Through a post-political gaze
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Through a post-political gaze
On the ideological loading of democracy in the coverage of Chávez's Venezuela
Abstract


Rooted in ideology critique, this dissertation studies the construction of democracy in the coverage of Venezuela during the era of President Hugo Chávez. The aim of this endeavor is twofold. First, the dissertation aims to understand the relationship between ideology and the construction of democracy in journalism on foreign political phenomena. Second, it attempts to explore the ways in which the relationship between ideology and democracy in journalism serves to legitimize or delegitimize the struggle for social justice in nations in the global South vis-à-vis the political and economic fundamentals of global capitalism.

The dissertation comprises three articles that study the construction of democracy in depictions of the Venezuelan political system and its key political actors. Article I studies the construction of (il)legitimate democracy in relation to the Venezuelan government, Article II explores the construction of difference between Chávez’s supporters and his opponents, and Article III studies the coverage of the coup d’état against Chávez in 2002. All three articles are methodologically rooted in critical discourse analysis and rely on materials from a sample of three elite newspapers: Dagens Nyheter (Sweden), El País (Uruguay), and the New York Times (US).

Across the studies, there are four macro-strategies that in different ways serve to ideologically load the notion of democracy. Three of these strategies – the constructs of populism, of power concentration and of difference – serve to define political deviance and to (de)legitimize political actors in relation to democracy. The fourth macro-strategy, relativization, serves to justify actions that contradict established democratic principles but serve greater politico-ideological goals.

(De)legitimation in relation to democracy corresponds with the closeness of a group of actors to the dominant political practices and values within global capitalism. Journalistic reporting thus follows a post-political gaze; it is generally in accordance with the political consensus that characterizes the post-Cold War era. Through this gaze, any challenge to the political tenets of global capitalism fails on democratic grounds.

Keywords: Ideology, Democracy, Hegemony, Journalism, International journalism, Post-politics, Critical discourse analysis, Media studies, Venezuela

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PART II

ARTICLE I

ARTICLE II
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ARTICLE III
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I felt rather confident at the interview for this PhD candidate position when one of the professors at the meeting – who was probably tired of my cockiness and not so impressed with my project plan – interrupted me and said: “Ernesto. The thesis you want to write has already been written. In 1986. By me.” Although I was fairly certain that something worthy of research must have happened in the world since the year that Maradona blessed the planet with his unorthodox playing skills, my confidence disappeared – along with all of the air in the room – and I was sure that my first trip to Örebro had been in vain. However, something must have gone fatally wrong in the admission process because I was accepted as a PhD student and, eventually, I finished my dissertation. Because research, like everything in social life, is the outcome of a collective effort, I would like to show my appreciation to a number of people.

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Ernesto Abalo
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1. Introduction

“Democracy is a northern luxury. The south is permitted its show, which is denied to nobody. And in the final analysis, it doesn’t bother anyone that politics be democratic so long as the economy is not.” (Eduardo Galeano, 1991:110)

In a debate session of the Swedish Riksdagen (Parliament) in 2008, the leader of Folkpartiet (the People’s Party, liberal), Jan Björklund, verbally attacked Lars Ohly, then the front man of oppositional Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party, socialist), for saying that Hugo Chávez, the president of Venezuela, was a democrat and that the politics of the Swedish government were undemocratic (Brors, 2008:12):

- Apologize, Ohly! Björklund demanded.
- I have nothing to apologize for! Chávez is not one of my favorites, but there are democratic elections in Venezuela. Whereas you diminish the amplitude of democracy with your privatizations, answered Ohly.
- Bresnjev also won all of the elections in the Soviet Union, replied Björklund. (Brors, 2008:12, my translation)

In our contemporary political history, the struggle to define something so obvious but simultaneously so nebulous as democracy has become critical for claiming political legitimacy. One can soundly argue that in contemporary society, democracy is considered to be neutral—a value that is embraced across the political continuum and the minimal requirement for judging the acceptability of a political regime. As French Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou argues, democracy is the “dominant emblem” of our contemporary society. However, he also claims that the concept is axiomatic because although “everyone” seems to be democratic, “everyone” is not really everyone but only those who have the privilege of defining democracy; thus, the people of the Western world (Badiou, 2011:6-7).

The excerpt provided above serves as an empirical illustration of the many aspects involved in the definition and everyday usage of discourses on democracy; thus, it also serves to illustrate the objective of the current dissertation. First, the example above illustrates that defining democracy is a struggle in which discourse—and, hence, the use of language—constitute important armory. What is to be considered democratic is not clear beforehand but rather is negotiated and contested, as demonstrated by the debate between the two Swedish politicians cited above. This brings us to
the next aspect: the definition of democracy is also a matter of ideology. In
the example above, the ideological aspect is plainly visible not only in the
political color of the two actors but also in the arguments they employ.
The leftist leader distances privatization—the selling of public property—
from democracy, which implies that market logics run counter to the prin-
ciples of democracy. In contrast, the liberal representative pits democracy
against communism by associating Chávez with former Soviet President
Bresnjev. The ideological character of democracy as discourse is also closely
related to the question of legitimacy. In the example above, Ohly legitimi-
izes Chávez’s rule by referring to the existence of “democratic elections
in Venezuela,” whereas Björklund delegitimizes Chávez by associating
Chávez’s electoral victories with elections in the one-party Soviet system. In
any case, democracy is positive and provides political legitimacy. Further-
more, the term democracy is often defined and used to describe a country’s
political system when assessed. In the example above, the two parliament-
tarians are at the very locus of Swedish democracy, but they are discussing
and, to certain degree, defining whether a country of the global South with
a political history that is starkly different from that of their own country
should be regarded as democratic. This discursive struggle, with all aspects
accounted for, is mediated, packaged as a news story, and distributed to
the public through mainstream media channels.

The focus of this dissertation is how the notion of democracy is ideolog-
ically loaded in international journalism, and newspaper discourse on
Venezuela serves as a case. How democracy is defined in the media plays
an important role in shaping the political knowledge of the citizenry. This
is especially true for international journalism, which is an important source
of knowledge about world events. However, because such mediation both
encompasses and occurs in a context characterized by economic, social and
political power struggles at both national and global levels, the meanings
attributed to democracy also indicate how such power relations are legiti-
mized or challenged. Therefore, studying the ideological loading of notions
of democracy in journalism is an important endeavor.

Below, the problem of the dissertation is described in detail and placed
into a social scientific context.

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1 International journalism is used as a generic term that encompasses all types of
editorial content regarding international affairs, not just news (see Williams, 2011).
In other instances, as in Article II, I have used the term foreign news to refer to
news content.
1.1 The problem

If there is any consensus among media researchers, it is with respect to the importance of the media to democracy. Scholars representing different—and sometimes even opposing—theoretical positions share a common concern that the actions of the media are somehow important to the functioning of democracy (see Aalberg and Curran, 2011; Baker, 2002; Baker, 2007; Christians et al., 2009; Curran, 2011; Dahlgren, 2009; Gans, 2003; Gunther and Mughan, 2000; Hackett and Zhao, 2005; Kellner, 2004; McChesney, 1999; McNair, 2007; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2005; Trappel et al., 2011). Of course, there is no unanimity in this area of research; for example, significant differences of opinion exist with regard to how the media should be structured vis-à-vis the state and the market to best serve democracy. Although such differences are important and will be addressed again in the context of the dissertation’s theoretical approach, my main point here is that much of the scholarly attention given to the relationship between media and democracy concerns what the media does for democracy. The media is thus perceived as an actor that, for better or for worse, has effects on an ongoing democratic process.

Such an approach to media and democracy is highly valuable and has provided important insights into the performance of the media in relation to surrounding political and social structures. However, the current dissertation aims to tweak the inquiry regarding the relationship between the media and democracy to focus on the question of what democracy is made to mean in the media, which is a relatively under-researched aspect in this field. This inquiry centers on an ideology-critical approach to journalism and on the ways in which the media, through the use of language, constructs meaning around democracy. Central to the ideology-critical impetus of this dissertation is understanding the relationship between the construction of democracy and the political and economic fundamentals of global capitalism. The scope is delimited to international journalism, which is an important source of information for people who seek knowledge of global occurrences. In addition, as Williams notes, international journalism is an important ingredient in the exercise of political power at the global level because, as a form of soft power, international journalism can influence the conduct of international relations (Williams, 2011:17).

The current dissertation thus straddles two research fields, which can be denominated media and democracy and international journalism. As will be explored in Chapter 2, which accounts for previous research, studies investigating how journalism ideologically loads notions of democracy are scarce. This is especially true in the field of media and democracy, where, as stated above, democracy is treated as an ongoing political process that is
affected by journalism rather than as a journalistic construction. Moreover, although there are several studies in the field of international journalism on how democracy is ideologically loaded (Garyantes and Murphy, 2010; Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Kim, 2000; Moyo, 2010), certain gaps must be filled. For example, important research on this subject has been conducted in the context of the Cold War, which greatly shaped the ideological character of international journalism. However, the vast political changes that have materialized across the global landscape after the end of the Cold War, such as the global expansion of capitalism and liberal democracy, begs the question of how extensively such changes have shaped the journalistic interpretation of foreign events in general and of democracy in particular. Therefore, more research on the contemporary construction of democracy in the media is needed.

The conceptualization of democracy is understood here as an important symbolic battlefield for the attribution of political legitimacy in today’s world. With the end of the Cold War and the accompanying disintegration of the Socialist camp in Eastern Europe, the capitalist world system and its liberal ideological fundamentals had no foreseeable challengers. In the wake of the Soviet collapse, Fukuyama wrote triumphantly about the end of history, claiming the endpoint of “mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (quoted in Cockin and Morrison, 2010:11). Fukuyama’s thesis seemed to be validated; the former socialist republics of Eastern Europe were transformed into states that sought to adopt liberal democratic characteristics (at least with respect to the existence of party pluralism, universal elections and privately owned media), and the former military dictatorships in Latin America had been re-democratized years before. Generally speaking, one could argue that liberal democracy, with its variations, became existing democracy and thus the form of democratic government. The expansion of liberal democracy was accompanied by the global expansion of capitalism, and significant parts of the former Socialist bloc became integrated into global capitalism. Additionally, the neoliberal character of capitalism, which began to take shape in the 1970s and indicated an extended liberalization of the economy, now reinforced the power of ruling classes on a global scale (Harvey, 2005; Harvey, 2006). As Margaret Thatcher explained in relation to her implemented neoliberal policies, there is no alternative. This phrase summarized the zeitgeist.

As Tesfahuney and Dahlstedt argue, these changes signified the globalization of the idea of a post-political world order. Political consensus reigned, the days of great ideological differences in the political mainstream vanished, and the economy became severely detached from the political
sphere; at the same time, economic rationality reigned in every sphere (Tes-fahuney and Dahlstedt, 2008). Some scholars argue that the meaning of democracy in this new political context—especially in the political mainstream of the Western world—was ideologically narrowed to fit the logics of liberalism and capitalism (Amin, 2004; Bensaïd, 2011; Brown, 2011). Others note that currently, democracy not only signifies a specific type of political order and specific practices but also, in some instances, serves as a discourse of legitimation, even of military intervention (see also Chomsky, 2006; Farrelly, 2008), which risks eviscerating its meaning (Farrelly, 2008).

Despite the post-political character of the post-Cold War era, one must understand that the dominant economic, political and ideological characteristics of the current world system are not static. The uneven power relations within and between nations in the global capitalist system also stimulate resistance and upheaval, not least in the region commonly termed the global South. The beginning of the twenty-first century saw the election of leftist governments of shifting radicalism in many South American countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela. Some of these countries had suffered from military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, and all of them were confronting the social consequences of the harsh neoliberal policies implemented in the 1990s (Barrett et al., 2008; Regalado Álvarez, 2007). The election of leftist governments, intended to reform neoliberal economic policies and thereby to diminish poverty and social exclusion, should therefore be regarded not only as a clear break with the region’s past, but also with some of the political fundamentals of the idea of a post-political order.

This dissertation studies the coverage of Venezuela during the presidency of Hugo Chávez as an empirical case to understand the ideological loading

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2 This dissertation uses the term *global South* and treats Bolivarian Venezuela as an exponent of the global South. Bullard explains that the term global South is a “political concept with theoretical roots informed by global patterns of domination and resistance” (Bullard, 2012:725). In this sense, the global South is a political actor that represents those dominated by and the resisters of neoliberal globalization (Bullard, 2012). The term has also been used more loosely as a generic term to describe less-developed economies, which are mainly situated in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In this sense (although it is not without dispute), the term global South functions as a post-Cold War substitute for the term *Third World*, which has its origins in the Non-Aligned Movement (see Prashad, 2010). Another similar term is *periphery*, which is an analytic category within world systems theory (Wallerstein, 2007). Because this dissertation uses the term global South to make sense of the geopolitical character of the world order and not as an analytical category with a strict definition, the term global South is sometimes used interchangeably with the term Third World.
of democracy. This endeavor is motivated by the understanding that as a result of the political process known as the Bolivarian Revolution, the Venezuelan government has become one of the most radical leftist governments in South America, not only with respect to its economic and foreign policies but also with respect to the restructuring of its political infrastructure. The presidency of Chávez, which spanned from 1999 to 2013, was characterized by a consistent position against neoliberalism, as demonstrated by its attempts to secure national control over the country’s vast oil industry (Ellner, 2008; Lander, 2008). Venezuela under Chávez also took a clear stance against US regional dominance and was a key player in projects aimed at regional integration (Ellner, 2008; Hellinger, 2006; Hellinger, 2011a). In this sense, the Bolivarian Revolution has been an important voice of resistance from the global South. To some extent, the Chávez government challenged a liberal democratic model in favor of a more radical model that promoted the mobilization of the masses, which manifested not only in the heavy use of suffrages to elect political personnel and to pass constitutional reforms but also in the use of government funds to empower local communities (Buxton, 2011; Cannon, 2009; Ellner, 2008; Ellner, 2010). Nonetheless, the Bolivarian Revolution has been highly controversial. The national opposition, as well as foreign commentators and politicians, have accused Chávez of being authoritarian and of restricting democracy (Ellner, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2008; López Maya, 2007; López Maya and Lander, 2011), and Venezuela under Chávez was also characterized by a failed coup, political violence, and social and political polarization. Democracy in Venezuela is thus complex and deeply entangled with past and present conflicts over control of the country’s vast oil resources and the revenues derived therefrom (Ellner, 2008).

Nevertheless, Venezuela under Chávez’s government serves as an important case for understanding the ideological loading of the concept of democracy because the Venezuelan government reformulated democracy into a radical construct linked to the goals of combatting neoliberalism and, in the long run, capitalism. In this sense, the Venezuelan political project poses a problem for the post-political framing of politics. The unusual characteristics of Venezuelan politics during the Chávez era make its coverage a critical case (Danermark et al., 2003) of empirical analysis. Therefore, by studying this case, one can explore how journalistic interpretation and recontextualization of different aspects of Venezuelan politics interacts with well-established notions of democracy and legitimate politics and with the uneven power relations between and within nations in global capitalism. At the same time, if other aspects are taken into consideration, the coverage of Venezuela under Chávez constitutes a normal case (Danermark
et al., 2003) of international journalism. The political turbulence involving several violent events and Chávez’s charismatic but somehow awkward style made Venezuela newsworthy according to the news values of international journalism in the global South (see Thussu, 2004; Williams, 2011). In this sense, it is likely that reporting on Venezuela is rather conflict-oriented and that the ideological loading of democracy is very closely tied to this type of reporting.

1.2 Aim and research questions

Drawing on an ideology-critical perspective, this dissertation uses a sample of elite newspapers to study how international journalism constructs Venezuelan politics during the Chávez era. The aim of this endeavor is twofold. First, the dissertation aims to understand the relationship between ideology and the construction of democracy in journalism on foreign political phenomena. Second, it attempts to explore the ways in which the relationship between ideology and democracy in journalism serves to legitimize or delegitimize the struggle for social justice in nations in the global South vis-à-vis the political and economic fundamentals of global capitalism. In fulfilling this twofold aim, this dissertation contributes to the scant ideology-critical theorization on journalistic understandings of democracy and their implications for hegemony.

This dissertation poses three research questions to fulfill these aims. Each question is answered in a specific article:

1. How is (il)legitimate democracy constructed with respect to the practices of the Venezuelan government?
2. How are supporters and opponents of the Venezuelan government constructed and differentiated, and how does such construction correspond with prevalent Western values and norms regarding politics in general and democracy in particular?
3. How is the toppling of the Venezuelan government in April of 2002 constructed, and how does reporting construct the events as democratically acceptable or unacceptable?

The backbone of the dissertation comprises three articles that present systematic, empirical research on newspaper discourse on Venezuela. Taken together, these articles examine the construction of democracy with a focus on Venezuela’s political system and key political actors.

The first article explores whether the Venezuelan political system is constructed as a legitimate democracy and how such construction corresponds to different conceptions of democracy. This study seeks to understand the hegemonic implications of the conception of a legitimate democracy; that
is, how it corresponds with political and socioeconomic power relations both in Venezuela and globally. The second study explores how government supporters and opponents are constructed and differentiated in the media discourse and how such construction can be understood through the framework of Eurocentrism, which assumes the cultural and politico-ideological fundamentals of the Western world to be normative and which, according to critics, views democracy as a central component of the Western self-image. In this sense, the second study seeks to understand how these Western political norms serve to sort and create in-groups and out-groups and to legitimize/delegitimize specific actors and their values and political practices. The third article seeks to understand the conception of democracy in relation to greater socioeconomic interests. By examining the media coverage of the illegal and unconstitutional overthrow of an anti-hegemonic government and by scrutinizing how such practices are denounced and legitimatized by the media, this study provides insights on the importance attributed by the media to constitutionality vis-à-vis the potential interests in counteracting the radical politics of the Venezuelan government when constructing what is democratically acceptable.

The next chapter presents a review of the research in the fields of media and democracy and international journalism. That chapter is followed by an account of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. The subsequent chapter presents the methods used and discusses the quality of the research. Chapter 5 discusses the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela to contextualize the studied case. The first part of the dissertation closes with a chapter that presents the main conclusions of the dissertation and develops their theoretical contributions. In the second part of the thesis, the papers that constitute the backbone of this study are presented.
2. Research review

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the current state of the art of the research on topics central to the aim of this dissertation to identify not only the major contributions to these fields of study but also the gaps and inconsistencies that remain. The existence of these gaps and the aim to provide further knowledge to fill them are the raison d’être of this dissertation.

The next section accounts for two research fields that are closely related to the aim of this dissertation and broadly maps their general characteristics. Subsequently, a more detailed discussion regarding a number of empirical studies that analyze the construction of democracy in the media is presented. Finally, the contributions and shortcomings of these studies are discussed, and the contribution of this dissertation is asserted.

2.1 Across two research fields

Due to the empirical and analytical focus of this dissertation, one can argue that this study lies at the intersection of two research fields: that of media and democracy and that of international journalism. Note that these research fields are not presented in an all-encompassing way. For example, virtually any component of media research can be said to thematically address questions of media and democracy because media studies, like any research subject in the social sciences, seeks to understand the consequences of a specific phenomenon for society. In addition, the topics included under the umbrella of international journalism are so versatile that accounting for all of the existing branches would be fruitless. Nonetheless, it is important to map the general characteristics of previous research on the relationship between media and democracy and on international journalism to place the current dissertation in the context of an ongoing social scientific discussion. My ambition is thus to select a body of research that provides a general but fair picture of the research on media and democracy and on international journalism.

2.1.1 Media and democracy

As noted in the previous chapter, the relationship between media and democracy is well established, and a vast body of research explicitly addresses this subject. As noted above, much research on the relationship between the media and democracy is concerned with what the media does for democracy, and thus, the focus is on how the media, through its structures, practices and content, enables the realization of different postulated democratic ideals. In addition to theoretical accounts of this subject (Baker,
There is important empirical work that considers the different aspects of this topic. Central to this area of research are the questions of how the media adapts the sphere of politics to fit media logics (Eriksson, 2002; Meyer, 2002) and how economic and political structures influence the means by which the media can serve democracy (Aalberg and Curran, 2011; Kellner, 2004; McChesney, 1999; McChesney, 2008; Trappel et al., 2011). An interest in examining democracy in action has also motivated research on the relationship between media and democracy in the field of political communication; this body of research seeks to evaluate the effects of media content on democratic practice by, for example, studying news frames (Aalberg et al., 2012; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2012; Gan et al., 2005). Additionally, research has been undertaken to assess the media’s role and transformation in democratization and globalization processes (Blankson and Murphy, 2007; Hackett and Zhao, 2005) and in new conjunctures of power (Boler, 2008); other studies have considered the role of the media in strengthening European public spheres (Bondebjerg and Madsen, 2009).

On an overall level, and despite theoretical and methodological differences, the research described above indicates that the media has effects on ongoing democratic processes and/or seeks to evaluate whether the media realizes its democratic potential. Although some of the research focuses on media content, the analytical focus is not on how democracy is given meaning. This body of research thus provides important insights into how political and economic structures shape media performance and how the interplay between the media and these structures can affect an ongoing democratic system, but it says almost nothing about how this relationship provides meaning to the notion of democracy. As we will see later, obtaining answers regarding this issue requires an examination of studies that, through ideological critique, have addressed the media’s reporting on matters of democracy. However, before we take this step, it is necessary to delineate the general characteristics of the research on international journalism.

2.1.2 International journalism

In addition to addressing the field of media and democracy, this dissertation intersects with the field of international journalism, which focuses on the production, distribution, publication and reception of journalistic con-

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3 Another branch of research concerns the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in democratic participation (see Dahlgren, 2009; Olsson and Dahlgren, 2010).
tent from around the world. For several decades, scholars have been interested in various aspects of the phenomenon of international journalism. In the 1970s, during the aftermath of the liberation of former colonies in Africa and Asia and in the midst of the Cold War, an important discussion on the flow of information and the role of international journalism arose at UNESCO (Carlsson, 1998; Carlsson, 2003). Although the end of the Cold War greatly stifled the political demands of countries in the global South for a new information and communication order, the academic interest in international journalism has remained substantial.

For example, scholars have scrutinized and clarified the concentration of information flow in the hands of a small number of Western wholesalers (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 2004; Thussu, 2006; Williams, 2011) and have examined the journalistic practices of foreign reporters (Hannerz, 2004; Luyendijk, 2010). Much research has also been devoted to the content of international journalism. For example, scholarly research has focused on how different parts of the world are represented in the news media and how such representation reflects global power relations (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Thussu, 2004; Wu, 2004). Scholarly attention has also been directed toward the discursive structure of foreign news (Roosvall, 2005).

Another dimension of international journalism that is closer to the aim of the current dissertation concerns ideology critique. Scholars have employed different theories and methods in their efforts to understand the ideological character and hegemonic implications of the content of international journalism. One strand of research uses content analysis and approaches foreign news as propaganda, guided by Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model (Dimaggio, 2009; Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Klaehn, 2002). These studies emphasize that elite media provide little room for dissent against powerful political actors, a sentiment that is echoed in studies that use similar methods but are not grounded in that theoretical model (Philo and Berry, 2004; Philo and Berry, 2011). In addition, discourse analysis has been used to examine the relationship between international journalism and ideology in war reporting (Erjavec, 2005; Nohrstedt, 2005; Olausson, 1999; Phelan, 2005) and in the coverage of the Middle East (Barkho, 2010), Venezuela (Salter and Weltman, 2011), and radical social movements (Ekman, 2011). A commonality between the studies on propaganda and those on ideological discourse is the emphasis on the role of elite ideology in the country of publication in shaping media reporting and in reproducing the power of political and economic elites. Yet another branch of ideology critique uses the postcolonial concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978) and focuses on the means by which international journalism...
reproduces cultural differences to differentiate the West from an “Other” (Klaus and Kassel, 2005; Roosvall, 2010; Vultee, 2009). Such research considers the intersection between culture and politics to be an important factor of the ideological character of media discourse.

