

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Meeting the Good Other: Proper Distance and the Representation of José Mujica in Swedish Feature Journalism

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This paper examines the representation of the then president of Uruguay, José Mujica, in a long-read feature story published in the Saturday supplement of the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. This is done with the aim of contributing to the understanding of how international journalism constructs distance and proximity in the reporting of distant subjects, and more specifically, how such constructions connect the Swedish audience to (or disconnect it from) political processes and relations in Latin America. In this way, the study contributes to the field of media representation in general, as well as to research on the representation of Latin America, more specifically. Critical discourse analysis is used to analyze the text and visuals. Three result topics are presented. The first comprises discourses that construct difference, such as those highlighting personal characteristics that make Mujica different from other presidents. The second centers on discourses that construct proximity between Mujica and the audience, such as those addressing sustainability and the connections between Sweden, Uruguay and Mujica. The third highlights discourses that distance or downplay difference and revolve around constructions about Mujica's political past. The paper ends with a discussion of how this representation is able to construct Mujica as a close other without, in the process, abandoning key tenets of contemporary capitalist ideology.

Keywords: Feature journalism; ideology; José Mujica; proper distance; representation; Uruguay

Este artículo estudia la representación del expresidente uruguayo José Mujica, en un reportaje publicado en el suplemento sabateño del diario sueco *Dagens Nyheter*. El estudio tiene el propósito de contribuir al entendimiento sobre como el periodismo internacional construye distancia y proximidad en el informe sobre sujetos lejanos y, específicamente, como este tipo de construcciones (des)conectan al público sueco a procesos y relaciones latinoamericanas. Por lo tanto, este estudio contribuye a la investigación sobre la representación mediática en general, y también, específicamente, al estudio sobre la representación de Latinoamérica. El estudio utiliza análisis crítico del discurso para analizar elementos textuales y visuales y presenta tres temas de resultados. El primero es compuesto por discursos que construyen diferencia, como son los que enfocan características personales que diferencian a Mujica de otros presidentes. El segundo tema se centra en discursos que construyen proximidad entre Mujica y los lectores suecos, como temas sobre sostenibilidad y la conexión entre ambos países. El tercer tema se centra en discursos que distancian o atenúan diferencias que hay entre Mujica y el contexto sueco, así como el pasado político del expresidente. El estudio finaliza discutiendo como la representación analizada logra construir a Mujica como un 'otro' bueno, sin que se abandonen principios ideológicos del capitalismo contemporáneo.

Palabras claves: Ideología; José Mujica; Latinoamérica; Periodismo; Representación; Uruguay

Introduction

How does Swedish journalism construct distance and proximity to 'the other' in the reporting on a South American political leader? How do such constructions connect a Swedish audience to (or disconnect it from) political

processes and relations concerning Latin America? And what ideological positions does such discourse unveil? These questions guide the current article, which studies a feature story about the then president of Uruguay, José Mujica, published in a weekend supplement of the leading Swedish morning newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) in August of 2014.

On one level, the feature story about Mujica, an ex-guerrilla who became president and who is known for

his unorthodox presidential style, is a case of what Orgad (2011), in a metaphorical reference to Kholstomer, calls Tolstoy's horse: a view and interpretation of an object from the outside. Here, Swedish journalism plays the role of the fictional horse Kholstomer as it attempts to make sense of a stranger and a distant reality. On another level, the feature story also serves as a case study for understanding how news media constructs what the late media and communication theorist Roger Silverstone (2007) called *proper distance*. Proper distance is about imagining the other in her own terms and about understanding the 'ethics of care' that make such imagination possible (Chouliaraki and Orgad 2011: 342). Understanding how the media constructs the other and simultaneously constructs distance and proximity to it is important for grasping how media representations serve to (dis)connect distant subjects in a globalized world (see also Appadurai 1990; Berglez 2013). Given the role that Sweden played in the 1970s and 1980s in offering asylum to Latin American political refugees fleeing from military dictatorships in their home countries—which has resulted in a community of almost 5,000 people living in Sweden who were either born in Uruguay or have at least one Uruguayan parent (SCB 2018)—the mediation of the other is here interrelated with discourses of national history and national identity.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding of how international journalism constructs distance and proximity in reporting on distant subjects and how such constructions connect the Swedish audience to (or disconnect it from) political processes and relations involving Latin America. The study uses critical discourse analysis, and the analysis shows how the representation of Mujica involves discourses that construct difference without necessarily othering the subject in question and strategies that de-emphasize differences between Mujica and the imagined audience. All in all, such representations serve to construct proximity and promote understanding between the audience and the distant subject represented.

The following section presents previous research about the mediation of distant subjects in international journalism, especially in relation to the Global South and Latin America, and it positions the current study against that body of research. The theoretical framework of the study is then outlined. Subsequently, the methods and materials that the study relies on are described, followed by a presentation of the study's main results. Lastly, the conclusions of the study are presented.

