidente* as the main source of data for analysis.

3. Preparation and selection of data for specific analyzes: Reisigl (2008) recommends that, at this point, researchers should sort the data so that meaningful bodies of text and/or oral data get included in the study. For the purposes of this study, an examination of all episodes of *Aló Presidente* was not required. Therefore, the researcher decided to select 40 episodes broadcast throughout the 12 years the show was on air to perform a longitudinal analysis of President Chávez’s discourse about the Bolivarian Revolution. In a later section of this chapter, the researcher describes in detail the data and the criteria she applied to select the *Aló Presidente* episodes that were analyzed.

4. Specification of the research question(s): This study is concerned with how President Chávez linguistically constructed and attributed qualities and features to
the Bolivarian Revolution on *Aló Presidente*. The focus was set on the rhetorical frames that allowed the president to connect the revolution to preexisting schemata that shapes Venezuelans’ beliefs and values and, thus, present the Bolivarian Revolution under a positive light.

5. Qualitative pilot analysis: Reisigl (2008) suggests that a pilot analysis is necessary to “adjust the analytical instruments” of the study (p. 101). For the present research, the researcher conducted a pilot analysis of the transcripts of ten *Aló Presidente* episodes to determine how she would identify the rhetorical frames employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution within the president’s speech. To identify the presence of rhetorical frames, the researcher focused on the language and symbolic devices—i.e. metaphors and metonyms—that contributed to the definition of the Bolivarian Revolution exclusively. For instance, war and conflict metaphors, although being commonly used by President Chávez to characterize elections, the economy and the administration’s relationship with the media and the opposition, did not define features of the Bolivarian Revolution *per se*, so they were not considered as eligible rhetorical frames to include in this study.

6. Linguistic and context analysis: As described in the previous section, the researcher examined the linguistic and contextual elements of President Chávez’s discourse following Fairclough (1992). This constitutes the first stages of the interpretation of the findings, taking into account the relationship between

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discourse and the social, political and historical context specific to Venezuela during Chávez’s presidency.

7. Formulation of the critique: For Reisigl (2008), this stage of the research project is an opportunity “to reveal problematic discursive strategies, to solve specific problems of (institutional) communication, or to improve communication” (p. 101). The critical assessment of discourse derives from ethical principles, democratic values and human rights that advocate for equality and freedom (Wodak, 2009). This step is undertaken in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

8. Application of analytical results: the last stage involves making the study widely accessible so that other scholars and members of society can reflect on the findings, interpretations and critiques provided by the author(s) and explore the topic at will. This master’s thesis is part of this sharing endeavor. Furthermore, a condensed version of this thesis was accepted for presentation at the 2016 annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Later, the researcher will pursue a refereed journal publication.

As referenced before, the researcher did not follow the aforementioned steps linearly. In many occasions, the researcher needed to reevaluate the selection of data, the analytic instruments and other elements before moving on to subsequent steps. However, Reisigl’s (2008) steps to analyze political rhetoric are a somewhat accurate description of the present study’s research design. In the following section, the researcher delves into a detailed description of the data employed to conduct the present study.
Data Corpus of the Study

The production team of *Aló Presidente* transcribed President Chávez’s speeches on the show and published them on www.alopresidente.gob.ve, a website hosted by the ministry of communication and information. The transcripts are written in Spanish and can be downloaded for free and they are in either Word or PDF format. To conduct the analysis of the president’s discourse, the researcher assessed the original text in Spanish in order to ensure that relevant meanings and connotations did not get lost in translation. Then, key excerpts of the transcripts that guided the analysis were translated and presented in the findings chapter. Punctuation and capitalization from the original text in Spanish were preserved unless they affected the translation clarity. When the president employed vernacular language or typical Venezuelan sayings that did not translate directly to English, the original text in Spanish appears in italics and a brief explanation is provided right after the quote inside square brackets.

The archive available in www.alopresidente.gob.ve is 81 percent complete; transcripts of 72 of the 378 episodes are missing. The website served not only as an archive but as a complement to the show, featuring original content based on the topics the president had raised on any given weekend. Constantini (2014) described the website as follows:

The website also provided continuity to the work done on the set: it published interviews with those involved in projects broadcast during the show; reports about the sites that were visited; maps of the areas; transcripts of the show; galleries of photographs; and publications in tune with the ideas discussed by Chávez (Constantini, 2014, p. 35).
The transcripts archive in www.alopresidente.gob.ve was an invaluable source of data because the critical evaluation of Chávez’s discourse required iterative readings of his speeches. According to Hartley (1992), written text can be considered “forensic evidence” of social actions because it “allows for the recovery and critical interrogation of discursive politics in an ‘empirical’ form” (p. 29). Therefore, the transcripts allowed the researcher to focus on finding patterns within the text that exposed its structure, function and meaning in relation to its context. The analysis of nonverbal elements of the president’s discourse— i.e. body language, tone, etc.— was out of the scope of this study.

The transcripts of a 40-episode sample of *Aló Presidente* are analyzed in the study. Instead of analyzing all the data available, the researcher decided to draw a sample that (1) represented the President Chávez’s mediated discourse about the Bolivarian Revolution throughout his presidency and (2) included speeches pronounced at significant moments in Venezuelan politics— i.e. the 2002 coup d’état. To put together this sample, the researcher established a three-rule criteria to select the episodes for analysis.

1. For each year *Aló Presidente* was on air, three episodes must be selected. The researcher considered 2012 was an exception because only three episodes broadcast on January that year before the show was canceled. Consequently, only one episode, 378, was included in the study sample.

2. There should be at least three episodes representing every month of the year. This criterion provided a reason to not choose more episodes from 2012: doing so would have over represented the month of January in the data.
3. Episodes of exceptional circumstances must be included. By exceptional circumstances the researcher refers to events that had a significant impact in the conduction of politics and the government. To select these episodes, the researcher relied on her own experience as a Venezuelan citizen and the aforementioned qualitative pilot study that allowed her to explore the data and identify key episodes. Five episodes were selected following this criterion: 1, 24, 61, 102 and 378. The following paragraphs explicate how and why each one of the broadcasts is relevant to the analysis of the president’s rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Considering that *Aló Presidente* was an unprecedented media phenomenon that allowed Venezuelans to interact directly with the head of the state, the researcher included episode 1 in the sample. As it was argued in chapter two, this show was the cornerstone of the president’s political communications and was the “‘black box’ of Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution” (Constantini, 2014, p. 25). Therefore, the first episode can be seen as the representation of the beginning of a new era in national politics.

Episode 378, as the last installation of *Aló Presidente*, earned a place in the sample as well. This was one of Chávez’s last public appearances and, by the time episode 378 was broadcast, the president’s prognosis for cancer was discouraging. As episode one represents the rise of mediated discourse as the protagonist of Venezuelan politics, episode 378 marks the end of a seminal media practice that resonated in the Latin American region.
Episode 24, broadcast in December 1999, preceded the referendum that approved the constitutional reform. This was the president’s first major initiative in policy making and it put in motion deep transformations in the structure of the state (Pino Iturrieta, 2003). Examining Chávez’s discourse on the eve of such an event is relevant because he relied heavily on electoral processes to advance his political agenda and reinforce the legitimacy of his government.27

The analysis of episode 61 is also relevant to the study of Chávez’s rhetorical framing about the Bolivarian Revolution. This episode aired on February 4th, 2001 during the commemoration of the 1992 coup d’état Chávez led against then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez. According to Chávez, this coup marked “the beginning of a new process of national reconstruction” and it was the first “sign of the revolution that erupted in Venezuela” (Chávez, 2001). The analysis of this episode, along with the examination of episode 102, which was broadcast just after Chávez returned to power after the failed coup on April 11th, 2002, is instrumental to interpret how the president communicated the legitimacy of both his presidency and the Bolivarian Revolution in the context of two coups.

By applying the aforementioned criteria, the researcher ensured that the 40 selected episodes were representative of the discourse Chávez developed throughout all 378 episodes of Aló Presidente. Table 2 shows all the episodes that were included in the study, the dates they were broadcast, the word count of their transcripts and an estimation

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27 During the 14 years of the Chávez’s administration, there were five referenda (two in 1999, and one in 2004, 2007, and 2009, respectively), four regional elections (in 2004, 2008, and 2012), two legislative national elections (in 2005, and 2010), and three presidential elections (in 2000, 2005, and 2012).
of each episode’s duration in minutes. Because there are no data that report the exact duration of each installation, the researcher estimated it by looking at the duration of ten Aló Presidente YouTube clips and the word count of the corresponding transcripts. On average, the president said 149.6 words per minute. For simplicity, the researcher rounded the average and assumed the words per minute ratio was 1:150.

Table 2. Transcripts of Aló Presidente episodes analyzed in the study

<table>
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<th>Transcript Word Count</th>
<th>Estimate Duration (in minutes)</th>
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n = 40
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of how President Hugo Chávez linguistically constructed the identity of the Bolivarian Revolution in the weekly show *Aló Presidente*. Drawing from Fairclough (1992), the researcher analyzed the president’s speeches by assessing the three dimensions of discourse: text, discourse practice and social practice. The first two dimensions, which examine the linguistic elements of discourse and its relation with its context, respectively, are addressed here as findings. The researcher delves into the last discourse dimension, which constitutes the researcher’s interpretations and critique, in chapter six.

Historical Rhetorical Frame

The historical rhetorical frame draws from Venezuelan history and prominent figures to place the Bolivarian Revolution in the larger scheme of Venezuela’s national history. On *Aló Presidente*, President Chávez usually dedicated time to the remembrance of national history and heroes to provide context or justification for current events and policies. References to historical events were present in all the episodes included in this study. On the first installation of *Aló Presidente*, for instance, Chávez reminded the audience of the Revolution of Liberal Restoration,\(^28\) which allowed Cipriano Castro to seize the presidency in 1899.

\(^{28}\) The Revolution of Liberal Restoration (1899) was the last major military clash that took place in Venezuela in the 19th century. Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez, both from the politically neglected west region of Los Andes, led this armed movement to seize power in Caracas. Restoring liberal political thinking and ending the isolation of Los Andes were the two main goals of this movement (Burggraaff, 1968). Castro’s presidency was marked by exacerbated nationalism and foreign relations crises, which led to the 1902-1903 naval blockade imposed by Britain, Germany and Italy (for a detailed explanation of the blockade see Singh, 1999).
Today marks 100 years of Revolution of Liberal Restoration. The last century was ending, 1899, when Cipriano Castro and Juan Vicente Gómez, as second in command, led the successful revolution with which Venezuela entered the twentieth century (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999a).

This historical recount took place within the first four minutes of the show and lasted approximately five minutes. As he told the story, the president encouraged the audience to study history to understand “where we come from and why we are like this now” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999a). Chávez briefly outlined the country’s situation in the late 19th century and presented it as a justification for Castro’s violent uprising.

Regardless of the form of government [he] installed, it must be recognized that the government of Cipriano Castro re-articulated Venezuela. He achieved the unity of Venezuela. Of course, in a very difficult, very bloody way. It was a revolution of much violence throughout the country, but the country was already violent; the country was disjointed. . . . We must remember that Cipriano Castro raised the nationalist flags. He defended before the world what Venezuela is, with much patriotic fervor (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999a).

The president in this quote highlighted the nationalism and patriotism that characterized the government of Cipriano Castro and backgrounded the means—violent rebellion—that allowed him to seize the presidency. Chávez admired the irreverence President Castro displayed when he confronted international powers during the naval blockade of 1902-1903. Castro, although being under extreme pressure, refused to pay debts due to Britain, Germany and Italy and to allow the Europeans to intervene in Venezuela’s economy. Castro’s popularity rose as Venezuelans rallied behind him against the Europeans’ blockade and his negotiations led to the lifting of the obstruction on terms that favored Venezuela (Singh, 1999). This remarkable victory over three
imperialist powers was a source of inspiration for Chávez, who was also trying to raise
the “nationalist flags.”

On the same episode, the president suggested another connection between the
Revolution of Liberal Restoration and the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez noted that
Venezuela was once again reaching the end of a century in the midst of deep
transformations, which had been put in motion by revolutionary movements. These
revolutions, President Chávez said, represented a new hope for the Venezuelan people, an
opportunity to resume their journey toward political and economic stability. Nevertheless,
the president also pointed out some key differences that in his view separated the
Bolivarian Revolution from the Revolution of Liberal Restoration:

So we are standing today, we are moving forward. We are ending another century
also moving forward, in a revolution. But [today’s revolution is] not violent, [it is
a] democratic revolution, a peaceful revolution. Not like Castro’s revolution or
Gómez’s revolution. This is a Bolivarian Revolution (Chávez as cited in
Maniglia, 1999a).

Journey and movement metaphors attached positive connotations to the notion of
“moving forward” as it denotes evolution or improvement (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The
president did not say what exactly is getting better as the result of “us moving forward”—
the noun “we” in the quote is ambiguous; it could refer to either Venezuela as a whole or
the government. However, the quote emphasizes the effects of the revolution, implicitly
characterizing it as the force that “moves us forward” and brings desirable changes to the
current situation.