Studies on ideology in international journalism thus provide important knowledge regarding the ways in which the content and discourse of the media serve to reproduce or challenge political power structures. However, the research cited above says little about the construction of democracy in the media or about the relationship between such construction and ideology. However, a few studies focus to some extent on how democracy is constructed in international journalism and on the relationship between the construction of democracy and ideology. I describe a number of these studies in the following section.

2.1.3 Studies on democracy in international journalism

In the now classic but nonetheless disputed book *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) outline a theory on propaganda that they call the *propaganda model*. The main thesis of this model is that due to its economic structure and dependence on elite sources, the US media promotes propaganda in line with US foreign policy. Furthermore, the authors argue that the media is tied to an anticommunist ideology, which serves as a type of control mechanism for the construction of news. The authors then test their model in a series of case studies, focusing primarily on foreign news. One such case study considers the ascription of legitimacy to various Central American elections in the early 1980s (Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002:87-142). Using content analysis, the authors find that the coverage in the *New York Times* constructed the elections in El Salvador and Guatemala—countries ruled by civic-military regimes backed by the US—as legitimate. For example, the fairly high voter turnout in the Salvadorian and Guatemalan elections was afforded importance as a legitimizing factor. However, the high turnout in Nicaraguan elections was practically ignored in the coverage, despite the fact that Nicaragua was the only country among those studied that did not have obligatory voting. This omission must be considered in light of the reality that Nicaragua was governed by the socialist Sandinista movement and was in serious conflict with the US. The coverage also neglected to mention rebel disruptions in Nicaragua (by right-wing paramilitary groups), whereas attacks by leftist rebels in El Salvador and Guatemala were highlighted and characterized as election disturbances. Based on this evidence, the authors conclude that US national interests are highly visible in media coverage and that these interests determine the legitimacy attributed to the covered elections. Thus, the
coverage associated El Salvador and Guatemala with democracy and constructed these countries as having elected presidents, whereas it associated Nicaragua with a communist dictatorship.

The conclusions of Herman and Chomsky are extensively echoed in Kim’s (2000) comparative study of how US newspapers covered two so-called pro-democracy movements: the Kwangju movement in South Korea and the Tiananmen movement in China. Both movements protested for democratic reforms in their respective countries in the 1980s, and both were brutally oppressed by military forces; in each case, a large number of demonstrators were killed. An important point of departure for Kim is that the military government of South Korea was a US ally, while there were greater ideological discrepancies between the North Americans and the Chinese government. This difference between South Korea’s and China’s relations with the US turned out to be an important factor in how the coverage was framed. The study uses content analysis, and on one level, Kim finds differences in the use of sourcing; in particular, the use of so-called movement sources—the protesters themselves—was more common in the coverage of the Tiananmen movement, whereas the use of government sources was more common in the Kwangju case. On another level, there were differences in the symbolic terms used. The Tiananmen movement was more likely to be associated with favorable terms, such as pro-democracy, whereas the Kwangju movement was more likely to be associated with relatively unfavorable terms, such as turmoil or riot. The nature of the coverage of the two movements thus supports the claim that reports by the news media reflect US foreign policy. The studies by Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) and Kim (2000) make important contributions to the literature on the media’s construction of democracy by showing that ideology is an important guiding principle for classifying something as democratic or not. Thus, the media seems to be guided not only by formal freedoms and other political prerequisites when deciding whether something is considered democratic but also by ideological prerequisites, such as the ideological closeness or distance between the political leadership of the country of publication and that of the covered country.

The importance of specific political cultures to the legitimation of elections in the media, which is key to constructing democracy, is emphasized in a study by Garyantes and Murphy (2010), who employ a computer-assisted textual analysis of framing and ideology to show important differences between CNN’s and Aljazeera’s coverage of the 2005 Iraqi elections. The authors find that even when the subject matter of the coverage is the same, the two media organizations frame the reported issues differently. For example, whereas Aljazeera drew attention to election disturbances
caused by conflicting groups in the region, CNN focused on the US troops providing security against insurgent groups and on topics that associated the Iraqi elections with Western-style democracy. In this sense, the two news organizations gave their respective audiences different portrayals of the elections: whereas CNN depicted the elections as a step toward Western-style democracy, the Aljazeera coverage focused on chaos and violence and used sources that expressed distrust of the US and questioned the legitimacy of the suffrage. The authors conclude that elite perspectives serve as “ideological anchors” (Garyantes and Murphy, 2010:165) that function as sense-makers for the broadcasters’ respective audiences. Related to this conclusion is the finding that both CNN and Aljazeera provide only contextual objectivity, which means that although the reporting of each outlet offers different points of view, these points of view are limited to the dominant values of their respective viewers. The significance of political culture in the framing of elections thus explains CNN’s focus on Western-style democracy, which is in line with the interests of the US government because it lends legitimacy to the US military presence in Iraq (see also Duncan, 2012).

In a critical discourse analysis of the coverage of the Tibetan crisis of 2008 by CNN, a corporate outlet, and the Chinese news agency Xinhua, a state outlet, Moyo (2010) looks through the lens of cosmopolitanism theory to understand the normative roles of both forms of media in the reporting on human rights and democracy. The author shows that CNN framed the conflict within a discourse on human rights, which prominently featured narratives alluding to moralism and humanism and stereotypically constructed the Chinese government as violators of human rights. In contrast, Xinhua used a nationalist discourse, which constructed the conflict as addressing Tibetan vandalism and riots. The author argues that although CNN made valuable contributions by divulging human rights violations in Tibet, the network simultaneously promoted a neoliberal democratic model and the interests of a global neoliberal order, in which human rights discourse constitutes a powerful political mechanism. Conversely, Moyo finds that although Xinhua provided an alternative discourse, it was an authoritarian discourse that contradicted formal liberties granted to minorities by the Chinese Constitution. The author concludes that both news media failed in their reporting on human rights issues because they were incapable of escaping the influence of national and global elites. The study also provides an important contribution to the understanding of the construction of democracy in media discourse by showing how this discourse is intertwined not only with Western conceptions of human rights but also with the promotion of neoliberalism.
2.1.4 Knowledge and knowledge gaps

The main contribution of the studies discussed in the previous section is that the construction of democracy is highly intertwined with ideology. Thus, what is constructed as democratic coheres with the general ideological outlooks of the political and economic elite in the country of publication. In addition, as Garyantes and Murphy (2010) and Moyo (2010) show, the construction of democracy is tied to the political culture in which a specific medium is situated. Because democracy has a central place in the self-image of the West (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation), democracy (together with human rights) can serve as a lens through which foreign events can be made understandable. The use of such framing can have ideological effects because it can take for granted the political and economic structures in which democracy in the West is grounded, as Moyo (2010) demonstrates. Therefore, an ideology-critical perspective that is sensitive to how different cultural contexts give meaning to political practices is a fruitful theoretical framework for understanding the media’s construction of democracy.

Although the reviewed studies are important to an understanding of media’s construction of democracy, a review of the literature reveals several gaps regarding how journalism constructs democracy in relation to a country’s political system and to central political actors.

First, although Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) and Kim (2000) address the importance of the ideological baggage of key political actors—and, to some extent, the political system of the reported country—to journalists’ constructions of democracy, one must remember that these studies examine US media during the Cold War. One can argue that the peculiarities of the global political situation of the Cold War—namely, the existence of two world-dividing political blocs with antagonistic political visions, one of which was headed by the US—may have shaped the ideological loading of democracy differently during that period than it would today or differently than other media did at that time. Given the Socialist bloc’s rejection of liberal democracy and its implementation of one-party systems, it was fairly easy for the US establishment to use the borders of the Cold War to draw the line between what should and should not be conceived as democratic. Moreover, as these two studies show, the media adopted a similar strategy. Even today, such strategies seem viable in the reporting on China (Moyo, 2010), a country that maintains a political (albeit not economic) model that is similar to the socialist countries of the Soviet bloc. However, the overall world order changed slightly after the Cold War ended; in particular, other political dichotomies are now prevalent at a global level, and there has been a great expansion and consolidation of Western
ideals of democracy. In this context, a case study on Venezuela could provide important insights. Venezuela under Chávez, although it voiced anti-neoliberal and sometimes anti-capitalist and pro-socialist ideals, differs from countries of the Warsaw Pact because Venezuela is not formally associated with any specific ideological or military alliance and has a very different—and more Western-like—political system. Its government is constitutional and elected by free elections in a multiparty system. It should therefore be more difficult to characterize Venezuela as another communist dictatorship, as Cuba is characterized. A case study of the coverage on Venezuela could therefore provide new insights on how democracy is conceived by the media in relation to a counter-hegemonic country’s political system and to key political actors during the post-Cold War period.

Second, one must consider the question of methodology. Whereas Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) and Kim (2000) use content analysis and Garyantes and Murphy (2010) use centering resonance analysis (which is a type of computer-assisted textual analysis), only Moyo (2010) approaches the ideological loading of democracy through discourse analysis. Without any intent to promote methodological apartheid (Deacon et al., 1999) or to depreciate other methodologies, I believe that there is much to gain from using a qualitative method such as discourse analysis. In particular, qualitative methods allow one to capture the ways in which ideology shapes journalistic texts, both at the macro- and microstructural levels (see Carvalho, 2008; van Dijk, 1988), which, in turn, can provide important insights into the relationship between ideology and democracy beyond those provided by quantifications. It is also important to note that the discourse analysis of Moyo (2010) is oriented more toward discourses on human rights than toward discourses on democracy. Thus, the news media’s discursive construction of democracy remains an under-researched topic.

Moreover, it must be stressed that previous studies place substantial emphasis on how the ideologies of the political elite in the context of publication shape media content; this practice mirrors research in the field of international journalism. The thoughts and actions of the political elite of a given country, as well as the specific political culture of that country, seem to play a crucial role in the shaping of media content. I believe that such results should be taken as a point of departure in future studies; it is expected that different geopolitical contexts give the media different biases. Therefore, I believe that it is useful to incorporate empirical materials from different geopolitical contexts to capture specific patterns of representation in the media discourse on a specific subject, without necessarily aiming to compare the various outlets. Therefore, this dissertation incorporates mate-
rials from Sweden, the US and Uruguay to study the ideological loading of democracy in the coverage of Venezuela (see Chapter 4).
3. Theoretical position

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework that serves as the lens through which the object of study is conceptualized and put into perspective. The task of the theoretical framework is thus to provide a basis on which the analyzed empirical materials are interpreted and perceived as something (see Asplund, 1970).

This chapter begins with a description of the dissertation’s ideology-critical position, which is centered on the concepts of hegemony and ideology and which provides the theoretical basis of the dissertation. After the ideology-critical position of the dissertation is discussed, this chapter provides a detailed discussion on the concept of democracy to understand its development and political use. Finally, this chapter provides a discussion of the relationship between media and journalism vis-à-vis ideology and hegemony.

3.1 An ideology-critical position

This dissertation is theoretically positioned within the framework of ideology critique and endorses its mission in media studies to “understand the role of the media in constructing consent to structural inequality” (Downey et al., 2014:880). The use of such an approach also situates the dissertation within the tradition of critical theory, a form of “intellectual class struggle” (Fuchs, 2011:14) that seeks to expose and challenge different types of relations of domination (Fuchs, 2011; Horkheimer, 2002), “in order to advance social struggles and the liberation from domination, so that a dominationless, co-operative, participatory society can emerge” (Fuchs, 2011:19).

The dissertation’s ideology-critical position is informed by the notion of hegemony, which is perceived here as seminal to the understanding of how power functions in society.

In line with the Italian communist scholar and activist Antonio Gramsci, this dissertation understands hegemony as a form of leadership that the ruling social blocs of society exercise over the dominated classes.4 Gramsci distinguishes between hegemony and domination as two different ways of

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4 To avoid confusion and misconceptions, I want to stress that this study follows a Gramscian perspective concerning (1) the understanding of hegemony as a social relation and (2) the relationships between hegemony and ideology. This means that the current study differs from other elaborations on hegemony, most notably, the influential work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), which situates the notion of hegemony at a discursive level.
exercising power. Whereas domination is power exercised through coercion, hegemony presupposes consent from the dominated.\(^5\) Therefore, the leading group in a hegemony must employ moral and intellectual leadership, which is contested and negotiated and at times must be redefined (Gramsci, 1971; Williams, 1977).\(^6\) Hegemony is thus based on ideological leadership. Nevertheless, the exercise of hegemony is not entirely separate from coercion because hegemony is situated in a social and political context. Gramsci states that hegemony can be perceived as being “protected by the armour of coercion” (Gramsci, 1971:263), a metaphor that aims to reflect the connection between the domination of the ruling classes and the state. For example, capitalism is legally sanctioned through an established set of laws, such as laws that protect private property. However, the question of values is central to galvanizing consent to political actions, and it is thus appropriate to understand hegemony as operating through the unity of “the vast majority of people […] within a common system of values, goals and beliefs”, which form a sort of value consensus (Hall et al., 1978:215). Furthermore, although hegemony must be negotiated and reformed, such a negotiation “cannot touch the essential” (Gramsci, 1971:161). Thus, the fundamental premises that constitute the power relation between the dominating and the dominated cannot be altered completely because it would destroy the hegemonic relation in question.

When conceptualizing hegemony, especially in a study of international journalism, it is important to remember that the Marxian notion of capitalism and class struggle is essentially international, albeit national in form (Marx and Engels, 1967/2002). On an international level, capitalism is characterized by the concentration of capital in a number of transnational

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\(^5\) Regardless of Gramsci’s conceptual distinction between domination and hegemony, it is important to emphasize that hegemony is always related to domination, even while being sustained by consent (which Gramsci also notes). Therefore, the term domination can be confusing. Hereafter, when I use the term domination, it is in reference to a specific power relation that is upheld by hegemony and not to a form of power distinct from hegemony.

\(^6\) It is important to note that Gramsci’s intellectual contributions did not come from a lecture hall but rather from a cell in a fascist prison in the 1920s and 1930s. The horrible conditions in which Gramsci was held during his imprisonment are far from anecdotal and have significant implications for his writings. In particular, Gramsci wrote in notebooks that had to pass through Fascist censors to leave the prison installment. This obstacle, combined with other circumstances, makes his writings quite troublesome. For example, Gramsci seldom defines concepts; rather, he uses them in different contexts. This means that meanings of particular concepts may vary (see Anderson 1976 for a discussion of the inconsistencies in Gramsci’s writings; see Santucci 2010 for a contextualization of Gramsci’s work).
corporations, an increasingly powerful finance capitalist sector, and an imperialistic relation between core capitalist countries—especially the US—and countries of the global South (Foster, 2014; Harvey, 2003). A notable characteristic of this imperialistic relation is the dependence of the global South on both corporations from core capitalist nations and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This dependence ultimately leads to the economic exploitation of the global South. Additionally, this imperialistic relation is guarded by a strong military apparatus, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Foster, 2014; Harvey, 2003). In this context, hegemony is a matter of galvanizing consent not only to the national bourgeoisie but also to capitalism as a global system and to the uneven power relations between nations that characterize this system.

Although the discussion above emphasizes that hegemony is always connected to a material reality because at its core, hegemony defends material power, a substantial portion of the exercise of hegemony takes place in cultural spheres (Martín-Barbero, 1993). Gramsci emphasizes the hegemonic roles of the Church and the educational system; moreover, as a political activist and journalist, he understood the importance of the media in inducing consent. We will return to this topic later.

Thus far, this section has established that hegemony is an ideological leadership that operates primarily in cultural spheres without explaining the concept of ideology. Ideology is understood here as “the mental frameworks” that are used by different social groups to make sense of the world (Hall, 1986a:29) and that articulate interests in specific social, economic and/or political relations of power. Ideologies are expressed not only in thought but also in various types of actions; for example, language use, or discourse, is an important form of ideological expression (Fairclough, 1995a; Fowler, 1991; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Central to the formation of ideologies is what is perceived as natural and commonsensical. As Hall (1986b:20) argues, common sense “is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed.” Ideological struggles are thus greatly about the (re)formation of the common sense of people through the use of language and other practices. Tied to this notion is the question of legitimacy; thus, ideology constructs certain things as more acceptable and justifiable than others (Thompson, 1990).

It is important to stress that language is not necessarily a mere reflection of ideology. Instead, as discourse theorists have noted, it is critical to understand that language always operates within a specific context of power and cannot be isolated from the premises of this context (Fairclough,
Language use is set in a dialectical relation with its sociocultural context; this relation also determines language’s ideological character (Fairclough, 1995a). The concept of ideology provided here does not conceive it as negative, misleading, or promoting domination per se (cf. Larrain, 1979; Marx and Engels, 1970; Thompson, 1990). However, this does not mean that ideology as defined in this manner is detached from questions of power. On the contrary, in line with the Gramscian notion of hegemony, ideology can certainly be used to promote political domination. Potential ideological effects (dominating or liberating) are determined by how ideology is used in relation to a specific power relation. For example, an ideological expression that naturalizes labor exploitation supports hegemonic power. An argument from a worker calling for the abolition of wage labor is ideological but counter-hegemonic. Here, ideology critique endeavors to study how media content expresses different ideological positions and how such expressions can induce consent for hegemony. Through such an ideology-critical approach, the conception of democracy is problematized.

Although ideology is a central concept in critical studies, a uniform definition of the term remains elusive, which some scholars have criticized (Corner, 2001). Nonetheless, the recurrent use of ideology as a concept in the social sciences means that it still has a strong explanatory power and that the concrete analysis of an object requires adjusting the concept of ideology to some degree to make it fit the research object in question. The studies included in this dissertation use the concept of ideology in slightly different ways, but it is always tied to the exercise of power. For example, ideology is understood in a traditional Gramscian sense and closely tied to hegemony in Articles I and III; in contrast, ideological operation in journalism is understood through the critique of Eurocentrism in Article II.

In general terms, Eurocentrism is understood as a thought system that perceives the conditions of the Western world as the norm while it simultaneously draws upon and mystifies the colonial and imperialist relations that have made the present power relations of global capitalism possible; it also takes liberal society for granted (Amin, 1989; Lander, 2002; Quijano, 2000). The concept of Eurocentrism is important to an understanding of how ideology works in the coverage of non-Western actors in international journalism and how differences between actors are constructed around Western political norms and values, such as the notion of Western democracy. In this sense, a Eurocentric perception can serve to legitimize or dele-

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7 This relationship will be addressed more thoroughly in the discussion of critical discourse analysis in the chapter on methods (see section 4.1).
gitimize different political actors. Therefore, the critique of Eurocentrism fits well into the ideology-critical endeavor to understand the ideological loading of democracy in journalism and its hegemonic consequences.

3.2 Understanding democracy

If hegemony operates by uniting people around a common value system (Hall et al., 1978:215), one must treat democracy as a part of such a value system. Democracy currently enjoys vast popularity around the world and across the political spectrum as a form of legitimate government. However, because the meaning given to democracy is not arbitrarily determined, the ideology-critical task is to understand how the meanings attributed to democracy accept or challenge the economic fundamentals of global capitalism.

This section discusses three different aspects that each differently capture how democracy can be ideologically loaded. First, I address the general premises of the concept of democracy and discuss the relationship between democracy as an empty signifier and the general values with which it has been associated. Second, I discuss the liberal understanding of democracy, which has been very important to the practical implementation of democracy as a form of government. Third, I discuss the meaning of democracy in the contemporary context of seemingly unrivalled neoliberalism after the end of the Cold War.

3.2.1 The promise of good government

As Wendy Brown argues, the present age is characterized by a paradox regarding democracy. Although democracy has never enjoyed as much worldwide support as it does today, the concept of democracy has also never previously been so loosely defined and so hollow. The same author argues that perhaps the current popularity of democracy “depends on the openness and even vacuity of its meaning and practice” (Brown, 2011:44). Alternatively, capitalism—which Brown labels “modern democracy’s non-identical birth twin and always the more robust and wily of the two”—might have “reduced democracy into a ‘brand’” (Brown, 2011:44). Brown also suggests the possibility that democracy has become a new world religion or “an altar before which the West and its admirers worship and through which divine purpose Western imperial crusades are shaped and legitimated” (Brown, 2011:45).

According to Brown, democracy functions as an empty signifier to which anyone can attach their “dreams and hopes” (Brown, 2011:44). The rule of the people—which is the core signification of the portmanteau of the Greek signifiers δῆμος [demos] and κράτος [kratos]—constitutes the
opposite of “aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny, and also [of] the condition of being colonized or occupied” (Brown, 2011:45). Brown continues her reasoning,

But no compelling argument can be made that democracy inherently entails representation, constitutions, deliberation, participation, free markets, rights, universality, or even equality. The term carries a simple and purely political claim that the people rule themselves, that the whole rather than a part or an Other is politically sovereign. In this regard, democracy is an unfinished principle – it specifies neither what powers must be shared among us for the people’s rule to be practiced, how this rule is to be organized, nor by which institutions or supplemental conditions it is enabled or secured, features of democracy Western political thought has been haggling over since the beginning. (Brown, 2011:45-46)

The openness of the concept of democracy can be easily understood by looking at the contents of a reader on democracy (e.g., Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 2001), where one finds a broad range of interpretations of the concept, as well as different arguments on related key concepts, such as freedom and autonomy, equality, representation, majority rule and citizenship. Furthermore, one finds Marxist, fascist and elitist, and feminist critiques of the concept. Additionally, with regard to the contemporary practice of democracy, there are discussions about liberal, deliberative and radical democracy. In sum, there is no single and constant interpretation of what democracy is.

French political historian Pierre Rosanvallon explains the openness of the concept of democracy by describing democracy as something that has always been both a promise and problem. Democracy promises a government that satisfies society’s need for equality and autonomy, but it constitutes a problem due to the difficulty of fulfilling such ideals. The project of democracy is thus unfinished everywhere, claims Rosanvallon, who argues that for this reason, it is difficult to categorize any regime as being entirely democratic in the strict meaning of the word (Rosanvallon, 2010:24). Moreover, as the author states in a different work, the unstable meaning of democracy is its very essence (Rosanvallon, 2009:20).

Rosanvallon provides an interesting quotation from the Bulletin de la République published immediately after the implementation of universal male suffrage in France in 1848 that exemplifies how the notion of democracy can function as a promise of good government: “As of the approval of this law, there are no longer any proletarians in France” (Rosanvallon, 2010:127, my translation). This quotation reveals a very hopeful vision of democracy; in this context, democracy is attached to social struggle. Universal suffrage, which has become the most fundamental symbol of demo-
cratic participation, is characterized in this quotation as providing a solution to the social inequalities of post-revolutionary France because it would by itself eradicate the existence of proletarians as a socially inferior class. Universal suffrage would thus create a truly “democratic society” (Rosanvallon, 2010:127, my translation). However, Rosanvallon argues that this hopeful vision was contradicted by a harsh reality that obstructed its realization, and thus, proletarians had to find means other than elections to reach their social goals.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding its definition and the disequilibrium between its promises and its implementation, democracy has nonetheless represented some sort of political ideal or horizon that people throughout history have deemed worthy of pursuit. French philosopher Jaques Rancière elaborates on this phenomenon by explaining that democracy is neither a model of society nor a form of government; rather, democratic society is a fantasy that functions as a background for principles of good government (Rancière, 2007:49). In this conception, the practical implementation of democracy is fairly independent of the democratic ideal, which is in line with the thesis of Rosanvallon. Democracy is thus not necessarily a specific practice but rather something akin to a “spirit,” to quote another French philosopher (Nancy, 2014:37, my translation).

