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# Through eurocentric logics

The construction of difference in foreign news discourse on Venezuela

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This study aims to explore the construction of difference in foreign news discourse on culturally similar but politically different non-Western subjects. Applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) together with a critique of Eurocentrism, the study examines difference in newspaper constructions of government supporters and oppositional groups in Venezuela. Discursive differences are evident in the strategies used for constructing the two groups with regard to political rationality and violence. Government supporters are associated with social justice, Venezuela's poor, dogmatic behavior, and the use of political violence. The opposition, in contrast, is constructed as following a Western democratic rationale that stresses anti-authoritarianism. This group is primarily associated with victims of violence. While the opposition is conveyed as being compatible with Eurocentric values and practices, government supporters to great extent deviate from these norms. Such constructions serve to legitimize politico-ideological undercurrents of Eurocentrism, as the defense of liberalism.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis, difference, Eurocentrism, foreign news, ideology, legitimacy, media, postcolonialism, Venezuela

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the construction of difference in foreign news discourse on culturally similar but politically different non-Western subjects. This is accomplished through a cross-national yet non-comparative critical discourse analysis (CDA) of media constructions of government supporters and oppositional groups in Venezuela as they are presented in three elite newspapers.

The construction of difference has for a long time been a central field of inquiry for the study of (discursive) representation, largely because this form of representation is ideologically significant and because it uses discourse to recontextualize reality. As Hall (1997) argues, the construction of difference is not only essential to meaning-making and for the classification and construction of the self. Rather, studying how social actors are discursively differentiated and how certain actors are constructed as others can unveil the discursive reinforcement of uneven power relations within cultural and political spheres. The concept of difference is here understood as being imbued with the question of legitimacy (Chouliaraki 2005), because as a form of soft power, it can serve to justify certain power structures and practices.

Even if not always conceptually explicit, difference and othering constitute recurrent topics in media studies on the coverage and representation of non-Western subjects. Orientalism and traditional ideology critique represent the central approaches used in the field. Content studies relying on ideology critique (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Kim 2000; Philo and Berry 2011) emphasize the importance of geopolitics in shaping how the media conveys political agents. The relationship between elite ideologies of the country

of publication and the subject represented — representing similar political and economic interests — is argued to be an important driver of the othering and (de)legitimization of different agents in the media. Such an approach tends to disregard cultural factors as agents of difference-making. Research using the concept of Orientalism (Said 1978), on the other hand, emphasizes the role of cultural difference in causing othering, and this concept has been particularly relevant to the study of representations of Islam in the wake of 9/11 (Klaus and Kassel 2005; Malcolm, Bairner, and Curry 2010; Powell 2011; Roosvall 2010; Vultee 2009). By associating Islam with irrationality, violence, and even terrorism, the media in turn others and delegitimizes Muslims. However, the Saidian perspective can be criticized for focusing too heavily on culture, which risks simplifying (post)colonial relations and neglecting class hierarchies and interests within ‘othered’ groups while failing to situate colonialism within the history of capitalism (see Dirlik 1997; Lazarus 2011).

To balance the theoretical focus on culture vis-à-vis politics and economics in relation to the construction of difference, this paper calls for an approach to media discourse that draws on critiques of Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is defined here as a perspective that takes the Western world as norm by naturalizing (neo)colonial relations and defending global capitalism (Amin 1989, Lander 2002) through difference making between subjects that either meet or deviate from the hegemonic perspective (Lander 2002).

The paper examines news discourse on Venezuela. Following the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, the country has witnessed the collapse of traditional political parties and the emergence of two main political blocs: chavismo (the Government and its political allies) and the opposition. The Venezuelan case is relevant as it can provide insight on the difference construction of non-Western subjects that are culturally similar, but which differ on political grounds. Such a study broadens understandings of how constructions of difference in foreign news discourse correspond with Western cultural and political ideals.

A more detailed description of the Venezuelan case is provided in the following section. An analytic framework that incorporates a critique of Eurocentrism through CDA is then presented together with the empirical materials. The results demonstrate how constructions of political rationality and violence are used as two general discursive strategies for constructing difference. Finally, the study concludes by stressing how the construction of difference in the studied case legitimizes politico-ideological sentiments of Eurocentrism.

## **2. Understanding the Venezuelan case**

Political scientists explain the rise of Chávez in 1998 and his consolidation of power (until his death in 2013) by the deep social divisions among Venezuelans — despite the country’s vast oil resources — and the failures of previous political actors in overcoming these divisions (Ellner 2008; Lander 2008). When Chávez was pardoned for leading the 1992 military coup, an anti-party sentiment among Venezuelans helped him win the 1998 elections (Ellner 2008) producing an environment of political polarization (Ellner 2003).

