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ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND CIRCULATING DISCOURSES IN CHILE

Veronica Stoeckel¹

Abstract

Through a qualitative and Critical Discourse Analysis of three Chilean newspapers and the discursive context in which they are being distributed, an examination has been undertaken of how issues, which according to scientific findings are directly linked to environmental problems and/or climate change, have been addressed, or not addressed, within this medium. The results of the analysis reveal the ideological significance of “the absent”, as well as the way by which the commodification-process operating within this medium creates a certain order of discourse.

Keywords

Mass media, social practice, discourse, environment, climate change, commodification, the absent, ideology

Introduction

This study examines the absence of multiple or alternative perspectives in three Chilean newspapers and the lack of connections made to other (according to scientific conclusions) relevant social factors within journalistic narratives on environment and/or climate change. I also examine the ideological significance of the absent, the political-economical ideas which these journalistic texts originates from, and the discursive context in which the newspapers are being distributed.

The significance of “the absent” has its origin not only in the ideology-critical tradition but also in those parts of the postmodern tradition articulated in Derrida’s critique of the Western thinker who tends to focus upon that which is present, and in Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical method. Derrida’s account brings forward the alternative voices of the absent, and Foucault draws attention to the relationship between power and knowledge as he notices how power-relations play a major part in the perception of knowledge and how the discourses which circulate correspond to these forms of knowledge.

A free media is considered to go hand-in-hand with the democratic process. The problem with this idea however, is that it restricts itself to defining a free media as a media-apparatus unregimented by governmental interference and, by doing so, overlooks the question of whether or not it is also free from economic pressure. The main channels of information in Chile bear witness of the latter.

One of the conclusions of Rosalind Breshnahan’s study “The Media and the Neoliberal Transition in Chile” (2003) holds that, during Chile’s transition from dictatorship to democracy, there has been a decline in the country’s media diversity. According to Breshnahan, this happened as a result of the Concertación administration “opting for a market model responsive to the needs of transnational investors...Overall, its communication policies have seriously eroded mass media diversity and limited the development of community-based, participatory media” (ibid., p. 61). In another words, the decline of media diversity is here seen as a manifestation of neo-liberal democracy.

In a democratic society – which the Chilean society may be regarded as – and from a theoretical and normative perspective, the main task of the mass media is considered to be that of informing, commenting upon and analyzing the events and developments taking place

within that society. This study aims to examine the extent to which the Chilean mass media fulfils this function four years after Bresnahan's study; however, where Bresnahan's study focused upon the variety of newspapers, this study will examine specific newspapers' diversity of approaches, connection or lack of connection to other relevant factors when it comes to addressing specific issues.

The socio-historical context

The general social context of this study is of a country characterizing itself as a pursuer of a neoliberal economic policy (this despite the fact it has been ruled by Michelle Bachelet for the last four years, a president formerly a Marxist); a country whose macroeconomic figures give evidence for a huge recent annual development, a development which has enabled the population to acquire material goods previously way out of their reach (cars, mobile phones, widescreen-TVs, etc.). And yet, this is also a country whose distribution of resources shows deficiencies in development policy. Although the part of the Chilean population living in extreme poverty has decreased from 12.9% in 1990, to 5.7% in 2000, the population's wealthiest fifth is still 15.5 times richer than the fifth constituting the poorest.

The same social context also shows a country in which 4.5 million people have had less than eight years of education (Millennium Development Goals, 2007). According to Manuel Castell (2006) more than half of the Chilean adult population have very limited literacy skills and only two percent is highly capable of processing textual information. All these highly contradictory aspects have facilitated the uncritical emergence of certain discourses in society, or a certain "order of discourse", to use Foucault's terminology.

The Chilean national daily press is dominated by the *El Mercurio-Copesa duopoly* where the El Mercurio-group owns the daily newspaper "El Mercurio", the evening papers (so-called tabloids) "La Segunda" and "Últimas Noticias", as well as 14 other local newspapers; Copesa, in turn, is the owner of "La Tercera" and "La Cuarta" as well as of the news magazine Qué Pasa. (Bresnahan, 2003: 48).

Theoretical and methodological considerations

The results of this study are based upon three elements: an analysis of Chilean newspapers; interviews held with knowledge-generating people within official institutions, as well as with

scientific researchers; and, finally, upon secondary literature on the subject of environmental issues in Chile.