Rosanvallon and Rancière both perceive a gap between democracy as an ideal or a promise—regardless, as something good—and as a practice. Acknowledgment of this gap is an important point of departure for understanding the relationship between the conception of democracy and ideology because the gap permits the creation of a concept of democracy that has a positive meaning from the outset: it is something worth striving for, it is good government. However, the practical content of this concept is more ambiguous. The conception of democracy can thus legitimize political actions undertaken in the name of good politics, regardless of the “democratic” characteristics of the implemented policies. This claim strongly relates to the paradox that Brown (2011) describes when she argues that although democracy is widely hailed today, its meaning is more hollow than ever. Moreover, as we will discuss later in this chapter, this claim also echoes Farrelly’s (2008) conception of democracy as a legitimizing but exhausted discourse.

3.2.2 Liberal democracy and its critics
According to Santos and Avritzer, the twentieth century was characterized by “intense dispute about the question of democracy” (Santos and Avritzer, 2005:xxxiv), and perhaps the most important player in that debate was liberalism. Liberalism has been a key guiding principle for the theoret-
lical development and practical implementation of democratic governance. Therefore, it is worthwhile to provide a critical discussion on the liberal understanding of democracy.

As its name reveals, liberalism is grounded in the belief in the exercise and protection of individual liberties. It was pioneered by European philosophers including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu. As David Held uses the term, liberalism signifies “the attempt to uphold the values of freedom of choice, reason and toleration in the face of tyranny, the absolutist system and religious intolerance” (Held, 2006:59). As a political philosophy, it incorporated the progressive demands of the bourgeoisie in their struggle against absolutist power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For liberals, the protection of political rights, including the freedoms of expression, assembly and publication, was central to their political vision, as were the ideals of a market economy and the separation of the private sphere from the political sphere (Held, 2006; Wennerhag and Unsgaard, 2006).

Liberalism has been seminal to the development of theories of democracy, and liberal democracy—in its many existing variants—has been the most implemented model in the world. Very generally speaking, it is appropriate to argue that liberal democracy, as theorized in the work of John Stuart Mill, for example, seeks to balance “might” and “right”; its twofold aim is to establish a state power that can guarantee order in society and to protect individual liberties (Held, 2006:59). Rooted in the ideas of John Locke, liberal democracy advocates a constitutional state that guarantees and protects the interests and freedoms of individuals (Held, 2006:63-65). A cornerstone of the theory and practice of liberal democracy is representation; hence, the political leadership (such as the parliament and the government) is elected through secret ballots in regular elections. Liberal democracies are therefore characterized by some sort of parliamentarianism (Held, 2006:84-85). The electoral process in this context is a technique for electing representatives and is therefore a form of participation (Rosanvallon, 2010:32). In addition, elections represent the consent of the people and are therefore fundamental to the legitimacy of a democratic system. Elections are also an expression of the political equality that is guaranteed.

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8 This paragraph on the characteristics of liberal democracy draws primarily from Held’s (2006:Chapter 3) discussion of the origins and characteristics of liberal democracy. I am aware that Held and other scholars distinguish between three different models within the liberal democratic tradition. Although important, such distinctions are not relevant here because the objective of this section is to describe the general characteristics of liberal democracy for the purpose of showing how liberalism (in general) has shaped the contemporary notion of democracy.
by a liberal democratic system because each vote is counted equally, re-
gardless of class, gender or ethnicity (which was far from given in early
liberal discussions) (Held, 2006:94).

Another important aspect of all variants of liberal democracy is the mat-
ter of the separation of powers. As elaborated by Montesquieu, the execu-
tive, legislative and judicial authorities of a democratic state must be sepa-
rate from each other (Held, 2006:65-70). Later liberal theorists deemed
this division a prerequisite for limiting and controlling political power and
thereby avoiding despotism. Related to separation of powers is the ques-
tion of accountability; a system of checks and balances fosters transparency
by holding elected officials accountable to citizens (Held, 2006:75). Elec-
tions are also an act of accountability because through elections, citizens
can choose one candidate over another and punish those in power if they
are found to be inept. Another important feature of liberal democracies,
although it was initially disputed by liberal theorists, is the existence of an
impersonal state bureaucracy that administers the policies of elected gov-
ernments (Held, 2006:87).

As with liberalism in general, the liberal understanding of democracy re-
lies on the acceptance of capitalist principles. As Macpherson notes, the
term *liberal* in liberal democracy has been widely interpreted to mean *ca-
pitalist*, and liberal democracy has generally been designed to fit a society
that is divided by class (Macpherson, 1977:2-9).

The symbiosis of capitalism and liberal democracy has effects on demo-
cratic practice. Macpherson argues that liberal democracy as practiced in
the Western world in the mid-twentieth century and as theorized by Joseph
Schumpeter was absorbed by market logic and that previous moral con-
cerns about human development tied to the notion of democracy were
abandoned. Democracy had thus been greatly reduced to a mechanism for
earning votes:

> The purpose of democracy is to register the desires of people as they are, not
to contribute to what they might be or might wish to be. Democracy is
simply a market mechanism: the voters are the consumers; the politicians
are the entrepreneurs. (Macpherson, 1977:79)

Macpherson likens such a democratic system to an oligopolistic econo-
my; there are few sellers, or parties that supply political goods, and these
sellers “can set prices and set the range of goods that will be offered” and,
to some degree, can even “create the demand” (Macpherson, 1977:89). In
this context, liberal democracy revolves around what is important and
acceptable to economically and politically powerful groups.
A related issue concerns the disharmony between the values of equality and liberty in liberal democracy. Liberal democracies promote private property rights, free enterprise and competition. The existence of such liberties is central to capitalism: one agent practices the freedom of exploiting work and accumulating capital, and the other is consigned to wage labor. Consequently, as Amin notes, “the value ‘equality’ comes into conflict with ‘liberty’” (Amin, 2004:58). This contradiction is ideologically important because the implementation of regulations and restrictions on economic liberties to overcome social injustice can be portrayed as a violation of democratic principles if democracy is understood as a liberal conception. Marxists have also noted what they perceive as the impossibility to “democratize the fundamental relation between capital and labor” in capitalism (Santos and Avritzer, 2005:xxxv; see also Roper, 2013), which fosters the uneven distribution of power in society.

Based on a critique of contemporary liberal democracy, Pateman (1970) formulates a theory of participatory democracy. This model challenges liberal democracy not only by calling for more direct participation by the people but also (drawing here on the ideas of Jean-Jaques Rousseau) by stressing that social equality makes democracy possible. In another line of critique, the model of radical democracy proposed by Mouffe (1992) criticizes the development and elitist character of democracy under neoliberalism and calls for the realization of the many potentials of liberal democracy. Although these models are mainly academic theories, there are parallels between these models and the perception of participatory democracy of Chávez in Venezuela (see Chapter 5).

Liberal democracy has survived challenges from both the academic sphere and real politics. After the end of the Cold War, the world witnessed the expansion of liberal democracy accompanied by capitalism. As we will see in the following section, such developments have had consequences for the content of the dominant contemporary conception of democracy.

3.2.4 The notion of democracy after the Cold War

One might ask why, if liberal democracy is elitist and relies on a society divided by class, it has not only survived but also maintained its position as the dominant democratic model of this day and age. Although such a question does not have an easy answer, it is clear that for many people, an elitist democratic system is preferable to a system that denies citizens fundamental rights. In this light, one must consider the elation felt by many Eastern Europeans at the collapse of Soviet-style socialism, regardless of the possible accuracy of Slavoj Žižek’s position that “they ‘went for’ de-
mocracy and got capitalism and nationalism instead” (quoted in Dean, 2005:156). It is also in this light that one can understand why the former socialist bloc in Eastern Europe is remembered for its democratic deficits rather than for its accomplishments in the realm of social equality. Similarly, the Western world’s democratic character has eclipsed its failures with respect to social equality.

As Rosanvallon notes, the idea of a real change has started to disappear in this new global political landscape. Revolution is generally no longer viewed as an alternative, and the definition of what is radical has changed. Additionally, the notion of politics as an arena in which choice exists between different models of society is fading away (Rosanvallon, 2010). In this context, which some scholars characterize as post-political, capitalism and liberal democracy appear to set the limits of political action (Mouffe, 2005; Tesfahuney and Dahlstedt, 2008; Žižek, 1999). Certainly, such developments can affect how democracy is perceived today.

In his discussion of the relationship between capitalism and democracy within liberalism, Amin (2004) makes an important observation regarding the shaping of the concept of democracy in this new political context:

If, in a concrete historical conjuncture, a fragmented movement of social criticism has been weakened because there appears to be no alternative to the dominant ideology, then democracy can be emptied of all content which restricts and is potentially dangerous for the market. It becomes a ‘low-intensity democracy.’ You are free to vote as you choose: white, blue green, pink, or red. In any case, it will have no effect; your fate is decided elsewhere, outside the precincts of Parliament, in the market. The subjection of democracy to the market (and not their convergence) is reflected in political language. (Amin, 2004:46)

Despite Amin’s generalized and oversimplified logic, his comment on the dependence of democracy’s meaning on the conjunctures of power is appropriate. In an epoch characterized by strong market forces and unrivaled liberal ideology, it is plausible that democracy will be shaped to accommodate such power structures. Although Amin’s discussion focuses primarily on democracy as a practice, shaping democracy to fit the needs of the market must have consequences for the meaning of democracy. Thus, if the content of democracy as a political practice changes, the conception of democracy must change as well. If we follow Amin’s argument, the general understanding of democracy today—in a context of seemingly uncontested neoliberal capitalism—should be subjugated to the premises of capitalism and thus offer little or no resistance to such structures. Against this background, one must consider the New Labour-type reformation of European
social democracy to incorporate neo-liberalism and the European Left’s abandonment of political ideals beyond capitalism and liberal democracy.

This argument is echoed and developed by Brown (2011), who claims that contemporary Western society has witnessed a process of de-democratization whereby even liberal democracy has been reduced “to a shell of its former self” (Brown, 2011:46). According to Brown, a central problem today is the practical merger of corporate and state power, which not only transforms neoliberalism into an omnipresent political rationality but also displaces many of the basic principles of liberal democracy. Therefore, although the political mainstream in the West consistently refers to itself as a champion of democracy, the democracy that it offers seems to subjugate the power of the demos to that of the market. This opens the door to a notion of democracy in which capitalism is viewed as a natural ingredient; a notion that in the long run allows the content of democracy to be shaped by the conjunctures of capitalism. The primary risk of such a development is that democracy—a term that connotes good government—ultimately legitimizes either capitalist practices or any other conduct of nation-states that is claimed to be democratic.

Farrelly (2008) takes this argument a bit further in an analysis of how democracy is given meaning in the current political discourse. For example, Farrelly finds that in the discourse of Tony Blair on military intervention in the Middle East, democracy is conceived as a component of “global values” (Farrelly, 2008:419) and that this conception of democracy functions as a discourse of legitimation. Farelly provides a very interesting quotation from a speech by Blair in 2006:

What is happening today out in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and beyond is an elemental struggle about the values that will shape our future. It is in part a struggle between what I will call reactionary Islam and moderate, mainstream Islam. But its implications go far wider. We are fighting a war, but not just against terrorism but about how the world should govern itself in the early 21st century, about global values. The root causes of the current crisis are supremely indicative of this. Ever since September 11, the US has embarked on a policy of intervention in order to protect its and our future security. Hence Afghanistan. Hence Iraq. Hence the broader Middle East initiative in support of moves towards democracy in the Arab world. The point about these interventions, however, military and otherwise, is that they were not just about changing regimes but changing the values systems governing the nations concerned. The banner was not actually ‘regime change’, it was ‘values change’. (Tony Blair, quoted in Farrelly, 2008:419)

Blair thus justified military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq by arguing that these interventions were intended to support a shift toward de-
Farrelly makes an important contribution to the understanding of the ideological loading of democracy in contemporary political discourse by showing that abstract allusions to democracy can even legitimize military interventions. These military interventions are thus constructed as being morally right—they are intended to put the Middle East on the right track (see also Jackson, 2005; Mral, 2004). In this sense, Blair’s arguments fit very well into what critics claim is a specific characteristic of contemporary political discourse, namely, the framing of politics with moral argumentation (Mouffe, 2005; Tesfahuney and Dahlstedt, 2008). Furthermore, Blair’s line of reasoning is interesting because it universalizes a particular conception of democracy and characterizes its implementation as more important than national sovereignty and UN regulations that prohibit arbitrary military intervention in other countries. Moreover, this notion of democracy exacerbates the uneven power relations between countries, whereby stronger nation-states can impose their version of democracy on weaker nation-states. This argument is thus coherent with the classic dichotomization between democracies and a “constitutive outside” (Brown, 2011:51) that may comprise barbarians, communists or terrorists. In Blair’s abstract conception, democracy also obscures other possible interests motivating the invasions in question, for example, the control of natural resources and the installation of NATO-friendly governments in the region (Chomsky, 2004), which would tighten the grip of core capitalist nations on the Middle East. The use of democracy as a discourse of legitimation can thus function as a form of soft power (Chouliaraki, 2005) in support of global capitalist hegemony.

It is also important to note that in contrast to US president George W. Bush, who used similar arguments for the same invasions (see Chomsky, 2006), Blair was an exponent of European social democracy. Thus, the use of democracy as a discourse to justify Western military intervention can be found among conservatives as well as among political parties that claim to stand further left, which, to a certain degree, validates the existing agreement on this perception of democracy across the political mainstream.
The discussion presented above provides insights into how the contemporary conjunctures of power can ideologically load the notion of democracy. However, the discussion thus far has stayed within the realm of politics, and now, we must turn our focus to the relationship between the media and hegemony.

3.3 Journalism and hegemony

Hegemony is mainly exercised by obtaining the consent of the broad masses, which means that the masses must to some extent accept the worldviews and common sense of the hegemonic groups (Gramsci, 1971). This makes the cultural sphere an important arena for fighting about hegemony (Martín-Barbero, 1993), which means that cultural institutions such as journalism are important vehicles for conveying, negotiating and contesting the ideologies of hegemonic groups (Allan, 1998; Allan, 1999; Gitlin, 1980/2003; Hallin, 1987).

The importance of journalism to hegemony lies in journalism’s power to provide information and interpretations to the citizenry about events and processes to which the majority of people do not have first-hand access. Journalism can therefore help people to understand and make sense of society and can guide citizens’ conceptions of complex notions such as democracy and political legitimacy. In so doing, journalism can provide the moral and intellectual leadership that hegemony requires.

However, journalism is not a formal mouthpiece for either political or economic power, at least not in countries with liberal media traditions. For the most part, journalism is independent of governments and guided by professional principles that encourage journalists to be critical of governmental power (Gans, 1979/2004). Nonetheless, the existing power relations in a society can indirectly shape journalism. Therefore, the role of journalism in the exercise of hegemony is complex and must be treated as such.

This section first describes how the mass media as cultural institutions can be understood through the theoretical lens of hegemony and discusses how the structural imperatives of the media condition journalistic content. Then, this section focuses on how ideology can be grasped in journalism.

3.3.1 The structural conditions of journalism

To comprehend the relationship between journalism and hegemony, one must understand some of the “structural imperatives” (Hall et al., 1978:60) that influence journalistic practices and condition the discursive outcome of journalism as well as the pursuit of journalistic professional ideals (see also Fairclough, 1995a).
An essential first step to understanding the structural imperatives of journalism is to examine the political economy of the media. As sellers of newspapers, subscriptions and advertising space, private media enterprises must be profitable, a requirement that conditions their journalistic capacities. In particular, the media must balance their needs for staff, beat coverage and advanced technology with their budgets. One can therefore conclude that the political economy of the media incorporates journalism into the logics of market capitalism (see Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Herman and McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 2008). This reality makes private media vulnerable to the conjunctures of the market (Fuchs, 2011), and critics assert that capitalist logics tie media content to the ideological frameworks of politically and economically powerful groups because the media cannot provide fundamental criticism of the market forces that finance them (Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002).

However, Murdock and Golding (2005) correctly assert that much of the political-economic research on the media has omitted a significant amount of complexity in describing how the media works, which leaves us with a rather one-dimensional picture. Although it is important not to lose touch with the economic structures in which journalism is situated, these structures alone do not explain the relationship between journalism and hegemony.

The production of journalistic content is structured by a set of journalistic routines and organizational practices (Davis, 2009; Gans, 1979/2004; Hall et al., 1978; Lee-Wright, 2009; Tuchman, 1978) through which a journalist learns how to assess the newsworthiness of an event and how to convert newsworthy events into news. In reference to Fishman (1980), Allan states that turning an event into news requires a journalist to have a “commonsensical understanding that society is bureaucratically structured” (Allan, 1999:68). This understanding gives journalists the ability to identify credible sources of knowledge about specific occurrences. For example, if a journalist writes about the effects of the financial crisis on employment, the reporter knows that reliable sources can be found in the government’s department of the economy, at employment agencies, and at the economics departments of universities. The bureaucratic character of this practice is related to what H.S Becker calls a “hierarchy of credibility” (quoted in Allan, 1999:68), which means that sources are ranked according to their positions in an organization or in society in general. As Allan notes, this principle makes sources ranked at the top of the hierarchy “more authoritative,” which means that journalists are more likely to “treat these accounts as factual” (Allan, 1999:68-69). The consequence of this practice is that elite sources are given the privilege of being “primary
definers” (Hall et al., 1978:57), which means that they will define the covered problem in a specific article or report and will set limits on what is discussed about a specific issue.

The bureaucratic understanding of society and the hierarchy of credibility are important aspects of the understanding of journalism in relation to hegemony because when journalists structure their work around societal hierarchies, they take for granted the power relations in society to some extent. The voices of powerful actors become more important than the voices of the sources at the bottom of the hierarchy for defining events and processes in an article. Such working principles thus make it plausible that journalistic content, especially news, is structured around dominant values in society. This subject will be further addressed later in this chapter.

It is also important to account for the structural conditions and journalistic routines of international journalism. An important but problematic characteristic of international journalism today is the concentration of ownership and distribution of sources. International news agencies (INA) are a dominant force in the production and distribution of international news. Due to increased competition, three Western companies currently dominate the market: Reuters, the Associated Press, and Agence France-Presse (Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen, 2004; Thussu, 2004; Williams, 2011).

The current concentration of ownership of sources also indicates that the newsgathering process is different in international journalism. Williams explains:

Rather than a set of news values determining the nature of international news, the value of news should be seen in terms of what clients and subscribers are willing to pay for. Giving customers what they want is crucial. The customers who dominate the market for international news are western media organisations and western conglomerates and companies. They spend the most on international news and their priorities determine what is covered. The INAs have to produce a product which satisfies their main customers, subscribers and purchases of news. The smaller news organisations of Africa, Latin America and Asia, for example, have to take what is given. What they are given is news geared to the demands of western interests. (Williams, 2011:78)

According to Williams’ argument, news agencies have significant power to decide what will become news. A consequence of this reality is that the news is geared toward a Western audience, which can lead to the omission or diminishment of problems and topics that are important to audiences in other geopolitical zones (see also van Ginneken, 1998). This observation is important for hegemony because if the Western world is assumed to be the norm in international journalism, there is a significant risk that interna-
tional journalism takes the West’s dominant position in global politics and economics for granted, which ultimately supports acceptance of the powers that be.

However, Williams’ argument mainly concerns newsrooms without their own foreign correspondents; thus, one could counter his arguments with examples of newsrooms that have their own foreign correspondents, which would be less dependent on INAs. However, one must also bear in mind that there has been a general decline in the number of foreign correspondents (Hafez, 2007; Williams, 2011:94-98), which, in some instances, has led to the expansion of the news beats of the remaining journalists (see Hannerz, 2004). If a news organization has only one African correspondent who is based in Egypt, this correspondent will have to rely on wire services or on other news outlets to cover a situation in Nigeria. Moreover, foreign correspondents are perhaps more vulnerable than regular beat journalists to PR and propaganda strategies from states, NGOs and other organizations (see Luyendijk, 2010; Palm, 2002; Williams, 2011). In sum, various restrictions on foreign correspondents can make it difficult to challenge Western norms in journalistic accounts (see Luyendijk, 2010) or to contest the information power of local elites. Accordingly, one can argue that the structural imperatives of international journalism facilitate the construction of stories in a manner that accords with the views of politically and economically powerful groups.

3.3.2 Understanding ideology in journalism

As stated earlier, ideologies are worldviews that articulate the interests of a social group in relation to a specific power relation. Ideologies are linked to the common sense of group members, which in turn is entwined with accepted (or normative) and non-accepted values in society. The notion of democracy must thus be viewed as an important ideological battlefield. In journalism, ideology generally appears in the form of naturalized or taken-for-granted assumptions, stereotypes and simplifications that legitimize or delegitimize specific groups, values or actions. However, the construction of ideology in journalistic texts rarely reflects the views and practices of a single journalist but rather occurs through a “chain of communicative events” (Fairclough, 1995a:49). This chain of events involves the recontextualization of real-world events upon which stories are based and of source materials, as well as the editing and re-drafting of stories, which may involve several news workers (Fairclough, 1995a).

Central to the manifestation of ideology in media representations is the construction of difference between actors. In general, one can say that difference relates to distinctions that are made between one subject and an-
other, such that one subject fits into an in-group (us) and the other subject fits into an out-group (them). As Hall (1997) explains, difference helps us to make sense of the world by comparing and emphasizing opposites: black and white, male and female, democracy and dictatorship. In addition, difference helps us to classify things, groups and nations; dogs, cats, and rabbits fall into the category of animals; birch, ash and oak are categorized as trees. Similar categorizations are often made regarding politics: Sweden, Great Britain and the US are democracies; Iran, North Korea and Saudi Arabia are dictatorships. Moreover, difference serves to construct individual and collective identities by separating self-images from images of an Other. Thus, Sweden (in-group) is a democracy and therefore different from, for example, Cuba (out-group). The construction of difference is thus intertwined with the ascription of legitimacy because difference can legitimize certain groups and their actions (by associating them with what is good), and de-legitimize the Other.

Hallin’s (1986) theory of the different spheres of journalism in relation to the notion of objectivity is also important for theorizing ideology in journalism. According to Hallin, one can characterize journalism as divided into three different spheres, all of which are guided by different standards of objectivity. The first sphere, the sphere of consensus, comprises events that are not regarded as controversial at all. Here, the journalist does not need to follow any principle of objectivity because there is a consensus among the general public on the topic in question. In the second sphere, called the sphere of legitimate controversy, the journalist is guided by the value of objectivity because she reports on events that include elements of dispute (such as an election or a strike). The third sphere, called the sphere of deviance, contains values, actors and actions that are despised by the political mainstream (for example, terrorist organizations). In this sphere, journalists do not need to be neutral because the journalistic task here is more or less to condemn particular values, actors and actions to uphold the boundaries of politically acceptable conflict.

Hallin’s theory is important to an understanding of ideology in journalism because it underscores that the journalistic principles of objectivity and impartiality are greatly dependent on established political values in society. Thus, what is accepted and taken for granted at the mainstream level also sets the boundaries of legitimate controversy in journalistic texts. Hallin provides examples from the coverage of the Vietnam War, wherein legitimate controversy excluded the position of communists because communism was considered deviant. In this sense, Hallin’s theorization explains how the work of journalists protects rather than defies established political values in a society. Moreover, such conduct is in accordance with
the notions of objectivity and impartiality because these concepts are closely connected to the perceived common sense of society in general (see also Allan, 1998; Gitlin, 1980/2003).