On one level, divisions between chavistas (government supporters) and the opposition are related to representations of different political and economic interests (López Maya 2004). It is well known that Chávez always addressed the AfroVenezuelan and low-

income population — groups that had been excluded from former government plans designed to modernize the country (Hellinger 2006; Herrera Salas 2007). Furthermore, periods of turmoil unfolded after the privileges of elite groups were modified through Chávez's policies. After Chávez passed a collection of forty-nine economic laws by decree in 2001, which put an end to generous fiscal terms for foreign investors primarily in the hydrocarbon sector, oil managers initiated general strikes that culminated in a failed coup d'état in 2002. In December of the same year, oppositional leaders declared a strike that paralyzed the oil industry for over a month, and in 2004, the opposition promoted and lost a referendum to recall Chávez's mandate (Ellner 2008; López Maya 2004). While it is erroneous to ignore the heterogeneity of the opposition, even with respect to class, it must be recognized that groups representing upper-class interests have been pivotal to the opposition's leadership (Ellner, 2008). The two parties also differ with respect to foreign policies, with *chavismo* taking an anti-hegemonic stance and promoting 'third worldist' policy (Hellinger 2006).

On another level, such divisions reflect perceptions of democracy. *Chavistas* subscribe to the creation of a 'participatory democracy' that emphasizes majority decisions and mobilization (Ellner 2010) as well as social equality and justice (García-Gaudilla 2007; López Maya and Lander 2011). Oppositional organizations instead tend to be enthusiasts of representative or liberal democracy, emphasizing individual liberty and market competition (García-Gaudilla 2007).

On a third level, polarization is tied to the use of civil society as a realm of struggle. The opposition has appropriated the term 'civil society' to claim the breadth of *chavismo* defiance (García-Gaudilla 2007) and has been composed of a broad range of organizations over the years. In contrast, the *chavista* movement has faced difficulties in institutionalizing networks to promote participation while state-sponsored programs have fared better (Ellner 2008; Hellinger 2006). However, apart from evidence from existing grass-roots *chavista* organizations (Valencia Ramirez 2007), this camp has recurrently demonstrated its ability to galvanize mass mobilization (Ellner 2010).

The media have provided a critical battle ground for the rival camps, with private media tending to be anti-governmental and state media tending to be pro-Chávez (Duno Gottberg 2004; Waisbord 2011). Chávez's media policy has been characterized by attempts to combat oppositional media sources by exerting greater control over airwaves (Waisbord 2011) while increasing the supply of community media (Fernandes 2011). Furthermore, the opposition appears to be in an advantageous position compared to the government in foreign reporting representations of Venezuela, evidenced by constructions of the opposition as bringing national unity while the government is presented as authoritarian and polarizing (Abalo 2012, 2014; Salter and Weltman 2011).

### **3. Analytical framework and materials**

This study positions itself within the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) — a research program that employs diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to understand the political consequences of discourse for society. By means of this process, CDA seeks to emancipate and offer new awareness to the research community and the general public (Wodak and Meyer 2009; Wodak et al 2009).

Grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of CDA, this study views the construction of difference as a discursive practice. CDA begins from a conception of discourse as

“language use in speech and writing” and as a type of “social practice” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258). This conception denotes a dialectical relationship between a discursive event and its context or the “situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)” that frame it (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258). This framework causes language use to be both constitutive and conditioned vis-à-vis the context. This understanding of discourse as intertwined with social structures makes CDA pivotal for the analysis of power and ideology; in other words, it illustrates how discourses can reproduce or challenge unequal relations between groups (Wodak and Meyer 2009).

Power struggles can, however, take a myriad of forms and can be discursively manifested in different arenas. This study focuses on how difference is constructed in foreign news discourse and how this representation is imbued with values and worldviews that regard Western political and economic structures as the norm. The discursive practice of the media must therefore be understood in relation to Eurocentrism.

Eurocentric knowledge, or Eurocentrism, which is in an outcome of (neo)colonial domination, is characterized by the universalization of European history and scientific knowledge and by the consistent construction of others through differentiation. One consequence of Eurocentric constructions of modern social knowledge is a disregard for the colonial origins of current relations between peoples and cultures despite colonialism’s pivotal role in the emergence of global capitalism as a world system (Lander 2002; Quijano 2000). In turn, “a systematic process of exclusion and subordination of people based on criteria of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture” is established (Lander 2000, 528). According to this perspective, the Western world represents the site of rationality and “the world of tolerance, diversity of opinions, respect for human rights and democracy” (Amin 1989, 107). Poverty and backwardness not only become fixed categories but are understood to result from “insufficient capitalist development” and “the absence of modernity” (Lander 2002, 247). This normalization is enabled as Eurocentrism views liberal society to be “the natural order of things” (Lander 2002, 247). By assuming that capitalism is superior as a system and by therefore promoting the Westernization of the world, Eurocentrism represents a dimension of capitalist ideology (Amin 1989). The effect of Eurocentrism in the Latin American context has been characterized by the naturalization of deep, internal race- and class-related divisions and of the inferior position of the postcolonial Latin American nation-states in relation to their Western counterparts (Quijano 2000). Eurocentric perceptions of the world are also unable to see such conditions as preconditions for the continuation of the capitalist world system.