The newspaper analysis took place during a randomly chosen period of two weeks (November 29th – December 15th) and built upon selected parts of *El Mercurio*, *La Tercera* and *La Segunda*; it comprised all news items and articles which in any way addressed or focused upon issues that, according to scientific findings, are related to environment or climate change. The result was a total of twenty-six analyzed texts. The interviews were conducted during November – December that same year as a part of a larger research-project on environment and communication in Chile (Stoehrel, 2009). The knowledge-generating interviewees were: scientific researchers working within universities; personnel from research-centers and organizations aiming to promote economic development in Chile; project managers operating within UN-governed programs endorsing environmental- and socioeconomic development and representatives of various non-governmental organizations (NGO's).

The scientific researchers from the official institutions as well as the NGO-representatives were selected on the basis of being either frequently referred to in the secondary literature dealing with environmental issues in Chile, or for having originated circulating documents on the same subject. Out of the seven interviewed researchers, two were also members of NGO's and the total amount of NGO-memberships was, in turn, divided amongst three different NGO's. Furthermore, three members of different non-profit organizations concerned with the Chilean social and economic development were also interviewed.

The interviews were conducted in an open-ended manner by which the interviewees got to speak of their own activities as well as discuss the various controversial issues emanating from the secondary literature. Each interview lasted for a duration of approximately one hour and was recorded. The secondary literature which was employed for the purpose of this study consisted partly of scientific reports and publications dealing with environmental issues in Chile, and partly of publications by which official sources have provided information about their own activities.

The methodology underlying the analysis in this study is qualitative in nature and has its theoretical basis in the Critical Discourse Analysis as developed by Thompson (1984) and Fairclough (1992): a mode of analysis founded upon the ideology-critical tradition as well as

upon Foucault's ideas and line of reasoning with regards to how a certain "order of discourse" serves as "the dominant world view" by means of, amongst other things, privileging certain discourses and excluding certain topics and certain voices (Foucault, 1982).

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is characterized as being an analysis of:

1. The text
2. The discursive practice (i.e. the production, distribution and consumption of the text)
3. The social practice (i.e. the ideologies and hegemonic ideas circulating within society)

In the analysis of the text this study will focus upon:

1. The absence of alternative models of explanation within the journalistic texts. By what we might call the "traces of the absent", the study clarifies those perspectives and relevant connections which are not mentioned and, moreover, explores the ideological significance of this absence.

2. The "process of commodification" operating within the journalistic texts, i.e. the process by which various issues and their "use values" have been converted into questions of their production, distribution and consumption; in other words, into questions of their "exchange values". Although originating from within a political-economical tradition, this terminology nevertheless proves highly relevant when explaining the content and ideological basis of the newspapers. The result of this part of the study has been arrived at by assessing the journalistic texts' positioning within specific sections of the newspaper; the way in which the themes raised are slanted; and, finally, which are the privileged political-ideological discourses.

As for the discursive practice, the journalistic texts analyzed in this study have been treated as precisely journalistic texts, that is to say texts which claim to portray a social reality and which get published in national-wide newspapers whose various specific sections function to indicate how the content is supposed to be interpreted. There is a difference between placing an article in the "business"-section or in the "chronicle"-section.

Den third level of the CDA, The Social Practice, analyses the discourses circulating within society. These discourses/practices are being produced within official institutions, non-

governmental organizations (NGO's), the research community (universities and research institutes) and the media. In this context, "discourse" is defined as statements which can be related to specific epistemic communities. The result of this part of the study is based upon conclusions drawn from the organizations' own informational material as well as from the interviews.

The distinct discourses circulating within specific social practices

The abovementioned discourses circulating within the Chilean society – the official, the non-governmental, the scientific and the medial discourse – reach out to different groups within that society and can each be said to generate, in its own specific way, that which is recognized as knowledge.

When examining the various reports and publications addressing environmental issues in Chile, the first thing one notices – and gets confused by – is the parallelism of discourses, many of which are so contradictory they might as well be referring to different countries. One discourse is that which stems from the official reports showing various international environmental-agreements signed by Chile, new laws designed to protect the indigenous forest, and macroeconomic figures indicating progress. These reports portray Chile as a country concerned with environmental care and genuinely interested in combining a socio-economic development with environmental protection.