However, it is important to note that the boundaries of the different spheres described in Hallin’s theory occasionally shift. For example, Hallin (1987) himself claims that the Cold War framework that influenced the US media coverage of the Vietnam War was not very dominant in the media after the end of the conflict in Indochina (see also Hammond, 2007). Furthermore, Schudson (2002/2011) shows that American journalism shifted from the sphere of legitimate controversy to the sphere of consensus when reporting on the terrorist attacks against the US in September 2001. Note that these shifts follow changes in real politics and exemplify the changing character of hegemony. As stated previously, hegemony must be constantly reformulated. For example, it is reasonable to believe that the defeat in Vietnam led to the need to reformulate US foreign policy, which affected the media’s coverage of foreign events. Similarly, the shocking and traumatic experiences of 9/11 made it easy to set journalistic ideals aside and to jump on the nationalist bandwagon. In any case, these examples suggest that the media adapted to the general political consensus.

To be sure, considering the media through the lens of hegemony is not intended to suggest that the media monolithically reproduces the ideologies of economically and politically powerful groups, contrary to the claims of some unfortunate interpretations of the theory (see Altheide, 1984). Criticism in the media clearly exists—at least in countries where the media is independent of the government—and the work of journalists has been important to revelations of power abuses in the sphere of politics. The question is thus not about ruling out the occurrence of criticism or alternative opinions but about examining whether critique in the media challenges the core ideological tenets of capitalist society or if the critique aligns with these tenets.

Ekman (2011) notes that the conventions of the different genres of journalism structure the range of views expressed in newspapers. For example, although editorials might express either liberal or conservative views, the culture section might contain more leftist viewpoints. Although such a range of opinions is an example of the political pluralism in newspapers, it suggests that more counter-hegemonic views are expressed in sections aimed at an audience that is more highbrow than that of other sections.

Gitlin (1980/2003) makes an important contribution to the understanding of counter-hegemonic views in the news media by arguing that tensions between journalistic routines and the demands of various interest groups on the media to be credible and responsible can induce the media to adjust
their evaluation of what is newsworthy and to provide access to other views and perspectives. Such adjustments may lead to the incorporation of alternative views in the coverage of specific topics without altering the core dominant ideology. Gitlin uses the Vietnam War as an example of how media coverage in the US shifted after the Tet offensive in 1968; specifically, moderate criticism of the war in the media was more common after this event. According to the new outlook “the war is unsuccessful, perhaps wrong; but ending it is the task of responsible authorities, not radical movements” (Gitlin, 1980/2003:274). Thus, radical social movements that opposed the war were still perceived to be unacceptable opposition. According to Gitlin, such shifts indicate that the practices of journalism “are at once steady enough to sustain hegemonic principles and flexible enough to absorb many new facts” (Gitlin, 1980/2003:272). Thus, radical viewpoints can be absorbed and domesticated.9

We have discussed in this section the different ways in which ideology can operate in journalism. As explained earlier, ideologies are often expressed through language use, or discourse, and can be discerned based on how journalistic texts use specific words, arguments or even inflections (Fairclough, 1995a; Fowler, 1991). The next chapter continues the discussion of the relationship between journalism and the manifestation of ideology—especially how ideology can be revealed in texts—in the context of describing the methodology of the dissertation, which is rooted in critical discourse analysis.

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9 For a critical discussion of Gitlin’s position, see Dimaggio (2009).
4. Methods and materials
This chapter aims to present and discuss the methodology of this dissertation in order to make the research process comprehensible. The chapter presents the research program of critical discourse analysis (CDA), whose methodology is used in the different studies. In addition, the choice of newspapers, data collection procedures and the selection of materials are discussed. Moreover, the analytic procedures of the empirical studies are described, and finally, the quality of the research is assessed.

Before presenting the methodological framework within which this dissertation has worked, it is important to note that the empirical research presented in the papers of this dissertation relies on qualitative methodology, sometimes referred to as an intensive research design (Danermark et al., 2003:Chapter 7). The motivation for this choice is that the overall methodological interest of the dissertation is to provide theoretically and contextually grounded interpretations of the ways in which the media ideologically ascribe meaning to the notion of democracy (see Richardson, 2007) and to focus closely on specific cases in which such constructions occur (Danermark et al., 2003). It is important to stress that the qualitative approach affects not only the form of analysis but also the data collection and the assessment of research quality and generalizability, which will be highlighted later in this chapter.

4.1 Critical discourse analysis: understanding ideology in journalism
In the chapter on theory, it was argued that hegemony is often fought out in the cultural sphere and in cultural institutions such as journalism and that ideologies, which serve as the main mechanisms of hegemony, are often expressed and manifested through language. This means that for the ideology-critical endeavor of this dissertation, we need a methodology that helps us to grasp how ideologies are manifested in journalism. This methodological need leads us to the framework of CDA.

CDA is an interdisciplinary research program that, through the use of different theories and methodologies, seeks to understand how the use of language can reinforce or challenge uneven relations of power; in short, it seeks to understand how discourses work ideologically (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Within the framework of CDA, media discourse is perceived as an important area of ideological manifestation, and the characteristics of media discourse have received particular attention (see Fairclough, 1995a; Machin and Mayr, 2012; Richardson, 2007).
Central to CDA is the conception of discourse as “language use in speech and writing” and as type of “social practice” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:258). Discourse is perceived as being set in a dialectical relationship with the “situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)”—hence, the contexts—that frame it (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:258). This dialectical relationship makes discourse both constitutive and shaped, and it gives language a dual role: it can be repressive, by reinforcing asymmetrical power-relations, and it can be emancipatory, by promoting transformation of the same asymmetrical power-relations (Wodak, 2001). It is in this manner that the ideological character of discourse is understood within CDA. In line with the “explicit socio-political agenda” of CDA (Garrett and Bell, 1998:6), the task is to unveil the ideological character of discourse to help to overcome relations of domination. Such fundamentals not only reflect the alignment of CDA with the critical theoretical tradition but also guide its methodological efforts on a general level (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

In general, one can say that CDA involves critique in at least two different respects. Through discourse-immanent critique, the critical analysis of discourse “aims at discovering inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009:88). Additionally, by drawing on her own contextual knowledge and on social theories, the discourse analyst can conduct socio-diagnostic critique to demystify “the—manifest or latent—persuasive or ‘manipulative’ character of discursive practices” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009:88). Qualitative research approaches are also common in CDA (Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2008) and are used in this dissertation.

However, CDA is an interdisciplinary research process and encompasses different traditions and perspectives. Three of these traditions/perspectives, each of which had a unique and important impact on the methodology of this dissertation, are described very briefly below.

The work of Norman Fairclough (1995a; 1995b; 2006) has been very influential in the social sciences for its development of an understanding of discourse through a linguistically oriented perspective. His approach,

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10 Reisigl and Wodak discuss CDA in the context of their discourse-historical approach (DHA), which is a specific branch of CDA. However, the two aspects of critique mentioned in this paragraph should be considered applicable to any type of CDA because they relate to the textual and contextual dimensions of discourse analysis. It is also appropriate to stress that in addition to these two aspects of critique, Reisigl and Wodak propose a third aspect, prospective critique, through which the analyst aims to contribute to communicative improvement (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).
which is sometimes called the dialectical-relational approach and which strongly relies on a Marxist understanding of social structures, seeks to comprehend how social conflict and social change are manifested linguistically in discourse. The analytical focus is thus rather micro-oriented because it puts methodological emphasis on the grammatical structure of a specific piece of discourse and aims to diagnose how struggle and changes at the sociocultural level are visible in discourse.

Teun van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach (van Dijk, 2009) emphasizes the relationship between socio-psychological processes and discourse. Grounded in socio-cognitive theory, this approach seeks to understand the links between social structures, our collective frames of reference, social representations and discourse. Compared with Fairclough’s approach, the linguistic focus in van Dijk’s approach is less micro-oriented. For example, when applied to media discourse, this approach focuses on the semantic and schematic structure and coherence of a text rather than on specific grammatical inflections or conjunctions (van Dijk, 1988).

The discourse-historical approach associated with Ruth Wodak centers on the political field and is interested in the interrelationships between discourses in different genres and historical contexts (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Reisigl and Wodak, 2009). Unlike other CDA approaches, the discourse-historical approach emphasizes the role of history as context and seeks to understand how discourses are embedded in and interact with specific historical contexts and the power relations that characterize these contexts. The linguistic analysis in this approach revolves around argumentation and is close to rhetorical analysis, with a special interest in understanding how different discursive strategies are used to construct meaning around a specific social problem.

As indicated above, CDA encompasses different theoretical and methodological approaches, which reflects CDA’s interdisciplinary nature. As Wodak and Meyer argue, “although there is no consistent CDA methodology”, there are certain common features among several approaches to CDA (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:31). One such a feature is that the analysis is problem oriented “and not focused on specific linguistic items”; another common feature is the eclectic nature of theory and methodology (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:31).

The use of CDA in the different studies of this dissertation is intended overall to produce an analysis that is primarily problem-oriented and to permit an eclectic approach to theory and methods (which will be specified in section 4.3). Thus, the research problems of each study have been placed at the center, and the methodological approaches that best fit the specific problems and best interact with the theoretical concepts have been selected.
This methodology has resulted in a rather unorthodox approach in terms of following specific “schools” within CDA. As will become evident when the analytic procedures of each study are described, certain studies in this dissertation even combine linguistic categories from different CDA approaches. Although one must be cautious when translating methodological concepts and tools into new contexts (to maintain the validity of the analysis), some degree of methodological eclecticism can certainly be necessary. One must bear in mind that every problem is unique, which, in some instances, requires the adaption of established methodologies and the development of new ones. The recent development of different CDA approaches to media discourse (Berglez, 2006; Carvalho, 2008; Eriksson, 2002; Fairclough, 1995a; Richardson, 2007) demonstrate the need for a certain degree of methodological flexibility.

Although CDA is generally centered on linguistic analysis at a textual level, the use of the CDA framework also requires skillful contextualization to understand the ideological characteristics of media output. Thus, the researcher is required to clearly define the contexts that surround a text and to have sufficient contextual knowledge to make inferences about the ideological character of a text. On one level, social theories, or so-called grand theories, can serve as macro-sociological frameworks for contextualizing a given discursive event within a specific social context. For example, by analyzing a piece of media discourse through feminist theory, one can evaluate if such discourse serves to challenge unequal power relations between the sexes. Furthermore, Reisigl and Wodak propose that researchers “transcend the pure linguistic dimension and […] include, more or less systematically, the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimensions in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:35). This type of triangulation requires the researcher to collect a variety of information that allows her to deeply understand a specific case and that occasionally requires her to collect various empirical materials.

This dissertation works with contextualization on different levels. On one level, as clear from the previous chapter, this study works with different theories to contextualize the object of study. The use of such a theoretical contextualization allows one to understand and evaluate how discourses on democracy support or challenge uneven power relations within and between nations in global capitalism. On another level, important research on the contemporary political history of Venezuela, which is the backbone of the context chapter of this thesis (see Chapter 5), has been studied. Additionally, a series of interviews has been conducted with journalists who work as correspondents or beat journalists in Venezuela or who are in-
volved in the reporting on Venezuela in international journalism in other ways. These interviews have not been transcribed and are not used as data for empirical analysis; rather, they were conducted to increase my contextual knowledge about Venezuela in general and about journalism in relation to Venezuela in particular.

CDA has been criticized by scholars who question the sufficiency of a textual analytical approach in making inferences beyond the actual text. Notably, Philo (2007) suggests that the textual dimensions of CDA should be integrated with an inquiry into the production and consumption of media texts to permit inferences based on the context. Although the methodological triangulation suggested by Philo—which is far from nonexistent (see Eriksson, 2002; Östman, 2009)—can be an excellent technique for following the circulation of meaning, it is difficult to agree with the claim that textual analysis as applied in CDA is an inferior method for making inferences beyond the text. As Fürsich (2009) argues, media texts serve as sites of debate and negotiation, and can have

moments of ‘deep-play’ ... beyond the producers’ and audiences’ intentions. It is in these moments when the text takes on a life of its own (often in ambiguities, unresolved dichotomies or contradictions) where the textual critic finds crucial insights. (Fürsich, 2009:245)

By considering such insights against a well-defined and studied socio-cultural context, the researcher can assess how textual items articulate perspectives and arguments that legitimize or question different positions in a given power struggle. In this regard, critics have warned that categorical appeals to context may serve certain interpretations but displace others (Blommaert, 2001; Lægaard, 2009). Even if this criticism is valid, the basis of such an argument essentially applies to all types of theory-driven and interpretative research. It is sound to argue that the best way for CDA scholars to address such criticism is to provide well-grounded analyses of context and to clearly identify power struggles within the context. In this way, the researcher can at a minimum provide a theoretically based argument that a piece of discourse serves specific positions in the given context.

4.2 Materials
It should be clear by now that journalism is an important institution for the exercise of hegemony, and that journalism’s use of language—or its discourse—is a rich source of information for the analysis of ideology. Thus, by conducting a critical analysis on journalistic discourse, we can more fully understand how the notion of democracy is ideologically loaded.
All individual studies of this dissertation are empirically grounded on a sample of three elite newspapers from different geo-political contexts. In this section, the motives for delimiting the analysis of journalism to elite newspapers are stated, and the data collection and the construction of samples for analysis are described.

**4.2.1 Choosing elite newspapers**

Although the newspaper medium constitutes one of the oldest mass media, its importance is evidenced by its relatively high circulation in different parts of the world (see Hadenius et al., 2011:138). According to World Press Trends, in 2011, there were approximately twice as many newspaper readers as Internet users on a global level (WAN-IFRA, 2012), which reveals the global importance of newspapers as source of information. Furthermore, as part of the news media genre, newspapers play an important role in people’s conceptions of the world, especially regarding politics (Antecol and Endersby, 1999; Scheufele, 2002; Shah et al., 2005). Therefore, as Richardson states, “it should come as no surprise that the discourse of newspapers has been, and continues to be, scrutinised” (Richardson, 2007:2).

This dissertation delimits its focus on newspaper discourse to that of elite newspapers, a choice that is based on the capital of credibility related to professionalism and journalistic quality that such media organizations enjoy, especially in societies with a liberal press tradition. Traditionally, elite dailies have, due to their orientation toward the middle and upper classes, distinguished themselves from the tabloid press by assigning more resources to the coverage of politics, including foreign affairs. Additionally, as agenda setters, elite newspapers have traditionally influenced the political coverage of other media. For the ideology-critical analysis of the notion of democracy in journalism, elite newspapers are therefore perceived here as a highly relevant source of information.

Three elite newspapers from different countries and continents are chosen as sources of data: *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden), *El Pais* (Uruguay) and the *New York Times* (US). The selection of the specific newspapers is not based on an intent to compare the outlets but rather is designed to obtain a broad set of data from exponents of different political cultures and geopolitical contexts. This methodological choice is grounded in the importance of the political culture in the country of publication to the construction of foreign affairs in the news media, as is evident from the research overview (see Chapter 2). Moreover, a selection that includes newspapers from countries that differ with respect to history, economics and politics “makes it possible to avoid results which are heavily dependent on the conditions...”
of one particular nation” (Olausson, 2013:713-714). The strategy has been to select the leading elite newspaper from each selected country.

The selection of the New York Times (NYT) provides data that are not only from one of the world’s leading elite newspapers but also from an exponent of the US, the world’s only remaining superpower and the country at the center of global capitalism. The selection of the NYT as an exponent of the US context is also important given Washington’s historical perception of Latin America as its “backyard,” which has been manifested in interventions in the internal affairs of Latin American countries (Goglinger, 2006; Regalado Álvarez, 2007). These historical relations have certainly shaped the discourse of the NYT on Latin America in general and on Venezuela specifically. Although the NYT does not state any explicit editorial stance, it is often alleged to be liberal. The NYT is owned by the New York Times Corporation and has one correspondent stationed in Venezuela, in addition to other correspondents in Latin America (Kumar, 2011; The New York Times Company, 2012). The weekday print circulation is approximately 780,000, and the Sunday circulation is approximately 1.3 million (Lee, 2012).

The selection of Dagens Nyheter (DN) yields data from a Western but traditionally non-aligned country. The Swedish political context was permeated by a social democratic hegemony during the twentieth century, and its foreign policy has been characterized by formal neutrality. Sweden had a benevolent attitude toward progressive countries of the South during the latter part of the last century; however, following its affiliation with the European Union, Sweden’s foreign policy has been characterized by closer relationships with NATO, which was clearly evidenced by Sweden’s provision of military support for the bombings against Libya in 2011. DN, which is based in Stockholm but has a national reach, is the leading daily morning newspaper in Sweden and had a circulation of 344,200 copies in 2007. The newspaper labels itself as independently liberal and is owned by media giant Bonnier AB. During recent decades, DN had at least one correspondent stationed in Latin America. However, it does not currently have any correspondents in the region, although it claims to have contributors in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Dagens Nyheter, 2008).

El País (EP) was selected to include the discourse of one Latin American newspaper regarding another Latin American country. Given that cultural distance is considered an important factor in the amount and shape of the coverage of international affairs (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Wu, 2004), the cultural proximity of Uruguay and Venezuela should shape the reporting to some extent. After the fall of the right-wing military dictatorship in the mid-1980s, the political context of Uruguay has been characterized by
political stability and openness. In 2004, the dominance of the two traditional political parties Partido Colorado (The Red Party) and Partido Nacional (National Party) was defeated and the leftist coalition Frente Amplio (Broad Front) was elected to the government for the first time. The political stability that has characterized Uruguay during the last twenty years, together with my prior knowledge regarding the media situation in that country, are the main reasons that EP was chosen over another Latin American newspaper. EP is based in Montevideo and is the country’s leading newspaper, with a circulation of approximately 130,000 (Quick, 2003). EP is part of the consortium Grupo Diarios de América, whose roster also includes other newspapers, including O Globo (Brazil), La Nación (Argentina), and El Nacional (Venezuela) (Grupo Diarios América, 2012). The editorial position of the Uruguayan daily is conservative (Achugar, 2004) and closely aligned with the right-wing political party Partido Nacional. Moreover, EP does not have any correspondents stationed in Venezuela.

The selection of newspapers for this dissertation can be challenged on at least two grounds. First, one can argue that delimitating the sample to elite newspapers may condition the results. Because these dailies are targeted first and foremost at middle- and upper-class audiences, one can assume not only that their discourse on politics is more formal but also that their news content is more focused on elite sources, compared with the tabloid press. Such elite press characteristics could, one might assume, foster bourgeois rather than counter-hegemonic understandings of democracy. However, such assumptions must be tested empirically, and rather than undermining the analytical focus on elite newspapers, these assumptions underscore the need to study the discourse of such media. Given the prestige and importance that elite newspapers enjoy, it is important to understand how their discourse manifests ideology in their treatment of democracy.

The selection of newspapers can also be criticized for its omission of any newssheets belonging to the (socialist) left. However, this exclusion merely reflects the media situation in the chosen countries and not a methodological strategy. For example, in Sweden, newspapers belonging to the political right are clearly predominant, especially among morning newspapers (Hadenius et al., 2011). A similar pattern is detected in the US. In Uruguay, the circulation of the main leftist daily La República lags behind those of both EP and the other conservative newspaper, El Observador. Moreover, according to the ethics espoused by these newsrooms, the right-wing bias in the selected newspapers should become apparent only in the editorial pages. Therefore, and considering the decline of foreign news (Hafez, 2007) and the concentration of international news sources (Boyd-Barrett...
and Rantanen, 2004; Williams, 2011), it is far from given that a left-oriented newspaper would have provided significantly different news content.

Finally, this dissertation relies on materials from the print editions of the respective newspapers, not from their web editions. This choice relates to the fact that typically only a selection of print materials is published in web editions. Thus, relying exclusively on web editions could potentially exclude important content.

### 4.2.2 Data collection and materials

Consistent with the methodology of intensive research, the collection of data is strategic (Danermark et al., 2003). The overarching goal of the data collection is to collect materials that, in accordance with the purpose of the study, can provide information on how democracy is constructed in relation to the political system and to the central political actors of Venezuela as an exponent of a counter-hegemonic country. To fulfill this goal, the strategy is to focus the data collection around a series of events in Venezuelan politics that, in different respects, serve as information-rich cases (Danermark et al., 2003). Because I have followed Venezuelan politics and its coverage for more than ten years, I know that certain political events, such as presidential elections, referendums, protests and upheavals, have attracted the attention of the media over the years and that the coverage of such events would most likely provide adequate information for the studies of this dissertation. Moreover, basing the data collection on such events increases the possibility of obtaining sufficient materials from each newspaper for each case.

The chosen events for data collection are the coup d’état of 2002, the oil strike of late 2002 and early 2003, the recall referendum of 2004, the presidential election of 2006, and the referendum for a constitutional reform in 2007 (for more information on these events, please see Chapter 5). The sudden death of Hugo Chávez in 2013 occurred when one of the studies (Article I) was being designed. Given the importance of Chávez to the political transformation of Venezuela (as well as other parts of Latin America), I decided to include this event as well.

Although all of the chosen cases are information rich, they are of different types. The oil strike, the presidential election and the recall referendum of 2004 are regarded as normal, or typical, cases (Danermark et al., 2003:298) because they fit within the topics that are commonly included in the coverage of countries from the global South, such as elections, political conflicts and violence (Thussu, 2004). In contrast, the coup of 2002 is regarded as a critical case (Danermark et al., 2003:298) because, although it is normal in many ways (i.e., it is a political conflict involving violence),
it also contains elements that make it special. For example, it centers on the overthrow of an elected but counter-hegemonic government and on the temporary installation of a coup regime that dissolved the parliament and other legal institutions. Thus, this case has rather unique characteristics that can provide interesting insights about the perception of what is democratically legitimate. Finally, the constitutional referendum of 2007 and the death of Chávez are regarded as extreme cases (Danermark et al., 2003:297). Although these cases are typical in the sense that they fit into the themes that are usually covered in the global South, they also possess some unusual characteristics. For example, if Chávez’s rejected proposal had instead been approved, the constitutional referendum would have radically altered the political system of Venezuela and shifted it even further away from liberal democracy. This case is therefore extreme in the sense that it focuses on a rather unusual event, namely, a referendum to shift the political system of a country away from the notions of democracy that dominate on a global scale. The death of a sitting president is also unusual, and given the importance of Chávez to the political development of Venezuela, this case can be very informative with respect to how the democratic character of Venezuela is assessed by the media.

Materials published by all three newspapers during the periods of the selected cases were collected. The materials from DN and the NYT were collected using the electronic databases Retriever and ProQuest, respectively. These materials were occasionally checked against microfilm copies to control the reliability of the database retrievals. Data from DN and the NYT were retrieved on different occasions in 2010, 2011 and 2013. The materials from EP were collected at the newspaper’s archive and at the Uruguayan National library in Uruguay’s capital, Montevideo, and by purchasing individual newspaper editions. The reason for this data collection is that, unlike the other two newspapers, EP does not maintain publicly accessible online databases of its print editions. Data were collected in Uruguay on three occasions in 2010, 2011 and 2013. Data collected from EP’s archive were photographed with a digital camera and later printed, whereas the materials collected from the National Library were photocopied. In some instances, supplementary collections of individual items were made, either through online searches or by contacting the newspaper.

The collection of data was intended to be as broad as possible. In addition to defining time frames for each event, rather broad search terms were used, such as *Venezuela and *Chávez; in the case of the coup d’état of 2002, the search terms *coup and *kupp (Swedish) were also used. For the EP material, I read the different editions of the newspaper and selected materials that mentioned Venezuela in a political context. Through this
strategy, a versatile body of data comprising different topics, sub-genres and discourse types was retrieved. Later, refined selections for each study were conducted to suit the aims of the respective studies.

The overall ambition of the sample construction for the different studies was to offer a high degree of complexity and variation in the topics and discourses as well as to reach saturation (see Viscovi 2006:115). Due to differences in the designs of the studies, different approaches were used to construct samples for empirical analysis. Whereas Articles I and II rely on materials from different cases, Article III is focused on a specific event: the coup d’État of 2002. This distinction corresponds to the different aims of the individual studies.