In identifying its discursive realization, this study takes an important step by recognizing that Eurocentrism shares a set of characteristics with the concept of national identity (Wodak and Kovács 2004; Wodak et al 2009). Like national identity, Eurocentrism should be understood as a notion that is deeply integrated in a nation’s general worldview that can manifest in many forms that assume “different shapes according to the context and to the public in which they emerge” (Wodak et al 2009, 3). Furthermore, Eurocentrism, like national identity, is understood here to be internalized “in the course of socialisation” (Wodak et al 2009, 28), which makes institutions such as the educational system and the media important centers for the distribution of Eurocentric knowledge. As research on national identity has shown, the media plays a central role in the discursive construction, reformulation and distribution of such collective beliefs and opinions (Benke 2003; Benke and Wodak 2003; Liebhart 2003; Wodak and Kovács 2004; Wodak et al 2009).

Structural imbalances in favor of the West are to a great extent reinforced through media content on postcolonial societies. The heavy global reliance on Western news agencies has caused foreign news to be primarily directed to Western recipients (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 2004; Thussu 2004; van Ginneken 1998). In turn, the dominance of news wholesalers can partly be attributed to a decline in the number of foreign correspondents (Hafez 2007). In this media environment, news on postcolonial societies has typically been dominated by themes of violence and conflict (Thussu 2004), and postcolonial subjects have tended to be portrayed as deviating from norms of Western rationality (Klaus and Kassel 2005; Roosvall 2010). This characterization can in turn be attributed to the overall use of differentiation strategies between in-groups and out-groups in news journalism (Sonwalkar 2005) and by difficulties of reporting from politically unstable and inaccessible locations (Luyendijk 2010). In addition, the objectivist style of news journalism risks naturalizing stereotypical accounts of postcolonial subjects, which in turn facilitates the reproduction of Eurocentrism in foreign news discourse. However, it is important to stress that Eurocentric conceptions of the world and the potential materialization of these views in news discourses do not necessarily consign all postcolonial subjects to a uniform category of 'others'. Rather, Eurocentrism is here perceived as enabling the construction of difference between groups within postcolonial societies. The elite perspective implicit of Eurocentrism can thus function to distinguish certain groups from others, thus ascribing legitimacy to specific groups. Eurocentric discourses would in the case studied here privilege the perspectives of elite groups and those who share elite interests.

### **3.1 Materials and analysis**

The current study qualitatively examines forty-four written foreign news items that cover news on chavistas and/or oppositional actors in the print editions of three elite newspapers: Dagens Nyheter (DN, Sweden), El País (EP, Uruguay) and the New York Times (NYT, US). The sample was obtained following a set of guiding principles.

The first principle concerns the selection of newspapers. Elite daily newspapers from countries characterized by different foreign policy agendas and geopolitical contexts were selected, although without any purposes of comparison. This approach was adopted due to the documented effects of foreign policy and the political contexts of the country of publication on the ideological character of foreign news reporting (Herman and Chomsky 2002), and on media discourse in general (Bickes, Otten, and Weymann 2014; Lundström 2013; Oberhuber et al 2005). The NYT is an internationally leading newspaper that is published from a country situated at the center of global capitalism that for more than a century has conceived of Latin America as its 'backyard'. DN, in turn, is published from a European country that has traditionally been characterized by non-alignment and a benevolent attitude to progressive countries of the South. Materials from EP are incorporated to analyze foreign news on Venezuela generated from another Latin American country that, at least on a general level, shares Venezuela's colonial history and the social structures that characterize its postcolonial present. Through analyses of these newspapers, the study can at least partially assess the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism across several geopolitical contexts, potentially strengthening the generalizability of this theory.

The second principle concerns the determination of selection periods and the data collection approach. To increase the volume of analysis materials from all three newspapers and to overcome representation particularities resulting from specificities of

a given situation, four key events in Venezuelan politics were chosen: the oil strike beginning in late 2002, the recall referendum of 2004, the presidential elections of 2006 and the referendum for constitutional reform of 2007<sup>1</sup>. Antagonisms between the chavistas and the opposition were heightened during these events, hence making them potentially interesting agents for the media. DN and NYT materials were collected through database searches (in Retriever and ProQuest, respectively, using the search word 'Venezuela'), and microfilm searches were also conducted in the case of DN. EP materials were collected from the National Library in Montevideo after reading the editions for the selected periods.