However, another discourse is that which appears from within those non-governmental organizations that combine a concern for environmental issues with a social one. These civic organizations are interested in the consequences which the macroeconomic policies may have upon smaller communities and upon the individuals residing there. These consequences may be direct, such as through adverse health effects, or indirect, through, for example, the contamination and destruction of farmland. They may also be either short- or long term, where an example of the former would be water-contamination and of the latter, emigration forced by environmental degradation. According to the NGO discourse then, Chile is still a highly underdeveloped country; not only in socio-economical terms – as the distribution data above gave evidence to – but also in cultural terms, when "culture" is defined as a whole way of life. As one of the scientists/NGO-members interviewed put it: "The way in which we

nurture the environment is an indication of civilization.” The NGO’s are consistent in pointing out the dangers and indeed harmful consequences of various environmental policies.

A third discourse is that which emerges from within scientific communities and research centers of economic development. With a few exceptions, this discourse seems to be interested more in the internal communication between different researchers and/or research-groups, less in the social communication and social application of its findings. The reasons for this are manifold. Universities and research-groups have a few different options when it comes to communicating with the population: via media, via outward-orientated activities such as public lectures, or via their own websites where research may be presented. Scientists do not tend to favour media as a channel for relaying information - perhaps this could be to put down to reasons such as media-communication not being considered reputable within the world of academia and/or the complexities of the relationship between science and journalism (e.g. Boykoff, 2007 and Lemons, 1998). Since the information communicated by means of public lectures reaches only a minority of the population, all that remains then, are the universities’ and research-groups’ own websites. However, although it is possible to download vast amounts of information from these websites, the fact remains that scientific reports are written primarily with fellow researchers in mind, which means they employ a language not comprehensible to the layman. Moreover, since these reports are intended for the international scientific community, they are written not in Spanish but in English. The result of these different factors put together is that only that very few people get a chance to familiarize themselves with these reports and, consequently, this discourse is being perceived as closed, effectively stifling further debate. Furthermore, there have been surveys showing how Chilean universities do not hold a clear stance when it comes to environmental degradation-problems such as for example air-contamination, and how the studies conducted within these institutions are not multidisciplinary which complicates the implementation of research-results and their possible measures (e.g. Simioni, 2004).

Yet another distinct discourse is that which circulates within the media. It differs from the official discourse, from the NGO’s discourse and from the scientific discourse; just like these, the mass media discourse appears to have a life of its own. The analysis of journalistic articles shows that whereas these texts may question politicians and government activities in general as well as specific statements arising from these sources, they nevertheless fail to question both the economic power and its actions, and the discourses originating from it. Reading these

journalistic articles, one is left with the impression that Chilean politicians may well be corrupted; that trade and industry are highly active; that any serious environmental degradation problems are non-existing and that climate change is something which takes place somewhere else in the world. An example of this prevailing attitude was found in a Peugeot car-advertisement occurring in a newspaper during the days of the analysis. The commercial - which sets out to entice the reader (and prospective buyer) by calling attention to the fact that air-conditioning is included in the selling-price of the car – depicts a ray of icicles underneath which (ice) blue capitals spell out the words: “GLOBAL COOLING”.

The absence of alternative models of explanation

Noteworthy in the analysis of the journalistic texts was the absence of alternative approaches, models of explanation, the selectivity of the information presented and the absence of relevant connections. Those readers who are unaware of environmental degradation problems, and who lack access to other sources of knowledge, no doubt run the risk of arriving at all the wrong conclusions. Not only do the journalistic texts present figures taken out of their contexts, make claims without specifying relevant sources, and transform interesting problems into one-track minded scandals, but moreover do they avoid certain connections or slant the themes presented in a manner which deflects any real understanding of the problem.

According to Agenda Setting theory (e.g. McCombs, 2004) the media’s main impact is seen as providing the topics that the public talks about. In this sense one could say that what the media does not talk about is as relevant for the readers’ perception of reality as what it does address. In all practical senses, that which we do not speak of does not exist.

For the purpose of illustrating this absence two articles have been chosen. The first is written on the subject-matter of the Bali Conference; the second deals with energy production and carries the title “Non-conventional energies: how much will they cost?” These articles were published in *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera* respectively.