For Article I, the data collection focused on materials related to the constitutional reform of 2007 and to Chávez’s death in 2013 because it was likely that questions about legitimate democracy would be raised in the coverage of a reform that would radically change Venezuela’s system of democracy and of the death of the man who had been Venezuela’s head of state for nearly one-and-a-half decades. Within these two broader cases, and in line with the aim of the study, I constructed a sample of news items. This sample construction was guided by the goal of obtaining a sample that includes different topics regarding Venezuelan democracy, such as political liberties, the performance of key political actors and the performance of key political institutions.

Article II is primarily interested in the discursive differentiation between supporters and opponents of Chávez and endeavors to address the complexity of the construction of these agents. To enhance the likelihood of obtaining a broad set of discourses on these agents, this study relies on materials from different cases (the oil strike, both referendums, and the presidential election). In line with the aim of the study, the sample was delimited to news items. After reading the bulk of the retrieved materials, a careful selection was made of news items that covered the composition and actions of the groups in different ways, with the goal of obtaining varied constructions of these actors.

In contrast to the other two studies, Article III focuses on one specific case, namely, the coup of 2002. Because the coup d’État in question is a deviant event that dramatically disrupted the constitutional order in Venezuela, the coverage of this event can help to identify conceptions of democracy. Because the study in question is also interested in discursive change, the selection of materials was also influenced by this aim. In accordance with the study design, the selection of materials was intended to encompass the complexity of coup coverage with regard to both topics and genres. Thus, unlike the other two studies, this article also includes other genres,
such as editorials, op-eds and articles from supplements, even though it focuses primarily on news. As scholars have emphasized, the selection of materials and the actual analysis are not completely separate in CDA (Carvalho, 2008; Wodak and Meyer, 2009), which is indeed true for this study. For example, in the first readings of the initial reporting on the overthrow of Chávez’s government, I detected a rather stark criticism of Chávez, which I conceived as more prevalent than the criticism of the actual coup. It was important to highlight and analyze such discursive patterns in more detail. One could also observe that criticism of the coup became more prevalent in the reporting of the aftermath of the coup, which I also found important to highlight. If I had ignored items that presented such criticism, I would have reduced the possibility of showing important discursive fluctuations regarding what is conceived as democratically legitimate.

The selection of individual newspaper items allows for a certain degree of subjectivity because the researcher must consider each selected piece to be sufficiently relevant. The risk of being too subjective in the selection of materials for qualitative or intensive research has often been criticized by the quantitative research camp. However, and as will be elaborated later, one must transcend quantitative notions of research quality when conducting intensive research. Despite the risks of subjectivity, which are practically inevitable, the strategic and careful selection of materials is a precondition for obtaining a sample that satisfies the aim of the specific study.

Taken together, the three studies analyze 163 items from DN, EP and the NYT, as specified in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>DN</th>
<th>EP</th>
<th>NYT</th>
<th>Sum (per study)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article I</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article II</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article III</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum (per newspaper)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Total 163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Analyzed items (separated by study and newspaper).

One should note that not all of the 163 analyzed items are unique. Of these, 8 items (4 from DN, 1 from EP and 3 from the NYT) pertaining to the case of the constitutional reform of 2007 are used in both Articles I and II. Therefore, the final corpus comprises 155 items. However, the methodological difference between these two studies (see section 4.3) means that I was not able to reuse the analysis conducted in one study in the other.
Moreover, the uneven distribution among the three newspapers reflects differences in the amount of coverage on Venezuela between the newssheets.

**4.3 The analytical procedures**

In the spirit of CDA, the empirical analysis endeavors to problematize how media discourse, in its constructions of democracy, serves to reinforce or challenge power relations at the level of signification. The analytical focus throughout the studies is delimited to verbal language, meaning that pictures and other means of communication are excluded. Although pictures are important elements for constructing meaning in newspapers, it is appropriate to argue that verbal language remains central to constructing meaning; this argument is particularly applicable to elite newspapers, in contrast to television, for example. Moreover, many newspaper articles are not accompanied by graphical content. Accordingly, the use of verbal language constitutes a central element in the recognition of ideology in elite newspaper discourse, which calls for the analysis of verbal language.

In general, the analytical task involves the search for “aspects or dimensions of reality that are obscured by an apparently natural and transparent use of language” (Carvalho, 2008:162). This task description indicates that textual analysis has been combined with sociodiagnostic critique (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:33) to discern the ideological character of discourse. In all studies herein, the analytical procedure has in different ways applied methodological concepts and analytical tools to parse the text to determine how the different elements of text serve to construct meaning at a more global level.

Moreover, the analysis in each of the three studies uses abduction to make inferences (Danermark et al., 2003:182-186). This principle involves not only the recontextualization of the empirical materials in light of theory but also the revision and development of theory in light of new insights provided by the empirical data. In contrast to both deduction and induction, abduction requires the researcher to go back and forth between theory and empirical data to obtain a more developed notion of a phenomenon.

Due to the different designs of the individual studies, the concrete analyses of the studies are also different. Below, certain aspects concerning the analysis that are not fully developed in each article are developed and clarified.
4.3.1 Article I

Article I is methodologically rooted in van Dijk’s (1988) model of discourse analysis of news. Essentially, the model focuses on the thematic and schematic structures as well as on the microstructure of news texts. The microstructural analysis focuses on coherence, lexical style, redundant and omitted information, and quotations. In this sense, the model is highly relevant to understanding the general topics and discourses of a news item and to understanding how different journalistic choices serve to realize them.

In this study, the methodological task is to extract the discursive construction of (il)legitimate democracy at both the macro and micro levels. To accomplish this task, it is important to understand not only the general topics of each text and how these topics concern different aspects of democracy but also the topics’ schematic functions (for example, whether the argument in question is used to contextualize a specific situation) and how individual microstructural realizations (such as lexical style) serve to provide a specific meaning to the general content. In some instances, important constructions that reveal specific perspectives on democracy are not part of any main topic but instead are identified as sub-topics and identified in the microstructural analysis. In such cases, it is important to compare how the specific finding corresponds to or differs from the general results.

The analysis is highly abductive and at times forced me to revise the theory and to consider the findings in a new light. For example, when I realized that the construction of power concentration was recurrent, I had to stop and consider what such a finding really meant. I could of course understand that the discourse constructed a problem for democracy, but I was unable to specify the ideological adherence of such construction. This problem led me to read more about liberal democratic theory and the theory of separation of powers. In this new theoretical light, I could see how much of the discourse focused on deviance from specific fundamentals of liberal democracy, which of course exposed liberal understandings of democracy in the media discourse.

4.3.2 Article II

The methodology of Article II differs from that of the other articles. Because the second study focuses on the construction of actors, a methodological toolkit that is appropriate for such an analytic endeavor was composed. In this study, the different topics of a news item are not very important per se (as in Articles I and III), whereas the discursive contexts in which the supporters and opponents of Chávez appear are highly signifi-
cant. Furthermore, from the outset, the analysis sought to compare the discourse on the supporters of Chávez with that on the president’s opponents to explore how difference is constructed. The theoretical framework around the concept of Eurocentrism has served as a framework of interpretation.

On one level, the analysis focused on how the studied political actors were framed through the choice of quotations and through interventions by the journalist’s voice (Carvalho, 2008). Such analysis looks for the use of phrases that associate the (members of the) two groups with specific values, objectives and struggles. This analysis allows one to discern how journalists choose to contextualize the different actors and how journalists provide an understanding of the polarization in Venezuela. On another level, the analysis is more micro-oriented and concentrates on different linguistic categories. The analysis of referential and predicational strategies (Richardson, 2007) examines how the actors are referred to and characterized. This analysis is important because it can reveal hidden values in the discourse. Furthermore, the analysis examines transitivity (Machin and Mayr, 2012), focusing on how the media discourse constructs activity, victimhood and blame. The methods by which some actors are provided agency and are constructed as active, especially in situations of confrontation, can be highly significant to the ideological loading of a text. An important complement to the analysis of transitivity is the analysis of nominalization (Machin and Mayr, 2012). This analytical moment focuses on sentences in which actions have been nominalized, meaning that a verb has been replaced with a noun. Such linguistic constructions, which are very common in journalistic discourse, can be of great ideological importance because they can delete an agent from a specific action and thereby conceal concrete actions by making the actions abstract. As observed in the results related to the construction of violence, transitivity and nominalization often intersect, which underscores the importance of combining these two analytical tools.

The micro-oriented linguistic analysis designed for this study is significant for the examination of actors and for understanding how discourse functions at the micro-level. Given that constructions involving transitivity and nominalization occur frequently in news texts, it is important that the researcher assess the relevance of different actions when studying a large body of data. As Viscoli (2006:112) notes, some parts of a text yield a better return than others do, and it is important to emphasize that it is “in relation to their direct or indirect involvement in reproducing or resisting the systems of ideology and social power” that we are interested in these linguistic categories (Richardson 2007:39). For example, when analyzing
the materials, the use of transitivity was found to be more relevant in constructions of physical confrontation than in ones in which an actor explains his political engagement. For the latter constructions, the analysis of phrases was found to be more revealing.

4.3.3 Article III
Article III studies the discursive construction of the coup d’état against Chávez’s government. For this study, the identification of how the media discourse changed and developed in relation to the twists and turns on the ground in Venezuela is pivotal to understanding ideological (re)formation. Unlike the other two studies, this study focuses not only on news but also on other sub-genres, such as opinion materials and supplements. The reason for including these sub-genres here is that this study is interested in understanding the ideological loading of the coup across sub-genres. Analysis of editorials, for example, is valuable because as opinion pieces, editorials are guided by, and thus make explicit, the doxa of the elite. Hence, editorials reveal the common-sense values of a specific newsroom.

Based on the readings of the materials collected in the first and broad retrieval, it was possible to identify different time spots in the coverage. For example, when Chávez’s government was overthrown, there was substantial focus on the toppling, whereas the president’s comeback forced the media to focus on that event. This process is of course quite normal and follows the logic of the news media. However, such shifts, which are temporal as well as greatly thematic, potentially have ideological relevance. The fact that the coup failed could mean that issues that were minimized in the initial coverage were highlighted in later coverage. I therefore constructed four temporal categories—pre-coup, overthrow, comeback, and aftermath—into which the materials were sorted. An important factor in setting the time frames of these categories was the overall thematics of the main articles in the foreign news pages and of the front-page articles, to the extent that there were any. All materials published on a date corresponding to a specific time spot were classified as belonging to that temporal category.

It is important to stress the constructivist nature of such categorizations, given the rapid developments in Venezuela during the days of the coup (see Chapter 5). However, because one objective of the study is to discern discursive change, these categories can still be useful for perceiving how the discourse in the reporting during a specific time spot of coup events (e.g., the overthrow) differs from the discourse in the coverage during another time spot (e.g., the aftermath). In particular, I found it analytically relevant to “freeze” the construction of the actual toppling of Chávez’s government.
because this event involved the overthrow of an elected government by unconstitutional means and thus yielded important insights for the study of the discursive construction of democracy. In this sense, one can argue that the overthrow constitutes a type of critical discourse moment (Carvalho, 2008), and thus, distinguishing the materials in this temporal category can be valuable for discerning discursive change.

An important component of the analysis was the identification of the main topics of the items and of what Reisigl and Wodak (2001) call discursive strategies. By “strategy,” they mean “a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim” (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001:44). Discursive strategies are realized linguistically, and the identification of strategies is based on discerning how the actions of different agents in Venezuela are justified or condemned in the media discourse. For example, from what perspective is the overthrow of the Venezuelan government constructed, what arguments are given prevalence, and which are mitigated? The identification of discursive strategies involves conducting more micro-level analyses of how argumentations on these issues are structured. Referential strategies, which include labels given to different events and actors and the ways and contexts in which different referents are used, are also important at this level. In addition, the identification of topoi, which are strategies based on common attitudes that are used to justify certain argumentations (Grue, 2009; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001), is also relevant. With respect to topoi, the analysis sought to evaluate how the discourse justifies certain actions without necessarily providing solid arguments to support such justifications. To adapt the analysis of discursive strategies to media discourse and especially to items of news discourse, the analysis followed certain premises of van Dijk’s (1988) microstructural analysis. Here, it was important to discern how lexical style, the choice of quotations, and implicit and redundant information helped to create strategies of argumentation. It is important to stress that by using categories from van Dijk’s microstructural analysis, tools other than the ones used by Reisigl and Wodak were employed to understand discursive strategies. However, such methodological eclecticism was necessary for the analysis of news items because the existent genre conventions make the forms of argumentation somewhat different in that type of text. Combining these two methodological approaches greatly enhanced the ability to analyze newspaper texts of different genres and discourse types.
4.4 Research quality and reflexivity

This section reflects on matters that are related to the quality of the research. First, this section discusses how the notion of research quality is understood and how its fulfillment is ensured. Then, this dissertation’s understanding of generalizability is presented. The last section provides a reflexive account of my role as a researcher.

4.4.1 Research quality

Wodak and Meyer argue that although qualitative research in the social sciences must assess the quality of its results, “the classical concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity used in quantitative research cannot be applied in unmodified ways” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:31). Their claim is sound, given the vast differences between the two methodological principles. In contrast to positivist notions of research, we must see qualitative research as productive because it “involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery” (Lindlof, 1995:25). However, we still must ensure the accuracy of our research.

An important dimension of research quality that is closely related to traditional notions of validity concerns how well the analysis and the overall scientific account capture the object of knowledge. The researcher thus must collect data and analyze these data in ways that allow the researcher to provide adequate answers to the problem of the study (Viscovi, 2006:112). Regarding this dissertation, one should ask how well the different studies collectively capture the ideological loading of the notion of democracy in international journalism.

As discussed earlier, the concept of democracy is simultaneously vague and broad, and it contains many different aspects and dimensions; it is impossible to capture all of these aspects and dimensions in only three case studies. Delimiting the analytical scope to reporting on the political system and central political actors of Venezuela serves as an important strategy for capturing certain aspects central to any notion of democracy. Especially important in this regard is the use of Venezuela as a case because the Venezuelan government challenges many aspects of established notions of democracy. The manners in which the political system and central political actors of that country are constructed and assessed in journalism can therefore reveal important underlying notions of how democracy is understood. Of course, one could argue that other approaches and research designs could capture the notion of democracy. For example, a study that focuses on the term democracy and investigates its given meaning in different journalistic contexts—similar to Vultee’s (2006) study of the term fatwa—could also provide important insights on the matter. Alternatively, if the
focus had instead been on how the coverage of Venezuelan politics changed during Chávez’s time in power, the dissertation would probably provide other results regarding how ideology shapes notions of what is democratically acceptable. Such approaches would indeed enhance the knowledge on the relationships between ideology and notions of democracy, but they are not necessarily preferable to the approach of this dissertation.

Moreover, as briefly mentioned above, one can argue that the choice of scope, together with the focus on elite newspapers, could condition the results. It is perhaps to be expected that elite newspapers incorporate bourgeois ideology, which might lead to a negative representation of the actions of the Venezuelan government and its affiliates and to the loading of ideology that aligns with bourgeois ideological frameworks. According to this line of reasoning, one might benefit more from studying a case that does not stand in such stark contrast to the established and dominant perceptions of politics in capitalist societies. However, one cannot take the ideological content of the elite press for granted. This type of journalism constitutes an important arena for the construction of social knowledge and therefore must be examined. Furthermore, the critical edge of the Venezuelan case—the situation of a counter-hegemonic government relying on broad popular support—is useful for exploring the intersections between ideology and notions of democracy and for evaluating how ideology defines the boundaries of acceptable democratic conduct.

Moreover, the ability to capture the object of knowledge greatly depends on the researcher’s capacity to make accurate interpretations of the materials. For this dissertation, the assessment of the ideological character of the discourse is critical. Ensuring quality in this respect entails both the use of adequate methodological tools for analysis and the ability to properly situate the studied materials in the appropriate theoretical and sociopolitical contexts. This approach is similar to the theoretical triangulation proposed by Wodak and Meyer (2009:31).

To ensure the accuracy of my interpretations, I evaluated the results in light of the theoretical concepts used. For example, in Article II, when identifying differences in how different political actors were framed, I assessed whether such results were compatible with the Eurocentric worldviews described in the literature. The conclusion was that the results were indeed compatible, if one considers the importance ascribed to democracy in the Eurocentric self-identity and the liberal understanding of society within this framework. In this sense, the construction of members of the Venezuelan opposition as fighters against authoritarianism and for democracy and as victims of political violence served to sort them into an in-group.
ver, by evaluating the results against a sociopolitical context in which the class character of the political polarization in Venezuela is accentuated (see Chapter 5), one can conclude that the analyzed discourse on Venezuela not only is in line with Eurocentric frameworks but also serves to legitimize the political forces that are aligned most closely with liberalism and capitalism, which in turn legitimizes these political and economic principles. Accordingly, actors that are aligned with capitalism and liberalism are more likely to be associated with democracy. As one can see, to reach this conclusion, which notes the ideological character of the discourse, we moved from concrete linguistic analysis to the evaluation of discourse against theory and then against a sociopolitical context. Such assessments are highly intertwined with the abductive method of generating inferences, which at times leads to the reformulation of theory, as discussed above.

Moreover, to ensure the transparency and systematics of one’s analysis, it is important to provide excerpts and quotations of the materials used and to explicate the interpretations made. In so doing, the researcher allows the reader to evaluate the researcher’s claims and, to a certain degree, to assess the quality of the research. This practice, which is often applied in discourse studies, is applied to the different studies of this dissertation through the provision of excerpts and quotations in support of analytical arguments.

Finally, some comments regarding the trustworthiness of the analysis in relation to language are necessary. The dissertation use materials from three different languages: English (the NYT), Spanish (EP) and Swedish (DN). For reasons of convenience, the materials were analyzed in their original languages. Because both Spanish and Swedish are my native tongues and English is my working language, it was possible to undertake such a task. However, this approach was not free from problems. For example, problems occasionally arose when certain excerpts were translated from Spanish or Swedish into English during the course of writing the articles. Such problems might concern the correct translation of a word or a phrase or the preservation of inflections that are analytically important. In such cases, external help was sought. In cases concerning Spanish, problems were discussed with the first supervisor of this dissertation, Leonor Camauër, who is also a native Spanish speaker. In cases concerning Swedish to English, help was sought either from colleagues in the English and Swedish departments or from other colleagues. Thus, collegial input was sought to minimize mistranslations and to ensure analytical accuracy.
4.4.2 Generalizability

This dissertation agrees with the argument that qualitative social science, like any scientific work, should have generalizing ambitions (see Danermark et al., 2003; Dannefjord, 1999). However, it is important to note that quantitative research has historically been associated with questions of generality, whereas qualitative research has been associated with questions of specificity (see Danermark et al., 2003). This problem originates in the dominance, or monopoly, that quantitative research has enjoyed in the research community. However, qualitative research needs to free itself from this view of generality.

Rather, one should emphasize that what we want to generalize in qualitative research is theory, including both the concepts that comprise the frameworks used to understand the data and the concepts that help us to understand social phenomena in a more abstract and general sense. Generality in this sense concerns the usability of theoretical concepts to explain social phenomena. This is not to say that a theory is the truth, but that it is useful and that its application to the analysis of other social phenomena requires its exploration and development (Dannefjord, 1999).

What this dissertation aims to generalize is thus how ideology can shape the notion of democracy in the news media, as well as the hegemonic character of this democratic notion. Although the coverage of Venezuela serves as a case, the ambitions of generalization go beyond empirical extrapolations that apply only to a specific sample; rather, this dissertation seeks to understand general structures of power (see Eriksson, 2006). As critical realists have noted (Danermark et al., 2003), it is important to distinguish empirical categories from abstract concepts. Whereas the analyzed newspaper materials and the discourses and strategies contained therein are components of the empirical categories and thus allow us to draw inferences regarding a specific sample, ideology and hegemony form part of more abstract concepts that claim to provide insights about general structures that to some extent are universal (Danermark et al., 2003:167-168). As researchers, we should thus seek to transcend the pure empirical dimension and to develop concepts that help us to comprehend the fundamental structures that make a specific social phenomenon possible (Danermark et al., 2003:191). In this case, the task involved reevaluating the theoretical apparatus in light of the main conclusions of the different studies and redeveloping the theorization of the ideological loading of democracy in news media. This dissertation wishes to generalize the synthesis of these elaborations, which are presented in the conclusions.
4.4.3 Reflexivity

Wodak and Meyer (2009:31-32) state that “rigorous ‘objectivity’ cannot be reached by means of discourse analysis, for each ‘technology’ of research must itself be examined as potentially embedding the beliefs and ideologies of the analysts and therefore guiding the analysis towards the analysts’ preconceptions.” This comment is not controversial if one accepts the critical premise of CDA and other approaches rooted in critical theory, which aim to “produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:7). This stance is part of critical theory’s explicit political agenda, which is to expose and, through research, to invite humans to challenge unequal relations of power. “Naming oneself ‘critical,’” say Wodak and Meyer, “only implies specific ethical standards: an intention to make their position, research interests and values explicit and their criteria as transparent as possible, without feeling the need to apologize for their critical stance of their work” (Wodak and Meyer, 2009:7). The remainder of this section is therefore dedicated to elaborating my position on the research object.

The work that I undertake in this dissertation intersects with my personal interest in social issues and politics. Born in Sweden into a working-class family of Uruguayan political refugees, I have been interested in issues concerning inequality and racism for as long as I can remember, probably because I have experienced both. Since my early teens, I have identified myself with the ideals of socialism, and I have developed a particular interest in the dialectics between socialism and imperialism in Latin America. As a musician, I have participated in projects to raise money for people in the global South, especially Palestinians. I have also been a member of the board of Centrum för Marxistiska samhällsstudier (Center for Marxist social studies) and of the editorial board of its journal Socialistisk Debatt (Socialist Debate); in addition, I have been a member of Kommunistiska Partiet (the Communist Party of Sweden) for the last three years.

My political interest has been a pivotal factor in certain choices that I have made as a researcher; undoubtedly, my decision to investigate the relationship between the media and hegemony is such a choice, as are my decisions to focus on reporting on the global South and on democracy and Venezuela. Additionally, the choice to work within the framework of CDA is related to the coherence between the principles of the CDA framework and my own political values. However, I must note that CDA was essentially new to me when I started as a PhD student, and therefore this dissertation to some extent shows my progress in working within this framework. In general, it is accurate to say that my political interest has to a
certain degree nurtured my academic interest, in the sense that my own values and preconceptions have guided my identification of social problems that I have been eager to study and explain. Moreover, I believe that the tone that I use in my work at times reveals my commitment to the research topic. For example, when I read Article III today, I realize that I was engaged with what I believe was another unjust toppling of an elected government in Latin America. This engagement may have conditioned my interpretations to a certain extent.

Allow me to comment on the case of Venezuela. When I began this project, I did not imagine how politically delicate the case of Venezuela would be. My experience through the years has been that Venezuela under the Bolivarian Revolution has become a topic that allows little or no sober analysis. The political right, both in Sweden and internationally, draws a very dark and negative picture of Venezuela, especially with respect to the political leadership of Chávez. Within the political left, there are tendencies to idealize the Venezuelan situation, which is makes it very difficult to understand what is actually occurring there. For example, on one occasion, when I presented my work at a non-academic seminar in Sweden, I felt that my progressive credentials were questioned because I offered some criticism on events transpiring in Venezuela. However, I have also received criticism from those in academia, even from those circles dedicated to CDA, for not being hard enough on Chávez’s politics. Personally, my position on Venezuela has remained very much the same throughout the years. I have sympathies for many things occurring in Venezuela, especially for attempts to take its impoverished people seriously and for the promotion of policy that places these people at the forefront, all of which occurred in the midst of reactions from powerful national and international groups. However, I have been critical of the apparent lack of collective leadership within the revolutionary movement in Venezuela and of the heavy focus on the image of Chávez. I also think that Chávez in some instances was unnecessarily divisive.