The accent on the democratic and non-violent spirit of the Bolivarian Revolution
separates it from its 1899 counterpart. The first episode of Aló Presidente took place just
three months after the president had officially taken office so his electoral victory was still fresh in collective memory. As noted in previous chapters, in the 1998 elections Chávez was able to break the 40-year-old bipartisan dominance of AD and COPEI. Although Chávez attempted to seize power through a coup seven years earlier, the democratic system was what allowed him to get the position of head of state. Therefore, the emphasis on the alleged democratic and peaceful nature of the Bolivarian Revolution seems pertinent to the political context of May 1999 when the country was still celebrating the lawful end of the AD/COPEI hegemony.

In the last two sentences of the aforementioned quote, the president employed parallel syntax and antithesis to spotlight the Bolivarian element that characterizes his revolution. Considering that “Bolivarian” became the main qualifier and the name of Chávez’s governance manifesto, the Liberator’s intellectual and moral legacy were supposed to be at the core of the Bolivarian Revolution. President Chávez, in his speeches on *Aló Presidente*, discursively drew connections linking his revolution, Bolívar and the Bolivarian ideology, which were key for the construction of the historical rhetorical frame.

On episode 24, broadcast on December 12th, 1999, the president averred that “The people are resurrecting Bolívar. Bolívar is more than memory; he is an eternal historical experience… Therefore, this is a Bolivarian Revolution; this is Bolívar who comes back with his redemption flag” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999c). Religious discourse that features language such as “redemption,” “resurrection” and “eternal,” gravitated around Chávez’s remarks about the Liberator in this particular installation of the show. Being the
last installation of the show before Christmas Day might have intensified the religious rhetoric. Nevertheless, this rhetoric resonates with what Langue (2009) called the Bolivarian civic religion and the Roman Catholic beliefs that are ingrained in Venezuelan culture. The “resurrection” of Bolívar suggested the revival of his legacy and the redirection of the country toward the destiny the Liberator originally envisioned.

Religious language also drew a subtle connection between the Liberator and Jesus Christ as well as between the people and God. In Acts, Peter preached to the crowd “God raised Him [Jesus] from the death, releasing Him from the agony of death” (Acts 2:24 Berean Study Bible). Therefore, in the quote, the president figuratively turned the people into the agents of a miracle, the resurrection of Bolívar, who like Jesus, is deemed as a messianic hero in Venezuela. The implications of this metaphor and the relationships it suggests might go beyond the mere resurface of the Bolivarian legacy. The second coming of Christ, according to Revelation, will bring a time of great tribulation before the Kingdom of God sets on Earth. This way, the president—maybe inadvertently—suggested that Venezuela will go through difficult times before achieving welfare.

References to other historical events allowed President Chávez to further relate the Bolivarian Revolution to the Liberator and his deeds, adding more layers to the historical rhetorical frame. On episode 61 broadcast on February 4th, 2001, Chávez organized a special commemoration for the ninth anniversary of the 1992 coup d’état. The event, called the “Caravan of the Rebellion,” was a march that started at the Carabobo field and ended in Caracas Square. The cameras and crew of Aló Presidente followed the president and his followers through the 112-mile journey and aired the
caravan live. The first words of the president outlined the justification for the caravan and its particular route.

Good morning to all! This day is a memorable day that undoubtedly split Venezuelan history in two. It is a day to remember, to think, to act. Therefore, we have decided today to come to the Carabobo field with this great concentration of people from all over the country [to do] this great caravan that will travel the backbone of the country, from this historic site: The Carabobo field, the inspiration of that Bolivarian military movement that nine years ago, on this day, opened and marked a new path in Venezuelan life (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001a).

The statement that defines February 4th, 1992 as a “day that undoubtedly split Venezuelan history in two” is also characteristic of religious rhetoric. According to Revelations, the second coming of Jesus Christ is the event that divides human history. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1). Therefore, President Chávez implied that his coup brought to a definite end the status quo that reigned in Venezuela—meaning the AD/COPEI hegemony—and transferred the positive connotations attached to Jesus Christ’s return to his political movement.

On a different note, the president also equated the 1992 coup to the Battle of Carabobo. The battle of Carabobo at the Carabobo field was the most significant military victory of Simón Bolívar against the Spanish conquistadors and has been celebrated ever since as the event that marked the definite independence of Venezuela (Rodríguez, 1996). By celebrating the anniversary of the 1992 coup d’état at the Carabobo field and defining the battle as an inspiration for his own movement, the president suggested a connection between the Bolivarian Revolution and the Liberator’s endeavors toward independence.
This way, the objectives of both movements seemed related and equally positive for the country.

A parallelism between the battle of Carabobo and the 1992 coup is not perfect, though. Apart from all the obvious temporal and circumstantial differences, the former military campaign was successful in securing the country’s independence, while the later failed in its attempt to seize power in Caracas. President Chávez used another historical event to compare to the coup that seemed more fitting.

I said it, “February 4th is a date comparable to April 19th.” A date of annunciation, a date of dawn. February 4th, 1992 was the beginning of the end of the Punto Fijo Pact. That day the perverse Punto Fijo Pact was wounded in the heart. Then we buried it, definitely, with the support of God and the massive response of the Venezuelan people . . . on December 6th, 1998 (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001a).

In this case, the president relied on an explicit simile to build the link between “February 4th” and “April 19th.” The use of these metonyms—the dates that represent the historical events—reinforced the similarities Chávez tried to highlight in this discourse. By “April 19th,” the president referred to the movement of April 19th, 1810, which marked the beginning the historical period in which the country takes the most pride. In the midst of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), the French seized Spain and claimed all its colonial territories in America (Blaufarb, 2007). A group of Creole aristocrats in Caracas seized the opportunity to gain political control of Venezuela and rejected the French rule under the claim that they would only respond to the deposed Spanish emperor, Ferdinand VII. On April 19th, 1810 the aristocrats pacifically ousted the Captain General Vicente Emparan and created the Venezuelan First Republic (1810-1812), which
was not under the rule of Spain (Colmenares, 2015). This movement was considered to be the start of the independence wars in Venezuela.

The statement comparing the 1992 coup to the event that sparked the independence wars in Latin America gave the coup the kind of validation the independence movement has in modern times. No Venezuelan or South American would ever question the legitimacy of the war against the Spanish conquistadors because it ensured self-governance for almost every country in the region. Religious rhetoric also contributed to the positive characterization both the 1992 coup and the April 19th movement. The term “annunciation” stands out in the aforementioned quote by Chávez. This particular word choice draws subtle connection linking the archangel Gabriel’s annunciation to the Virgin Mary, April 19th and the 1992 coup. Consequently, the three events come to represent the first manifestations of deep, difficult but ultimately positive changes in history. Just like Gabriel’s annunciation predicted the coming of Jesus Christ and the events of April 19th, 1810 sparked the independence movement Bolívar commanded, the 1992 coup d’état functions as an annunciation of the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution and its leader Hugo Chávez.

February 4th marked the beginning of a new process of national reconstruction. . . Our role is a dual role: we are the gravediggers of Punto Fijo and, on the other hand, the parteros [roughly, male midwives] of a new time, just like the patriots who buried the Spanish empire and created our nations. . . We are the parteros of a new Venezuela, of a new history (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001a).

Several metaphors and metonyms contribute to the positive framing of the president’s coup and administration in this quote. President Chávez employed a construction metaphor, which attaches positive connotations to the notion of “building,”
to frame the 1992 coup as a legitimate movement. Additionally, birth and death
metaphors contributed to frame the president and his collaborators as agents of change—
“we are the gravediggers… we are the parteros.” The metonym “Punto Fijo” refers to the
regimes that followed the ousting of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez on January 1958.
These were the years in which the AD/COPEI hegemony was built and consolidated
(Urbaneja, 2007). Paraphrasing Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution came to end the
corruption and social injustice that had become normal practice during the “Punto Fijo
era,” and also to end the neoliberal policies that had subdued the economy to the will of
foreign powers and the International Monetary Fund. This way, the president set up the
goal to cut with the neoliberal tradition so that Venezuela could achieve “real
independence” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001a).

The notion that Venezuela, although being a self-governed country, was not
entirely independent was the main theme of episode 49 of Aló Presidente, broadcast on
October 29th, 2000. In this installation of the show, Chávez invited then-President Fidel
Castro of Cuba to co-host. Castro was the first foreign president to appear on Aló
Presidente. After commenting about a baseball game they had played the day before,
President Chávez asked Castro to explain the independence process in Cuba. The
presidents complimented each other in the narration until Chávez took over to delve into
the Venezuelan independence endeavor, focusing on the military campaign that resulted
in the Battle of Carabobo.

This is very important because today we are taking up the concept of Carabobo,
of independence, of revolution. Now, as you know, Fidel, beyond the military
deed comes the social revolution and the political revolution. In that, Bolivar
failed. He could not help it. He could [fight] no more so he ended up dying in
Santa Marta [a Colombian town], saying: “I have plowed the sea” because he wanted to go much further (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2000b).

The syntactic parallelism at the beginning of the quote relates Carabobo to the broader concepts of independence and revolution. “Carabobo,” used as a metonym for the Battle of Carabobo, symbolized the whole independence endeavor and its victorious outcome. Nothing in the context of the sentence suggests that the term “revolution” is referring to President Chávez’s governance manifesto and the adjective Bolivarian is not qualifying it. Therefore, “revolution” in this quote seems to signify “transformative movement” or “transformative process,” as the president has traditionally defined it (Chávez as cited in Susi-Sarfati, 2011, p. 180).

The relationship that the president suggests between the notions of Carabobo, independence and revolution is not irrelevant. President Chávez had appropriated the term “revolution” to a point that anything related to his administration was “revolutionary” or a “revolution” in itself. Consequently, the parallelism Carabobo-independence-revolution incorporated the independence endeavor in a concept/category the president had already proclaimed to characterize his governance manifesto. Furthermore, for the rest of the episode— and in other episodes that followed this particular installation of Aló Presidente— the president referred to the independence war as the “independence revolution,” suggesting, linguistically, a parallelism with the Bolivarian Revolution. Later on episode 49, President Chávez continued:

Our Bolivarian Revolution has just ended another phase. There was a military phase of another tone, similar to the one of the 1810s, 1820s and 1830s. If we had not met that military phase, we would not have gone into the political or institutional phase, which in today’s case manifested in the constitutional process. That phase ended and we are now taking a step forward and entering the phase of
giving land, justice, education, health, employment and happiness to our people (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2000b).

Here, President Chávez explicitly treated the independence war and the Bolivarian Revolution as comparable historical events and divided them in phases that mirror each other. First, he talked about the existence of “a military phase of another tone.” The phrase by itself does not have clear meaning, but the word “similar” connects it to the decades in which most of the military clashes between the patriots and the Spanish conquistadors took place. The only event related to Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution that could be “similar” to these military campaigns is the 1992 coup d’état, which the president deemed as the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution. The construction “a military phase” joins other terms, such as “rebellion,” “uprising” and the metonym “February 4th,” which Chávez frequently used to characterize his and his comrades’ actions on February 4th, 1992. By avoiding the word “coup,” the president systematically separated the 1992 coup from the negative connotations connected to coup d’états as violent military movements that threaten the continuity of any democratic system. Furthermore, in the case of the aforementioned quote, the president presented the coup as being “similar” to the independence military campaigns, whose legitimacy is unquestioned in Venezuela. The following sentence, a conditional construction, reinforced the idea that the “military phase”— the coup and the battles during the independence war— was a necessary step to move on to the next stages of the— independence and Bolivarian— revolution.

The “political or institutional phase” referred explicitly to the “constitutional process.” By the time episode 49 was broadcast, the constitutional referendum—
celebrated on December 1999—had approved the reform of the 1961 Constitution, allowing the president to significantly transform the economic and social systems in Venezuela, as outlined in chapter three. Although the aforementioned quote does not provide the constitutional process with an independence war equivalent, a section of an earlier quote from episode 49 helps to complete the parallelism. President Chávez had already established that Bolivar had “failed” to fulfill the political and social revolution. Therefore, the “political or institutional phase” of the “independence revolution” would be the processes that followed the expulsion of the Spanish troops from South America. After gaining independence, Bolivar created *la Gran Colombia* [the Great Colombia], a republic that integrated several Latin American countries and that ultimately could not maintain its territorial and political unity. Therefore, the institutional portion of the “independence revolution” was never fully accomplished despite the Liberator’s will. In the president’s discourse, the Bolivarian Revolution, unlike the independence revolution, was able to move on to the next stage and was implementing a series of economic and social policies to ensure the “people’s happiness.” This way, Chávez framed the Bolivarian Revolution as a continuation of the independence revolution, a central concept within the historical rhetorical frame.

On episode 163, broadcast on September 7th, 2003, the president brought up the independence endeavor in the midst of a major threat to his administration. On August
20th, 2003, opposition leaders had submitted approximately three million signatures to the National Electoral Council, CNE, to request a recall referendum to oust President Chávez and some government representatives. Although the Constitution mandated that recall referendums were to be celebrated at the middle of the pertinent official’s mandate— which in Chávez’s case was on December 2003— the CNE stalled the voting until August 15th, 2004.30

Throughout episode 163 of Aló Presidente, the president made various remarks about the referendum, the opposition’s motives and the potential consequences of his withdrawing. The statements regarding the referendum as a whole represented roughly 38 percent of this particular installation of the show, meaning approximately one hour and 20 minutes. The president dedicated the first 30 minutes of the show to the remembrance of the 1973 Chilean coup d’état that overthrew socialist President Salvador Allende.