The day before the Bali Conference began, *El Mercurio* published an article entitled “Ten thousand go [to Bali] in order to stop global warming.” The article begins by giving a brief historical review of the Kyoto Protocol and of the IPCC’s report. Upon approaching the conference itself and its purpose, the article quotes an interviewee saying: “The most

important thing is that China, Brazil and India join [the up-coming international agreement on reducing the emissions of carbon dioxide]. The U.S. is waiting for this before joining themselves.”

The article does not mention these countries’ emissions of carbon dioxide *per capita*; figures which in fact reveal a different picture altogether. It is true that China and India emit large quantities of carbon dioxide: out of the total global emissions in 2004, the former was responsible for 17,3% and the latter for 4,6%. However the numbers for emitted CO₂ *per capita* show China and India as liable for 3,8 and 1,2 tons respectively – the corresponding number for Chile was 3,9 - figures which are all relatively low in comparison to the U.S.’s emission of 20,6 ton CO₂ per capita and year (Human Development Report, 2005). The article mentions none of this. The Chinese economy is growing by between 8% and 10% each year which means that their emissions of carbon dioxide will increase further. By all means, this calls for rapid measures. Yet, when the article suggests that China, India and Brazil are key in solving the emission-problem, it fails to recognize how this is not only a question of emissions but a question of these emissions in conjunction with justice for developing countries. Nowhere in the journalistic text is this mentioned.

The title of the second article, “Non-conventional energies: how much will they cost?” is indicative of its stance that energy-production be viewed not as a significant aspect of sustainable development, or as part of a solution to climate change, but solely in terms of its financial cost. This is the prevailing attitude not only in this specific article’s title and subsequent content, but in all the journalistic texts on energy which were analyzed. Failing to mention sustainable development when discussing alternative sources of energy is like looking at a square centimeter without considering the square meter in which it is positioned. The lack of contextual information may well lead to all the wrong conclusions. The author of the article argues against a bill proposing that electricity companies holding a capacity exceeding that of a certain number of MWs should, as from 2010, see that 5% of their total energy-distribution comes from nonconventional energy-forms - a percentage which should increase to 8% by the year 2024. The reason behind this proposal would be an attempt to spread the distribution-risk and to kindle sustainable development. The author claims that in order for wind-energy to be trade-friendly it needs to be subsidized; without this subsidy, he states, the construction-cost would be US\$ 1 billion, money which the consumers would have to pay for the next twenty-five years. Another complaint of the author’s is that of how the size of such a construction-site would cover an area as big as that of Chile’s second-largest city -

he does not, however, mention the possibility of using Chile's 2000 km long desert, or its approximately 4000 km long coastline. The author further points out the uncertainty of relying on wind power; the inevitable increase in electricity-costs; and how the only ones benefitting from this alternative energy-generating technology would be its producers. Any possible environmental benefits are not mentioned at all. According to the same author, solar energy cannot be considered as a reliable source of energy either, as this technology is allegedly still in its experimental stage; geothermal energy is mentioned yet not discussed. Finally, the author expresses his regrets over how it is possible to propose a bill of law without having done the necessary research.

In a footnote at the end of the article we can read of how its content has been based upon a larger project funded by AES Gener S.A. The footnote does not however inform us of the fact that AES Gener S.A. is an international energy-producing company using primarily fossil fuels such as natural gas, coal and oil – all of which are sources of greenhouse gas. Neither is there any mentioning of how AES Gener S.A. has financial interests in Inversiones Cahagua Ltda, the Chilean company controlling 20% of the country's total energy trade (as calculated in MW capacity). All this information is obtainable from the AES Gener S.A. website. Given the company's economic interest in maintaining an energy-use based on fossil fuels – AES Gener S.A.'s production and distribution of alternative forms of energy is minimal in comparison to that derived from fossil fuels – the way in which the author of the article accuses the producers of wind-energy for monetary thinking, now seems almost ironic.