With the goal of gaining a better understanding of the situation in Venezuela, and especially of how the international media work there, I visited the country for two weeks in 2012. While there, I spoke with journalists, scholars, activists and ordinary people about their experiences of the current political situation in Venezuela. My general impression is that Venezuela is a country where class struggle is highly visible; different social groups reclaim and defend their interests in different domains of society. This struggle is especially visible in the media, where adherence or opposition to the government has to a great extent replaced the journalistic ideals of impartiality. Although I believe that this is a problem for the citizenry, it
is nonetheless interesting how such polarization also establishes an extraordinary range of political perspectives. In one newspaper, you can read editorials that challenge the government and promote right-wing policies, and in another newspaper, you can read about the reforms that are necessary to secure a socialist transformation. I have never encountered such a wide range of perspectives in editorials in the mainstream media in Sweden.

Finally, I would like to briefly comment on my own position as a Western scholar engaged in research that focuses on the global South. Because some of the theoretical focus of this dissertation centers on the critique of Western supremacy, I must confess that this project has also compelled me to face and challenge my own taken-for-granted Western perceptions. As a European, I was highly skeptical of the central importance attributed to Chávez as the engine of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. Political leadership, I thought, should be assessed critically and should be easily replaceable. However, when I was in Venezuela, I realized that my opinion was highly elitist and based on Western political ideals. For many people in Venezuela, Chávez was not only a political leader; he was one of them. He was of mixed race, he came from poverty, he spoke and acted differently from former political elites, and he was despised by those elites. The vast majority of Venezuelans could thus identify themselves with Chávez, whose leadership promised and, to some extent, delivered policy in the interests of the poor.

Moreover, I also realized how Europeanized I was when collecting data in Uruguay. Naively, I had imagined a smooth process, wherein I went to a digital archive and downloaded the needed materials. However, I encountered an archive that was not built with researchers in mind and a bureaucratic library system. Although this experience was initially frustrating, I learned to work in this new environment, where a slow working tempo is not necessarily considered something bad and service is not always a priority. In the end, these are the conditions under which researchers in that country must work. Recognizing my own Western perceptions has helped me to realize and strive to overcome my own limitations to produce a critique of taken-for-granted Western values.
5. Contextualizing the Bolivarian Revolution

To analyze how the notion of democracy is ideologically loaded in the coverage of Venezuela in international journalism, we must understand how the Bolivarian Revolution is in many ways a break with the past (or at least an attempt to break with the past) and how it generates conflicts of interests between different groups. As will be argued in this section, it is through these conflicts of interests that we can understand the Bolivarian project’s counter-hegemonic character.

This chapter aims to place the Bolivarian Revolution in the context of social struggle, both within Venezuela and on a global level, and focuses mainly on the era of Hugo Chávez. Without any ambitions of being exhaustive, this chapter is rooted in important works on Venezuelan politics, history, sociology and political economy. However, the chapter should not be regarded as an objective narrative on past and current affairs but as an analysis and interpretation of the same, driven by the same critical impetus that informs the thesis as a whole. Furthermore, this chapter should not be regarded as independent of the analyses presented in the articles of this dissertation but as integrated with them, in the sense that this chapter constitutes part of the context against which the media discourse must be assessed (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).

The chapter begins with a discussion of the characteristics of the pre-Chávez era to provide an understanding of the rise of the Bolivarian Revolution. Then, it proceeds to discuss the Bolivarian Revolution as a national project. Subsequently, the chapter contextualizes Chávez's political project in a global context. An account of the media situation in Venezuela and its effects on the coverage of Venezuela in international media is provided next. Finally, the main counter-hegemonic characteristics of the Bolivarian Revolution are summarized.

5.1 Oil and neoliberalism

In many historical accounts, pre-Chávez Venezuela has been perceived as an exceptional democracy in Latin America, a term that indicates political and economic stability following the end of the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez in 1958 (Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2007). However, as critics have noted, this perspective disregards political, economic and social struggles that transpired in Venezuela (Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2007; Ellner, 2008; Lander, 2007), and these struggles explain the rise of Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution. To a large extent, these struggles revolve around power over the country’s vast oil resources.
Since the 1930s, oil has become Venezuela’s most important product in terms of both exports and the growth of national wealth. The increasing reliance on oil productivity transformed Venezuela from a traditional agricultural economy, like many other Latin American countries, to an economy dominated by oil production, commerce and service (Wilpert, 2007a). Today, Venezuela is one of the world’s largest exporters of oil. It has the largest reserves of conventional oil in the Western hemisphere and is estimated to have the largest reserves of non-conventional oil in the world (Energy Information Administration, 2012; Schenk et al., 2009; Wilpert, 2007a). Due to oil booms and a severely overvalued currency during the 1970s and 1980s, oil revenues made it cheaper to import agricultural goods than to produce them locally. This trend has hindered industrialization in Venezuela, leaving the country with a weak working class and a strong service sector. In addition, Venezuela is the only Latin American country that is a net food importer (Tinker Salas, 2007; Wilpert, 2007a).

Despite having a national oil industry through the state company Petróleos de Venezuela S. A. (PDVSA) since the 1970s, wealth was not distributed equally. Instead, these revenues became incitements for political power. The oil business became lucrative because it offered high salaries, good benefits and a powerful position in the country’s economy (Ellner, 2008; Kozloff, 2007; Wilpert, 2007a). The national oil company was something of a “state within a state” (Mommer, 2003:131) and its managers widely kept “the company from government interference” (Parker, 2007:62).

Between the late 1980s and until the election of Chávez in 1998, Venezuela underwent significant neoliberal transformations, the results of which include vast privatizations of public industries and the social security system and adjustments according to IMF standards. Another neoliberal measure was the implementation of an oil-opening program in the mid-1990s, which unlocked Venezuelan oil reserves for foreign capital to exploit in association with PDVSA (Ellner, 2008:89-108).

Discontent with neoliberal reforms and with economic stagnation became intense by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. In February 1989, civilians, many of whom were from the suburbs of Caracas, gathered in the capital city to protest fare increases on public transportation. Mass looting and rioting were followed by confrontations with the military, leaving at least 277 dead and more than one thousand wounded.\footnote{Estimates vary as to the number of people killed and wounded during the Caracazo. For example, Ellner (2008:95) notes that although official figures maintain that 277 were killed and 1,009 were wounded, other sources estimate that more than 2,000 people were killed.}
This event, known as the *Caracazo* (the Caracas shake), was the beginning of a series of strikes and protests against implemented neoliberal measures. In addition, the brutality of the Caracazo prompted parts of the military to rebel against President Carlos Andrés Pérez. In 1992, two failed coup attempts were staged against him. The better known of these two attempts is the one that occurred in February and that was undertaken by a leftist military group led by Colonel Hugo Chávez. Chávez was sentenced to prison but was pardoned after serving two years (Ellner, 2008:94-97; Lander, 2008; Wilpert, 2007a).

During the late 1990s, neoliberalism became consolidated among the main political parties. Social democratic Acción Democrática (AD) and Christian democratic Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI), which had enjoyed political hegemony in the country since the late 1950s, abandoned their traditional state interventionist policies in favor of privatization. Whether this shift was a cause of their respective declines is subject to dispute, but scholars agree that an anti-party sentiment arose among the electors, opening the door for the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998 (Alvarez, 2006; cf. Ellner, 2008:105-108).

### 5.2 The Bolivarian Revolution as a national project

Hugo Chávez was elected president as a representative of the coalition Polo Patriótico (Patriotic Pole), which comprised a diverse range of leftist organizations but revolved around Chávez’s own party, Movimiento Quinta República (MVR) (Ellner, 2008).

Even if it was vaguely defined, Chávez frequently referred to his political project as *Revolución Bolivariana* (Bolivarian Revolution), which was named after the Caracas-born independence fighter Simón Bolívar. In general terms, the Chávez camp (or *Chavismo*) used a discourse of social justice to address the poor and the dark skinned, that is, the social groups that were excluded from previous governments’ projects to modernize Venezuela (Hellinger, 2006; Herrera Salas, 2007). Through the years, the political direction of Chavismo evolved from being rather broadly anti-neoliberal and anti-establishment to defining itself as socialist during the presidential elections of 2006. From that point in time, Chávez and his affiliates repeatedly expressed their aim to build *socialism for the twenty-first century*, a conception that, although somewhat vague, referred to the establishment of a socialism with more pronounced popular power than what was offered by the Eastern European models of the previous century (Bilbao, 2008; Foster, 2015; Reyes, 2006). These ambitions resulted in the construction of the socialist party Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela.
(PSUV), into which many of the parties included in the Patriotic Pole merged.

5.2.1 Participatory democracy

Even if Chávez advocated resistance against neoliberalism before being elected in 1998, his first years in power were moderate in terms of socioeconomic reforms (Ellner, 2008; Wilpert, 2007a). Instead, much effort was devoted to constitutional reforms, including the election of a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution and holding a referendum in which the constitution was passed by a wide margin in 1999. The constitutional reformation was consistent with the Chavista promise to build a participatory democracy that would transform the previous representative (or liberal) system (Ellner, 2008:177-180; López Maya, 2007; López Maya and Lander, 2011).

The new constitution, in accordance with which the country was renamed the República Bolivariana de Venezuela (the Bolivarian republic of Venezuela), not only mandated a reformation of the legislative system that would transform it into a unicameral system but also extended the presidential mandate from five to six years with the right to one reelection. Furthermore, the new constitution contemplated the implementation of five branches of government. In addition to the three existing branches (legislative, executive and judiciary), a citizen branch and an electoral branch were formed by the constitutional base. The purpose of the citizen branch was to ensure that the other branches performed their constitutional tasks, and it was overseen by an ombudsman called the defender of the people, as well as by an attorney general and a comptroller general. The electoral branch now comprised a national electoral council that regulated and oversaw electoral procedures. The new constitution also granted citizens the right to call for a binding recall referendum against any elected office, which Chávez later had to face himself. Furthermore, the new constitution required the state to guarantee universal health care, education and employment, as well as national industry and agriculture; however, it did not specify how such items would be provided. The reformed constitution also extended the rights of indigenous groups by guaranteeing them three seats on the National Assembly (parliament) (Constitución Venezolana, 2009; for a summary, see Wilpert, 2007a:29-44).

Reformation of the Constitution of 1999 was proposed on two occasions during the Chávez era, both times through popular referendums, as required. First, in 2007, the government and the Chavista majority in the parliament promoted a vast constitutional reform that included the amendment of 69 articles. This package, which was voted on in two
blocks, contained amendments that would strengthen social inclusion and civil liberties but would also give the president even more authority. The proposed reform was defeated by a 51 percent majority vote (against 49 percent) (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2007). In February 2009, a new constitutional referendum took place. This time, the government’s proposal was limited to the abolishment of term limits and was approved by a 55 percent majority vote (against 45 percent) (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2009). With this reformation of the constitution, Chávez was able to run for president in the 2012 elections.

Ellner argues that the Constitution of 1999 “attempts to curb political party hegemony and transfer the power to social movements,” among other goals, by explicitly mandating participatory democracy and the facilitation of popular contributions to decision-making (Ellner, 2008:177). In addition, the Bolivarian Constitution ended subsidies to political parties and required them to hold internal elections for the leading posts. However, the Bolivarian understanding of participation preserved certain elements of representative democracy (Hellinger, 2011b:35), as evidenced by the multiple elections and referendums that took place during the Chávez era and by the legitimacy conferred upon institutions such as the National Assembly and the electoral council (Buxton, 2011:xv).

In 2006, the government passed a law that established so-called communal councils as vehicles for popular participation in a more radical democratic spirit. The communal councils were formed at the neighborhood level and were given the right to plan, develop and administer social projects in their neighborhoods and to present plans on community development to the government (Lalander, 2012). The decisions of the councils were to be taken in assemblies, the spokespersons of the councils had to be elected by a secret vote, and any elected person could be recalled by the assembly (López Maya, 2007).

The construction of social spaces such as communal councils is an important example of the promotion of participation and local decision-making by Chávez’s government. However, there are reasons to question the independence of the communal councils from the state, given the government’s power to decide on whether to approve and finance the projects presented by the communal councils (Lalander, 2012; López Maya, 2007). Similar problems were visible in other spaces for participation where grassroots involvement had either been promoted or directly constructed by the government (García-Gaudilla, 2011; Schiller, 2011), which increased the risks of clientelism and expanded corruption (López Maya and Lander, 2011:75-77). However, the government’s active role in promulgating forums for participation can also be explained by the problems experienced

Regardless of the problems associated with the institutionalization of participation, the ambition to create alternatives to political parties for popular engagement threatened the interests of those adhering to the traditional party system, even within Chavismo. Ellner identifies a dialectic relationship between the so-called rank-and-file Chavistas, who supported grassroots involvement, and party leaders, who supported a more statist approach. Thus, a tension over interests existed; Chavista bureaucrats felt their positions were threatened by increased grassroots involvement. As has been shown in regional, parliamentary and internal party elections, rank-and-file Chavistas on several occasions turned their backs on Chavista bureaucrats that the former considered inept (Ellner, 2008:175-194; Ellner, 2010). Given the alignment of many grassroots organizations with the revolutionary process, the weakening of traditional political parties with the rise of Chávez, and the adherence of the opposition to the liberal democratic tradition (García-Gaudilla, 2007), it is reasonable to argue that grassroots involvement also challenged the interests of oppositional parties.

Chávez can be described as having played somewhat contradictory roles in relation to participation. On the one hand, he frequently promoted grassroots participation; on the other hand, he called for the creation and strengthening of a revolutionary party (the PSUV). Furthermore, Chávez’s heavy use of legislation by decree, although constitutional, reduced political debate in the National Assembly. Additionally, Chávez’s charismatic leadership played a dual role; although it was evidently a factor of his popularity, his leadership style also led to the concentration of power to the president and the obstruction of collective leadership, as noted by López Maya and Lander (2011:60). Nevertheless, the rank and file played an important role in mobilizing support for Chávez in times of crisis (most evidently in the coup against him in 2002), which demonstrates radical democratic and spontaneous participation and indicates the complexity of participation in Venezuela.

In sum, it is important to recognize that the complexity of the Venezuelan political system requires an analysis that is not restricted to the established liberal democratic model. As Ellner (2010) notes, the Chávez admin-

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12 According to the Venezuelan Constitution (Article 203), the President of the Republic can legislate by decree (formally, by an enabling law) if given the authority by three-fifths of the members of the National Assembly. Furthermore, the National Assembly must approve the sectors to which the decree will apply (e.g., energy or agriculture) as well as the time period during which it will remain in force (Constitución Venezolana, 2009).
istration performed far better if it is judged by the standards of radical democracy than if it is judged using a liberal framework. In a similar vein, Buxton argues that the Venezuelan political system under Chávez ought to be understood as a “state-sponsored participatory democracy” (Buxton, 2011:xii) and that its characteristics are distorted if evaluated exclusively through a liberal understanding of politics that emphasizes the use of formal institutions for participation (Buxton, 2011:xii-xv).

5.2.2 Economic and social policy
Social and economic policies under Chávez were generally anti-neoliberal, although his first years as president were moderate (Ellner, 2008:110-112). The Constitution of 1999 “held back privatization by prohibiting the sale of PDVSA stock” (Ellner, 2008:112), which indicates that the constitutional reformation was strongly motivated by the desire to secure a legal platform for countering neoliberalism.

An important characteristic of Chávez’s anti-neoliberal social policy was the use of oil revenues for increased social spending. Much of the increased social spending was dedicated to health care, but spending in education and the subvention of food also increased (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2007) and manifested in the launch of several social programs, or missions (Daguerre, 2011; Hawkins et al., 2011). These social programs, such as communal councils, were launched parallel to traditional state institutions. Scholars have noted problems of partisanship with the missions because Chavista strongholds were more likely to obtain allocations (Hawkins et al., 2011). However, it is notable that during the 2012 presidential elections, the oppositional candidate, Henrique Capriles Radonski, promised to preserve the missions if he won the elections (Hay un Camino, 2012), which can be viewed as recognition of those programs.

In addition to eradicating illiteracy in 2005 (López Maya and Lander, 2011:71) and making major advancements toward achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals four years in advance (MINCI, 2011), Chávez’s first ten years in power saw the poverty rate decrease from that of the pre-Chávez years. In late 1998, 43.9 percent of the households belonged to impoverished homes, compared to 23.8 percent in late 2009. Furthermore, 19.3 percent of households belonged to the category of extremely impoverished homes in late 1998, which decreased to 5.9 percent in the second half of 2009 (Weisbrot and Ray, 2010).

When discussing economic policy under Chávez, it is important to remember that his government did not fully control the oil company PDVSA until 2003.
However, although government intervention in the economy increased under Chávez, the private sector grew faster than the public sector during his first decade in power (Weisbrot et al., 2009). Thus, capitalism remained healthy despite Chávez’s anti-neoliberal policies. In this regard, Ellner (2010) argues that Venezuela under Chávez resembled other revolutionary projects in the twentieth century, scoring high on the social front but failing to stimulate the production of consumer goods.

5.2.3 Political polarization

Chávez’s presidency was characterized by acute political polarization between Chavistas and the opposition. However, even if Chávez was polarizing due to his style and use of harsh language, one cannot ignore that many of the grave political crises that occurred during Chávez’s leadership resulted from economic and political power struggles between the former elites and Chavismo (Ellner, 2008; Lander, 2008; López Maya, 2004).

Political polarization revolving around Chávez commenced with his election in 1998, when the traditionally strong AD and COPEI parties removed their support for their respective candidates immediately prior to the election to support Chávez’s main opponent, Henrique Salas Römer (Ellner, 2003). With the rise of Chávez, the traditional political parties were severely undermined, which made space for other organizations, such as Venezuela’s Chambers of Commerce (Fedecameras) and the trade union federation Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (CTV), the latter of which is closely aligned with AD, to head the opposition movement in Venezuela (Ellner, 2008:113-114).

In a radical move related to economic policy, Chávez passed 49 so-called special laws by decree in 2001. A central and controversial component of this package of laws was the Organic Hydrocarbons Law, which guaranteed the government a majority ownership in companies that dealt with hydrocarbons and that were co-owned by the state and private actors. Through this law, the government could secure its control over the oil industry and thereby reverse the neoliberal oil-opening program of the 1990s. Also included in this package were an agrarian law, which approved the expropriation of idle land; a fisheries law, which contested fishing monopolies; and a law that secured state control over social security. The passage of these laws not only stimulated protests by oppositional groups but also caused certain groups to leave the government camp (Ellner, 2008:112-114). Ellner argues that although Chávez had the constitutional right to pass laws by decree, and although decisions related to hydrocarbon policies had never previously been the subject of public debate in Venezuela, Chávez’s failure to rally public support for his decrees...
gave the opposition a reason to protest. In this sense, Chávez put his government in a weak position ahead of the political crisis that was about to occur (Ellner, 2008:114-115).

In April of 2002, Chávez made another radical and controversial decision when he expelled the board of national oil company PDVSA and replaced board members with people from his own political camp (Golinger, 2006:56; Kozloff, 2007). This measure was designed to secure loyalty for the government’s new oil policies, but it effectively wrested control of the oil industry from the old elite.

The coup attempt of 2002 occurred against this backdrop. Following Chávez’s expulsion of the old PDVSA board and in the midst of discontent with the president among groups of militaries, the Catholic Church and the privately owned media, CTV, with the support of the Chambers of Commerce, organized a general strike, which was followed by a protest march on April 11, 2002. The march, which was very crowded, initially headed toward the facilities of PDVSA, but the route was changed mid-march and redirected toward the presidential palace, Miraflores, where a pro-Chávez demonstration was taking place. Violence erupted, and demonstrators from both camps were shot, leaving more than 12 people dead and more than one hundred wounded. High-ranking officials demanded the resignation of Chávez, who later that night surrendered to the military and was put into custody. The then-president of the Chambers of Commerce, Pedro Carmona Estanga, was proclaimed president of the country. However, after intense pro-Chávez protests and military rebellion, the new power structure was dismantled after only approximately 48 hours. By April 13, Chávez was released and reinstalled as president. During his brief presidency, Carmona abolished the Constitution of 1999, dissolved the National Assembly and expelled all the members of the Supreme Court; he also revoked all 49 economic laws passed by Chávez and reinstalled the old board of PDVSA (Golinger, 2006:57-78; Villegas Poljak, 2012).

Another deep crisis for the Chávez government was the oil crisis that occurred between December 2002 and February 2003, which momentarily paralyzed PDVSA and the Venezuelan oil industry. An executive of PDVSA that was reappointed by Chávez after the coup “declared an indefinite general strike with the aim of forcing the president out of power” (Ellner, 2008:119); this strike was accompanied by a business lockout affecting shops, supermarkets, banks and schools. The crisis had severe consequences for Venezuelan society in general and for its economy in particular. Specifically, the unemployment rate increased from 15.4 percent to 20.3 percent in four months (López Maya, 2004), and Venezuela’s GDP declined by 24 percent (Weisbrot and Sandoval, 2007). In response, the government
fired nearly 18,000 oil workers, most of them managers, for their participation in the strike, which the government had declared illegal (López Maya, 2004). Regardless, scholars argue that the strike was a political failure for the opposition because they did not achieve their political goals despite a massive endeavor (Ellner, 2008; López Maya, 2004). Instead, by showing that it could resist such a crisis and by emphasizing the damage caused by the strike to Venezuelan society, Chávez’s government mobilized support.

A third attempt to remove Chávez from the presidency during his mandate occurred after the oil strike ceased. This time, the opposition used the opportunity to recall the president’s mandate through a referendum, as stated in Article 72 of the Constitution of 1999. The referendum took place on August 15, 2004, and the recall was defeated by a vote of 59 percent to 40 percent (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2004). Although the results were consistent with polling trends and were accepted by foreign observers, certain segments of the opposition refused to accept them. The opposition boycotted the 2005 National Assembly elections, leaving Chavistas with a total majority in the parliament (Ellner, 2008:120-121).

The political polarization in Venezuela remained, albeit with a changed character, until Chávez died of cancer in 2013. After failing to remove Chávez unconstitutionally, the opposition adhered more closely to constitutional rules, which was fairly successful for that political force.

5.3 The Bolivarian Revolution in a global context

When Chávez referred to US president George W. Bush as the devil in front of the General Assembly of the UN in 2006, the gravity of the animosity between Venezuela and the US was revealed to the world. However, to explain the root of the conflict between the two governments, one must go beyond verbal insults and instead examine the opposing political and economic interests represented by each of the two governments. As Ellner (2008:201) states, “diametrically opposed international strategies underpinned by different long-term goals and interests were the motor force of the escalation” of this antagonism.

Chávez’s foreign policy was characterized by the promotion of a “multipolar world,” in contrast to the “single-polar world” characterized by US domination (Ellner, 2008:202; see also Hellinger, 2006). The notion of a multipolar world is perhaps the most obvious aspect in which Chávez drew on Bolívar because the latter envisioned a close alliance between Latin American countries to disrupt colonial structures of dependence (Bolívar, 2009:164-168; Ellner, 2008:27-28).

One of Chávez’s early measures was to abide by OPEC standards for oil production, which diverged from earlier conduct. This measure was in line
with his ambitions to revitalize and strengthen the oil cartel, whose influence had been declining for a while. One important initiative of Chávez was the organization of an OPEC summit in Caracas in 2000. Before the summit, the Venezuelan president visited all ten heads of state of the OPEC countries and personally invited each one to the summit. This tour included a visit to Saddam Hussein in Iraq, which made Chávez the first head of state to visit that country after the Gulf War of 1991. The tour also included visits to two other archenemies of the US: Libya and Iran. Not surprisingly, Chávez was criticized by the US for these three trips. Nonetheless, the summit was a success for Venezuela because its proposals to stabilize higher oil prices were accepted by OPEC member states (Ellner, 2008:206-208).