Research About Media Representation

This section reviews previous research about media representation in general as well as that of Latin America in particular. It ends with a discussion about how the current study contributes to the understanding of international journalism's construction of proximity and distance in relation to Latin America.

Although the misrepresentation of the Global South in international journalism has been an issue of interest at least since the discussions about a New World Information and Communication Order in the late 1970s and early

1980s (see Carlsson 2003; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al. 1985), media research about this subject is mainly tied to conceptual developments in cultural studies (Hall 1997), postcolonial theory (Said 1979) and cosmopolitanism (Silverstone 2007).

A topic of research has been the ways in which journalistic strategies are used to mark cultural and religious differences, especially in the representations of Islam (Klaus and Kassel 2005; Roosvall 2016; Vultee 2009). Research has also problematized the ways in which what appears to be neutral reporting in fact serves to other Global South subjects living in poverty and/or working under poor conditions and to reproduce the economic practices that lead to such situations in the first place (Abalo 2017; Cotal San Martin 2019; Lugo-Ocando 2015). Furthermore, Chouliaraki (2006) has studied and problematized the ways in which journalism constructs distant suffering and how strategies of othering hinder the spectator from acting. Orgad (2011) has, in turn, engaged with conceptions of the other, but in a slightly different way: exploring how international reporting constructs estrangement from the 'us' identity.

Apart from existing research about media and journalism in Latin America, there is a limited body of research dealing with the representation of Latin America in international media. Studies conducted during the Cold War have shown that the US media complies with US foreign policy in their coverage of Central American countries (Herman and Chomsky 2002) and that Latin America in general received little and mainly crisis-oriented attention by US media (Larson, McAnany and Storey 1986). Contemporary studies have focused on stereotypical representations of Latin America in news media (Johnson 2010; Pakkasvirta 2008) and social media (Pakkasvirta 2018).

Moreover, critical studies on the representation of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela are recurrent and they are relevant to bring up here because of their topical closeness to the current study. These studies represent the contemporary research about the representation of Latin American politics in international journalism. Lewis (2018) has used UK reporting of presidential elections in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela to understand the representation of post-neoliberal politics. He argues that the delegitimation of the processes in right-of-center publications serves to promote neoliberal worldviews and liberal democracy. The left-of-center newspaper *The Guardian*, on the other hand, both legitimizes and criticizes the processes in the three countries, which serves to promote a European type of social democracy, he argues. Studying the coverage of Venezuela in major UK and US newspapers, MacLeod (2018) shows that the studied news media reproduce the ideology of their respective governments. Interviews with journalists also reveal that an anti-Chavista sentiment is present in some newsrooms. Salter and Weltman's (2011) analysis of BBC News Online's coverage of Venezuela shows that the liberal nationalism that permeates the reporting overlooks class conflict in Venezuelan politics, leading to constructing Chávez as the source of crisis. Moreover, in studies of the international

coverage of Venezuela, Abalo (2015) has shown that news media can relativize democratic principles in the ascription of political legitimacy, that the linking of Chávez to populism and power concentration constructs discourses of an illegitimate democracy, and that discursive differences in how government supporters and opponents are constructed in relation to political rationality and violence serve to construct legitimacy but also othering.

Although the representation of the other has been studied in different ways, more research into how journalistic representations of distant subjects construct distance and proximity and how they connect the reported subject to global processes and relations is needed. This is especially the case for research about the contemporary international media representation of Latin American politics, which is limited. This research area would benefit from studies dealing with countries and cases that are less conflict-laden than the Venezuelan one, in order to broaden the understanding of how Latin America is represented in the media. In this context, the feature story about Mujica is a valuable case that adds to the present body of research. It is also important that research on the media representation of distant subjects—not only in the case of Latin America—go beyond hard news, which is associated with relatively short pieces of representation produced at a fast pace. The study of a long-read feature, as the case studied, can bring new insights to the construction of proximity and distance. Key aspects here are the mere situation of a journalist having a face to face conversation with a political leader such as Mujica, and the possibility to present this in a longer piece with room for longer quotations and expositions, as well as visual representations.

Analytical Framework and Materials

Theoretical framework

As Roger Silverstone (2007: 4) points out, ‘the mediated images of strangers increasingly define what actually constitutes the world’, making the media’s representation of distant subjects a central locus for investigating cultural aspects of globalization (see also Appadurai 1990). Silverstone identifies the mediation of the other as part of the morality of the media, the ‘generality of orientation and procedure within which the world is constructed by the media and within which the other appears’ (2007: 7). According to Silverstone (2007: 7), the media’s frameworks for the appearance of the other also define the moral space in which the other appears to us, and the media asks for a ‘equivalent moral response from us, the audience, as a potential or actual citizen’.