The final consideration of the data collection process is concerned with the development of the final sample. This involved excluding retrieved items that pertained to other genres and which focus on other topics. The remaining items were then read, and news items that paid notable attention to the composition and/or actions of the two groups were carefully selected. Based on principles of theoretical sampling, data collection and general analysis strategies were then combined: "it is a matter of finding indicators for particular concepts, expanding concepts into categories and, on the basis of these results, collecting further data" (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 27). The selection of materials from all of the examined periods and from all of the newspapers, where possible, was also prioritized at this stage to overcome inevitable particularities of the different newspapers and selection periods and to strengthen the degree of theoretical generalizability. This process involved the exclusion of items that did not contribute theoretically relevant insights. Information boxes and additional items in the content were excluded. The selection methods used allow for a degree of subjectivity, which is more or less unavoidable in qualitative research. However, subjectivity in this case does not imply arbitrariness because the selection process was governed by the overall guiding principles of data collection and by the aims of the study.

Table 1 specifies the analyzed materials.

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<sup>1</sup> The month in which the actual event took place was chosen as the selection period. Because the referendum of 2007 occurred on December 3, materials published in both November and December were selected.

**Table 1.** Number of selected articles in relation to newspapers and events.

Event (selection period)	<i>DN</i>	<i>EP</i>	<i>NYT</i>	Total (p. event)
Oil strike 2002–2003 (Dec. 2002)	3	5	4	12
Referendum 2004 (Aug. 2004)	5	5	4	14
Pres. Elections 2006 (Dec. 2006)	2	2	3	7
Referendum 2007 (Nov.–Dec. 2007)	4	4	3	11
Total (p. newspaper)	14	16	14	44

All of the items examined pertain to the foreign news genre, and the news article was the dominant discourse type analyzed. However, one news column (NYT<sub>4</sub>) and two briefs (DN<sub>7</sub>, DN<sub>8</sub>) were also included in the sample. While all of the items selected from EP were generated by news agencies or other external sources, all of the NYT items derive from the publication's offices. Eleven of the DN items analyzed were produced by the publication's staff correspondents while three items were drawn from news agencies. Although sourcing was not included as a selection criterion and falls beyond the analytical scope of this study, the lack of inhouse material provided in EP suggests that this newspaper is more heavily dependent on wire sources, which may have in turn shaped the discourse of its coverage.

While the analysis is linguistically driven, it does not overlook the important genre-specific conventions of meaning-making in journalistic discourse (Carvalho 2008; van Dijk 1988<sup>2</sup>). At the macrostructural level, the analysis has identified the named social actors in each item (especially chavistas and oppositional groups) and their functions within the major objects (e.g., strikes, violence, crime, class) in the text. While the concept of objects is similar to the notion of topics, the former term highlights that discourses construct rather than reflect reality (Carvalho 2008).

At the microstructural level, the analysis is more linguistically informed with the aim of discerning differences in constructions of the two political camps. A series of analytical tools was systematically applied to each item. At the most general linguistic level, the analysis examined the framing of the two political groups through in the interventions from quoted actors and from the journalistic voice. Framing is here defined as actions that “organize discourse according to a certain point of view or perspective” (Carvalho 2008, 169), and the concept is central to the construction of meaning in journalistic discourse. The framing analysis centers on examinations of phrases that associate the two groups as both individuals and political entities with certain values, objectives and struggles.

More micro-oriented, is the identification of referential strategies (Richardson 2007), and especially strategies that collectivize actors and which link them to a specific group. Related to this notion is the identification of predicational strategies (Richardson 2007), which are used to ascribe qualities to actors or groups. As with referential strategies,

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<sup>2</sup> Given that the author is bilingual (Spanish and Swedish) and his working language is English, the collected materials have been analyzed in their original language. Excerpts from DN and EP were translated by the author.

predication can unveil underlying ideological conceptions that the speaker imposes on the actors.

Moreover, transitivity analysis (Machin and Mayr 2012) is central to the analysis of actions (primarily material processes, but also verbal and mental ones), and especially with regards to constructions of confrontation between actors. Here, analytical focus has been placed on the construction of activity between participants (active agents vs. afflicted) in a specific circumstance. Transitivity implies the ascription of responsibility and blame to actions, which is ideologically significant. A related concept is that of nominalization (Machin and Mayr 2012) as replacing a verb with a noun can conceal actions and agents, which in turn has ideological implications.

Thus, this study acknowledges that media discourse across countries and languages frequently differs with respect to semantics and thematic structures (Oberhuber et al 2005), discourse positioning (Bickes, Otten, and Weymann 2014) and discursive strategies (Lundström 2013). However, such differences are not considered an obstacle for the current analysis. Instead, including diversified discourses in the materials increases the possibilities for exploring the multifaceted ways in which difference is constructed in and by the media. Moreover, provided that the methods employed allow for interpretation — and to ensure a systematic analysis — the analytical function of the aforementioned tools remains in plain view throughout the analysis of the constructions of difference presented in the following section.

## **4. Results**

Overall, the materials offer constructions of Venezuela as polarized between two opposing political camps with differing attitudes towards the government. Below, I present two general discursive strategies through which difference between the groups have been constructed: constructions of political rationality and violence. These strategies are analytically generated, and the discourses that they produce support an approach to difference-making that is in line with Eurocentric logics and, as will be discussed in the following section, which legitimates groups and practices that match such logics.