Chávez emphasized the role of the United States in the Chilean coup.

The Chilean people found a peaceful, democratic way and elected Salvador Allende. . . . And then, the oligarchy and the government of the United States and the CIA . . . [continued] all this history of interventionism, of chains, of colonialism and of imperialism. [This is] old story in our America, five centuries of imposition, intrusion, interference [and] shredding against the dreams of the peoples of this continent that also have the right to dream of a better world. . . .

30 Eddy Reyes Torres (2015), lawyer and columnist for El Nacional daily, summarized the obstacles the CNE put up for the opposition to overcome. On September 12th, 2003, the president of the CNE, Francisco Carrasquero, announced that the submitted signatures were not admissible because they were presented before the due date. The opposition collected signatures again on November 2003 and resubmitted them to the CNE. Opposition leaders reported that approximately 3.5 million signatures were submitted. However, the CNE ruled that only 1.8 million signatures were valid and 800,000 were in question for presenting “serious irregularities” (Reyes Torres, 2015). The opposition turned to the Supreme Court to rule on the matter and started protesting on the streets. In the meantime, government representative Luis Tascón published the signatures on a website and signatories started to get fired from state-owned companies, be denied credit from public banks, etc. The outrage increased along with the number and intensity of street protests. On December, the CNE announced that there were enough valid signatures to execute the recall.
Bolívar prophesied it, [in] 1826 Simón Bolívar said: “the United States seems destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of freedom” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003b).

The United States, as a participant in the overthrow of a head of state, became the bridge that connected the coup against Allende with the coup against Chávez in 2002. “The Venezuelan oligarchy and its international allies are now looking for other ways [to topple Chávez] because the Allende and Chilean format didn’t work out” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003b). Here, the president’s discourse suggested that coups—or at least those against socialist leaders such as Allende and Chávez—are not events that respond to specific circumstances in each particular country but modi operandi characteristic of imperialist/interventionist foreign powers, in this case the United States. Therefore, Chávez framed the 2002 coup as part of an ongoing international conspiracy that aims to weaken/eliminate anti-neoliberal or anti-capitalist regimes. Because this “format” failed in 2002, “other ways” were emerging, according to the president.

At first sight and considering the political context of the moment, these “other ways” seem to refer to the recall referendum. However, the 1999 Constitution, which was the first major achievement of Chávez’s presidency, incorporated the concept of recall referenda to Venezuela’s legal system and made it a right. Therefore, the “other ways” most likely signified the process of signature collection the opposition had organized to activate the referendum, which President Chávez qualified as a “tremendous fraud” later in the same episode. On a broader sense, the president could also have been referring to

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31 This quote by Bolivar comes from a letter he wrote to Patricio Campbell on 1829, not 1826 (Briceño-Iragorry, 1951). As is common in Latin America, Bolivar used the word “America” to refer to North and South America.
other strategies of his adversaries, such as the “economic war” or the “media war” that, according to Chávez, the opposition and the “international imperialism” were waging against the Bolivarian Revolution. While emphasizing that Venezuela’s status as a sovereign state, the president talked about the independence war once again:

We have been independent politically, well, historically speaking, from the day Bolívar commanded the Battle of Carabobo and buried the last lance [into the heart of] the Spanish Empire which swept this land for 300 years; and today more than ever in these last 200 years with the Bolivarian Revolution, we are an independent country. . . . However, the dream of some Venezuelans is that another empire comes along . . . that the Marines invade us and then finish Chávez up, take him prisoner or get him killed. Prisoner? [They] want him killed. And it does not matter if they killed a hundred thousand or two million [people in the process]. The important thing for them is to re-settle here [in Miraflores, where episode 163 was shot] (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003b).

The idea that the Bolivarian Revolution had reinforced independence in Venezuela resurfaced in this quote, but unlike past years the emphasis went back to the struggle for self-governance. The threat to sovereignty, the president noted, has domestic and international sources. On the domestic front, Chávez talked about some unidentified Venezuelans who are willing to form an alliance with an imperialist force to seize power. Yet, the word “re-settle” suggested that these Venezuelans had already occupied Miraflores before. Two groups match this description: the leaders of the diminished AD and COPEI, who according to Chávez had sold the country to foreign capital, and the group of opposition leaders that held power after Chávez was briefly toppled on April 2002. These groups are anyway intertwined as far as Chávez’s discourse is concerned, considering that the president usually framed dissenters of different parties and ideological traditions as one homogeneous group that took on different names, such as the opposition, elites, oligarchy and lackeys of the empire (Aponte Moreno, 2008).
A similarity among sentence structures in previous quotes is worth noticing at this point as they further characterize the opposition Chávez linguistically constructed. When talking about the coup against Allende, the president regarded “the oligarchy and the government of the United States” as the agents responsible for the coup. Then, while referencing the 2002 coup, Chávez pointed to the “Venezuelan oligarchy and its international allies.” The president made the relation between these oligarchies and international actors explicit later on that episode. “These are the same international sectors, the same sectors of the oligarchy, the same format. You see images with the different hairstyles... they dress differently, but it is the same oligarchy” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003b). This parallel structure allowed the president to frame his political struggle— and the Bolivarian Revolution— on a larger historical scheme that involved an ancient conflict between elites and international powers on one side and the Latin American people on the other.

On the international front of the conflict President Chávez discursively constructed, the United States stood as the embodiment of international imperialism. In one of the later excerpts, “the Marines” functioned as a metonym of the U.S., framing the country to a military agent. The militaristic rhetoric in the quote, which spotlighted actions such as “invade,” “take prisoner” and “kill,” reinforced the framing of the U.S. as a one-dimensional military agent because it suppressed actions that the U.S. as a state would have taken before— or instead of— invading Venezuela, such as calling for negotiations, imposing economic sanctions, etc. This discourse focused on the effects of a hypothetical U.S. military intervention— the invasion of Venezuela and death of Chávez.
and others—and ignored the process that would take place on a real-life scenario. This, along with the remarks by Bolívar that the president quoted, contributed to the representation of United States as an imperialist power and mostly as an immoral and murderous force.

In later installations of Aló Presidente, President Chávez continued to use historical rhetorical frames to legitimize his national and foreign policies and projects. After several readings of the chosen Aló Presidente episodes, it became predictable to find references to and quotes by Bolivar in the segments of the show Chávez dedicated to talk about the Bolivarian Revolution’s plans and accomplishments. For instance, after passing the Land Act in 2001 prohibiting large estates, the government went on a land expropriation spree that by 2013 resulted in the seizure of 3.6 million hectares, an area the size of Maryland (“Fincas expropiadas,” 2014). On episode 365 of Aló Presidente, Chávez claimed this land policy was in line with Bolívar’s thinking:

Bolívar knew that the land had to be given to the peasants. However, that was really impossible in his time... it was impossible to do a social revolution in these lands. The conditions did not exist. But [Bolívar] was more advanced, as if he had come from another planet. He tried to do the impossible, but one day he had to write: “The great day of America has not come yet. . . .” Now, the day has come and the revolution has brought justice to our peasants (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2010).

Statements such framed Chávez’s decision-making as guided by the Bolivarian thinking. The rationale of almost every policy or venture outlined in the show was framed as the result of a thoughtful analysis of Bolivar’s objectives as a statesman. The president always approached the Liberator’s failures with a forgiving tone, emphasizing that it was “impossible” to materialize the “advanced” vision of Bolívar in the 1800’s. The
Bolivarian Revolution, however, accomplished Bolívar’s goals, according to the president.

On the last episode of Aló Presidente, broadcast on January 29th, 2012, Chávez visited a cattle raising center in Barinas, a state in the southwest region of Venezuela. The center was settled in a land the government had recently expropriated. Chávez, along with some members of his Cabinet, interviewed some workers about the technology available in the center and other details about its operation. About approximately two hours into the show, the president was asking questions about the center’s output to the vice minister of development of agricultural production circuits Yván Gil. Chávez interrupted the vice minister as he was sharing his estimates:

Look, Yván, the agricultural and livestock production is so important for national independence . . . we must strengthen it constantly. Independence [from imports] is the most important thing. . . . That is why Bolívar said: “I blush to say that independence is the only asset we have acquired after 20 years of revolutionary war. . . .”32 But, pay attention, Bolivar continued: “However, that independence . . . leaves the door open for us to conquer everything else,” meaning economic and social development. Today, look, after 200 years, we have conquered our independence (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2012).

The president assessed cattle raising as an instrument to achieve economic self-sufficiency and thus as a key element of his broader definition of national independence. Furthermore, considering the structure of last sentence of this quote, the raising center functioned as a token or visual representation of the “conquered” independence of Venezuela. Thus, independence was not a dream or an objective anymore; it was— “after

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32 This quote is taken from the last message Bolívar sent to the Congress of Colombia, dated on January 20th, 1830. The original quote reads: “I blush to say: independence is the only asset we have acquired at the expense of all others. But it [independence] opens the door to reconquer [other assets] under your sovereign auspices, with all the splendor of glory and freedom.” The quotation marks in the provided excerpt of Aló Presidente were in the episode’s transcript as shown.
200 years”—a secured possession. The change in the president’s characterization of Venezuela’s independence in this episode is worth noting because it was the last installation of *Aló Presidente* and one of the last times Chávez made a public appearance before his death. Whether he was already thinking of his legacy is somewhat irrelevant, but, in retrospective, there seemed to be some kind of closure associated with the alleged conquest of national independence.

After 200 years, we have recovered the independence we had lost. This is the first thing we have to take care of, our national independence. Independence is like the foundation upon which we will build *la Patria Nueva* [the New Fatherland]. That is *la Patria Socialista* [the Socialist Fatherland]. All these lands are highly revolutionary, not only highly productive for livestock, rice [and] agricultural activity, but for revolutionary activity. This is Revolutionary land (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2012).

The new goal of the Bolivarian Revolution, as the president noted above, was the creation of *la Patria Socialista*. This was not a new endeavor, though. As outlined in chapter three, the president declared himself and his revolution to be socialist on January 2005. Therefore, socialism was an ongoing project or, in Chávez’s words, a radicalization of the Bolivarian Revolution. The role of socialism in the characterization of the Bolivarian Revolution is assessed in the following section, which delves into the socioeconomic rhetorical frame.

**Socioeconomic Rhetorical Frame**

The socioeconomic rhetorical frame characterized the Bolivarian Revolution in terms of the transformative social and economic ideologies and policies the Chávez administration applied during its tenure. Hugo Chávez approached social and economic issues as tightly intertwined matters. Furthermore, the president claimed that
transforming Venezuela’s socioeconomic model was the *médula*—bone marrow—of the Bolivarian Revolution. “If we were not able to . . . really change the socioeconomic model, we would not be doing a revolution” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003a).

As a presidential candidate, Chávez had promised to find an alternative to neoliberalism in order to fairly distribute wealth and eradicate poverty (Gott, 2001). One of the government’s first economic policies involved the creation of the *Banco del Pueblo*—Bank of the People— which would offer comprehensive micro-credits for low-income and unemployed citizens who needed capital to create or finance small businesses. In the tenth episode of *Aló Presidente*, broadcast on August 15th, 1999, Alicia Rodríguez called the show asking for money to repair/replace her sewing machine. She claimed to be an independent designer, so not having a sewing machine cut her only source of income. The president explained to her the micro-credit program and referred her to his chief of staff, General Francisco Rangel, who would “call you tomorrow to take your information and set up the micro-credit interview” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999b). After the call, Chávez commented on the rationale behind his economic policy:

> We need to break away from the habits of savage capitalism that give money to the big [companies and businessmen] to do big deals, then the micro-enterprises, micro-entrepreneurs, the individuals who have something [knowledge or abilities] but lack what have you, one million *bolívares* [Venezuela’s currency], two hundred thousand *bolívares*, they have no way to get credit. They have no one to endorse them, they have no bank accounts, no credit cards. . . . They do not have the support to get a credit from commercial banks. Furthermore, with the interest rates who would be able to pay? Rather people are sinking even deeper. That is why we created the Bank of the People (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999b).

Here, President Chávez’s discourse exemplifies a personification of capitalism. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained, personification is an ontological metaphor that
defines nonhuman entities and concepts “in terms of human motivations, characteristics and activities” (p. 33). This way, capitalism came to have “habits” and is able to “give” money to corporations, becoming the agent responsible for the situations the president described later. By qualifying capitalism as “savage,” Chávez also humanized it as this adjective can only describe the behavior or mindset of living entities.

In the first couple of sentences, the president argued *grosso modo* that micro-entrepreneurs do not have access to credit because capitalism gives money to big companies. The causal relationship between capitalism’s habit to give money to large corporations and micro-entrepreneurs inability to get credit is established by the connector “then.” However, some key premises are missing from this argument. To conclude that the aforementioned habit of capitalism impedes micro-entrepreneurs to get credit, it is necessary to assume that capitalism “gives” *all* the money to big companies so there are no funds left to finance small businesses. Common sense denies this premise and, thus, the conclusion President Chávez proposed in this quote. The credit system does not work that way. However, value judgments concealed in the argument hold the president’s reasoning together. The verb “give,” by definition, constitutes a voluntary transference of possessions that is not necessarily reciprocated. Considering that the president suppressed all references regarding the compromises companies must make to get credit, the audience might infer that the funds capitalism provides corporations with are hand-outs. On the contrary, Chávez spotlighted the obstacles micro-entrepreneurs face right after stating that companies are just given money, creating by juxtaposition a high contrast between the cases. Plus, the qualifier “savage” had already attached
negative connotations to capitalism. Introduced as a vicious and hostile entity, the moral compass of capitalism is put into question from the beginning. Therefore, the audience could agree with the president in that capitalism, acting through commercial banks, has no intentions to and will not “support” micro-entrepreneurs in their search for credit. Hence, the government founded the Bank of the People.