From a global perspective, Venezuela’s contribution to the consolidation of OPEC and the increase in oil prices can be viewed as contrary to the interests of Washington in two main respects. First, given that the US is a major oil importer and that it imports a significant amount of oil from Venezuela, North Americans benefitted more from the cheaper oil prices offered by Chávez’s predecessors. Second, the consolidation of OPEC also strengthened several traditional rivals of the US.

In line with the vision of a multipolar world, the Venezuelan government worked for regional economic integration in Latin America. For example, from the outset, the Bolivarian government cooperated with Cuba by selling it cheap oil; in so doing, Venezuela defied the US blockade against the Caribbean island (Lander, 2008). Furthermore, the Venezuelan government requested membership in the South American trade organization, Mercosur, early in the Chávez presidency and was a key actor in the foundation of the Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América (ALBA) trade agreement in 2005, the Banco del Sur regional bank, the Petrocaribe and Petrosur energy projects, and the TeleSur broadcasting network. All these projects were initiated to promote Latin American and Caribbean integration and to provide alternatives to institutions promoted by the US (see Hellinger, 2011a). Much of Venezuela’s integrationist efforts were possible due to changes in the political landscape of Latin America during the first decade of the 2000s, when many countries elected leftist governments (see Barrett et al., 2008; Kozloff, 2008). As Hellner describes, the diplomacy of Venezuela “contributed to (and benefitted from) broader

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14 It worth noting that the countries visited by Chávez also included Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, two allies of the US in the Middle East.

15 Mercosur is a trade organization comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay; Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are associate members.
tendencies that have weakened U.S. hegemony in the region” (Hellinger, 2011a:47).

The administration of George W. Bush was also clear in its direct responses to Venezuela’s challenges. In addition to verbal criticism, the funding of oppositional movements seems to have been an important strategy. Clement observes that between 2000 and 2001, Venezuela went from sixth to first place in terms of the amount of funds received from the democracy promotion program National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean. Much of this money, which was transferred in the form of grants, went to groups that participated in the anti-Chávez mobilizations that preceded the 2002 coup (Clement, 2007:194-195). Furthermore, according to studies of declassified documents conducted by American-Venezuelan attorney and journalist Eva Golinger, more than 34 million US dollars of US public funds was used for democracy promotion in Venezuela between 2000 and 2006 (Golinger, 2006:56). Similarly, investigative journalist Jeremy Bigwood states that according to declassified documents, the US State Department funneled at least 700,000 US dollars to the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) between 2007 and 2009 to provide journalism grants and to sponsor journalism education programs in Venezuela (Bigwood, 2010).

The Bush administration also tacitly accepted the 2002 coup against Chávez’s government. In an official statement made the day after the coup, the US government labeled the Carmona government a “transitional authority” and a “transitional civilian government” and stated that Chávez had “resigned” and had “dismissed the vice presidency and the cabinet” (Golinger, 2006:74). This statement demonstrates that the Bush administration chose to interpret the events in a manner very similar to that of the Venezuelan opposition and to turn a blind eye to the unconstitutional character of the ousting.

The conception of a multipolar world and its heavy focus on the US as the major political antagonist can indeed be problematic when transformed into realpolitik. In particular, certain partners of the Chávez government, especially outside of Latin America, clearly deviated from the Bolivarian ideals of participatory democracy and grassroots involvement (Hellinger, 2011a:47). Pictures in the media showing Chávez embracing the leader of Iran or of Belarus obviously made the Venezuelan government and its president more vulnerable to allegations of authoritarianism. However, it is important to remember that Venezuelan diplomacy under Chávez, which included bilateral agreements with countries of such diverse political orientations as China and Colombia, demonstrated diversity and respect for national sovereignty and political differences. Additionally, one should
bear in mind that a country such as Sweden, for example, whose democratic credentials are seldom questioned, sells weapons—and hence helps to arm—regimes such as that of Saudi Arabia, which clearly deviates from the notion of political openness. This fact shows that the contradictory character of realpolitik extends beyond Venezuela.

5.4 The media as a battlefield

During the Bolivarian Revolution, the media was a significant battlefield for the interests of both the government and the opposition both within and outside of Venezuela. One can soundly argue that the media has been rather entangled with the political polarization in Venezuela.

Like many other Latin American countries, Venezuela has historically been characterized by a media landscape—including the press, radio and TV—that is dominated by commercial players. When Chávez was elected president in 1998, there was only one state-owned TV channel, *Venezolana de Televisión* (VTV) (Golinger, 2004). Chávez rather quickly transformed VTV into a government voice by, among other things, airing his own show, *Aló Presidente*, where he spoke directly to the audience about different political topics. In a context of weakened positions for traditional political parties after the election of Chávez in 1998, the privately owned media, perhaps driven by the business interests of their owners, perceived a need to rally opposition to Chávez, and thus, this media sector evolved into a strong oppositional voice.

The partiality of the media has taken different forms through the years, but there has been a documented tendency on the part of state media to provide a voice for the government and to generally neglect oppositional views, whereas certain commercial media amplified oppositional voices and neglected the Chavista camp (Andersson Odén, 2005).

In addition, the media, especially TV channels, have also played more direct roles in the conflict between the government and the opposition. For example, the private Venezuelan media played an important propagandistic role against the government in both the coup of 2002 and the subsequent oil crisis (Golinger, 2006). In the days prior to the coup, private TV channels replaced their regular programs with anti-Chávez content, and on the day of the coup, these channels broadcast a video claiming that Chávez supporters were shooting at oppositional demonstrators. Although the video was later revealed to be a montage, it served to assign blame to the government and to obscure the opposition’s responsibility for the coup situation. The private media also orchestrated a blackout of political coverage during the reversal of the coup; viewers were offered cartoons and movies on the same channels that had previously been saturated with harsh
political content (Golinger, 2006:67-80; Villegas Poljak, 2012). Golinger (2006) argues that similar performance was evident during the oil crisis several months later, when the private media served as a voice of the opposition that attempted to overthrow Chávez during the strike.

Chávez’s government subsequently took several severe measures to handle the media. Among other things, it increased the number of public television channels to even the information flow. In 2007, the government declined to renew the broadcasting license of the private TV-channel *Radio Caracas Televisión* (*RCTV*) when it expired that year. The government’s main rationale for this decision was that *RCTV* had continuously violated regulations, especially during the coup crisis (Wilpert, 2007b). However, oppositional groups characterized this measure as the suppression of an oppositional voice and viewed it as a threat to the freedom of expression (Carlson, 2007). This oppositional criticism was echoed in a report by Human Rights Watch (2008), and the president of its Venezuelan office was later expelled from the country. The government also revoked the licenses of more than 200 radio stations that it claimed were working illegally (Waisbord, 2011). During the final Chávez years, Venezuela experienced an explosion in government-funded community media run by grassroots organizations (Artz, 2012). Although most of these organizations were sympathetic to the Bolivarian project, their community involvement made them amenable to criticizing bureaucrat Chavistas (Fernandes, 2011; Schiller, 2011).

The media relations during the Bolivarian Revolution also had an international dimension that influenced the manner in which Venezuela has been covered and portrayed abroad. It is an understatement to say that the Chavista camp has felt misrepresented by the international mainstream media, and research has shown that the BBC reporting of social conflicts in Venezuela fits into the frameworks of the opposition (Salter and Weltman, 2011). The reasons for this representation in international mainstream

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16 It was occasionally reported by international media that Chávez controlled the Venezuelan media. However, a report from the Center for Economic and Policy Research (Weisbrot and Ruttenberg, 2010) suggests that in 2010, state television channels had a mere 5.4 audience share, compared with shares of 61.4 and 33.1 for privately owned TV and paid TV, respectively.

17 The Human Rights Watch report was controversial among scholars who specialized in Latin America. Indeed, over 100 scholars, among them Noam Chomsky, joined in an open letter to the board of Human Rights Watch in which the scholars asserted that the report “does not meet even the most minimal standards of scholarship, impartiality, accuracy, or credibility” and claimed that the report was politically motivated (venezuelanalysis.com, 2008).
media are certainly numerous, but the polarized media situation in Venezuela is one explanation. An interview study with Swedish journalists regarding their coverage of Venezuela revealed that Venezuelan media were at times a central source of information for Swedish media. In particular, private Venezuelan media, which were entangled with oppositional activity during the 2002 coup, were an important source for certain Swedish journalists who covered that event (Lagercrantz, 2002). One can suppose that the use of these sources served to promote opposition-friendly coverage of the coup (see Article III). In any case, the results of the study suggest that the polarized media situation in Venezuela has indeed influenced the recon-textualization and presentation of Venezuelan events abroad.

Another international aspect of the polarized media situation in Venezuela concerns the interests of foreign actors in the performance of Venezuelan media. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Chávez’s Venezuela was an important destination for US grants sponsoring journalism (Bigwood, 2010), and although it is not clear where this money ultimately settled, it is likely that it was directed toward oppositional groups, similar to other grants coming from the US government (see Golinger, 2006; Golinger, 2011). Additionally, according to WikiLeaks reports, the US ambassador to Venezuela met with the spokespersons of three leading private media outlets in 2010 to discuss their political content, and the Venezuelan daily El Nacional asked the US Embassy for funding (Pearson, 2011). This type of intervention by the US bolstered the Chavista camp’s claims that the private media conspired against the government and provided grounds for the Venezuelan government to take measures against the private media. US intervention also aggravated the already problematic media situation in Venezuela.

### 5.5 Summing up

The Bolivarian Revolution of the Chávez era challenged the established political order in at least three ways. First, by aiming to construct a participatory and more radical form of democracy, it challenged the former hegemonic political parties, former political elites and other groups that benefited from more elitist forms of democracy. Second, its anti-neoliberal stance challenged the interests of economically powerful groups both within and outside of Venezuela. Third, and related to the previous item, Chávez’s foreign policy challenged the dominance of the US in the region. By presenting such challenges, Chávez’s political project can soundly be characterized as counter-hegemonic. In the critical analysis of international journalism on Venezuela, this contextualization is crucial to understanding how journalism serves to legitimize or challenge specific interests in ongo-
ing power struggles. Clearly, being counter-hegemonic does not mean that one is immune from any type of criticism. Nonetheless, against this backdrop, the coverage of the Bolivarian Revolution constitutes a rich empirical source for the examination of the ideological loading of the notion of democracy in international journalism.
6. Conclusions
This chapter will achieve the twofold aim of this dissertation by discussing the main results of the three articles against the background of previous research. In addition, the chapter utilizes an abductive manner to present the rethinking and development of an ideology-critical understanding of the construction of democracy by the news media.

This chapter comprises two sections. In the first section, four macro-strategies that reveal the ideological character of the construction of what is democratically acceptable are discussed. Three of these macro-strategies serve to construct political deviance and to (de)legitimize political actors in relation to democracy: the construction of populism, the construction of power concentration and the construction of difference. The fourth macro-strategy, relativization, serves to justify actions that contradict liberal democratic principles but serve greater politico-ideological goals. Whereas the first three strategies may be regarded as stable, the fourth macro-strategy involves discursive change. Moreover, the discussion in this first section aims to achieve the first part of the dissertation’s aim, namely, to understand the relationship between ideology and the construction of democracy in journalism on foreign political phenomena.

The second section takes an overall view of the results to address the second part of the dissertation’s aim, which is to explore the ways in which the relationship between ideology and democracy in journalism serves to legitimize or delegitimize the struggle for social justice in nations in the global South vis-à-vis the political and economic fundamentals of global capitalism. Drawing on the overall results of the empirical studies, this section also provides a synthesis of the conclusions, which serves as the main contribution to ideology-critical theorization on the journalistic understanding of democracy and its hegemonic implications.

6.1 The ideological loading of the notion of democracy
Regardless of the frameworks through which one perceives democracy, it ultimately always revolves around the question of political power. Therefore, understanding how political power is constructed is central to the study of how democracy is ideologically loaded in journalism. However, political power is realized at different levels of society; clearly, it is realized in parliaments and governments, but it is also realized in the private sector, through PR and lobbying, and in civil society by campaigns and social struggle. Therefore, the level of society on which one focuses determines how political power is constructed.
This thesis focuses on the political system and main political actors of Venezuela to understand constructions of democracy. Journalism, especially journalism on international events, tends to focus heavily on countries’ governments and politicians, making these entities central to how a country’s political power is understood. In the case of Venezuela, one finds journalistic constructions that demonstrate the interconnections between ideology and notions of democracy in the construction of the country’s government, of the central political actors and of their political conduct. Especially important to such ideological loading is how political actors and their actions are (de)legitimized.

6.1.1 Populism as a deviance marker
As explored primarily in Article I, although it is somewhat evident in the other two articles as well, the association of the Venezuelan government with populism is an important strategy for indicating deviance from accepted political conduct. In Article I, I explain that although populism is a rather vague notion, it is used in everyday speech as an invective against political actors and practices that seek to promote the people against a group of elites and/or that use cheap tactics to rally support. In the case of Venezuela, populism serves to conceptualize Chávez’s social policies regarding disadvantaged social groups in that country and to explain Chávez’s style of government. Chávez’s strategies for mobilizing support among the popular classes in Venezuela are thus understood through the populist lens as a form of paternalism toward the poor. In this sense, the discourse on populism also serves to explain Chávez’s consolidation of power: his populist approach helps him to maintain support. However, given the negative meaning that is inherent in the notion of populism in everyday speech, the use of such a discourse serves as a strategy for stripping legitimacy from Chávez’s government, which ultimately relied on electoral victories with broad popular support. Populism, as argued in Article I, is used as a strategy to construct illegitimate democracy.

However, if populism signifies political deviance from accepted political conduct and serves to construct a notion of illegitimate democracy, it is appropriate to ask what the characteristics of a (non-populist) legitimate democracy are. By answering this question, we can begin to comprehend the ideologies behind such a strategy.

To understand the discourse on populism, it is important to focus on the vagueness that characterizes the notion of populism and on the negative meaning of the word in everyday speech. Its vague content makes it applicable to diverse political actors who are considered to diverge from some type of political norm in various ways. Thus, these deviant characteristics
unite different actors labeled as populists. In addition to Chávez, other political actors labeled as populists in the media include former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and European neo-fascist parties such as the Front National in France, all of which differ from the Venezuelan president in terms of both political goals and methods. In contrast to Chávez, all the aforementioned actors stand on the far right and have complied with neoliberalism. What they have in common with Chávez, at least if judged rather superficially, is their rhetorical appeal to the people as opposed to the elite groups of society or to the establishment. In this sense, these actors question (or at least they claim to question) a fundamental characteristic of liberal society, namely, the uneven distribution of political power between social groups. Some of these actors, including Chávez and Fujimori, have also called for the redefinition of established liberal notions of democracy, although they have done so in diametrically different ways. The discourse on populism suggests deviance from what is legitimate based on a liberal understanding of politics in general and of democracy in particular. Populism thus serves to denounce deviance on a rather superficial level, a strategy that ascribes to these deviant actors a negative meaning rather than explaining their political positions.

As discussed in Article I, the discourse on populism also works as a moral argument that is linked to the notion that populists use cheap tactics to rally support. For example, when Chávez’s social policies are constructed as means of maintaining support from the poor but not necessarily changing their situation, it conveys an impression of the president as utilizing the most vulnerable sectors of Venezuelan society for his own purposes of staying in power. In this sense, the discourse on populism indicates fraudulent behavior and therefore serves to delegitimize actors on moral grounds. By discrediting actors that claim to strive for social justice, this strategy ultimately diverts attention from social inequality, its roots in capitalism and how it can be overcome. In this way, the discourse on populism serves the interests of economically powerful social groups.

Scholars have discussed whether populism in the media is meant to signify a “pathology of democracy” (Mény and Surel, 2002:3) or more generally to indicate the rallying of support through cheap tactics (Andersson, 2009). Judging from the studied coverage of Venezuela, I argue that it signifies both, if one considers both the explicit and implicit manners in which the notion of populism appears and the construction of Chávez as concentrating power (see Article I). In the Venezuelan case, cheap tactics refer to methods that appeal to the most vulnerable groups in society but that do not necessarily promote real change to their situation. Furthermore, if one
also considers the construction of Chávez as concentrating power, it is clear that populism serves to construct a pathology, particularly to liberal notions of democracy.

6.1.2 Power concentration and the liberal approach
Any model of democracy, including a representative model, is based on the principle that the people are the ultimate power-holders. Despotic regimes that concentrate political power without significant influence from the people contradict this principle. As explored in Article I, the Venezuelan government is constructed as concentrating a significant amount of political power. The construction of the Venezuelan government as concentrating political power works as a strategy to construct that entity as deviating from what is democratically acceptable. Article I concludes that the depiction of the Venezuelan government as concentrating political power combined with its characterization as populist serves to construct Chávez’s Venezuela as an illegitimate democracy. The government is elected, and it is not really constructed as violating any Venezuelan laws, but its actions, as conveyed, are nonetheless questionable. What is questionable is the notion that the government not only acts in a populist way by seeking support from the most vulnerable sectors of Venezuelan society but also risks perpetrating itself in power through the concentration of political power. In this way, the government acts offensively, deviating not only from what is common but also from what is right.

As with the discourse on populism, there are reasons to argue that the discourse on power concentration corresponds to liberal conceptions of democracy. Such conceptions are evident in the depiction of the Venezuelan government as deviating from principles that are central to liberal understandings of democracy. One such principle is the restriction on of the number of terms that a particular president can serve, which is espoused in many countries that rely on a liberal democratic model, such as the US and Uruguay. Such restrictions are intended to protect the citizenry from despotism and autocratic rule. Thus, Chávez’s intention to abolish term limits contravenes such liberal principles. Another liberal principle that the Venezuelan government is constructed as violating is the separation of powers, specifically, the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, which dates back to Montesquieu’s theorizations and has been an important ingredient in the development of liberal democratic theory (Held, 2006). This principle is intended to limit the power of the government to guarantee accountability and rule of law, which ultimately protects the citizenry from governmental abuse of power. The journalistic focus on whether and how the Venezuelan government disregards the separation of
these branches thus indicates that the journalistic construction of democracy corresponds with such liberal principles.

In light of a liberal understanding of democracy, the conduct of the Venezuelan government stands out for its deficits, not least because the government appears to violate important principles intended to guard the political system and the citizenry from governmental abuse of power and from despotism. Through this outlook, the actions of Chávez’s government can be viewed as alarming and as undermining democracy in Venezuela, creating the risk that the country will devolve into autocratic rule. In this sense, and with the construction of populism in mind, Venezuela under Chávez is depicted as a form of illegitimate democracy—a construction that is based more on what is considered morally right according to liberal notions of democracy than on what is legally right according to the Venezuelan Constitution. Moreover, the construction of the Venezuelan government as illegitimate is consistent with previous research, which shows that Chávez’s government is generally constructed as a source of conflict with national well being (Salter and Weltman, 2011).

The construction of Venezuela as an illegitimate democracy also serves to obscure the complexity of the political system in Venezuela, where a strong government apparatus has coexisted with and promoted popular participation by the citizenry. As Buxton notes, under Chávez’s government, “political inclusion and participation have been catalyzed by state support” (Buxton, 2011:xvii), meaning that the government has played an active role in stimulating political participation, particularly in the poorer sectors of civil society. An example of such support is the implementation of communal councils, which were launched as autonomous bodies at the local level and which received government grants to finance specific community projects (Lalander, 2012). Furthermore, one must understand that democratic deficits in Venezuela according to a liberal framework did not originate with the Chávez presidency. Rather, critics stress that the rule of law has been historically weak in Venezuela and that participation was limited, state institutions were politicized, and a minority was privileged under governments prior to that of Chávez (Buxton, 2011). Although these realities are occasionally acknowledged in the coverage of Venezuela, they are far from dominant. Therefore, to “present the Bolivarian process as some form of democratic regression or authoritarian aberration in this historical context is misleading” (Buxton, 2011:xv). In this sense, the construction of Venezuela as an illegitimate democracy serves the ideological purpose of associating the South American country with other counter-hegemonic governments that fail to meet liberal democratic criteria and
that are generally characterized by the West as non-democratic, such as the Cuban one.

6.1.3 Difference and democratic (de)legitimacy

Another important strategy that ideologically loads the notion of democracy in the studied materials relates to the question of difference. One must emphasize that difference, whereby actors are distinguished through the attribution of different characteristics (see Hall, 1997), constitutes a major strategy for constructing meaning in journalism in general and is a central component of the journalistic dramaturgy. In a situation such as that of Venezuela, where political polarization is apparent, difference serves to amplify the dissimilarities of opposing political actors.

One conclusion that can be drawn from Article II is that democracy as a value is central to the journalistic construction of the struggle between supporters and opponents of Chávez and for constructing difference between these two groups. In the construction of the different actors through interventions from journalists and quotations from actors, the opposition is generally depicted as fighting against authoritarianism, which constructs the opposition as acting in accordance with a democratic rationale. In contrast, the Chavistas are constructed as acting according to a rationale of social justice; in particular, their struggle mainly concerns the implementation of social programs, the reduction of poverty, and the agglomeration of support for the government. To some degree, these two rationales serve to represent the ideological struggles between the two political camps. However, such differentiation also has important consequences for the construction of democracy. The construction of the opposition as struggling for greater democracy depicts Venezuela as suffering from some sort of democratic deficit. Therefore, oppositional actors become agents that could provide a solution to this democratic deficit, a characterization that echoes previous research on the coverage of Venezuela (Salter and Weltman, 2011). However, depicting Chavistas as fighting for social improvements does not by itself construct the supporters of Chávez as anti-democratic. Rather, their struggle for social justice could to some extent even generate sympathy for the supporters of Chávez. Nonetheless, there are aspects of the social justice rationale that call into question the democratic ambitions of Chávez’s supporters, including constructions of supporters as having blind trust in the president. However, what most strongly associates Chavistas with anti-democratic behavior is the construction of them as using political violence, accompanied by the construction of oppositional actors as suffering from political violence. Such constructions serve to underscore and validate the view of the opposition as suffering from authori-
tarianism and as fighting against it. In this way, the journalistic discourse works to associate the oppositional camp with democracy, whereas Chávez supporters are constructed as deviating from democratic behavior. Such constructions reinforce the results of Article I, which showed that the Venezuelan government was constructed as illegitimate in terms of democracy by delegitimizing the supporters of the government in terms of democracy.

Moreover, in line with the theoretical framework used in Article II, I have argued that the construction of difference in the studied newspapers follows Eurocentric logics (Amin, 1989; Lander, 2000; Lander, 2002; Quijano, 2000). Through the perspective of Eurocentrism, which centers on Western-style democracy, the association of the opposition with democracy serves to construct them as an in-group of an imagined Western-style democratic community, whereas the association of Chavistas with political violence serves to construct Chavistas as an out-group. In this way, the former is given legitimacy, whereas the latter is delegitimized. These arguments echo previous research that reveals Western media’s frequent use of discourses on democracy to legitimize actors and events in international journalism (Garyantes and Murphy, 2010; Moyo, 2010), a strategy that seems to extend beyond Western media. Furthermore, if one takes the political positions of the two opposing Venezuelan parties into consideration, one can see that the construction of in- and out-groups follows Eurocentric politico-ideological ideals that defend liberalism and global capitalism. The Chavistas deviate further from these positions than the Venezuelan opposition does.