In order to understand this moral space and the degree to which the media creates understanding of the other, Silverstone (2007: 119) introduces the concept of *proper distance*, which in general is understood as ‘the capacity to enlarge one’s perspective, and the willingness to recognize the other in her sameness and difference’. The ability to recognize both sameness and difference is key in Silverstone’s concept, and in that it differs from conceptualizations of the representation of others that mainly concentrate on how difference is used as a tool

to mark deviance, such as the critique of Orientalism (see Said 1979). Proper distance, says Silverstone, ‘preserves the other through difference as well as through shared identity’, and it ‘involves both imagination, understanding and a duty of care’ (Silverstone 2007: 47). Silverstone (2007: 48) distinguishes proper distance from mediated representations that are *too close* due to the exotification of the other, *too far* due to the one-sided representation of the distant other as just an other, or *neither close nor far*, as when difference is either exaggerated or naturalized. Proper distance, by contrast, is *both close and far* and ‘requires imagination, both from those who construct the narratives and images of the media’ and from the audience (Silverstone 2007: 48).

As Chouliaraki and Orgad (2011: 342) argue, proper distance ‘opens up an analytical space through which we can examine how our mediated social relationships produce ethical norms by which the humanity of others is constantly defined and negotiated’ and lets us ‘engage with otherness as a problem of representation’ in the media.

Proper distance invites the impossible question: can we imagine the other in her or his own terms? And momentarily it seduces us into thinking that perhaps there is an answer. After all, “proper” announces an ethical norm. Which is this norm? Which is this ethics of care that allows the mediated other to emerge in her/his sovereignty and humanity? (Chouliaraki and Orgad 2011: 341–342).

It is in the search for the ethical norms underlying proper distance that the concept has great potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of representation. Representations, regardless of the type, do not occur in a sociocultural or ideological vacuum. Instead, one needs to understand representations—and concomitant constructions of proximity and distance—as interrelated, not only with the social structures but also with the grand narratives and dominant ideologies of the context where the representation occurs and where the audience is. The same principle applies to the ethical norms of representation that are at the heart of the concept of proper distance. These ethical norms are most likely shaped by—and to some extent reshape—the grand narratives and hegemonic ideologies in the context where the representation is produced and consumed.

Central obstacles to the mediation of proper distance and an ethics of care are at the meso-level of journalism—its practices and routines—and at the societal and geopolitical macro-level. These factors could largely explain many of the conclusions, presented in the previous section, that point to journalism doing something other than bridging the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’, especially as regards the relationship between the West and the Global South. It has been noted that a Western perspective dominates international journalism, which can be explained by the fact that there has historically been a concentration of (Western) sources that distribute international news and the newsrooms that pay for

the wire services have mainly been Western (Williams 2011). Furthermore, critical media scholars have again and again underscored how the representation of foreign affairs breathes the hegemonic ideology of the country of publication and fails to provide explanations that challenge capitalist logics (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Lugo-Ocando 2015). Such types of constricted representations may thus serve to other and delegitimize actors that go against the hegemony of global capitalism; as well as to disconnect the representation of distant social actors from certain global processes and relations, such as neoliberalization, global inequality and imperialism. Including such aspects could, instead, serve to bridge gaps between the audience and the represented subject.

These obstacles are important to have in mind when studying the representation of politics in Latin America, a region whose contemporary history is permeated by struggles related to imperialism and inequality. However, it is possible that other journalistic genres and less conflict-laden cases than for example the Venezuelan may provide a more open and pluralistic representation that could let us see the contours of proper distance. In any case, it is important to understand the ethical norms behind such representation and the ideological limits it entails.

The following section argues for the studied case more thoroughly.

The case study

As Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, it is not the number of cases that constitutes the basis of generalization and theoretical development, but it is the nature of the case and how it is chosen. This study is a qualitative discourse analysis of a long-read feature story about the then president of Uruguay, José Mujica, published in *DN*'s weekly supplementary magazine *Lördag* [Saturday], on August 30, 2014. *DN* is Sweden's leading morning newspaper and it has a national reach despite being centered in the capital Stockholm. Its political allegiance is independently liberal, which ideally should only be reflected in the editorial pages in a Swedish newspaper context.

The story was written by the Swedish reporter Henrik Brandão Jönsson with assistance from the Uruguayan photographer Matilde Campodónico, and it is based on an interview that the team conducted with Mujica at his home outside of Montevideo.¹ The *DN* feature was selected for this study because in its representation of distant subjects and of Latin American politics, it has the potential provide a discourse that, compared to discourse analyzed in previous studies, exhibits what is closer to Silverstone's concept of proper distance. Below, I develop this argument further.