Amongst all the information excluded from the article is the government's reason for proposing the bill in the first place: the importance of finding alternative energy-forms in order to stimulate a sustainable development. So does a fact like that of how the development of wind-energy in countries such as for example Germany - in connection with a tax shift from labour to energy - gave rise to 64 000 new jobs during its initial seven years, a number which is expected to increase to 103 000 by 2010. The reader of the article would most probably have arrived at conclusions entirely different had he or she been informed of how, due to this use of wind-energy, the German emissions of carbon dioxide decreased by 20 million tons per year in the period between 1999 – 2003 (Brown, 2007); or of how solar power – an energy-form which the author claims exists merely in its experimental stage – is already used by 2 million Germans and by 15% of the Austrian population. And how would the reader have interpreted the idea of using non-conventional forms of energy, had he or she

also learnt that the money which the villagers in some parts of Los Andes spent on the installation and utilization of different types of solar-panels during a period of 30 months is less than they would have spent had they used candles (*ibid*). And as to geothermal energy, which the author mentions only in passing, the reader is told nothing of how the use of this energy-form is already spreading, nor of how Chile is in fact one of the countries holding the greatest potential for utilizing such a technology.

To summarize: had the reader been given access to the information which the article now excludes, he or she may well have arrived at conclusions entirely different from those which may be drawn from the presented data. By above stated examples of such “excluded information” I do not, of course, intend to point out what *specific* information should have been included in the article, but instead to demonstrate the text’s lack of alternative perspectives. The absence of this information here legitimizes the message of the information present, namely that of how the country needs to continue utilizing energy derived from fossil fuels. It is not particularly difficult to gather whose economic interests are the ones being favoured.

The perennial logic of commercialization: the process of commodification

As defined above, “the process of commodification” is the process by which various issues and their “use values” gets converted into questions of their production, distribution and consumption, i.e. into questions of their “exchange values”. In all of the analyzed journalistic texts dealing with energy, as well as in those addressing different forms of environmental contamination, this process of commodification is taking place. Evidence of this is found not only in their content but also in the subheadings functioning to summarize the text and in the way by which the article or news item get positioned in specific sections of the newspaper – all texts written on energy, even when they address alternative energy-forms, are located in the “Business”-section.

None of the articles about energy published in Chile’s two largest newspapers make any connection between energy-production/energy-use and environmental issues, nor between energy, climate change and sustainable development. The sole exception is an article published in *La Segunda*, an evening paper which includes the concept of “non-contaminating forms of energy.” Otherwise the articles and news items on energy published in the analyzed

newspapers primarily concentrate upon questions of how much energy costs or will cost in the future depending upon what technology is being used. Their primary focus rests upon the millions of dollars spent by various companies investing in new energy-production facilities.

The journalistic texts covering environmental contamination in Chile follow the same process of commodification, perhaps even more markedly so. For example, a news item published in connection to the national oil-company ENAP having contaminated a port in southern Chile has the following headline: “ENAP spend 15 million dollars on clearing the effluents.” There is no discussion of the damage these effluents may have had upon the environment. In another news item, reporting on how a government-lodged body has declared the air in a Chilean city as highly contaminated, a district mayor is quoted saying: “[The decision to declare the city as contaminated] will prevent the development of enterprises”. The issue of adverse environment and the impact it has upon the inhabitants’ health is converted into an issue of impeding business-growth, i.e. into an issue of money.

Perhaps the article which best serves to illustrate the process of commodification is one published on a Sunday – the day when most people have time to read the paper – in *El Mercurio*, one of Chile’s two largest daily newspapers. The story behind the article dates back to the year 2004, to the discovery of how the black-necked swans inhabiting one of Chile’s wetlands had begun to either die or migrate. It is necessary to take a closer look at these events before going back to the newspaper article addressing them.

The wetland had long been South America’s most imperative habitat for the black-necked swan. Then, at some point between autumn and winter 2004, these swans and other birds were suddenly found to have either migrated, leaving behind no bird-nests or nestlings, or died without any clear explanation. Later on the “luchecillo” - the plant which constituted the swans’ main food-supply - was also found having become extinct. During the following spring, the water coming down from the wetland, pouring into two tributary rivers, was discovered to have changed colour; it was now brown. The population turned its accusations to CELCO (Celulosa Arauco y Constitución) - a wood-pulp, engineered wood and Forestry Company which had started its activities in February 2004 and was located 25 km upstream from the wetland.