One can therefore argue not only that journalistic discourse uses democracy as a point of departure for constructing difference between the two groups and that a specific notion of democracy is central to ascribing legitimacy to political actors but also that the association of political actors with democracy corresponds to a liberal understanding of society. The closer one aligns with the politico-ideological fundaments of Eurocentrism—liberalism and the defense of capitalism—the more likely one is to be constructed as a democrat. Moreover, the focus on Western-style democracy in distinguishing these two political groups serves to some extent to conceal the class interests of the Venezuelan opposition. Specifically, the opposition’s political struggle is constructed as focusing more on the issue of democracy than on securing political and economic privileges.

It is interesting to consider such remarks against previous research that contends that journalism followed Cold War logic when deciding who was and was not a democrat (Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Kim, 2000). These studies show that the (de)legitimation of different actors in terms of democracy closely follows the foreign policy of the country of publication,
which, in general terms, serves to differentiate between democrats and non-democrats. Countries and political actors that were aligned closely with US foreign policy were more likely to be associated with democracy in the US media than their antagonists were.

Although my study is centered in a post-Cold War context, my results show similarities in journalistic constructions. To detect these similarities, it is important to recall that the Cold War was to a great extent about the challenges that global capitalism and the liberal values that underpinned it faced against communism. Based on the results of Article II as well as those of the previous research mentioned above, it is therefore accurate to argue that political actors that deviate from liberal notions of politics and that oppose global capitalism or the regimes that embrace global capitalist structures are less likely to be associated with democracy compared with actors that either embrace liberalism or accept global capitalism. In turn, such ideological loading of democracy fosters an understanding of democracy as being tied to the acceptance of liberalism and global capitalism.

### 6.1.4 Relativization and the flexibility of democracy

Hitherto, the discussion focused on how liberal notions of democracy permeate newspapers’ construction of Venezuela. This construction serves to categorize Venezuela as an illegitimate democracy, to delegitimize Chávez supporters and to legitimize the Venezuelan opposition. However, one cannot regard international journalism as mechanically following liberal democratic notions; the analysis of the materials suggests that the ideological character of the construction of democracy is more complex than that. The study of the 2002 coup against the Venezuelan government, as presented in Article III, is especially important to understanding this complexity.

The 2002 coup constitutes a critical case (Danermark et al., 2003) because it involves coverage of the toppling of an elected but counter-hegemonic government and the rapid dismantling of Venezuela’s legal institutions. The manner in which journalism constructs these events reveals how the importance of the legal frameworks of a country and of institutionalism to the perception of something as democratically acceptable evolves as events unfold. It also demonstrates the complexity of the ideological character of journalism.

This complexity originates in how democracy is relativized in the reporting of the coup. Initially, the newspapers (especially the news pages), were less concerned with the notion that the toppling of Chávez violated the constitutional principles of Venezuela—and of any democratic government—than with how the president’s own behavior could explain the loss
of his governmental power. Here, blaming the Chávez camp for the death of demonstrators was an important strategy for legitimizing the coup and for depicting Chávez as an authoritarian and violent despot rather than as a legal and constitutional president that defended democracy. The coup was thus constructed as something other than simply the overthrow of a legally elected government, but as an important step toward the strengthening of Venezuelan democracy. In sum, the overthrow of an elected government and the dismantling of Venezuela’s legal institutions were given legitimacy in the initial coverage by newspapers, a construction which depended on the relativization of Venezuelan democracy under Chávez.

To understand the relativization of Venezuelan democracy, one must stress that the initial reporting on the coup substantially echoed the propaganda from the Venezuelan opposition and private media and from US government spokespersons. According to those agents, the overthrow of Chávez was not a coup but a resignation by the president after military pressure, a move that was seen as democratically justifiable based on the government’s supposed responsibility for the killing of anti-government demonstrators (see Golinger, 2006). From this perspective, ousting Chávez thus becomes a humanitarian necessity that transcends constitutional formalities. The toppling of the president is characterized in this sense as being morally right. Moreover, this moral justification must be considered highly effective because the studied newspapers failed to challenge this propaganda in their initial coverage and instead served mainly to endorse the common sense of those who benefitted from the democratic rupture in Venezuela. In this sense, the initial reporting on the coup in the studied newspapers resembles the coverage of, for example, the Kosovo War, when the media of different countries had serious difficulties in overcoming official propaganda that justified military aggression based on humanitarian arguments (Nohrstedt et al., 2000; Nohrstedt et al., 2002).

Furthermore, it is clear that in contrast to the construction of power concentration, as described in Article I, the initial coverage of the toppling of Chávez did not evaluate this event through the lens of liberal democratic principles such as constitutionality or the separation of powers. Had there been correspondence between these liberal democratic principles and the journalistic coverage during this initial stage, the newspaper discourse would have focused on the de facto consequence of overthrowing an elected president and of dismantling the country’s constitution, namely, the installation of a dictatorial regime. On the contrary, there is evidence that journalists disavowed such an argument even despite Latin America’s history of coup d’états against progressive leaders.
However, the discourse on the coup evolved with the failure of the de facto government, and the liberal democratic character of this evolved discourse is perhaps most apparent in the accounts that are labeled as *passive critique*. Passive critique accommodates the discourse on the coup as being on the right side of democracy by offering criticism of the US government’s tacit support of the coup while simultaneously criticizing Chávez and lamenting that the conduct of the US government will harm its credibility as a protector of democracy. In this way, the passive critique became a means of criticizing certain aspects of the coup events while simultaneously accepting US dominance in world politics and—with the exception of one *NYT* editorial—obscuring the problematic character of the newspapers’ own coverage of the overthrow of Chávez. Most importantly, passive critique does all of that in the name of democracy. One can therefore argue that passive critique in this case re-appropriates the notion of democracy by exposing the moral wrong of supporting a coup, even one against such a highly problematic figure as Chávez.

The workings of the discourse on the coup expose a rather flexible treatment of democracy. As shown in the initial coverage of the coup, when the media fails to see through propaganda, international journalism can legitimize even the violation of a country’s legal institutions, which, in normal cases, would be considered a breach of democratic principles. The second stage of the reporting demonstrates that newsrooms can adapt and change their discourse to correct previous missteps in relation to democracy. However, this flexible treatment of democracy is not arbitrary but rather corresponds with interests in preserving the global power relations that be. Such flexibility must be understood as a crucial feature of hegemonic ideology because it shows that democracy is not always sacred but rather can be compromised to counteract actors and political projects that challenge existing global power relations.

### 6.2 Through a post-political gaze

The theory of hegemony suggests that political power in capitalist societies is normally exercised through consent rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971), which makes the ideological character of cultural institutions such as the news media central to magnetizing consent among the citizenry (Allan, 1998; Hall et al., 1978; Hallin, 1987). Given the importance of democracy as a value representing good government (Farrelly, 2008), its ideological loading in the news media can therefore serve as an important mechanism for inducing consent to the power of global capitalism. Below, I discuss the general study results through this framework and provide the generality claims of this dissertation.
The general results of the dissertation suggest that one should understand the construction of democracy in international journalism as generally serving a global capitalist hegemony. The political position of an actor or a political group in relation to established power relations within global capitalism plays an important role in how their actions will be evaluated in relation to democracy. Counter-hegemonic actors are more likely to be delegitimized and constructed as deviating from democracy compared with actors that are close to the dominant political practices and values of global capitalism. In this sense, the construction of democracy is generally consistent with the political and economic interests of the ruling social blocs of global capitalism, which includes the political leadership of core capitalist nations, such as the US. This conclusion about the ideological loading of democracy in the Venezuelan case thus lends support to previous research that highlights the importance of the political orientation of a group to its evaluation by Western media in relation to democracy (Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Kim, 2000) and to research that claims that discourses on democracy and human rights in Western journalism on foreign events embeds legitimacy for a neoliberal world order (Moyo, 2010). Furthermore, this pattern is visible not only in Western elite newspapers but also in a South American elite newspaper, suggesting that correspondence between the ideological loading of democracy and global capitalist hegemony is not limited to the journalism of core capitalist nations. Moreover, such ideological characteristics contradict the foreign policy of Uruguay after 2005, when the leftist government of Frente Amplio assumed control. This contradiction poses a problem to ideology-critical media research that places significant emphasis on the relationship between the foreign policy of the country of publication and the shaping of journalistic content (Herman and Chomsky, 1988/2002; Kim, 2000). Rather, the results of this dissertation suggest that newsrooms enjoy a notable degree of autonomy from national governmental policy but not necessarily from global power relations or from general politico-ideological conjunctures at a global level. This conclusion also highlights the importance of studying media outlets across geo-political contexts to observe how certain patterns in the reporting are common in international journalism from countries with different histories and political cultures.

Moreover, principles of liberal democracy are important for distinguishing between what is illegitimate from a democratic point of view and what is not illegitimate. In that sense, liberalism should be perceived as an important guiding principle for the construction of democracy. However, there are reasons to argue that there is some flexibility in how liberal notions of democracy serve to (de)legitimize political actors and actions. Alt-
hough liberal principles serve to construct deviance from democracy when they are breached by counter-hegemonic actors, the same principles are not necessarily applied equally strictly for judging the actions of actors that stand closer to the premises of global capitalism. The construction of the latter type of political actors as fighting against authoritarianism and championing democracy serves as an important strategy for legitimizing these actors’ actions, even in cases where they violate liberal democratic principles. In such cases, these actors are characterized as struggling for a good cause, something that serves to relativize even liberal democratic notions of democracy in the name of a greater good. The ideological loading of the construction of democracy must thus be regarded as heavily supported by moral arguments. In this sense, what is considered to be morally right or wrong should be perceived as important for evaluating what is democratically acceptable.

Reconsidering the ideological characteristics of the news media discourse on democracy against the background of the theoretical apparatus in order to transcend the pure empirical categories and grasp the fundamental structures that make such phenomena possible (Danermark et al., 2003), one can observe that the journalistic construction of democracy is fairly coherent with a post-political notion of politics. As scholars have noted, the post-political zeitgeist is characterized by the disappearance of ideological conflicts from mainstream politics and by a general consensus on the global capitalist system and on liberal democratic practice (Mouffe, 2005; Tesfahuney and Dahlstedt, 2008; Žižek, 1999). Mouffe summarizes the post-political outlook:

The ‘free world’ has triumphed over communism and, with the weakening of collective identities, a world ‘without enemies’ is now possible. Partisan conflicts are a thing of the past and consensus can now be obtained through dialogue. Thanks to globalization and the universalization of liberal democracy, we can expect a cosmopolitan future bringing peace, prosperity and the implementation of human rights worldwide. (Mouffe, 2005:1)

In post-political times, argumentation on moral rather than overtly political grounds constitutes a fundamental mechanism to justify the current political order. “In place of a struggle between ‘right and left,’” says Mouffe, “we are faced with a struggle between ‘right and wrong’” (Mouffe, 2005:5). Stated bluntly, political and social issues are reduced to a contest of good versus evil, which serves to obscure underlying political and economic interests. In this sense, it is appropriate to conceptualize journalism’s construction of democracy as generally corresponding with a post-political gaze, a concept that also synthetizes the theoretical contribu-
tion of this dissertation. The notion of *gaze* is understood here as a “mode of production” (Eriksson, 2015:24; see also Lyle, 2008) that organizes the reported events around established political values and presents them as being the objective reality. Of course, exceptions to this gaze exist, as evidenced by some op-eds, for example, but it is arguable that the post-political gaze is characteristic of the general construction of what is democratically acceptable.

Through the post-political gaze, democracy becomes more a matter of who carries *good* values and who does not—based on a politico-ideological evaluation—than a matter of what actually enhances the political participation of the citizenry or what is appropriate or not according to the established laws and procedures of a specific country. Thus, this principle enables the construction of an elected government as illegitimate and the legitimization of the overthrow of such a government. Such a notion of democracy resembles the one exposed by Tony Blair when arguing that Western military interventions and regime changes in the Middle East were about the promotion of democracy and global values (Farrelly, 2008). The concept of global values, although vague, is clear enough to encompass the post-political notion of politics. Politics is then a matter of either following a unanimous model of established and good values and thereby becoming part of the in-group or rejecting that model and facing the consequences. In this way, democracy does more than define a model of political participation; it forms part of the basis for legitimizing this zero-sum game. In this sense, Farrelly (2008) is correct in his conclusions that democracy serves as a discourse of legitimation that blurs the meaning of democracy, and the results of this dissertation show that international journalism contributes to this understanding of democracy.

Post-political characteristics of international journalism have been observed by media researchers concentrating on post-Cold War conflicts. As Hammond (2007) notes, Western military interventions after the end of the Cold War have been launched officially to respond to humanitarian needs, making moral arguments highly important. This strategy has also affected the media. Prominent journalists from BBC and CNN have promoted what Hammond calls “advocacy journalism” that rejects moral neutrality (Hammond, 2007:13). “From this perspective,” says Hammond, “failing to report conflicts in the ‘right’ way is understood as complicity with ‘evil’” (Hammond, 2007:14). Some of these assumptions can be perceived in the reporting of post-Cold War conflicts, many of which involve countries in the global South. Hammond notes that in general terms, the “legitimacy of Western military intervention was almost never questioned in the press”
(Hammond, 2007:219), a conclusion that is echoed in research by other scholars (Nohrstedt et al., 2000; Nohrstedt et al., 2002; Thussu, 2004).

One must acknowledge that there are positive aspects of the ways in which democracy is constructed in journalism, even if a post-political logic is followed and if the contemporary practice of liberal democracy is more or less conceived as the democratic model. Adherence to a liberal democratic framework compels journalists to expose governmental abuses of power and to criticize conduct that risks diminishing political participation. Because liberal democracy places significant weight on institutionalism, transparency and checks and balances—values that are indeed important for guarding political systems from despotism and that, to some extent, enhance the political power of the citizenry—the use of such a framework to highlight problems and to determine what is to be considered democratically acceptable can indeed be positive. One must also bear in mind that in light of the centralist and top-down character of past socialist experiments (see Lebowitz, 2012), it might be a sign of healthy skepticism that journalism sounds a note of caution when political actors that claim to provide alternatives to the problems of capitalism also seek to alter fundamental elements of liberal democracy. Ultimately, even the most elitist form of democracy is preferable to a political system that denies its citizens fundamental rights and liberties. In this sense, the post-political morale could serve a good cause. In the best-case scenario, journalism acts as a watchdog against political power and thus achieves an important liberal democratic task.

However, there are also reasons to be concerned about the implications of ideologically loading the notion of democracy through a post-political gaze. A central point of concern relates to how news media constructions of democracy legitimizes or delegitimizes the struggle for social justice in nations of the global South. Based on the results of this dissertation, it is appropriate to argue that attempts to challenge neoliberal—and, in the long run, capitalist—economic policies as well as liberal political practices are conveyed as deviating from legitimate democratic conduct. In this sense, a post-political understanding of democracy clearly undermines attempts to alter the status quo in global South nations and to overcome social injustice. The overreliance on liberal notions of politics, combined with journalism’s constant preoccupation with the present, inevitably ignores the effects of current global capitalist relations and the preceding colonial relations on the present problems of many nations of the global South. For many of these nations, including Venezuela, breaking with some aspects of liberalism is an important step toward combatting social inequality and integrating marginalized people into the political arena. Other
important steps include breaking with the taken-for-granted notion that capitalism soundly coexists with democracy, even as capitalism simultaneously produces vast social inequalities, and abandoning a model of democracy that excludes the vast majority of people between elections. Liberal notions of politics alone are therefore insufficient for understanding—and even more insufficient for providing long-term solutions to—the political and social problems of global South nations. As Koelble and Lipuma (2008) argue in their postcolonial critique of contemporary approaches to measuring democracy, there are fundamental differences between former colonies and Western nations that must be taken into consideration when one is evaluating the democratic characteristics of a former colony. The colonial experience in combination with the global financial system has put both internal and external constraints on the implementation of democracy in postcolonial nations. Many countries of the global South are dependent on international finance institutions that are primarily interested in “pursuing risk-reduced financial returns, rather than in democracy or social welfare” (Koelble and Lipuma, 2008:17). If such aspects are ignored when evaluating the democratic character of a nation, then the Western world will always be considered superior in terms of democracy. Therefore, the authors claim, we need to democratize democracy and take seriously the attempts to implement democratic government in settings that are different from Western Europe or North America. In this respect, international journalism clearly lags behind.

Moreover, and related to the arguments above, when journalism employs its post-political gaze to interpret and evaluate events in the global South, as in the case of Venezuela, they tend to disregard the importance of the political and economic interests that are at stake in the transformation of a country away from neoliberal and capitalist policies and practices and to ignore how these interests transcend the actual country that is covered. Contrary to a post-political gaze, it is pivotal that one contextualizes democracy as situated within a context of social struggles that affect how politics are pursued. Based on past revolutionary experiences in countries of the global South, such as Cuba, Vietnam, Chile and Nicaragua, it is to be expected that former political and economic elites will react negatively to implemented policies that conflict with their interests and that such counter-revolutionary reactions will emerge regardless of whether the government in question is legally elected. In the case of Venezuela, Chávez’s government faced illegal oppositional actions headed by economically powerful groups throughout the Chávez presidency, the most significant of which were manifested in a coup d’état and an oil strike that seriously affected the country’s economy (Golinger, 2006). Such oppositional activi-
ty must be viewed as related to the interest of the US government in undermining the Venezuelan government, an interest that has been advanced by, among other things, funneling money to oppositional groups in Venezuela, some of which had a prominent role in the 2002 coup (Golinger, 2006; Golinger, 2011). It is against this backdrop that one must understand the ambition of Chávez’s government to construct a strong government apparatus, regardless of one’s attitude toward that specific political endeavor. If journalism fails to place democracy in such a context of power, which would permit an increased understanding of the struggle for social justice in countries of the global South, then the journalistic construction of democracy serves the interests of those who benefit from the uneven power relations both within the nations of the global South and between those nations and the core countries of the global capitalist system. By acting in accordance with the post-political gaze, journalism thus essentially serves hegemony by providing a construction of reality in general and of democracy in particular that serves as a moral and intellectual guidepost for its readers that aligns with the premises of contemporary global capitalism.

A post-political gaze of democracy is also problematic for areas beyond the global South. At a time of global economic crisis, of the rise of nationalist and neo-fascist parties in Europe, and of a more explicit antagonism between the European Union and NATO on one side and Russia on the other, there is not only a substantial risk that the moral judgments inherent in the post-political gaze will be used as arguments to rally support for Western political and economic interests but also that such arguments will put wind in the sails of political forces that any true defender of liberalism and liberal democracy should reject. Recent developments in Ukraine demonstrate that European liberal and conservative power-holders can turn a blind eye to the rise of fascist groups, such as Svoboda or the Azov Battalion, as long as they share a common enemy, be it a seemingly authoritarian Russian ally or Russian-backed separatists. Therefore, in certain circumstances, a post-political gaze of democracy can, even if unintentionally, serve to legitimize fascist forces, which, as Amin (2014) rightly states, have always been repugnant to the idea of democracy.

An examination of the construction of the Ukrainian case could therefore be an important point of departure for future research on the ideological loading of democracy in journalistic texts. In any case, additional media research on democracy as a discursive practice (Fairclough, 1995a)—and thus on the production and consumption of discourses on democracy—is needed. There is a particular need for more research that concentrates on newsrooms and explores how democracy is perceived by journalists, as
well as how such perceptions, together with other structural imperatives of journalism, shape the textual construction of democracy in national and international matters. Here, research that combines critical discourse analysis with ethnographic methods, such as interviews and participant observations, could provide key insights into the production of ideology in relation to constructions of democracy.

It is important to emphasize that the ideological loading of democracy does not necessarily reflect the views and thoughts of individual journalists. Rather, just like the post-political gaze corresponds with global relations of power in general, it also reflects the global information flow; thus, it corresponds to the structural imperatives of international journalism. At a time when media businesses are in crisis, which leads to a smaller “news hole” and to diminished resources for journalistic production, individual news outlets have become increasingly dependent on a small number of wholesalers and other news providers. In this institutional context, individual newsrooms become more vulnerable to propaganda from economically and politically powerful groups, which in turn fosters the construction of foreign political matters in accordance with the post-political gaze. Scholars have called for a new type of journalism that interconnects specific events to surrounding global processes and offers new global outlooks (Berglez, 2013). This type of journalism, if implemented, could certainly take journalism beyond a post-political gaze. However, if the ideological character of international journalism significantly corresponds to the structural conditions of journalism, then changing these structural conditions is the key to changing journalistic performance.

Finally, a brief comment on the contemporary relevance of the concept of democracy for progressive and emancipatory political struggle is necessary. Is it true, as some critics argue (Badiou, 2011; Dean, 2005), that because post-political conditions have equated the concept of democracy with capitalism and liberal democracy, we must look beyond the notion of democracy to reach emancipation and social equality? If everyone is a democrat, as Badiou contends, do we gain anything by including ourselves in that category? I believe that even if it is true that the post-political notion of democracy has (as in the case of the European left) checked progressive actions by framing them within the limits of capitalism and liberal democracy, one should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. If the struggle against the post-political zeitgeist is to be more than just an elitist academic endeavor, it must be rooted in the notion of democracy. The struggle for social equality must therefore be intertwined with the redefinition of democracy from something that supports capitalism and inequality, as in the liberal notion, to something that guarantees the true power of the people.
Resumen en castellano

Aplicando una mirada pospolítica: ideología en la noción de democracia en la cobertura mediática de la Venezuela de Chávez

Basándose en una perspectiva crítica de la ideología, esta tesis estudia la construcción discursiva de democracia en la cobertura mediática sobre Venezuela en la época del presidente Hugo Chávez (limitado a los años entre 2002 y 2013). El objetivo del estudio es doble. Por una parte, busca entender la relación entre ideología y la construcción discursiva de democracia en la prensa internacional. Por otra parte, busca identificar de qué formas la relación entre ideología y democracia en el periodismo sirve para legitimar o deslegitimar la lucha por la justicia social de naciones del Sur global, en relación con los fundamentos políticos y económicos del capitalismo global.

La tesis doctoral está compuesta por tres artículos los cuales de distintas formas estudian la construcción discursiva de democracia en la cobertura mediática sobre el sistema político venezolano y sus actores políticos claves. El Articulo I estudia la construcción de democracia (i)legítima en relación con el gobierno venezolano. El Articulo II examina la construcción discursiva de diferencia (difference) entre los seguidores y oponentes de Chávez, y el Articulo III estudia la cobertura sobre el golpe de estado contra Chávez en el 2002. El método utilizado en los tres estudios es el del análisis crítico del discurso y el material empírico procede de tres periódicos de alto prestigio en sus respectivos países: Dagens Nyheter (Suecia), El País (Uruguay) y New York Times (EEUU).

Una de las conclusiones es que, en su conjunto, los estudios identifican cuatro macro-estrategias las cuales de diferentes formas atribuyen un significado ideológico a la noción de democracia. Tres de estas, la construcción discursiva de populismo, de concentración del poder, y de diferencia, sirven para construir anomalías políticas y para (des)legitar actores políticos. La cuarta estrategia, la relativización, justifica acciones que normalmente van en contra de ciertos principios democráticos predominantes pero que a su vez coinciden con intereses políticos e ideológicos.

La (des)legitimación de un grupo de actores políticos en relación a democracia corresponde a la cercanía que aquellos tienen con las prácticas políticas y los valores políticos dominantes dentro del capitalismo global. De ese modo, la cobertura mediática en general se basa en una mirada pospolítica: de acuerdo con el consenso político que, en gran parte, carac-
teriza la época de pos Guerra Fría. A través de esta mirada, el concepto de democracia tiende a comprenderse de acuerdo con los fundamentos políticos y económicos del capitalismo global, teniendo como resultado que aquellos actores políticos que desafían dichos fundamentos sean interpretados principalmente como anomalías en el sistema democrático.
References


ERNESTO ABALO Through a post-political gaze


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