José Alberto Mujica Cordano (b. 1935), also known as 'El Pepe', was Uruguay's president between 2010 and 2015. He had previously been a senator and served as the Minister of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries between 2005 and 2008 in the first government of president Tabaré Vázquez (see Danza and Tulbovitz 2018 for a general account of his political life). Mujica conducted his parliamentary activities as a member of Frente Amplio (Broad Front), a leftist coalition founded in 1971 and in power since 2005

(it was prohibited by the military dictatorship between 1973 and 1984, although some currents within the Front were prohibited until the end of the dictatorship in 1985). However, Mujica is well known for his role as one of the leaders of the urban guerrilla movement Tupamaros, which operated in the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. Mujica's Tupamaro record is well known and includes armed assaults, being shot by the police several times, two prison escapes and 13 years in captivity, during several of which he was in isolation and under threat of being killed if the guerrilla continued to act. The post-Tupamaro Mujica is associated with a leftist approach softer than that found in some radical Marxist currents within the Broad Front and in other leftist projects in Latin America, such as ones in Cuba and Venezuela. Scholars have also noted Mujica distancing himself from his guerilla past in his contemporary speeches (Montero 2015). Policies implemented by Mujica's government include the right to same-sex marriage (Rivera-Vélez 2018), the decriminalization of abortion (Fernandez Anderson 2017) and the legalization of cannabis (Cerdá and Kilmer 2017),² serving to cast Uruguay as a progressive-liberal country. Mujica is also renowned for his ascetic lifestyle, which includes the donation of a large part of his salary and commuting in an old Volkswagen Beetle. Due to his lifestyle, he has been called 'The world's "poorest" president' (see Hernandez 2012).

The relevance of the selected case

The selected case is important to study for both theoretical and empirical reasons, which will be developed here. The feature story about Mujica in *DN* is not only interesting insofar as it is a rare opportunity for a Swedish newsroom to visit the home of a non-Scandinavian head of state to conduct an interview, but the importance of the case is also to be found in Mujica himself and what he represents politically. The cultural and geographical distance between the Swedish newspaper and Mujica makes him a priori a distant other in the eyes of Swedish journalism, but there are also aspects that could provide proximity. His association with a more moderate left than, for example, the governments at the time in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, as well as his government's positions on abortion and same-sex marriage—policies that are similar to those in Sweden—could serve to render him something of a close stranger. Mujica's admiration for the Scandinavian welfare models, as well as the ties between Sweden and Uruguay due to Uruguayan immigration could also create closeness. Thus, these cultural and geographical proximities and distances between Mujica and the Swedish context make the case highly relevant from a theoretical point of view, in the light of proper distance (Silverstone 2007).

Furthermore, the genre of the text is also important in my choice of this case. Much of the previous research and critique against the representation of distant subjects in international journalism concerns (hard) news, a genre that consists of shorter texts that are produced relatively quickly. The feature story, on the other hand, consists of a longer representation and it relies heavily on the interplay

between text and visuals and requires a relatively high production budget. Moreover, in the case of interview-based features such as this one, the journalist is less dependent on secondhand sources. This is also important in light of *DN* being a prestigious newspaper with a nationwide audience. With the feature about Mujica, *DN* must carefully select topics and angles so the subject represented becomes understandable for its readership, and the piece itself has to meet the criteria of depth that the genre holds. Analyzing the representation of Mujica in this genre can therefore contribute empirically and add new insights to how proximity and distance are discursively constructed in the representation of a Latin American political subject.

In sum, the chosen case has been carefully selected because of the theoretical and empirical relevance of the subject and the forms of the representation. Viewed in the light of previous research dealing with Latin American cases represented in Western media, the studied case can provide new insights to the construction of proximity and distance.

Analytical approach

This study uses critical discourse analysis to analyze the feature story about Mujica. In particular, it employs critical discourse analysis approaches that are sensitive to the analysis of journalistic texts (Carvalho 2008) as well as to the interplay between different semiotic resources (Machin and Mayr 2012). The overall ambition is to examine how proximity and distance are constructed in the feature story, how this connects the reader to Latin America and what the ideological implications of the discourse are. The analysis examines the following elements in the text:

Objects. Objects are constructed realities; they are similar to topics and serve to construct issues of both broad and specific character (Carvalho 2008). The analysis examines how textual and visual elements serve to construct objects of different kinds. Central here is a close analysis of how constructions in the body of the text and in the visuals underpin the broader topics introduced in the headlines and lead paragraphs. Examples of broader objects could be poverty and gender equality, and more narrow objects could be, for example, specific actions or events corresponding to them.

Lexical choices. The choice of specific words, terms and concepts is important for attaching certain values to specific actors, actions or events (Carvalho 2008; Machin and Mayr 2012), which is what this level of the analysis looks for. Also important here is seeing how different lexical choices are connected to specific objects.

Discursive strategies. Discursive strategies are textual interventions that social actors and journalists use more or less consciously to shape reality (Carvalho 2008). A discursive strategy that is central in this analysis is framing. Framing is how a social actor or the journalistic voice use semiotic resources to select an angle through which a certain reality is perceived (Carvalho 2008). Another strategy is positioning, how actors are set in relationship to others and how their identity is discursively constructed (Carvalho 2008). A third is legitimation, which is the use

of discourse to justify actions (Carvalho 2008). A fourth is politicization, whether a specific event or action is ascribed a political nature (or is detached from its political nature; Carvalho 2008). Additionally, the analysis looked for domestication, which is the use of discourse to connect a represented reality to the domestic/national context of the audience (see Roosvall 2010 for examples of domestication).