A team of researchers from the local university, Universidad Austral de Chile, was set to examine the events and upon a series of surveys and observations it could repudiate some of the hypotheses. The swans had not died of an infectious disease; neither were their deaths or, alternatively, their migration caused by changes in the amount of fallout rain. As to the extinction of the luchecillo-plant, it was asserted that the time-period had not seen an increase in the amount of UV-light, in agricultural pesticides, or in sewage-leakage from the immediate area.

Instead, the research-team could conclude the following: the death and migration of swans was caused by the luchecillo-plant's extinction which, in turn, was due to the plant having accumulated vast measures of iron and manganese. This accumulation of chemicals - more specifically, iron - was also found in the swan-corpses where it had caused parasites and diseases of the liver (hemacromatosis) – a discovery which further explained the increased mortality-rate.

Surveys showed the wetland as also containing traces of various different chemicals and the water-quality as having deteriorated substantially since CELCO had started its operations and, moreover, how this deterioration was markedly more prominent downstream from the company's inflow. Three years later, in 2007, the situation was still the same: the water-quality continued to be poor, the luchecillo-plant had not recovered, neither had the population of swans or any other birds. Out of the original 14 000 black-necked swans living in the Chilean wetland before 2004, barely 500 were left in November 2007. Due to lack of food these swans no longer had the muscle-capacity to fly, but instead had to stay put, continue feeding on whatever remained of a plant contaminated with heavy metals, heading for an inevitable death, via liver-disease. In Latin America, hemacromatosis has sometimes been found amongst birds in the zoo – the reason being a failure in getting the proportions of iron in their diet right – but never amongst birds of the wild. The sole explanation to why these swans had attracted the disease was an excessive intake of iron and the only identified source to this chemical was the company CELCO.

In November 2007 there had still not been any studies investigating what further consequences the extinction and/or contamination of the luchecillo-plant may have had. Whilst it has been determined that the amount of birds living off fish, e.g. herons, has remained the same, their state of health has nevertheless gone unexamined. So has the condition of a specific shrimp inhabiting the same wetland and serving as food for both fish

and otters. Should this shrimp become extinct, so will the fish and otter populations depending on it for their survival; should it not disappear but instead, like the lucheillo-plant, become contaminated, there is an impending risk that the fish eating the shrimp, and the herons as well as humans eating the fish, also will get these heavy metals into their systems. None of this has been studied. Neither has the possible occurrence of dioxins in the surrounding environment and in the remaining birds. When the Chilean Agriculture Cattle Service, SAG, examined some of the emaciated swans and proclaimed to have found no trace of dioxins, this, of course, was hardly surprising given that, as the research team acknowledged, dioxins are stored in fat – and so was unlikely to be found in such mal-nourished specimens.

Between 2005 and 2007, CELCO has periodically been closed for business – once on demand by the Chilean National Commission for the Environment, CONAMA, and at other times on the company's own accord for maintenance purposes. As soon as these intermissions have come to an end and CELCO's activities restart, the level of chemical substances in the water again increases. In June 2007 the contamination and subsequent death of large amounts of fish inhabiting a nearby river was detected - again, due to technical defects at CELCO.

When abovementioned article gets published in *El Mercurio*, December 2007, it is with an introductory text - also functioning as a title – laid out by means of a mixture of capital- and lowercase letters:

”Unclear rules and postponed decisions”

The authorities' political fears result in [CELCO] having operated to merely half of its capacity for the last 20 months

Although the first sentence of the article declare rules as having been “unclear”, this assertion easily passes unnoticed, partly due to the small lettering-size but more so because of how the article do not touch upon this subject again. Instead, from the preamble and onwards, it focuses upon the fact that the requirements put on CELCO by the “authorities” – exactly which these “authorities” actually are, is not specified – has resulted in the company operating on just half-speed which, in turn, has led to a 100 million dollar-loss and a high unemployment in the area.