Of course, to connect the creation of the Bank of the People to capitalism’s disregard of the struggles of small businessmen, the audience have to configure another assumption. That is, the Chávez administration *does* care about the financial needs of micro-entrepreneurs and low-income citizens. Consequently, it created an entity to facilitate credit approval to these sectors. The president further emphasized the anti-values attached to neoliberalism on episode ten:

> We need to get our collective spirit back and get rid of those vices we have learned for so many years. Savage neoliberalism taught us that what matters the most is “me.” . . . And that “what matters the most is me” sometimes penetrates entire families and privileged social sectors who live showing off, sometimes even rudely, their way of life, wasting money, when there are compatriots who are crying out to get some money to save their lives (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999b).

As he did with capitalism, President Chávez personified neoliberalism and held it responsible for the selfish practices of the high class in Venezuela. Juxtaposition and hyperbole spotlight the contrast between the experience of the privileged— the show-offs who waste money— and the underprivileged, who are the ones pleading for money to survive. Although the president is comparing the privileged with the underprivileged, he addressed the later as “compatriots.” This word choice had two major implications. First, it emphasized that those who are economically deprived are part of the nation and, as
people who share the same history and culture of Venezuelans from other classes, they should be subject of empathy and state assistance. Second, the privileged become excluded from the compatriots’ group. The word “compatriots” is anchored in an antithesis, a rhetorical strategy that puts two elements on opposite sides of a given spectrum to emphasize their differences (Cuddon, 2012). Therefore, this quote implied that the privileged and the compatriots are two different groups that do not overlap. It also suggested that the underprivileged are the only ones the president considered compatriots. This way, the socioeconomic rhetorical frame constructed a positive image for the impoverished and a negative image of the high class, who represented capitalist values in President Chávez’s discourse.

The president’s critiques against capitalism and neoliberalism hardened as time passed. On episode 32 of Aló Presidente, broadcast on March 5th, 2000, Chávez took approximately 15 minutes to refute the comments then-President of Fedecamaras³³ Vicente Brito made in an interview for El Universal daily. The president based his rebuttal on only one sentence from the interview: “They [the government] are fighting inflation with recession.” Chávez said that it was important to note that the economy was “devastated” when he took office because of the mishandling of state affairs and corruption of previous administrations.

[For the government’s economic policies to work] the private sector is the one that has to step up. Of course, we will not follow the path of savage neoliberalism. . . . Neoliberalism is the path to hell, but there are entrepreneurs that want neoliberalism, the wide part of the funnel for them and the narrow part of the

³³ Fedecamaras is a nonprofit civic association composed by chambers of commerce in 12 trade groups: agriculture, ranching, mining, manufacturing, construction, commerce, banking, transportation, tourism, energy, media and insurance.
funnel for the people, for the country. No, gentlemen, we need to change those patterns. . . . We must exorcise ourselves, take the devils out, we have like a thousand devils inside (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2000a).

Here, the president assigned some responsibility to the private sector—represented as a whole in Fedecamaras—in the improvement of the economy. By stating that the private sector has to “step up” to make the administration’s economic policies work, the president suggested that the government had already done its part creating appropriate economic policies—many of which were outlined in the newly enforced 1999 Constitution. This way, Chávez implied that the slow recovery of the economy was not his administration’s but the neoliberal-leaning private sector’s fault.

In the quote, two metaphors with religious connotations frame neoliberalism. On the one hand, by stating that neoliberalism is the “path to hell,” the president built a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): neoliberalism is a sin, for sins are the deeds that ultimately cast people’s souls to hell, according to the Roman Catholic religion. Consequently, neoliberalism corrupts the soul and the people who commit to neoliberalism should be judged and punished. On the other hand, however, the exorcism metaphor defined neoliberalism not as a sin but as a demon/devil. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, major exorcisms are directed “at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation [of a person] from demonic possession” (para. 1673). The Catechism also states that exorcisms can only be performed by bishops or priests with the express consent of the local ordinary. President Chávez, however, suggested that each individual is responsible for and able to do their own “exorcism.” The noun “we” could even imply that the president is not free of sin or possession. Therefore, the departure
from neoliberalism in Chávez’s discourse, instead of constituting a shift in the nation’s economic model, became an act of personal redemption, an effort to purify individuals and the society.

These remarks clearly resonated with the ideas posited in the Theology of Liberation. The Theology of Liberation promoted “the work and importance of concrete behavior, of deeds, of action, of praxis in the Christian life” (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 8). Therefore, the Church encouraged individuals to take responsibility over their own “liberation” from oppression and to participate in activities and programs that helped others to liberate themselves as well. In the Theology of Liberation, “oppression” was an all-encompassing concept that referred to dominance in any field, including economics, politics, culture and society. Therefore, capitalism as a system that perpetuates exploitative relations among people became a target for the Church and it endorsed socialism as an alternative (López Maya, 2014). Now, the Church’s criticism to capitalism was carried from a theological perspective, having the teachings of the Bible and Christ as guiding principles. Therefore, when President Chávez incorporated religious rhetoric and Christian values to socioeconomic remarks, he was eliciting arguments characteristic of the Theology of Liberation.

You have to be your own liberator; you have to definitely liberate yourselves from the chains of individualism because . . . that takes away the most precious thing: life as a collective. . . . It is about helping others, regardless of who they are; it is about finding ourselves again and vindicate what we are. . . . Know this, brothers and sisters, you carry the blood of liberators . . . this is the crib of liberty, Venezuela is the crib of utopia (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2001a).

Once again, the president employed frames of value judgments that resonate with the Theology of Liberation. However, the repetition of this rhetoric such as “liberators,”
“liberation” and “liberty” also draws a clear connection with the independence hero Simón Bolívar. The link becomes more obvious when the president noted that “his brothers and sisters,” meaning the audience and/or Venezuelans at large, carry the “blood of liberators.” Considering that he had already defined capitalism/neoliberalism as sins/demons from whom people should break free, the president brought up the legacy of Bolívar to rally the audience behind the “ousting” of these economic models. Venezuelans’ historical identity as liberators, Chávez implied, had to be vindicated. Therefore, in this quote the president suggested that capitalism and neoliberalism should be fought and expelled, not only from Venezuela but eventually from Latin America as many South American countries owe their independence to Bolívar.

The sentence “Venezuela is the crib of utopia” triggers another set of connotations that speak of the ideological framework that guided President Chávez’s discourse. In everyday speech, “utopia” denotes an imagined state of harmony and perfection. In this sense, the meaning of Chávez’s rhetoric is straightforward: Venezuela is growing to become a perfect nation, free from inequality, injustice and suffering. The concept of utopia, however, has a history that connects it to one of the most influential political, economic and social theoretical frameworks in history. “Utopia” was coined by Thomas More, who constructed “the first integrated scheme of a socialist society” in his book *A Fruitful and Pleasant Worke of the Best State of a Publique Weale, and of the Newe Yle Named Utopia*, published in 1516 (Lorimer, 1999, p. 9).

In his introduction to Friedrich Engel’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Lorimer (1999) noted how Thomas More criticized the social and economic order that
was emerging within feudal England and Europe, in which new market relations led to the exploitation and alienation of artisans and farmers. More described an ideal society, settled at the fictional Utopia Island. In Utopia, people engaged in social production and freely gave their goods to state officials for them to fairly distribute according to people’s needs. All property and commerce were collective and money did not exist. Considering President Chávez’s appreciation for “collective life,” there is a possibility that he was not referencing the everyday concept of utopia but More’s Utopia. Perhaps, a more accurate transcription of the president’s remark would have been “Venezuela is the crib of Utopia.” If that was the case, the president was hinting that he aimed to model Venezuela after the perfect society depicted in More’s book, one of the foundational ideals of socialism.

Socialist discourse can be noted throughout Chávez’s speeches on Aló Presidente and was a defining feature of the socioeconomic rhetorical frame. The aforementioned quotes, for instance, resonate with Karl Marx’s observations about emerging socialist societies. “The particular defect [in new socialist societies] Marx described was the nature of the human beings produced in the old society with the old ideas” (Lebowitz, 2006, p. 62). Chávez’s pleas to abandon the “inherited anti-values” of capitalism and neoliberalism— i.e. selfishness, individualism, corruption, etc.— suggested that the president was aware of the “vices” he, his Cabinet and Venezuelans in general carried as a result of years under the influence of neoliberal regimes and foreign capitalism. The president said it was paramount to undergo a “revolution inside each of us” to create a just society. This thought mirrors Marx’s definition of revolutionary practice, a struggle
“not only in order to bring about change in society but also to change yourselves” (Marx as cited in Lebowitz, 2006, p. 70). Although the president subscribed basic socialist notions in his discourse, the term “socialism” did not appear in any of his Aló Presidente speeches before 2005, when Chávez announced to the world he was socialist at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Religious rhetoric kept appearing after the president’s announcement:

It is necessary to create a socialist morality, a socialist sentiment, a socialist philosophy, which is the same as Christ’s. I will repeat it once again: Capitalism is anti-Christian, socialism is love between human beings, equality, justice, the Kingdom of God here on Earth (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2006a).

Antitheses such as this located socialism and capitalism at the opposite sides of the good/evil spectrum so that each model came to respectively embody virtue and depravity. By connecting socialism to Jesus Christ, the president reinforced the positive connotations he associated with socialism and the negative connotations he attached to capitalism. Chávez also claimed that “Christ was the first socialist revolutionary” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009b). Jesus Christ’s teachings about love for the fellow man, wealth sharing, solidarity and equality resonated with the values socialism subscribes, according to the president—and the Theology of Liberation. The president usually referenced, paraphrased or quoted Bible passages when a discussion of social or economic issues or policies emerged on Aló Presidente. The most common example was Jesus’ metaphor of the camel and the needle (Matt. 19:24), which Chávez quoted in seven of the episodes included in this study to censure the pursuit of personal wealth.

We do not want to be rich, I think Jesus Christ said one day. Being rich is bad. It is as simple as that. It is bad to be rich. Christ was even more radical on this than all of us together. Christ said, “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a
needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2008c).

Christ came to liberate us through the spiritual, moral, social and economic revolution. In the word of Christ, there is a vast theoretical foundation . . . to build the socialist project. When Christ multiplied the bread and the fish and gave a piece to each person, and it is one for each, it is an example of equality, of justice, of socialism. This is the path: The Theology of Liberation (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2011b).

The president did not take the comment about the Theology of Liberation any further in this episode and made no other mention to it in the other Aló Presidente installations included in this study. Perhaps the old alliance of the social movement of the Roman Catholic Church with the traditional party COPEI (López Maya, 2014) led Chávez to avoid any explicit reference to the Theology of Liberation regardless of the links it originally proposed between Christianity and socialism. However, the president frequently emphasized those connections with utterances such as the ones mentioned above. This way, the president employed religious rhetoric to enhance the persuasiveness of the socioeconomic rhetorical frame.

After 2005, the Bolivarian Revolution’s main goal was to “build” the Patria Socialista—Socialist Fatherland. Eventually, the label Revolución Socialista—Socialist Revolution—became interchangeable with Bolivarian Revolution as an identifier of Chávez’s governance manifesto. The president employed construction metaphors to define socialism as a work in process in Aló Presidente. In the president’s discourse, socialism was a building and “socialist values” were its foundations. However, socialism could not be built or would not be sufficiently solid unless society subscribed to and lived by socialism’s core ethical values.

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We must demolish the old customs, the bad customs. . . . I refer to the capitalist culture, that way of life, that selfishness, that individualism, that corruption. Corruption is inherent to capitalism, corruption is the expression of individualism, of selfishness, of ambition. . . . We must build a new culture, new values, the socialist values, the socialist Fatherland. . . . Partnership, equality, responsibility, transparency, love among us, love for the Fatherland. Those are the moral foundations of socialism (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2006b).

The modal verb “must” characterized the demolition of the capitalist culture and the construction of the socialist Fatherland as necessities or obligations. Drawing from the organization of the sentences in the president’s quote, the “demolition” of capitalism is a precondition/prerequisite for the “construction” of socialism. This notion, typical of the socioeconomic rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution, coincided with Marxist thinking, which sustains that socialism cannot emerge from capitalist structures (Lebowitz, 2006). The president focused on the moral aspects of both economic models to make his case around the condemnation and eradication of capitalism. Antithesis was the main rhetorical strategy the president employed to emphasize the positive values of socialism and the negative values of capitalism/neoliberalism. Parallel sentence structures and repetition also spotlighted the ethical differences between these economic models whose contrasting characteristics were at the core of the socioeconomic rhetorical frame:

Capitalism just invests wherever there is financial surplus. Socialism does not. A capitalist government ends up privatizing everything and denying everything to the people, especially to those sectors that have been exploited by capitalism. A socialist government does not. Capitalists deny the majorities health, education, housing, electricity because they cannot pay. Socialists do not (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2007b).