Visual analysis. The visual analysis sought to identify how the use of visual resources creates meaning through denotation and connotation (Machin and Mayr 2012) and complements linguistic resources in the construction of objects. The analysis looked for attributes (the different objects represented), the settings of the image and salience (what resources are made to stand out; Machin and Mayr 2012). Central here was identifying the contexts in which Mujica appears visually and how this serves to reinforce specific objects.

It is important to note that discourses many times appear in the interplay between language and visuals, which means that the textual and visual analysis are intertwined.

Results

The results of the study are presented in this section, which is organized around central result topics generated by the analysis. The section first accounts for discourses that construct difference around Mujica. It then presents discourses that construct proximity between Mujica and the Swedish audience, followed by a presentation of discourses that serve to distance or de-emphasize aspects that could serve to other Mujica.

One can say that the analyzed feature story generally shows enthusiasm towards Mujica, which is manifested in discourses that construct proximity and sympathy for him, which should be seen as part of the ethics of care (Chouliaraki and Orgad 2011: 342) that guides the representation. The genre itself helps enable such constructions since it allows freer representations that are not bound by principles of objectivity in the same way hard news is. It must also be noted that the interview taking place in Mujica's home, which means that he invited the journalists to his home, can have an impact on the focus and the tone of the feature story. As will be shown, the story reveals a certain dynamism in the representation of Mujica as a distant subject, involving discourses that could serve to construct difference without necessarily othering him, as well as those that construct proximity.

Difference but not othering: An odd president

A central object in the analyzed feature story is how Mujica is different from other presidents in the world, and key here is the emphasis put on his ascetic lifestyle and background as a guerrilla and bank robber. This is seen in the Saturday supplement's front page, which contains an intertwined blurb and headline, reading,

He has given away his salary, legalized abortion and cannabis, been nominated for the Nobel Peace

Prize and is now depicted in a movie. Come along to Uruguay and meet 79-year-old José Mujica – the bank robber who became THE WORLD'S POOREST PRESIDENT. (p. 1)³

In the quoted blurb, the president's name stands out in red letters and the phrase 'THE WORLD'S POOREST PRESIDENT' functions as a headline as it is written in capital letters and in a bigger font size than the rest of the text. The front cover of the Saturday supplement, where the text appears, is composed of a long-distance photograph that covers the page and denotes a graveled road next to pasture or plantations. On the road is an older model light blue Volkswagen Type 1 containing two people. Above the car, there is a balloon-like black graphic circle with an arrow pointing to the car. The text in the balloon reads, 'Uruguay, 2014. President José Mujica and his wife Lucia Topolansky in their car, a Beetle from 1987' (p. 1). On one level, the balloon with the arrow serves to point out that the people traveling in the car are Mujica and Topolansky. On another level, together with the blurb quoted above and the photograph itself, the text serves to connote difference. In contrast to the formality and wealthiness that could be expected of the First Family of a country, the Uruguayan presidential couple is traveling in an old car to what seems to be their home in the countryside. What is communicated thus is difference from the common type of head of state, and what is central in this differentiation is the informal and popular style of Mujica and his wife. Visuals supporting the story also serve such constructions. For example, on page 11 there is a picture showing Mujica in office wearing sandals and no socks, which connotes informality. On the same page there is also a picture of him getting out of a tractor, symbolizing his agricultural work, showing him in a role that we seldom see a politician in.

This differentiation is also highlighted in the headline of the feature story, which reads 'José Mujica. "It is the world's other presidents who are strange."' (p. 9). The quoted phrase, which derives from Mujica, and in particular the lexical choice of 'strange', positions the Uruguayan against other presidents and proposes that Mujica is the normal one and other presidents are odd. The difference that Mujica symbolizes by, among other things, his austere lifestyle, is—although exotified to some degree—in other words interpreted as a good thing.

The mere circumstance that Mujica met the team of journalists in his home enables a close and personal representation of the president, something that in turn allows for constructions of the president himself as odd. This is the case with representations that highlight Mujica's bad temper, which serves to construct difference. In the beginning of the article, a situation is described where the team enters Mujica's house and the photographer enters the kitchen, unaware that the president is sitting on the toilet. Mujica is quoted as yelling at her to go out, giving the interview something of a bad start. Mujica's bad temper is also made visible when he is questioned by the journalist about not condemning the Uruguayan soccer player Luis Suárez after he bit an opponent in the 2014 World Cup.

Although criticizing the player, Mujica is also quoted as shouting 'FIFA are fascists! Soccer is not soccer anymore! It's business!' (p. 15), which leads Mujica's press secretary to end the interview. Apart from serving a construction of authenticity, highlighting Mujica's bad temper in this way also constructs him as odd and very different from the typical politician. In this sense difference is emphasized, at least on a personal level.