The article outlines how, following the death and migration of the black-necked swans, the government required that in order for CELCO to return to its full activity it would have to dispose of its liquid industrial waste elsewhere. Moreover, it would have to meet a series of draconian requirements and allow to be inspected by an international consulting-firm, Knight Piésol, selected by the Regional Environment Authority, Corema. According to the article this consultancy-firm had, already in March 2006, sent a letter to Corema certifying how all these requirements had been met. The “authorities”, however, had allegedly not responded to this letter, neither to a letter which the company itself had sent in which they asked permission to return to full activity. The article states how twenty months down the line, CELCO is today still operating to a mere 80% of its capacity, a state of affairs which has resulted not only in a 128 million dollar-loss for the company but moreover a decrease in electricity-production and hence a decrease in the KW distributed to the Central Interconnected System SIC (the largest Chilean electric distribution-system). This, in turn, has led to farmers being unable to cultivate their land and to thousands of people losing their jobs.

The article asserts how there are 8500 people that have been affected by this situation, and tells further of employees from CELCO’s subcontracting-companies participating in public protests alongside employees from vulcanization-companies in the area, petrol station-attendants from a nearby village and others who indirectly benefit from CELCO’s activities. The author argues that when CELCO’s activities are decreased by 20%, it results in a decrease in everything from road-tax income, via the need for transport, vulcanization and car-tires, to the demand for petrol and general car-maintenance.

The article does not offer the “authorities” any opportunity to give their account of these affairs. In fact, the closest it ever gets to any of these “authorities” is by quoting the minister of environment saying “the local Regional Environment Authority, Corema, has complied with the laws and regulations applicable when assessing the company CELCO’s request”.

With this my chosen example (involving CELCO and the research community) my focus of interest - as well as my point – is not to suggest that the researchers’ conclusions are per definition correct, neither that whatever appears in the newspapers is false. Instead, what I wish to demonstrate is the fact that the newspaper article does not offer all the information required for a full understanding of the complex of problems *and* that the information given is slanted in a way which supports the “business as usual” ideology.

Political economy, sustainable development and journalism

In order to understand the significance of the commodification as underscored in this article, we will look to the former World Bank economist Herman Daly (2007). Daly has devoted much of his time and effort to issues related to sustainable development and he defines it in terms of “throughput by determining the environment's capacity for supplying each raw resource and for absorbing the end waste products” (ibid: 15), where “throughput” is “the entropic physical flow from nature’s sources through the economy and back to nature’s sinks” (ibid., p. 37).

Daly experiments with the concept of non-economic development, using it to describe the point at which the cost of producing something becomes greater than the use to be gained from it. Should, for instance, the production of something result in eco-systems no longer functioning to provide us with the services we need for our survival, then the costs have become too great - the collapse of ecosystems may be caused by factors such as depletion of resources, pollution, climate change, etc. Yet, as Daly points out, the abolishment of a non-economic development is complicated by the fact that there are always individuals and companies who benefit from it, at least in the short term – which is the corporate perspective. Central to Daly’s line of argument is the idea that “the economy is a subsystem of the larger ecosystem and the latter is finite” (ibid., p. 9) and that, moreover, this is something which the neoclassical economy fails to incorporate in its calculations.

Daly is critical of the way in which the gross domestic product (GDP) has come to be used, in the popular sense, as a measure of well-being - here we can add that by means of this use, the concept has given rise to a discourse legitimizing such a view - since what the GDP in fact is, is a measure of economic activity, something entirely different. Economic activity may well lead to development yet, should we traverse the optimum development-point by which this activity gets converted into a non-economic development as outlined above, it may also lead to decline.

Daly further criticizes the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB) for not bringing this non-economic development into their computations. The political economy of these organizations requires that the rich countries continue to grow for the purpose of providing an export-market for their still-developing counterparts; at the same time it forces upon the developing countries an export-economy which is not always to their own gain – these developing countries are

dependent upon their export-revenue for being able to repay loans which they, in turn, have taken out to hire companies (often from the richer parts of the world) involved in the exploitation of their countries' resources. The argument which holds that export increases the GDP is accurate, yet, as previously stated, a high GDP does not necessarily mean a high level of well-being amongst the total population.