Those who want to defend capitalism, go ahead. Those who want to defend the neoliberal model, go ahead. They are difficult to defend, though, because it is like a lawyer trying to defend a murderer, a murderer who killed someone while the world was watching. How do you defend that? It is indefensible. Defending socialist values is easy because they represent all the virtues of the human being.
Being good is not easy, though. We have to fight off this cancer and come up with a new morality (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009b).

President Chávez regarded the moral shift from capitalist to socialist values as the most challenging task in the construction of socialism. As the last quote shows, the president used metaphors and similes to define capitalism as a murderer and a disease, entities that clearly elicit fear. These characterizations of capitalism legitimized two approaches. As a murderer, capitalism is to be prosecuted and incarcerated, in the sense that it should be separated from law-abiding members of society. This approach, for example, gave ground to the passing of legislation that banned privatizations, monopoly and mergers, which made these “capitalist practices” illegal and punishable. As a disease, capitalism consumes members of society and society as a whole and therefore it must be expelled and/or cured. This evoked again the principles of the Theology of Liberation, which called people to purge themselves from the capitalist system of values that oppressed them.

On Aló Presidente’s episode 235, broadcast on October 2nd, 2005, the president discussed the frailty of Latin American economic and social alliances as the result of a capitalist mindset that encouraged competition instead of cooperation in the region. Chávez referenced the work of Brazilian economist Celso Furtado, who theorized that underdevelopment had its origins in two mechanisms. First, the mechanism of internal exploitation of the masses in each individual country and second the mechanism of external dependence, which keeps developing nations exporting raw and cheap materials while importing expensive manufactured products. Chávez averred that the objective of the Bolivarian Revolution was to eradicate the mechanisms of internal exploitation and
external dependence in Venezuela and that this endeavor had sparked a violent reaction among the former economic and political elites.

In Venezuela, after seven years of revolution, we have been weakening the mechanisms of internal exploitation and that is why the elite reacted the way they did: the coup d’état, the oil sabotage, the economic sabotage, the media war that continues today and the exaggerated and sometimes irrational response to our fight against latifundio [latifundium]... What we are doing here is fight injustice in the frame of the Constitution and the law (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2005c).

Here, the president employed personification once more to characterize internal exploitation mechanisms and latifundia as adversaries whom the government “weakens” and “fights” with its economic and social programs. Chávez characterized the government’s efforts to eliminate latifundia as a lawful fight against injustice, highlighting the morality behind the decisions of his administration. This exemplifies how the president attached moral qualities to his governance manifesto through socioeconomic rhetorical frames.

Unlike the deeds of the government, the president framed the responses of the elite as “coup,” “sabotages,” “wars” and qualified them as “irrational” and “exaggerated” actions. This portrayed the relationship between the administration and the elites as a conflict. The discourse presented the resistance of the elites as violent and unreasonable and the suppression of the motivations behind the dissenters’ actions supported said characterization. The only reason the president provided for the elite’s unrest was the debilitation of the “mechanisms of internal exploitation,” which—

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34 Latifundia are large extensions of land under the ownership of a single landlord or family (Frank, 2009). Drawing from farm management manuals, Ruef and Harness (2009) estimated that latifundia as a form of land tenure emerged in Italy shortly before the formation of the Roman Empire in 27 BC.
with the use of the term “elite” itself—implied that those who opposed the
administration’s policies were responsible of the exploitation of the masses or at least
supported it. “They [the elites/opposition] play the victims when in fact they are the
victimizers. We are just giving back to the people what they took from them years ago”
(Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2010).

In the following section, the researcher examines the religious rhetorical frame in
President Chávez’s discourse. Religious language and symbolism, apart from
contributing to the construction of the historical and socioeconomic rhetorical frames,
added another dimension to the characterization and promotion of the Bolivarian
Revolution, becoming the third and last rhetorical frame the researcher analyzed in this
study.

Religious Rhetorical Frame

In previous sections, the researcher showed how President Chávez incorporated
religious rhetoric in his discourse, strengthening the persuasive power of other rhetorical
frames that characterized the Bolivarian Revolution. This section delves into the function
of religion as a rhetorical frame in its own right that was also employed to describe this
governance manifesto. In broad terms, religious language and references allowed the
president to define the revolution as a Christian movement.

The 24th installation of Aló Presidente, broadcast on December 12th, 1999, was
concerned with the upcoming constitutional referendum, in which Venezuelans would
decide if the reformed Constitution would be enforced or not. The citizens in favor of the
reform would vote yes and the citizens against it would vote no in the polls on December
15th, 1999. Journalist Juan Barreto opened the show commenting on the debate about the constitutional reform: “There are some people around here saying NO to Venezuela, saying NO to the future.” The president noted that “intellectual elites” and some bishops, including the Vatican nuncio Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara, disagreed with the reform and accused them of manipulating Venezuelans into thinking that the constitutional reform had authoritarian underpinnings. “It seems like the devil got into some bishops’ cassocks. The devil gets everywhere and he does not even respect cassocks sometimes” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999c). Chávez did not mention any of the bishops’ arguments. Relating dissenting bishops to the source of all evils, the devil, was the primary strategy the president used to delegitimize their position against the reform. Chávez immediately extended his metaphor to Judas Iscariot.

El diablo se le mete hasta al más pintado [roughly, the devil is a squirrel]. So ojo pelao, amigos [open your eyes, friends], the devil is on the loose and he is getting into people and he is successful, the devil. Look how he got into Judas Iscariot. Judas walked beside Jesus. Look how powerful the devil was; he got into Judas Iscariot who was next to no one else but Jesus, that great revolutionary, the Son of God and the example for all of us and also the leader of all these struggles for justice, for the poor, for the oppressed and that was the reason why Jesus died. Christ died for the truth, for the poor, for the salvation of human beings and that is what we are fighting for (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 1999c).

In informal terms, the president referenced here the biblical passage about Judas’ treason. “Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot. . . . And Judas went to discuss with the chief priests and temple officers how he might betray Jesus to them” (Luke 22:4). This reference, along with the first sentence in the quote—el diablo se le mete hasta al más pintado—subtly equated the bishops to Judas Iscariot and their dissent to Judas’ betrayal.

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35 The capital letters come from the original transcript.
Then, the president explicitly related his own political struggle to the causes Jesus, according to the Bible, defended by saying that “we,” meaning the government, are “fighting” for justice, the poor and the oppressed. Considering that at that time the president’s struggle regarded the approval of the new Constitution, this discourse framed the reform as the instrument that would allow the Chávez administration to follow Jesus’ example. This way, the president dismissed the bishops’ arguments against the reform as treasonous and immoral without even addressing the rationale behind them.

In later installations of *Aló Presidente*, Chávez consistently referenced the causes Jesus Christ championed, particularly the liberation of the poor.

We must pay tribute to Jesus, who was a great rebel. We have said that Jesus is one of the great revolutionaries of history. Why did they crucify him? Let us ask that. Because he fought for the poor, faced the powerful of the time, who led the Roman Empire. Jesus went out to confront them, to confront the power and suffered betrayals. . . . and he suffered the misunderstanding of many and suffered martyrdom and suffered the cross and death to be useful to others. . . . It is important for us today to remember this as we set out to be useful to others too. We have to abandon everything, abandon everything for others (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2000c).

Many times we have talked about the collective Lazarus. Venezuela was like Lazarus when he lay in his grave. That is how Venezuela was. Christ came and told Lazarus: “Rise, Lazarus, it is not time to die, walk.” That is how history came and the time and the circumstance have told us: “Rise, collective Lazarus, Venezuelan people, it is not time to die, walk.” And here we are, walking the path to get justice for the impoverished (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009b).

God is with the poor and this government is with the poor, committed to the poor walking the path of God, the same path that Christ showed. Shame on the bishops that are with the rich, it is not all of them, but most of them are with the rich, committed to the bourgeoisie, betraying Christ (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2011a).

President Chávez had been talking about the construction of socialism for approximately ten minutes right before he mentioned the metaphor about Venezuela
being the “collective Lazarus.” Provided this context, “history,” “time” and “circumstance,” which the president had personified and turned into collective Lazarus’ resurrectors, might refer to the rise of socialism in Venezuela. Therefore, the president drew a subtle parallelism between Jesus Christ and socialism as providers of miracles and life. Considering other metaphors and parallelisms the researcher noted in the historical and socioeconomic rhetorical frames about the Bolivarian Revolution dividing history in two, capitalism being the path to hell and socialism representing the values of Christianity— for instance, honesty, generosity, humility, love, and others— this quote about the collective Lazarus fits into a broader narrative that framed Chávez’s governance manifesto as the work of God.

The reference to Lazarus’ resurrection brings other implications to the surface. This was the last miracle Christ performed in the flesh and it was the act that “brought the wrath of the Sanhedrin to a head, stirring them to decide to murder Jesus” (Collins, 2014). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus took a great risk in heading back to Judea to resurrect Lazarus. “He said to the disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea.’ ‘Rabbi, they replied, ‘the Jews just tried to stone You, and You are going back there?’” (John 11:8). This act of selflessness catalyzed Judas Iscariot’s betrayal and Christ’s martyrdom. Consequently, when President Chávez equated the resurrection of Lazarus to socialism, he implicitly equated the opposition to socialism in Venezuela to the betrayal of Judas.

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36 For the most succinct summary of Christian values by the author of possibly 13 books of the New Testament, see 1 Corinthians 13. Saint Paul describes the key Christian value of love as patient, kind, humble, contented, self-effacing, altruistic, slow to anger, forgetful of others’ wrongs, truthful, protective, trustworthy, hopeful, and steadfast.
Iscariot and/or the persecution of the Sanhedrin. This way, the president implied that his administration, just as Christ, was “suffering the betrayals and misunderstanding of many” as it is “walking the path of God.” These parallelisms with Christ’s struggle, which defined the Bolivarian Revolution as a Christian movement, were instrumental for Chávez to build the religious rhetorical frame.

The president extensively employed religious rhetoric on Aló Presidente’s episode 102, broadcast on April 28th, 2002, shortly after his return to power after the brief coup d’état. Chávez’s discourse had a conciliatory tone. The president’s rhetoric gravitated around notions such as “reconciliation,” “reflection,” “forgiveness” and “unity” to encourage Venezuelans to “not give in to hate” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2002b). This discourse evoked religious connotations as the president indicated that the reflections Venezuelans had to undergo were not only political or intellectual, but “spiritual.”

Jesus is my commander. He faced his tragedy with the courage of a man, and with the greatness of a God. Let’s pray to God and Jesus Christ. Let’s ask them to give us all what we need to make national union and reconciliation possible. . . . I start this message with the same spirit of the one I gave you two weeks ago when I was freed from my brief captivity on that almost miraculous morning. Some refer to this [Chávez’s return] as the resurrection, the resurrection of the Constitution, the resurrection of democracy (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2002b).

In the quote, the president built a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): Chávez’s return to power is a resurrection. This metaphor clearly connected the president’s return to Jesus Christ’s resurrection. The religious rhetoric, which spotlighted notions such as “miracle” and “resurrection,” strongly resonated with the story at the core of Christianity and the Roman Catholic religion and built a link between Jesus Christ’s
passion, crucifixion and resurrection and Chávez’s destitution, captivity and return to power. The parallel structure at the end of the quote—“the resurrection, the resurrection of the Constitution, the resurrection of democracy”—implied that the president was the embodiment of the Constitution and democracy, as his return derived in the “resurrection” of these entities. An extension of this metaphor relates the opposition to the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and the brutality of the Sanhedrin once more.

The religious rhetorical frame kept appearing in moments of political crisis, when the legitimacy of the administration was at stake. The president employed references to Jesus Christ to calm the concerns his audience might feel about the radicalization of the revolution. After Chávez won the recall referendum on August 15th, 2004, he announced on Aló Presidente that his government was getting ready to move toward a “new stage” in the revolution.

We are preparing to take on this new stage, the revolution within the revolution, the deepening of the revolutionary process and this should not scare anyone. To the Venezuelan friends who still might be frightened when one speaks of revolution... Christ came to the world to make a revolution, the revolution of love, this is a revolution of love; it is not hate-filled, not blood-filled, not death-filled, nor is it a revolution that ignores the rights of others. No. What we want is the national union, the national debate, transformation and that is what the word revolution means (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2004b).

Once again, the president suggested that the Bolivarian Revolution was a Christian revolution as his governance manifesto and the movement Christ led are both “revolutions of love.” This way, Chávez transferred all the positive connotations attached to Christianity to the Bolivarian Revolution. Later, after losing the referendum for the constitutional reform on December 2007, the president emphasized the connections
between his governance manifesto and the Christian faith on the 299th installation of Aló Presidente, broadcast on January 6th, 2008:

We cannot allow ourselves to lose Catholic spaces. Why, because of a minority? No. We are Catholics, well, let's be Catholics, Christians. Ah! But if there were atheists, welcome, evangelicals, welcome; blacks, whites, Indians, blue-eyed, green-eyed, brown-eyed, here we all fit. They are sectarian, we are not. We are peace, they are war, we are justice, they are injustice. The path of this revolution is the only way to peace, let's convince the majority, that is part of our task (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2008a).