### **4.1 Political rationality**

An important strategy that has been used to differentiate the two groups has involved the construction of different political rationales, thus the politico-ideological logics that the groups are conveyed as acting in accordance with. Constructions of political rationality are not directly centered on specific events, but are for the most part conveyed through the ways in which the two opposing groups are framed in relation to their goals, values and political actions as well as through the referential and predicational strategies that are used to label them.

On a general level, rank and file chavistas and oppositional groups are constructed as following differing political rationales. While the chavistas are constructed as following what I refer to as a rationale of social justice, the opposition is constructed as following a western democratic rationale. The rationale of the chavistas highlights issues surrounding of poverty reduction, social programming, and revolutionary leadership support while the rationale of the opposition stresses the following core values implicit of western democracy: the separation of power, anti-authoritarianism and elections.

These different political rationales are presented lucidly in phrases that frame the Venezuelan situation through the journalist's voice.

(1) Venezuelans were presented with two starkly different options: supporting a leader who had promised to transform this country to ease life of the poor or throw him out for what opposition groups call his autocratic tendencies and ineptitude. (NYT8)

(2) Venezuelans are deeply divided on their views of the ruler [Chávez]. His supporters praise his efforts to improve the living conditions of the poor, while his opponents accuse him of having dictatorial tendencies and of administering the economy poorly. (EP6)

Central to the framing of the situation are phrases that construct Venezuela as being politically divided (e.g., "Venezuelans are deeply divided...") and phrases that explain the logics of this division (e.g., "supporting a leader ... to ease life of the poor" vs. "throw him out for ... autocratic tendencies ..."). Such a discourse frames Chávez as the major cause of polarization as his followers and opponents follow opposing rationales. According to this construction, the living conditions of the poor, and hence social struggles, are pivotal to the chavistas while the struggle against ineptitude for more democratic rule is viewed as central to the opposition.

The construction of chavistas as fighting for a social cause is coherent with associations of this group with the poor, which are demonstrated by referential strategies used to geographically localize the group. Individuals who support Chávez are described as "people from the shanty towns" (DN1). They are also perceived to live in Caracas' "poor peripheries" (DN1), "poor districts" (NYT1), "poor shanty towns" (EP6), "poorest communities" (NYT9) and "slums" (NYT14).

Although references that link the opposition to the wealthy exist, the socioeconomic interests of this group, as cause for opposing Chávez, is not foregrounded (which is visible in excerpts 1 and 2). Such a construction is supported by an analysis of the framing of social actors. Actors that oppose Chávez — both leaders and regular citizens — are often quoted in the materials, and several quotes from these actors use phrases that highlight democratic values.

(3) "The shortages are his fault," Mr. Vega said of President Chávez. "The people want new elections, and he refuses to listen." (NYT4)

(4) What is taking place in Venezuela is not "a conventional confrontation, but one between a government of authoritarian vocation and a country (...)." (EP8)

(5) – I will vote no. It is alarming that the president will be able to promulgate emergency power acts. All power should not be in the hands of one man, whoever it is, says Luz Astorino. (DN14)

The political commitments of these actors are framed through phrases connoting ideals of democracy and (anti-)authoritarianism such as, "The people want," "new elections," "government of authoritarian vocation," "emergency power acts" and "All power ... in the hands of one man." Through the use of such phrases, Chávez's antagonists are framed as acting against an alleged authoritarian rule, and thus as fighting for a more democratic alternative.

The framing exemplified above can be contrasted with quotations from rank and file chavistas.

(6) “Now there is concern for the barrios, for the people who are in need,” said Víctor Rojas, a Pdvsa employee for 23 years who is helping oversee this project. “I’m sad we didn’t do this before. We could have changed people’s lives. They would be living in dignity, not in misery.” (NYT6)

(7) In the vast crowd of people, Carina Rivas is standing and listening. She works as a cleaner and says that she is here to support her president. – I have been able to build my house thanks to him, and my job at the cooperative is also to his credit, she says. She does not know much about the new constitution. – However, I trust my president, she says. (DN13)