What we have seen hitherto is that the construction of Mujica as different can highlight his good and bad sides. Being shown as different because of his ascetic lifestyle can, as we will see in the next section, construct proximity to the imagined audience. At the same time, emphasizing his bad temper serves to construct him as odd and, to some extent, laughable but not necessarily an other that needs to be rejected.

Constructing proximity: Sustainability and domestication

The differentiation of Mujica from other presidents is intertwined with discourses that more clearly connect the audience with Mujica, which in turn constructs proximity and, to some extent, also creates sympathy for him.

On one level, proximity is constructed by bringing Mujica the person close to the audience; visuals play a central role in this construction. The feature contains several photographs where the focus is on Mujica and his home environment, something that serves to make the representation more intimate. On another level, proximity is constructed in the interplay between visuals, the journalistic voice, and quotations from Mujica, especially in relation to two specific discourses.

The first discourse revolves around sustainability, by which is meant the need for sustainable environmental, social and economic development (Berglez, Olausson and Ots 2017). Three interrelated topics appear under this discursive umbrella: Mujica's ascetic lifestyle and views about the economy, his sustainability activism, and his critique against a consumerist society.

Mujica's ascetic lifestyle, which is part of the general objects of the story, is developed throughout the body of the text. Quotations from the interviews with Mujica provide firsthand accounts of his views on his lifestyle. Consider the following two quotations:

– The majority of the people in my country live like this. Why should I live differently? I am their representative. It is the world's other presidents who are strange. They live like kings, while the majority of their voters do not [...]. (p. 9)

– The most important thing in your life is not the economy. You don't fall in love in the economy. You don't have children because of economic reasons. Yet everybody talks about money. What is important is time. That creates your freedom. But if you have to work all the time to pay off everything you have bought, you aren't free anymore, he says. (p. 10)

In the first excerpt, Mujica is quoted as answering the journalist's question about why he did not move into the presidential palace when taking office. Mujica's discursive strategy here is thus to draw attention to questions of poverty in Uruguay and other countries as well as to acknowledging this reality and adapting to it. Central here is his emphasis on how 'the majority' lives and that he is their 'representative', which connects him with the Uruguayan people and justifies his way of living.

In the second quote, Mujica accounts for his views on financial issues, questioning the importance of money in achieving happiness and being free. The quote provides further legitimation of Mujica's lifestyle and also connects it to a broader critique against consumerism, which is also visible in other interview quotations in the story. For example, when arguing against what he considers a drive to consume, he refers to the indigenous Aymara people saying that 'Poor is the one who needs more all the time' (p. 11). In this way, Mujica promotes an alternative to the values of consumer capitalism, and he is constructed as practicing what he preaches.

Supporting such representations are visuals complementing the body text. On page 14 there is, for example, a picture of Mujica's kitchen, whose simple and ordinary character is salient. The picture shows a kitchen sink and a small countertop on which are a fruit bowl, at least two other bowls, and a bottle of mineral water. Below the countertop, there are cupboards and drawers made of wood, and the countertop is placed beside a small combined stovetop and oven of older model. The walls are rustic, and there are wooden shelves containing cups and other utilities. Under the shelves are hanging pots, which look well used. The kitchen as represented lacks any signs of luxury and lacks items that would likely be part of a modern kitchen, such as a dishwashing machine, a microwave oven, a blender, or an electric food processor. One can assume that the kitchen was depicted because of its simple characteristics. Such representation thus adds to the construction of Mujica as living, as well as promoting, an ascetic lifestyle.

Moreover, Mujica's perspectives on consumerism are constructed as tied to his views on environmental matters. The journalistic voice highlights Mujica's role in the UN's sustainability conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, where he is said to have had enough of the attending world leaders' unwillingness to reach an agreement instead of buying luxury items during the conference.

For ten minutes he spewed vitriol on the heads of states' lack of interest in getting to the bottom of the causes of environmental destruction: consumer society. "It is not about going back to the Stone Age or that we will fall behind. We must just realize that we cannot let ourselves eternally be governed by the market, when it is we who should govern the market." The heads of states squirmed when he came to his conclusion: "The reason for climate change is the model of civilization that we have built. We have to start looking at how we live", he said. To the world's billions of voters,

what he brought up was common sense, but not for the heads of states. They looked at each other ashamed. (p. 11)

On one level, the excerpt above shows how the journalistic voice connects Mujica's critique of consumer capitalism to his views on environmental issues. In this sense, Mujica's views are made to fit with current trends of leftist critique that blame consumer capitalism and neoliberalism for the pressing environmental problems that the world is facing (see Klein 2014). On another level, the way in which the journalistic voice incorporates secondhand quotes from Mujica's speech at the Rio conference also constructs admiration and respect for Mujica. What is of special relevance here is the journalistic voice's use of the discursive strategies of positioning and legitimation (Carvalho 2008), in this case the positioning of Mujica against other political leaders regarding climate change and how this legitimizes his actions. Mujica is constructed as brave for critiquing consumer capitalism and making the other leaders feel ashamed. Furthermore, by aligning him with 'the world's billions of voters', he is made to stand with the people of the world. These strategies construct Mujica as belonging to the good side concerning global problems, compared to the world leaders unwilling to solve pressing environmental problems. Furthermore, the construction of Mujica in relation to sustainability shows him as sharing concerns that historically have been important for Sweden, such as poverty and equality, but also those that are central in contemporary political debate, such as climate change. These discourses therefore construct proximity between Mujica and the imagined audience.