By “catholic spaces,” the president meant states and municipalities as later on November 2008 the electorate would go to the polls again to vote for new governors and majors. Parallel structures and antithesis separated the Bolivarian Revolution from the opposition and created a clear Us-versus-Them scenario, in which “us”—meaning the government and its supporters—represented all virtues while the opposition, “them,” embodied violence, immorality and anti-Christianity. On the same episode, President Chávez commented:

The reform was not approved por ahora [for now], well, it was not approved. . . . But we will not rest . . . to continue transferring power, to whom? To the people. Give power to the people. Only the people will save the people. Only the people will build the new Fatherland (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2008a).

By appointing the people as responsible for their own salvation, the president drew again from the principles of the Theology of Liberation and characterized the electoral defeat in religious terms. The quote implied that the approval of the constitutional reform would have brought salvation. This, way, a religious rhetorical frame evoked a major objective of Christianity, the salvation of souls, to connect it to a major objective of the Chávez administration, the new constitutional reform. However, according to the president, the people were not strong enough to save themselves.
Therefore, the president stated here that his government “will not rest” in its efforts to give power to the people so that they can liberate themselves in the future. This mirrors the active role the Roman Catholic Church took in the development of society during the pinnacle of the Theology of Liberation movement in Latin America during the 1960s.

It is important to note the use of the passive voice in this quote, which allowed the president to eliminate the agent of the sentence. Who did not approve the reform? The electorate, the people. President Chávez avoided pointing out his failure with the electorate by focusing on its effect— the rejection of the constitutional reform. However, the phrase *por ahora* evoked the television speech that made Chávez famous in 1992 as well as his history as a man whose failure derived into a major political victory. The president did not pronounce the phrase in vain. As discussed in chapter three, several articles of the reform passed years later as constitutional amendments and presidential decrees.

In the next chapter, the researcher delves into the critique of the rhetorical frames analyzed in this chapter. The political implications of President Chávez’s characterization of the Bolivarian Revolution are addressed as the researcher explores how this characterization exposed the political dominance of Chávez and derived in abuses of power.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

The present study identifies and analyzes the rhetorical frames Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez employed in his discourse on the weekly show *Aló Presidente* to characterize and promote the Bolivarian Revolution. The examination of these rhetorical frames allowed the researcher to uncover the interpretative schemas the president evoked in order to persuade the audience about the Bolivarian Revolution’s legitimacy and appropriateness as a governance manifesto. Chávez made use of historical references, socioeconomic rationales and religious beliefs and values to construct a compelling identity for the revolution.

Analyzing the president’s discourse requires a critical analysis for context and deeper meaning other than a neutral assessment of the rhetorical frames. In their scholarship on critical discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough (1992), Teun van Dijk (1997a), Ruth Wodak (1989) and others have stated that critical discourse analysts should not remain impartial toward their objects of study. The aim of CDA is to demystify social and political processes through the critical examination of the dialectics that take place among language, society, power, values, ideologies, etc. As researchers assess the discursive manifestations of social and political processes, they reveal key problematic aspects of these processes and how discourse contributes to the (re)production and perpetuation of abuse of power, injustice, inequality and discrimination (Wodak, 1989). Therefore, in this chapter, the researcher delved into the critical evaluation of President Chávez’s rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution in *Aló Presidente*. 
The first section, below, revisits the rhetorical frames presented in chapter five in order to provide a critical evaluation about their role in the characterization of the Bolivarian Revolution and the implications of such a characterization in the conduction of politics in Venezuela. In the second section, the president’s rhetoric about the Bolivarian Revolution is related to his governance and the policies and projects his discourse helped legitimize. The third section takes a step back from the president’s discourse per se to take a critical and normative stance toward the show Aló Presidente, whose format and periodicity allowed the president to promote his governance manifesto on a regular basis. The problematic aspects of the overall media strategy that made the presence of President Chávez pervasive in national broadcast media are addressed as well. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are outlined in the last two section of this discussion.

**Delegitimizing Dissent**

The findings chapter showed how President Chávez constructed an appealing identity for the Bolivarian Revolution through the employment of rhetorical frames that strongly resonated with interpretative schemas ingrained in Venezuelans’ culture. The historical rhetorical frame presented the Bolivarian Revolution as an heir of the independence movement and Bolivarianism as well as a process that liberated Venezuela from the AD/COPEI elitist and corrupt hegemony. The president employed historical references—especially to the life and thinking of Simón Bolívar—along with parallel syntax structures and religious metaphors to connect the Bolivarian Revolution to the
Liberator’s legacy and frame the administration’s policies as the result of the analysis of the Bolivarian dream.

Considering that Bolívar and the independence endeavor have a unifying effect in Venezuela (Langue, 2009), the appropriation of the Liberator as a symbol of the revolution was a smart political strategy by Chávez. This symbolic appropriation allowed the president to transfer all the positive—and heroic—connotations related to Bolívar and the patriots to his governance manifesto. However, the president did not use Bolívar just to unify his supporters. The Liberator became a polarizing element that allowed Chávez to characterize dissenters as treasonous individuals. *Apátrida* and *vendepatria*—an unpatriotic person and someone who “sells” his/her country, respectively—were two of the most popular nicknames the head of state, government officials and supporters used to identify the opposition. “They [the opposition] do not have Bolívar in their heart. Do you imagine if they came back [to power]? They would let the United States come here and take everything just to get their share” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2009b). Statements such as this depicted opposition to the Bolivarian Revolution as a betrayal against the fatherland and a threat to Venezuela’s sovereignty, compromising people’s right to dissent.

The socioeconomic frame defined the Bolivarian Revolution as a model opposite to neoliberalism/capitalism that advocated the empowerment of the people. Antithesis and hyperbole were instrumental rhetorical strategies for the president to emphasize the virtues of socialism and the vices of capitalism. As shown in the findings chapter, President Chávez did not draw much from economic rationales to explain and promote
socialism as an economic model alternative to neoliberalism in Aló Presidente. Instead, Chávez framed the embrace of socialism as a moral imperative, a shift that resulted from his administration’s sympathy toward the impoverished. The president complemented this moral approach to socialism by subtly incorporating the principles of the Theology of Liberation. This allowed the president to provide a theological view of socialism in which values traditionally endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church, such as solidarity, honesty, and love for fellow men, became the foundation of the identity Chávez created for the socialism of the 21st century, which at the same time defined the Bolivarian Revolution. In this context, the socialist government became a representation of the Theology of Liberation’s particular vision of the Roman Catholic Church: an institution that must assume the responsibility of developing strategies and programs to empower the people so that they can liberate themselves from economic, social and/or political oppression.

Such positive characterizations of the Bolivarian Revolution as a socialist revolution were usually paired with vicious depictions of the opposition. President Chávez equated any criticism to the socialist system to an automatic endorsement of capitalism and neoliberalism. That by extension defined members of the opposition as capitalists even though most of them do not agree with the implementation of capitalist or neoliberal policies in Venezuela. The president’s discourse, however, successfully placed socialism and its supporters, on the one hand, and capitalism/neoliberalism and the opposition, on the other, at the opposite extremes of the good/evil spectrum, providing no nuances in the categorization. This way, anyone who manifested any degree of rejection toward the policies the government put in place to implement socialism as an economic
model was instantly equated to capitalism and all the vices the president had attached to it. As Chávez employed religious rhetoric extensively to relate socialism to Christianity and capitalism to the devil, the opposition to the construction of socialism could be easily qualified as an anti-Christian movement.

The religious rhetorical frame reinforced the links between Christianity as a movement and the Bolivarian Revolution. According to President Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution stood for all the causes Jesus Christ championed, such as the liberation of the poor. Additionally, the head of state framed his governance manifesto as a movement that embodied values that the Roman Catholic Church and the Bible encourage in the Christian fellowship—such as honesty, generosity, humility, among others. Just as the president framed the revolution as a continuation of the independence war, the religious rhetorical frame allowed the president to represent the Bolivarian Revolution as a continuation of the Christian movement. Religious metaphors and symbolism along with parallel syntax structures worked together within the president’s discourse to suggest that his governance manifesto could be equated to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the advent of the Kingdom of God on earth. Provided this context, the president employed antithesis, hyperbole and parallel syntax structures once more to portray the opposition as the embodiment of Judas Iscariot and the priests of the Sanhedrin who demanded that the Roman government crucify Jesus. Political dissent was understood as an immoral betrayal instead of a right that should be protected.

In a Roman Catholic majority country, where the values of Christianity are held dear—or at least respected—, this characterization of the Bolivarian Revolution and the
opposition was powerfully polarizing. On episode 331 of *Aló Presidente* denoted in the findings, Judith Rosales called to congratulate the president for the tenth anniversary of the show. Her intervention serves as a token of the kind of dread against the opposition the president’s speech permeated to his supporters’:

[I want] to tell the bourgeoisie, that malign opposition that go and say things about us, about our country, they speak ill of our country instead of defending it, because esos [pejorative form of “they’’] do not love *nuestra patria* [our fatherland], president. They do not love our country, they will tear us apart, say things that are not true. But with this [she is likely referring to *Aló Presidente*] we are showing the world that here we are building socialism, that here we are living this revolution that you have inspired in us. And we will follow you, Mr. President, we will support you in all that you undertake in this country. Count on our support (Rosales as cited in Maniglia, 2009b).

Rosales’ discourse mirrors President Chávez’s rhetoric somewhat accurately. Terms such as “bourgeoisie,” “malign opposition,” “patria” and “love” are common in the president’s discourse. Furthermore, the expression “building socialism” evokes one of the most frequent metaphors the head of state employed to talk about socialism in the Venezuelan context. Rosales sees dissenters and critics of the government as the—evil and deceitful—Other. This brief intervention also reveals that, for Rosales, the members of the opposition are not included in her conception of the fatherland. Every time she refers to the country or *la patria*, Rosales adds the possessive “our,” which subtly exposes an underlying belief: dissenters are not part of “her” patria. Rosales also shares with Chávez the fallacious *ad hominem* strategy that dismisses dissenters’ opinions by attacking their character— which was also discursively constructed by the president—

37 *Ad hominem* fallacies or arguments— also called character attacks— are designed to discredit the opponent as a mean to refute the opponent’s argument (Walton, 1998).
without addressing or challenging their arguments. As noted earlier in this section, President Chávez discredited his opponents’ characters using the same rhetorical frames with which he attached positive qualities to the Bolivarian Revolution. Therefore, Rosales’ intervention exemplifies how the president’s rhetorical strategies successfully permeated to some of his followers.

These rhetorical techniques, which aimed to tarnish the reputation of members of the opposition, is by definition problematic for the development of free debate in a democratic system. Douglas Walton (1998) raised the following concerns about how *ad hominem* attacks disrupt and distort public debate:

Personal attack on an arguer’s character can make him look dishonest and untrustworthy or illogical and confused. The resulting lack of credibility can make it impossible for the person to carry on effectively to defend his side of the disputed issue at all. A reputation can be stained by a drastic and colorful allegation because the powerful stigma of the accusation itself is such that the critical faculties of the audience are suspended, leaving a residue of doubt and mistrust, even though little or unverifiable evidence supporting the charge was put forward by the accuser (Walton, 1998, p. 13).

The use of *ad hominem* fallacies in a show such as *Aló Presidente* is even more concerning. Considering that opposition leaders did not have access to the show, they did not have the opportunity to defend their position— and their reputation. As other television and radio channels progressively refused to cover opposition events and politicians, the proposals of the opposition were not readily available to the masses so that they could not compete on equal terms with the administration (Rosati, 2013).

The rhetorical framing portrayed the Bolivarian Revolution as a bastion of patriotism, morality and religious faith. Opposing such a governance manifesto, then, is not a matter of mere political disagreement. Dissent, thanks to this rhetorical framing,
becomes an act of treason, depravity and/or heresy. This way, the opposition to the
Chávez administration was automatically demonized and, as a result, the president
legitimized the discriminatory practices that became common place during his tenure.

Human Rights Watch reported on the issue of political discrimination in Venezuela:

Discrimination on political grounds has been a defining feature of the Chávez
presidency. At times, the president himself has openly endorsed acts of
discrimination. More generally, he has encouraged his subordinates to engage in
discrimination. . . . The Venezuelan government under President Chávez has
tolerated, encouraged, and engaged in wide-ranging acts of discrimination against
political opponents and critics. . . . The government has:
• Fired and blacklisted political opponents from some state agencies and from the
  national oil company;
• Denied some citizens access to social programs based on their political opinions;
  and
• Discriminated against media outlets, labor unions, and civil society in response
to legitimate criticism or political activity (“A Decade under Chávez,” 2008, pp.
  1-2).

President Chávez’s discourse on Aló Presidente, the cornerstone of the
government media strategy, played a key role in the emergence of the intolerance that
polarized Venezuela and the political discrimination that violated people’s freedom of
expression, information and right to dissent. The precedent Chávez established became
the breeding ground for the violation of other human rights. For example, the Maduro
administration recently enforced a new food distribution policy in which citizens must
join one of the civil organizations created by the government— communal councils,
Bolívar Chávez Battle Units, Unamujer or Francisco de Miranda Front— to have access
to food staples (von Bergen, 2016). All these organizations are politicized in varying
degrees and respond to the administration and the ruling party. Opposition leaders have
already expressed outrage that people who are not affiliated with the government are being left out of the new distribution circuits (“Oposición venezolana denuncia,” 2016).