These chavistas are quoted as stressing values that differ from those of the oppositional members quoted above. Phrases such as “concern for the barrios,” “people ... in need,” “people’s lives,” “living in dignity,” “not in misery,” “build my house,” and “job at the cooperative” serve to construct these individuals as placing welfare and struggle against social inequality at the forefront. Furthermore, the woman in the second excerpt is framed as being ignorant with regard to the proposal that she will vote for, and as basing her vote on her trust in Chávez. It is important to stress that the ignorance ascribed to her is not constructed by a quoted phrase but by a claim by the journalist through a clause that constructs a mental process. As framed, her behavior goes against any democratic rationality, and instead resembles a dogmatic behavior. The excerpt thus exemplifies that the rationale of social justice also allows for a blind trust in Chávez, because the president is conceived as bearing the responsibility for her social gains. Similarly, a woman is quoted as saying that “The comandante [Chávez] should have more power because he is the force behind our revolution” (NYT13). Such a statement accentuates the will to give Chávez increased authority, which conflicts with the rationale ascribed to the opposition. The journalist frames this quote as deviant by stating that “Such statements may sound dogmatic, but they are voiced with a fervor in organized campaigning that is unmatched in richer areas of Venezuela’s largest cities, from which much of the opposition to Mr. Chávez is drawn” (NYT13). By highlighting the plurality of the comment (“statements” and “they are”), referencing dogmatism (“may sound dogmatic”), and stressing the unusualness of such “fervor,” the constructed deviant behavior is differentiated from behavior of the opposition.

Moreover, referential and predicational strategies applied through journalist narratives in reference to chavistas introduce another dimension to such constructions. Chavistas are cited as being “fervent” (NYT7, NYT8, NYT14) or “ecstatic” (DN13, DN14), implying that these individuals are emotional and heated. Another strategy used relates to the concept of loyalty, demonstrated in the following phrases: “Chávez loyalists” (NYT7, NYT13), “circuitos bolivarianos, blindly loyal” (DN1, my emphasis), and “staunchest backers” (NYT14). Related to this is the use of a predicational strategy that implies a degree of religiosity, shown in the following statement: “Evelyn Uzcanga, 27, is all Chavista, all the time, a fervent believer in President Hugo Chávez...” (NYT7, my emphasis). Taken together, these excerpts suggest that chavistas are perceived as deviant and as harboring unusually strong support for the president, which in turn complements constructions of this group as dogmatic.

It is, on the other hand, difficult to find similar presentations of the opposition, although there are examples of loaded adjectives that are used as a form of predication. This group is described as “increasingly intractable” (NYT1), “dogged” (NYT7), and “a fractured, stumbling movement” (NYT5). Rather, these strategies that do not imply facets of

dogmatism, and unlike the referential strategies used to describe chavistas, the opposition is described as a unit and not in reference to the individuals who compose it. In one excerpt, a fraction of the opposition is described as “the most furious enemies [of Chávez]” (EP5), which denotes a predicational strategy that describes the individuals as being ill-tempered (similar to fervent). The journalist frames this group as preferring to prolong a strike against the government over Christmas and risk the holiday celebration over allowing Chávez to remain in power. One of the strikers is quoted as stating that “Freedom has no price and freedom cannot be traded for a tank of gasoline ...” (EP5). Hence, Chávez’s “most furious enemies” are framed as struggling for freedom, a sentiment that reinforces democratic ideals ascribed to the opposition and that limits connotations of dogmatism.

However, the materials also offer examples of the democratic rationales of the opposition that are being negotiated. Most important are perhaps constructions that link the opposition to the 2002 coup that temporarily ousted Chávez. Apart from quotations from Chávez and other leading chavistas that refer to the opposition’s actions as insurrectional or putschist, there are examples in which the journalistic voice frames the group similarly. For example, one article uses phrases as “the opposition’s failed coup attempt against President Hugo Chávez,” which clearly links the opposition to the coup. The same article later phrases that opponents in the past “had also tried all manner of illegal means to get rid of him [Chávez]” (NYT5), which links the opposition to illegal actions. However, such non-democratic actions are also framed as having occurred in the past, implying a break with the current situation.

#### 4.2 Violence

All of the analyzed newspapers contain articles that focus on violence. As an object, it appears mainly as what can be referred to as political violence, although references to general criminal violence are also present in the texts. Referential strategies have politicized violent actions by attributing agents of violence and afflicted groups as being either chavistas or part of the opposition. In general, constructions of violence serve to portray the situation in Venezuela as deviating from the western democratic ideals of democracy and liberty through the reported use of politically motivated violence, and most notably against government opponents. Major differences in portrayals of violence are demonstrated in the ways that the two groups are ascribed agency over material processes of violence. In obtaining such findings, an analysis of transitivity complemented with an analysis of nominalization is central.

Characteristic to this method of conveying difference is the construction of oppositional actors as being afflicted of violence. On one level, clear-cut constructions place responsibility on either chavistas or actors that presumably support Chávez.