Vincent Mosco (1996) claims that the commodity production operating within mass media reflects the interest of capital. The above-mentioned article on CELCO could be said to clearly exemplify this, as it, by means of rhetorical and ideological strategies, seeks to portray the company's economic interests as the interests of the employees. The article defines the interests of the employees as constituted by the salary which they receive upon selling their labour to CELCO, to a CELCO-supplier or to any other business-sector affected by, or affecting, CELCO's activities. Nowhere in the article is there any mention of the employees' interests in terms of both a healthy living environment and their physical well-being. The article thus conceives of the economy as a closed economic system and not, as Daly describes it, as a subsystem of the larger ecological system. The fact that, according to scientific reports, the company CELCO has harmed both the environment and the eco-system and that no one yet knows how severe and widely spread this damage will prove to be or what impact it may have upon the entire food-chain, is not something that the journalist has included in her calculations. The environment and the eco-system both have a "use value" for human beings in the sense that they are vital for our existence. The article however, obliterates this "use value" and instead converts nature's resources into marketable products, into "exchange value". When the journalist argues for the company's continued activity, she does not take into account the externalities which these activities give rise to.

It may be the case that the government has not been entirely clear in its requirements – of this we can know nothing since the article fails to interview any of its spokesmen – however, within this context, it is of little significance. What does matter here is the way in which economic interests and economic systems seemingly dominate the interests of nature and of ecosystems; in other words, the way in which the economic subsystem is treated as something separate from the larger ecological system.

When the journalist speaks of the interests and welfares of the employees directly or indirectly connected to CELCO, she implicitly assumes that what is best for the company is also best for its employees.

This line of reasoning goes hand-in-hand with the supposition that a country's increased GDP indicates an increase in its population's level of well-being. However – and in addition to points already made about how well-being entails personal as well as environmental health – when looking at how the wealth is being distributed it is easy to find examples of the contrary. There are for instance studies indicating how, in areas where forestry-companies (timber and pulp) operate, the farmers are the ones most heavily affected by the environmental contamination caused by such company-activity; a state of affairs which, inevitably, results in their increased poverty and, in many cases, their necessity to emigrate. For an example of this, see the Montalba, Carrasco & Araya-publication *Contexto económico y social de las plantaciones forestales en Chile* (2005).

It is not difficult to understand the journalist's and CELCO's concerns as to what reduced production means in terms of lost revenue considering that the company is one of Chile's twelve largest export-companies (www.prochile.cl) with an export that amounted to US\$ 874,354,297 FOB in 2006. However, and this is the point of the Montalba, Carrasco & Araya-analysis, these optimistic macroeconomic figures are not corresponsive to the level of well-being amongst the inhabitants of the area, but in fact rather the opposite.

The way of looking upon the economy as an end in itself and not as a means to achieve an increased social well-being and a sustainable development is clearly illustrated not only in above-mentioned article on CELCO but also in many of the other analyzed texts.

Final considerations

Where discourses are defined as statements shared by various epistemic communities, the circulating discourses which reach the adult and interested population in Chile are characterized as being parallel, co-existent, and contradictory. These discourses may be nominated as the official discourse, the NGO discourse, the scientific discourse and the mass media discourse. The official discourse primarily makes use of reports, publications, websites and occasionally training-courses in order to reach their audiences. The NGO's use websites, publications and direct contact with groups of the population. The scientific community mainly employs internal reports, publications and websites. For the official discourse, the NGO discourse and the scientific discourse, the amount of given opportunities to appear in the media varies, yet – on the basis of the empirical material underlying this study and the statements made by the interviewed members from these different epistemic communities -

they are at all times very limited. Hence, given these discourses' distribution-possibilities, the discourse circulating within the media should be the one most likely to actually reach the adult portion of the population.

The Critical Discourse Analysis of the journalistic texts included in this study has shown how the selected newspapers avoid addressing certain perspectives and important connections and solutions. Foucault's ideas on how different practices create a certain order of discourse is of great relevance in understanding the significance of "the absent" within these texts. The analysis has also shown how the discourses which circulate in these journalistic texts go hand-in-hand with practices originating in neoclassical and neoliberal economic politics; neoclassical in the sense that the economy is considered to be a closed system independent of the larger ecological system, and neoliberal in the sense that it promotes large-scale enterprise activities.

When applying a CDA of the journalistic texts included in the study, certain ideas became clear; ideas which point at a hegemonic discourse. Here it seems as if journalism functions as an instrument at the hand of a neoclassical and neoliberal economic discourse. The information accessible to the citizen seems not to be the information provided by the public authorities, by the NGO's or by the scientific community, but the one provided by the interest of the market.

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