This way, President Chávez’s discourse had a ripple effect that Venezuelans still feel today as President Maduro perpetuates his predecessor’s discriminatory and oppressive practices both in broadcast media and the government. The rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution led to an understanding of national politics that fostered polarization and hatred instead of unity and tolerance among the Venezuelan people. As it is taken to the extremes, Chávez’s rhetoric justifies and legitimizes the violation of dissenters’ human rights.

From Discourse to Governance

President Chávez’s rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution in Aló Presidente had an impact in how Venezuelans thought about politics because the show was at the core of a broader communication strategy that made the president’s messages pervasive in broadcast media. The hegemonic approach to mass media allowed the administration to have unprecedented control over public debate as its framing of issues were more salient and accessible. This way, the capacity of the government to set the agenda and influence public opinion was greater than the opposition’s.

The rhetorical frames President Chávez employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution built an overall positive identity for this governance manifesto and its supporters. Consequently, the decisions, efforts and achievements of the revolution leaders were also shown under the flattering light the rhetorical frames evoked. First, the historical rhetorical frame turned the Bolivarian Revolution into the heir of the Bolivarian
doctrine. This way, policies and projects were framed as modern implementations of Simón Bolívar’s thinking. Considering that the Liberator is the embodiment of patriotism and heroism in Venezuela, the use of his image to legitimize the modification and enforcement of legislation and policies was highly persuasive. In the analyzed episodes, the president frequently pronounced quotes by Bolívar and passages of his public documents and presented them as precedents or justification of policies, such as the Land Act of 2001 which legalized expropriations.

Simón Bolívar also served as the foundation of Chávez’s stance against international imperialism and specifically the United States. The history of Bolivar as a prominent Venezuelan who commanded the region toward independence from external powers was quite fitting for the president as he attempted to become an influential leader in Latin America as well. After attending the Summit of Mar de Plata in Argentina, in which Latin American heads of state debated about the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, a U.S. initiative, Chávez said in Aló Presidente: “The old debate has re-emerged between Monroe and Bolívar. Monroe: America for the Americans, and Bolívar: the union of the South. They want to turn us into their annex, their back yard, while we want to be free” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2005c). President Chávez led the regional movement that prevented the implementation of the free trade area in South America and created the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, a regional trade organization that excluded the United States. Chávez’s Bolivarian rhetoric was definitely successful throughout the region.
Socialism also contributed to the president’s leadership in Latin America as left-leaning administrations led Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina in the 2000s. The socioeconomic rhetorical frame, which emphasized the sense of morality behind the implementation of socialism, was instrumental to promote this economic model not only in Venezuela but abroad. In the international arena, not only rhetoric sold the idea of socialism, though. During his presidency, Chávez signed more than 2,000 international treaties (Gutiérrez, 2013) in the name of international cooperation. Venezuela committed to make considerable investments and donations and give credit to other countries in Latin America. Many of these investments were not monitored by the National Assembly and did not produce any revenue. As a result, the country’s external debt by 2014 topped USD $10 billion (Hinds, 2014).

On the domestic front, the rhetorical framing of the socialist revolution as the only economic model that could ensure the fair distribution of wealth legitimised the implementation of controversial measures, such as the expropriation of private lands and assets and the state’s increasing control over strategic industries such as oil, cement, steel, food and even banking. As the government seized control over most means of production in the country Chávez could allocate funds at will and was able to finance his social programs (“¿Cuál fue el rumbo…?,” 2013). For instance, the Bolivarian Missions, programs that provided basic services in health, education and more for free, had a great

38 The Chávez administration created dozens of Bolivarian Missions to provide the impoverished with basic education programs, health services, material for construction, food, professional training and even Christmas presents. At http://gobiernoenlinea.gob.ve/home/misiones.dot, the government provided a brief description of the objectives and achievements of the missions in Venezuela.
impact in the president’s popularity after their creation in 2003. According to Eddy Reyes Torres (2015), the president created the missions as a response to the opposition efforts to activate the recall referendum. These social programs, Reyes Torres argued, were key for Chávez’s victory in the recall referendum of 2004 because his approval ratings had reached a historical low in 2003. The government campaign for the recall referendum focused on the missions. “The Bolivarian Missions would not be possible in capitalism. If you let them [the opposition] come back, they will take the missions away” (Chávez as cited in Maniglia, 2003b). The missions became a representation of the virtues of socialism and the Bolivarian Revolution was framed as the only system capable of implementing such comprehensive programs in the benefit of the impoverished. In the president’s discourse, there seemed to be no other option but capitalism—meaning exploitation of the working class and social injustice—outside the boundaries of the Bolivarian Revolution. If the revolution should fail, Chávez often averred, only unrest and inequality would follow.

By characterizing Chávez’s governance manifesto as a Christian movement, the religious rhetorical frame complemented the persuasive power of the aforementioned frames. As all projects and especially socialist policies were framed as driven by ethical values, religious symbolism and metaphors helped relate those values to the cause of Jesus and the Roman Catholic Church in the context of the Theology of Liberation. The president, for instance, defined the reformed Constitution of 1999 as an instrument that would allow the government to follow the path of Jesus Christ because it contained the tools to empower the people and help the poor (Chávez in Maniglia, 1999b). This kind of
rhetoric, in a Roman Catholic majority country, is likely to become effective and powerful when it comes to persuading the audience about the legitimacy of the government’s actions.

The rhetoric the president employed in *Aló Presidente* to promote his governance manifesto prepared the ground for the violation of Venezuelans’ freedom of information and speech, the vilification and criminalization of dissent and the legitimation of every endeavor the government undertook. Now, it is necessary to examine the problematic aspects of *Aló Presidente* as a show that was part of a larger media strategy that allowed the government to control broadcast media and public debate. The show can be understood as part of a *system* of domination that jeopardized the ability of Venezuelans to hold the government accountable and genuinely participate in state decisions.

*Aló Presidente* in the Communication Hegemony

As outlined in chapter two, a wide range of activities took place on *Aló Presidente*. The show was the main outlet through which President Chávez informed his audience about the projects and policies of his administration, provided guidelines and instructions to members of his Cabinet and party and bonded with his supporters (Constantini, 2014; Frajman, 2014). The president also used the stage of *Aló Presidente* to describe the ideological and ethical foundations of the Bolivarian Revolution, as the findings of this thesis have shown. Chávez considered he was engaged in a “battle of ideas” and the show was his best asset in the war against his political adversaries. “As Bolívar said, ‘The press is the artillery of thought.’ *Aló Presidente* today is the heavy artillery of the Revolution, artillery of thought, of our liberating thought” (Chávez as
cited in Maniglia, 2009b). Evidently, Chávez embraced the conceptual metaphor that defines politics as war (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and, in that context, his weekly show was a weapon.

This vision of politics is not a problem in itself. The metaphorical understanding of politics in terms of war is inherent at least to Western thinking and it derives in the creation of positive representations of in-groups—“we”—and negative depictions of out-groups—“they” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). However, President Chávez’s militaristic approach to politics not only allowed him to create the Us-versus-Them discursive scenario that characterizes political confrontation, but also aimed at the “elimination” of his political adversaries. The term “elimination” here is used metaphorically to stay in the spirit of the war metaphor and to denote the president’s intention to sweep the opposition off the battle field: the public sphere.\(^{39}\) Considering the media policies and strategies of President Chávez, coexistence with the opposition on the broadcast media landscape was not part of his plan.

The Chávez administration set out to make the values and achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution more visible to Venezuelans. Disparaging views were attacks in the eyes of Chávez and, in the early years of his presidency, he saw himself outnumbered and outgunned in the broadcast media landscape (Bisbal, 2007). There were more private-owned radio and television channels than state-run outlets, and independent

\[^{39}\] Habermas (1993) defined the public sphere as the social space in which private individuals meet to freely identify and discuss matters of common concern. The discussion of affairs in the public sphere is supposed to influence political action. Habermas (1993) argued that the public sphere was defined by three institutional criteria: Disregard of status, domain of common concern and inclusivity.
media had better infrastructure, technology and equipment and held larger portions of audience share than their government-owned counterparts. When the independent media started to take critical stances against the government in 1999 and especially after the 2002 coup d’état, instead of encouraging open criticism in the spirit of democracy, President Chávez focused on the construction of a communication hegemony to control—or monopolize—public debate in Venezuela.

The enforcement of legislation regulating media content, the non-aggression pact with Venevisión, RCTV’s shut down and the fine against Globovisión encouraged generalized self-censorship and increasingly silenced the opposition on the airwaves. The current administration of Nicolás Maduro followed Chávez’s steps and has kept the opposition away from broadcast media. In May 2013, entrepreneurs related to the government purchased Globovisión, which was the last opposition-leaning television news channel on air. Prominent journalists who anchored opinion shows and newscasts quit or were fired and the network’s critical editorial line changed drastically (Rosati, 2013). Before Globovisión’s purchase, scholar Marcelino Bisbal had reported that the government controlled 72 percent of broadcast media (Delgado, 2013). Now, the government goes virtually unchallenged on national television and radio, which are the media with highest penetration rates in Venezuela (Weisbrot & Ruttenberg, 2010). As the communication hegemony of the Maduro administration grows, the freedom of expression in Venezuela fades. Opposition leaders have no access to television, so that television viewers can only see the news through the lens of the administration. President
Chávez’s media policies prepared the ground for the absolute dominance of national television President Maduro enjoys today.

*Aló Presidente* along with *cadenas*\(^{40}\) also contributed to the progressive ousting of the opposition from broadcast media. As the Chávez administration seized private media assets and put more state-run media on air, the message of the president became ubiquitous in broadcast media, limiting the media exposure of disparaging views. “Whenever there was an anti-Chávez march or a news program particularly critical of the regime, Chávez would give a long speech or run a government infomercial that effectively blocked out the normal programming” (Nelson, 2007, p. 154). This way, the Chávez administration—abusively—employed the resources and powers of different branches of the state to impose their worldview on broadcast media.

The aforementioned practices compromised freedom of speech and information, and not just among those portions of the population who disagreed with the government. *Chavistas* did not have venues to expose their positions in the media, either. *Aló Presidente* was supposed to embody participatory democracy and provide a window for all citizens to communicate their views and grievances to their president on mass media. However, citizen participation on the show decreased consistently over time and eventually no one who was not connected to government programs had the opportunity to interact with the head of state on *Aló Presidente* (Constantini, 2014; Frajman, 2014). This way, President Chávez became the main—and some would argue the only—individual

\(^{40}\) In addition to *Aló Presidente*, Chávez accumulated a total of 1,300 hours of *cadenas*, an average of 195 interventions a year, between 1999 and 2010 (Mena, 2010).
who represented the administration and the Bolivarian Revolution. The power the president could concentrate in himself as the only host and authority on Aló Presidente mirrored the power he amassed during his tenure in the presidency. This way, the show can be understood as a metaphor of the overall political process of the 1999-2013 Venezuela, a stage that made visible how the power of President Chávez was ever growing. The following excerpt from Freedom House’s report on Venezuela describes the level of power Chávez was able to accumulate by 2013:

The ruling party’s majority [in the unicameral National Assembly] acts as a reliable rubber stamp for the executive, and Chávez’s control of the 2006–10 assembly allowed him to further curb the independence of institutions including the judiciary, the intelligence services, and the Citizen Power branch of government, which was created by the 1999 constitution to fight corruption and protect citizens’ rights. The December 2010 grant of decree powers to Chávez was the third time he received such authority [from the National Assembly]. He used it to enact 54 laws before the period expired in June 2012. The president serves six-year terms, but due to the results of the 2009 referendum, he and other elected officials are no longer subject to term limits (“Freedom in the World,” 2013).

From this exceptional position of power in his own administration and in broadcast media, President Chávez defined his governance manifesto on Aló Presidente and influenced the way people thought about the Bolivarian Revolution and the opposition.

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41 For more details about the mechanisms the Chávez administration employed to concentrate power in the executive and the cases that exposed how the president used these powers to discriminate against and criminalize the opposition, see A Decade under Chávez, a Human Rights Watch report published in 2008 and available at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/venezuela0908web.pdf.
Limitations

The discourses President Hugo Chávez pronounced in *Aló Presidente* are without doubt a useful source of data for researchers who are interested in examining not only his rhetoric but the nature of his leadership and governance. However, although the show is considered to be the cornerstone of the president’s political communications, *Aló Presidente* was one of many strategic actions that propelled the state’s overall media strategy. Therefore, in order to enhance the understanding of the president’s rhetoric and overall media strategy, it is necessary that future research advances this work by exploring the discourse Chávez employed in other media platforms during his tenure.

Broadcast media were not the only venues the president chose to distribute his discourse and rhetoric. For instance, on January 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2009 state-owned newspapers, such as *El Correo del Orinoco*, published for the first time the column *Las Líneas de Chávez*—The Lines of Chávez. In those weekly columns, Chávez opined about politics, national and international affairs, economy, etc. Government supporters have described the Lines as an extraordinary source for political education. Additionally, the president published four books that discussed socialism in the Venezuelan context during his time in office. President Chávez also joined Twitter on April 2010 to spread his message on social media. His account @chavezcandanga had approximately 4.26 million followers and he sent out 1,823 tweets. As this thesis focused on *Aló Presidente*, these other relevant manifestations of Chávez’s discourse remained largely unexplored.