(8) Woman dead in election disturbances A woman was killed when supporters of Venezuela’s president Hugo Chávez opened fire against oppositional demonstrators in the capital Caracas on Monday, a hospital source declared according to AFP. (DN7)

(9) DISTURBANCES. Hundreds of oppositionals that protested at the plaza Altamira, an anti-chavista bastion to the east of the capital, were attacked with firearms by a group of motorcyclists that wore red shirts with badges in favor of “No,” which was the option of Chávez in the referendum. (EP10)

Although both excerpts are passive (the goal rather than the agent is the grammatical subject), the referential strategies included in these passages clearly state that chavistas are presumed to be the constructed agents behind each violent deed (e.g., “supporters of ... Hugo Chávez) while the afflicted belong to the opposition (e.g., “oppositional demonstrators”). The identification of arms used (“opened fire,” “firearms”) and the reported lethal outcomes of the attacks suggest that the political violence reported is of a serious nature. Furthermore, the victims are reported as have been attacked in the process of demonstrating, which is revealed through the reference to the function of the oppositional (“demonstrators”) in the first excerpt and through the description of the circumstance (“that protested at plaza Altamira”) in the second excerpt. This in turn suggests that the reported victims were attacked based on their political commitments while exercising their democratic rights. The lack of further contextualization that may have provided a more complete understanding of impetus behind the alleged chavista violence helps to construct these material processes as happening without provocation. Similar passages published in EP construct the opposition as being subjected to violence at the hands of police or security forces.

(10) At least 20 people exhibited injuries and symptoms of suffocation yesterday after that the National Guard, using tear gas and rubber bullets, dispersed a group of demonstrators that protested against the government of Hugo Chávez in front of the headquarters of the state-owned *Petróleos de Venezuela*. (EP1)

In this example, the National Guard is constructed as the active agent that violently disperses a group of oppositional demonstrators, which in turn links the injured victims with the dispersed demonstrators. As with the reported chavista violence listed above, government opponents are here referred to as “demonstrators,” highlighting their civilian character. Such a discourse thus serves to construct an image of the opposition as facing violence from the state while acting in accordance with their democratic responsibilities.

The relationship between the violent agent and the afflicted is, on the other hand, constructed differently in cases where supporters of the opposition are active in violent activity. At one level there are references are made to situations in which both camps are reported as acting violently. The following phrases act as examples: “clashes between opposing student groups” (NYT12), or an event where “groups of ‘chavistas’ and ‘antichavistas’ clashed throwing stones, bottles and other objects at each other” (EP2). The nominalization “clashes” and verb “clash” included in these examples serve to generalize the violent events so that the cause of the violence remains unspecified, which in turn equates responsibility to both of the parties involved. These constructions thus do not include passive victims. On another level, there are examples of constructions of violence that specify the opposition’s role as agent but describe the circumstances of the incidents in a manner that justifies the occurrence of violence:

(11) The shots came from the square’s west side and were fired recklessly against the government-hostile mass of people that threw themselves to the ground. Three people were killed and thirty or so were injured. Seven men and two pistols were taken into custody by the police, but eyewitnesses doubt that all of them had been involved. In the confusion after the deed the demonstrators were close to lynching an ice cream vendor whom they wrongly associated with “los círculos bolivarianos,” the president’s [Chávez] most devoted and now armed supporters. (DN2, my emphasis)

(12) After the incident, several hundred oppositionals carried out a protest on one of the principle highways to the east of the capital [Caracas], where they formed barricades to block the traffic for several hours. Some of the demonstrators stormed and sacked a truck that was driving on the road. (EP10)

In these excerpts, oppositional actors are constructed as the active agents behind the attack against the ice cream vendor and truck, which represent the afflicted. However, a difference in relation to the construction of chavista violence is that the agents are here referred to as “demonstrators,” which foregrounds their civilian character. Furthermore, none of the victims of oppositional violence are presented as civil political opponents. In one case, the victim is an ice cream vendor who was wrongly attacked, and in the other example, violence is directed at a truck that is not specified further, resulting in a construction that removes the involvement of human victims. Another difference concerns the means through which the violence is carried out; none of the excerpts make reference to the use of arms by the opposition.

Furthermore, both excerpts construct the actions of the opposition as reactions to violence directed against them. The DN excerpt accomplishes this by first reporting a lethal attack against a group of individuals belonging to the opposition that is referred to as a “government-hostile mass.” Although the construction uses a nominalization (“The shots”) and the passive voice (“were fired”), which abstracts the act of violence by omitting an active agent, it still foregrounds the opposition’s role as a victim of deadly violence. Furthermore, the construction of the attack against the ice cream vendor is framed under the following circumstance: “In the confusion after the deed.” This links actions to the attack against the opposition and thus provides a rationale for the violent act. The construction also indicates that the violent reaction was directed toward an allegedly armed chavista group, justifying the oppositional violence. In a similar manner, the EP excerpt’s statement “After the incident” in fact refers to the reported attack against oppositional demonstrators that is exemplified in excerpt 9. The assault of the truck is thus constructed as a reaction to the armed attack directed toward oppositional demonstrators. By providing background information on previous armed attacks inflicted on the opposition, the violent actions of the opposition are contextualized, which in turn constructs these actions as somewhat reasonable reactions.

As was shown in the examples above, constructions of violence against the opposition have largely involved portrayals of this group as being attacked in their role as demonstrators by an active agent. Constructions of violent events in which chavistas represent the afflicted group are somewhat different. The one excerpt found in which a chavista is reported to have been killed conveys a highly abstract discourse.