In addition to the discourses on sustainability, there are discourses that more directly connect Mujica to a Swedish context and construct proximity. A central discursive strategy is domestication, which is used fairly often in international journalism to make a foreign topic close to the national audience (Roosvall 2010; cf. Olausson 2014). Domestication here connects Mujica/Uruguay to Sweden. A node of connection is the former Swedish prime minister Olof Palme, whom Mujica is said to admire. That connection is already made on the page before that featuring the story's headline. Covering the page is a portrait photograph of Mujica in profile, and the only text is a small caption at the bottom of the page, which reads 'José Mujica is a big admirer of Olof Palme. "According to me, he built the best society that you can build within capitalism"' (p. 8). In the portrait, which focuses on Mujica's right side from his head to his shoulder, his right hand is placed on his chin, covering his lower lip, and his gaze is fixed on something in front of him that is outside of the picture. The portrait connotes a thinking man, and together with the caption it also serves to construct proximity, because the picture offers the audience a close and detailed view of Mujica, who does not have his gaze on the reader, and the use of domestication in the caption bridges the cultural and geographical distance between Mujica and the audience.

The embedded quotation about Palme reappears in the body of the text, along with other accounts of Mujica's

admiration for the Swedish politician. Mujica is, among other things, also quoted as saying that 'I liked his critique of communism in the Soviet Union', in reference to Palme (p. 10). The highlighting of his recognition of Palme and rejection of Soviet communism functions to position Mujica as sharing some sort of 'us' identity with the political mainstream in Sweden. The connection between Mujica and Sweden is also reinforced at the end of the article, when he is asked to send a greeting to Uruguayans living in Sweden.

Distancing difference: Dealing with Mujica's past

Previous research on international journalism about Latin America has shown that liberal democratic ideals are important parameters for ascribing positive and negative characteristics to the social actors represented (Abalo 2015; Lewis 2016; MacLeod 2018). Deviance from such ideals is likely to lead to negative representations. The representation of Mujica is interesting, in this sense, because his political present corresponds to liberal democratic practices, while his Tupamaro history does not.

Consistent with the construction of Mujica as somewhat of a close other, and contrary to what one could expect based on previous research, Mujica's Tupamaro past is not used to delegitimize him as a politician. The journalistic voice asks Mujica about his guerrilla past at the end of the interview, and Mujica is constructed as not wanting to answer. When the journalist insists, Mujica is quoted as saying 'We cannot judge Sparta's soldiers with today's eyes. As we cannot judge what happened in the 1960s with today's eyes. It was another time. We did it that way then but would not do so today' (p. 15). Mujica is thus constructed as differentiating the past from the present, which in turn constructs his guerrilla past as a closed chapter. This type of macro-strategy, which I call *distancing difference*, is also seen in how the journalistic voice constructs Mujica's past.

Mujica's past as a guerrilla and subsequently a prisoner is accounted for, mostly by the journalistic voice, to provide a historical background for Mujica and his country. Uruguay is described as going from having a strong economy in the beginning of the 20th century to facing an economic crisis in the 1950s, during which, among other things, 'enterprisers stacked money in piles' (p. 9) and inequality increased. In this context, the journalistic voice contends that,

Some students were inspired by the Cuban revolution and started robbing food supply transports to distribute the goods to the poor. The group grew to become the urban guerrilla Tupamaros who robbed banks to give money to the poor and to finance their struggle to topple the regime. One of the leaders of the guerrilla movement was José Mujica, who was the group's expert in robbing banks. (p. 9–10)

In the excerpt above, the journalist is using the discursive strategy of legitimation, which justifies the guerrilla actions, and key in this strategy is the reference to the poor

and the construction of Tupamaro actions as directly benefiting the poor. In this sense, the moral rationale for the guerrilla actions, which contrast with liberal democratic principles, is explained and also justified to some degree. The journalist then goes on to account for one of Mujica's prison escapes; the killing of a US agent, which Mujica was suspected of planning; how he met his wife; and his time as a political prisoner, during which he was tortured and isolated. Although some of these actions clearly deviate from what is accepted political action according to a liberal democratic perspective, the background previously provided sheds light on the problematic and unjust Uruguayan context in which Mujica was acting. The description of the inhuman conditions in which Mujica was held in prison also serves to justify his actions and to construct him as a victim. Mujica is quoted as saying that he 'searched for life [itself]' (p. 10) when he was in solitary confinement, something that reinforces his position as a victim of oppression.