The impact of the president’s political discourse on media discourse was also outside the scope of this thesis. However, exploring this relationship could also be key to
understand how political debate unfolded during the Chávez presidency and how the interactions between the president and news media’s discourse unveiled the relations of power that emerged under this particular administration. To address these relations, it is important that future research examines print and social media as these outlets were also part of the all-encompassing media strategy of the Bolivarian Revolution leaders.

On another level, as this research focused on textual data, the nonverbal aspects of President Chávez’s discourse— for example, his body language, his tone of voice and the expression on his face— were also unexplored. A broader understanding of rhetoric makes the examination of visual elements of discourse relevant to the study of persuasion (Ehninger, 1972). Therefore, future research should incorporate the analysis of the president’s nonverbal communication to enhance the understanding of his rhetorical strategies. In the following section, the researcher suggests more approaches to Aló Presidente as a media phenomenon.

Future Research

This thesis provided a theoretically driven categorization of the rhetorical frames President Hugo Chávez employed to characterize the Bolivarian Revolution as a desirable governance manifesto for Venezuela. Future research could build from these categories and conduct empirical studies to, for instance, examine in more depth the linguistic aspects of the frames and identify and measure linguistic patterns in the president’s discourse over time. This exploration could also include discourses by the president that were distributed in print and social media in order to examine how the rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution that Chávez constructed in Aló
manifested in other outlets. Such comparative studies could also assess how the president adapted his rhetoric to diverse media formats.

The diverse political functions of *Aló Presidente* are also worthy of further exploration. As outlined on previous chapters, the show was not only useful to communicate the attributes of the Bolivarian Revolution. First, *Aló Presidente* was a vehicle of government propaganda, through which the president could publicize the accomplishments of his administration regularly. Researchers could examine the discourse produced in this show by applying the Institute for Propaganda Analysis’ analytical construct, devices of propaganda. Finding and measuring the use of name calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonials, plain folk, card stacking and band wagon (for a description of each propaganda device see Sproule, 2001) in *Aló Presidente* could be useful to form a normative evaluation of the Chávez’s communication practices as head of state.

Second, *Aló Presidente* was one of the main stages President Chávez chose to attack his political adversaries. In each episode included in this study, the president dedicated a time to criticize opposition leaders and challenge the opinions they pronounced in other media outlets. For the president, addressing the views of his political adversaries was an important part of the national debate since he had the right to respond to the insults and calumnies opposition leaders published in national media. A critical analysis of the characterization of the opposition by Chávez, the characterization of the president by opposition leaders—as exposed in their discourse distributed in other media outlets—and how this divergent rhetoric interacted in the Venezuelan public sphere
could also be a revealing and interesting approach to the power relations that emerged in
the country after 1999.

Third, Aló Presidente was a space for the president to have a direct contact with
his supporters, who could either make calls or visit the live shows to have a conversation
with Chávez. During these exchanges, the president had the participants expose their
grievances and try to come up with a solution for their particular problems. The issues
people put forward were diverse, ranging from conflicts with employers to quarrels
between relatives. These exchanges with average citizens were paramount for the
president to establish a strong bond with his supporters. On episode 163 of Aló
Presidente, for example, a caller named Emilia manifested her admiration for the
president in the following terms: “You solve everything. You come after God. You are a
hero to me” (Emilia as cited in Maniglia, 2003b). Examining the conversational
dimension of Aló Presidente could reveal how Chávez established himself as a familiar
yet authoritative leader and how this image helped him to gain power within the
government.

Future research should approach these other dimensions of Aló Presidente in
order to make a meaningful assessment of the show’s functions and significance in the
conduction of politics in Venezuela during Chávez’s tenure. As a unique form of political
show that has not been yet successfully replicated elsewhere in the world, Aló Presidente
provides the opportunity to investigate how the pervasive presence of a charismatic
politician in mass media influences public opinion. In Chávez’s case, the show might
have granted him an almost spiritual connection with his supporters that he could exploit
electorally for 14 years. This kind of power emerging from mass media is worthy of study and deep reflection as other media savvy political leaders could easily use media exposure to manipulate their ways to power.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The Bolivarian Revolution has traditionally been an elusive concept. In Venezuelan literature, the definitions vary depending on the political stances of the writers and some neutral foreign scholars describe the revolution as a populist leftist movement that exacerbated nationalism while challenging the United States’ international policy. However, how did the Bolivarian Revolution’s leader define it? How did Hugo Chávez use rhetoric and manage to push forward a governance manifesto that was so different from the political system that had been in place for 40 years in Venezuela? This study addressed these inquiries by performing a critical discourse analysis of the transcripts of 40 Aló Presidente episodes that spanned almost the entire Chávez presidency.

After an iterative examination of the selected episodes, the study finds that the president characterized and promoted the Bolivarian Revolution using three rhetorical frames that evoked interpretative schemas at the core of the Venezuelan culture. The first rhetorical frame was historical and it constructed a connection between the revolution and several events and people that marked Venezuela’s history. The president focused much of his discourse on linking his governance manifesto to the Venezuelan independence war hero the inspired its name, Simón Bolívar.

Appropriating Bolivar and the independence endeavor as symbols unique to the Bolivarian Revolution was one of the first smart moves President Chávez made in the construction of his rhetoric. The Liberator is a particularly unifying figure in Venezuela and the cause the patriots defended during the war against the Spanish empire is virtually
holy in Venezuela. This way, the Bolivarian Revolution, framed as a continuation of the independence war and the heir of the Bolivarian doctrine, could aspire to a degree of legitimacy and praise similar to the one the Liberator and the independence movement had earned in Venezuelan culture.

As Gronbeck (1998) and Bostdorff and Goldzwig (2005) noted in their studies of the uses of history in politics, President Chávez rhetorically reconstructed historical events and heroes in his discourse to justify his actions as head of state. The emphasis on specific passages of Bolívar’s life and the independence war show the president’s intention to connect his governance manifesto to the most flattering episodes of Venezuela’s history. Inconvenient facts about the Bolivarian Revolution and its origins were systematically backgrounded, as if linguistic suppression could cast them into oblivion. President Chávez recontextualized history in a way that resembles O’Brien’s remarks about power and history in George Orwell’s iconic 1949 novel Nineteen Eighty-Four: “He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.” As an increasingly powerful head of state Chávez, controlled the present and perhaps dreamt of perpetuating his power—or at least his legacy—in the future. Therefore, he tailored the past to his needs in order to give his Bolivarian Revolution a chance at immortality.

The connections to Bolivar that the president suggested in his discourse also served as a more pragmatic function: they were legitimizing tools for the revolution and the administration’s policies. The persuasive power of the historical rhetorical frame arises because it strongly resonated with the Venezuelan ideal of total independence from
foreign dominance and the sense of pride Venezuelans derive from the heroic years of the independence war. Once Chávez appropriated Bolívar, supporting the Bolivarian Revolution became a matter of patriotism and not an issue of political affiliation and preference. This rhetorical frame distorted the meaning of patriotism to serve the purposes of the administration. In short, Bolivarianism and patriotism, among the arsenal of Chávez’s rhetorical devices, became oppressive instruments against the opposition.

American President Theodore Roosevelt noted how dissent turns into the essence of true patriotism when governments fail to lead fairly and efficiently:

Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the president or any other public official, save exactly to the degree in which he himself stands by the country. It is patriotic to support him insofar as he efficiently serves the country. It is unpatriotic not to oppose him to the exact extent that by inefficiency or otherwise he fails in his duty to stand by the country. In either event, it is unpatriotic not to tell the truth, whether about the president or anyone else (Roosevelt as cited in MacLennan, 1918, p. 32).

The second rhetorical frame focused on the Venezuelan socioeconomic system and the administration’s efforts to make said system fairer for the poor. The rhetoric the president employed to frame the socialism of the 21st century did not draw much from economic rationales. President Chávez presented socialism as a model that challenged capitalism, neoliberalism and all the vices these economic models fostered in Venezuela’s society, such as selfishness, individualism, ambition and corruption.

In his speeches on Aló Presidente, the president successfully placed socialism and capitalism at the opposite extremes of the good/evil spectrum attaching all sorts of positive connotations to socialism while vilifying capitalism and its supporters. This way, the construction of socialism, instead of being a shift in Venezuela’s economic model,
became a moral imperative. Moreover, socialism in the president’s discourse constituted the only viable path toward social equality and comprehensive distribution of wealth. Religious rhetoric reinforced the persuasive power of this rhetorical frame by attaching values championed by Christianity—for instance, love, humility, generosity, honesty, among others—to socialism and, thus, to the Bolivarian Revolution. Dissenters of the socialist revolution fell in the evil side of the spectrum, being equated to Judas Iscariot and the devil itself. Such negative and powerful representations of the opposition had, to say the least, high persuasive potential among devoted an important number of government supporters who were uneducated and religious (Ramírez, 2005).

Finally, the religious rhetorical frame characterized the Bolivarian Revolution as a Christian movement that could be equated to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Religious symbolism and language allowed President Chávez to navigate through circumstances that threatened his legitimacy throughout his tenure by (1) linking the Bolivarian Revolution to the positive connotations attached to Christianity and (2) connecting political enemies at home and abroad to the negative connotations attributed to the devil, Judas Iscariot and the priests of the Sanhedrin who crucified Jesus. In countries with a Christian majority such as Venezuela, the persuasive power of a religiously devoted leader who claims to be guided by God’s mandate has demonstrated to be strong (Rojas, 2012). Therefore, Chávez’s constant references to religion were not capriciously incorporated to his discourse. They were a key element of his rhetorical strategy to gain political support.
The discussion chapter of this thesis highlights how the president’s rhetorical framing of the Bolivarian Revolution was problematic for the conduction of politics in Venezuela. The analyzed rhetorical frames legitimized the vilification of dissent and the construction of the government’s communication hegemony. In Chávez’s discourse, the Bolivarian Revolution embodied patriotism, ethical values and Christianity. Opposing such a governance manifesto was then an immoral act of treason and not a legitimate manifestation of disagreement or concern. The depiction of the opposition as the evil Other derived in a profound polarization in Venezuela that has even broken families. 

*Chavistas* and *oppositores*— supporters of the opposition— could rarely coexist.

*Aló Presidente*, however, was just one piece of the larger communication strategy that the government built in order to dominate political debate on Venezuela’s airwaves. If anything, the show becomes a metaphor of the president’s rise to univocal power within his own administration. Chávez used the resources and powers of the branches of the state to create a convenient legal framework that allowed it to control broadcast media and criminalize criticism against public officials. As the administration shut down television and radio channels and the remaining broadcasters gave in to self-censorship to keep their licenses, the messages of the president became pervasive and went virtually unchallenged on broadcast media. This seriously compromised the people’s right to access information as well as their freedom of expression.

As the discourse in *Aló Presidente* revealed key aspects of the identity of the Bolivarian Revolution as well as the role the show itself played in the larger scheme of
national politics, a question remains pending: What did Chávez *represent* within his own discursive reconstruction of the Bolivarian Revolution?

A first look could suggest that the president positioned himself as a reincarnation of Simón Bolívar and Jesus Christ, the new champion of freedom and human virtue. Although the thought is provoking, Chávez frequently elevated Bolívar and Christ to levels far above mere mortals. These men were to be perceived as Gods, whose lessons Chávez tried to live by. Under this light, the president could become a Saint Paul, an interpreter of the higher values that stream from God—in this case, a Bolívar/Jesus dichotomy. Chávez might also be seen as a prophet. Interestingly, the Theology of Liberation says a prophet is someone whose “prophecy becomes preaching, proclamation. He explains to the people the true meaning of all events; he informs them of the plan and will of God” (Cullman as cited in Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 10). As discourse subtly transformed Chávez into an instrument for communion, the deep and almost spiritual connection that some of his followers developed with the president becomes understandable.

Now, it is important to remember that that image of “Chávez the prophet” was constructed by and lived in discourse. The real Chávez, the president who has accumulated more power and wealth than any of his predecessors, was more of a Big Brother, the autocrat of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: a virtually omnipresent figure who reached almost every aspect of Venezuelans’ lives. Chávez was at Miraflores, at international summits, on the street walls, in people’s jokes and conversations, in everybody’s living room. All roads led to the president. Even today, after he has passed,
he seems to be still “looking at you.” The feeling of being observed by the deceased commander is quite tangible in the country as banners and graffiti of Chávez’s face, eyes, signature and slogans are spread all over Venezuela. Even today, the state channel VTV broadcasts reruns of Aló Presidente on Sunday mornings.

After Chávez, the Venezuelan society remains divided and fostering resentment in the midst of a humanitarian crisis that has exposed people from all classes to violence and hunger. Overwhelmed by the difficulties of everyday life—standing in lines for hours to get staples, working multiple jobs to survive and watching for criminals at every turn—most Venezuelans are left with no time or will to thoughtfully examine the source of their problems. The government, when confronted about the tangible disaster, says “pero tenemos patria”—but we have the fatherland. Venezuela falls apart, pero tenemos patria. This is the legacy of Hugo Chávez. “It does not matter if we go around naked. It does not matter if we do not have anything to eat. This is about saving the revolution” (Chávez, 2007).
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