(13) Violence has already marred the weeks preceding the vote. Two students involved in anti-government protests claimed they had been kidnapped and tortured this week by masked men in Barquisimeto, an interior city. And in Valencia, another city, a supporter of Mr. Chávez was shot dead this week in an exchange of gunfire at a protest site. (NYT14, my emphasis)

Reviewing the underlined sentence, one can see that while the afflicted is identified as a chavista through the uses of referential strategy (“supporter of Mr. Chávez”), the violent action is abstracted through the use of passive voice in the clause (“was shot dead”) and through the lack of agent specified. It is important to note the circumstance (“exchange of gunfire”) that replaces the agent. The use of the nominalization “exchange of gunfire” not only conceals the agent (we do not know who did what) but also implies that the

armed activity involved at least two actors. Given the context of conflict in Venezuela, one can presume that the abstracted gunmen belong to both camps, although this remains unclear. Furthermore, the killing is reported to have taken place at the site of a protest (“protest site”). Based on previous reporting on Venezuela, one can draw the conclusion that the event occurred during an oppositional demonstration, because this group is known for holding protests. With the backdrop of reports citing attacks on the opposition while demonstrating together with the “exchange of gunfire” nominalization, the construction supports the assumption that the oppositional protesters had been attacked and resorted to firing back.

This construction of the chavista killing illustrates a clear difference in how violence against the two camps has been constructed. Abstracting the agent and nominalizing the violent event masks any explicit reference to oppositional involvement in the killing, while the constructed circumstance serves to ascribe a degree of responsibility to the afflicted. Such a construction serves to construct an image of opposition supporters as not being responsible for unprovoked and politically charged violence. In turn, the chavistas are not conveyed as having been subjected to unprovoked political violence.

## 5. Conclusions

On a general level, the results of this study support the claim that a Western rationality serves as a benchmark for othering subjects in foreign news discourse (Roosvall 2010). However, the results more specifically suggest that differences presented in the studied case follow Eurocentric logics.

The construction of difference follows Eurocentric logics in the sense that the opposition as it has been constructed becomes an in-group that is compatible with Eurocentric values and practices, while chavistas to great extent deviate from these norms. Especially important in this case are the values of human rights and democracy, which are central to the Eurocentric self-image (Amin 1989, 107).

Oppositional groups are depicted as victims of human rights violations by being constructed as victims of unprovoked violent assaults while demonstrating. In minimizing emphasis on oppositional involvement in violent activities by nominalizing the occurrence of such occurrences or by justifying such actions as reactions, the same overall picture is sustained. At the same time, the construction of chavistas as fervent and dogmatic complements their reported use of political violence.

Moreover, the opposition is to a great extent constructed as championing democratic values, which are clearly demonstrated through interventions from the journalist voice and in quotations that frame this group. Such framing stresses the opposition’s struggle for democracy at the expense of foregrounding the relationship between their eventual class interests and their political struggles. The opposite is the case for the chavistas, whose socioeconomic interests are constructed as guiding their political rationale. In this sense, the ways in which the opposing groups are ascribed different political rationales serve to conceal the class-related nature of the Venezuelan conflict.

The ways in which such differences follow Eurocentric logics are related to issues of legitimacy (Chouliaraki 2005). On one level, the victimization of the opposition and the construction of this as struggling against an authoritarian government serve to limit any questioning of the group’s legitimacy. Associations of chavistas with violence and dogmatism conversely serve to delegitimize this group. However, the issue of legitimacy

also applies on a broader level. The results suggest that patterns of difference-making between culturally similar, non-Western subjects closely adhere to the represented subject's relations to the politico-ideological ideals of Eurocentrism namely, the defense of liberalism and global capitalism. Chavistas and the opposition not only represent differing ideologies on the redistribution of wealth and state intervention in the economy; the two groups also hold opposing views on the role of Venezuela and Latin America vis-à-vis global capitalism. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the construction of difference in foreign news discourse not only follows Western cultural norms but is also imbued with the legitimation of western political and economic structures, in turn exposing the limitations of theoretical perspectives that do not complement the West-Other dichotomy in the context of global capitalism (Dirlik 1997; Lazarus 2011). Because difference-making, according to Eurocentric logics, is visible in newspaper media generated from several geopolitical contexts, this study suggests that Eurocentrism works as an overarching framework that guides the discursive construction of difference in foreign news discourse, both in Western and non-Western elite newspapers.

The critique of Eurocentrism presented in this study on news media discourse is in several ways still in its infancy and requires further development. The recurrence of similar patterns of construction in the studied newspapers derived from three different geopolitical contexts raises questions about the discursive standardization of information in foreign news. A more detailed examination of the implications of sourcing for the reproduction of Eurocentric discourse, and particularly for non-Western contexts, may thus be an important point of departure for future studies.

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