Thus, this discourse, on a general level, distances actions and characteristics that could otherwise mark difference between Mujica and the Swedish audience. Difference is distanced through historicization and legitimation, which are intertwined. Mujica's actions that deviate from liberal democratic principles are then constructed as a closed case, something belonging to a turbulent time in history.

Conclusions

The analysis of this feature story about Mujica provides insights into how international journalism constructs distance and proximity of distant subjects and how such constructions connect a Swedish audience to (or disconnect them from) processes and relations involving Latin America. A conclusion to be drawn from this case study is that a political figure from the Latin American left, with a background that is dissonant with Western democratic practices, can indeed be represented in ways that that de-emphasize his controversial character. At first sight, this appears contrary to what some previous research has suggested. However, as will be argued in more detail below, this representation does not mean that the journalists are abandoning key tenets of contemporary capitalist ideology. Instead, they are fundamental in the ethics of care (Chouliaraki and Orgad 2011: 342) that guide the representation.

As mentioned before, the feature story genre allows a more open representation. On the one hand, this gives Mujica space to elaborate on his political views and his critique of consumer capitalism. On the other hand, the genre and the representation as a whole serve to de-formalize, and even de-dramatize, his views. It goes without saying that it is because of his role as a politician that Mujica is interesting to the media, but since the representation centers on Mujica the *person*, and he is represented in his simple home in the Uruguayan countryside, he is to some extent also de-politicized. In this sense, his views become more expressions of personal thought than of belonging to any political current or movement. The genre and the scope of the story thus have something of a neutralizing effect.

Furthermore, the representation of Mujica's critique against consumer capitalism does not include evidence of his commitment to a defined alternative to the status quo, something that also serves to neutralize his critique. The critique denounces consumer capitalism, but no real alternatives are suggested. His admiration for Olof Palme, as constructed, implicitly suggests an adherence to social democracy, which in the best of cases would serve as an alternative to neoliberalism but would not necessarily be a path to altering (consumer) capitalism. Moreover, the representation of Mujica's ascetic lifestyle and his justification of it raises questions about its progressive nature. Being 'the world's poorest president' and saying that one should care less about money might be sympathetic, but it is also a way to adapt to, and to some extent to accept, the reality of poverty and inequality in contemporary Latin America. As represented, Mujica thus individualizes the struggle against poverty and inequality instead of politicizing it. The solution—or the progressive action—thus becomes to donate money or to care less about money, something that, in fact, requires the privilege of having money in the first place.

The above is also consistent with the legitimization of Mujica's Tupamaro past. Apart from abstracting the politico-ideological goals of the movement, Mujica's involvement in the Tupamaro movement becomes anecdotal because he has gone through a political and ideological transformation since then. He now plays by the liberal democratic rules and can therefore be treated as an odd but legitimate political actor, less controversial than his leftist homologues in Cuba or Venezuela. In the end, this reinforces rather than refutes the claims made in previous research about the centrality of a liberal democratic framework for the ascription of legitimacy in mediated representations about Latin America (see Abalo 2015; Lewis 2016; MacLeod 2018).

In this sense, the representation provides both a critique of capitalism and an acceptance of its premises. The ethics of care guiding journalism in this case are in line with a cosmopolitan view of the world, in which the Western subject cares for and respects the distant other, its situation and its history. Poverty and environmental problems are taken seriously, although the solutions to such problems seem more uncertain, as noted above. However, there are also progressive potentials with this view and how it journalistically approaches distant subjects. The representation of Mujica serves to connect a Swedish audience to Uruguay, its history, its policies and its relationship to Sweden. By providing the perspectives of a political leader in South America on pressing global issues such as poverty and climate change, representations such as this one can enhance the audience's understanding of the global character of such problems. Although different from a global journalism that blurs the foreign/domestic dimension (Berglez 2013), journalism such as that analyzed can indeed serve to tie the audience with the distant subjects and reality represented, and in line with what Olausson (2014) proposes, domestication can connect the audience to global matters. In this sense, journalism intertwines international

and domestic elements in a story in order to make global issues and distant subjects understandable and close to 'us', without necessarily erasing their 'foreign' characteristics.

The potentials outlined above are, to a great extent, tied to the feature story genre, which allows the journalist to write longer texts, use visuals more extensively and be less event centered (thus more process centered), all of which can result in deeper and more nuanced accounts than those of regular (fast) news pieces. However, more research is needed about how these aspects may shape the representation of distant subjects. A proposal for future research, therefore, is to compare the representation of Latin American political actors in international news and feature stories. In doing so, one can provide further understanding of the representation of Latin American politics in journalism.

Notes

- ¹ The feature story is eight pages long and has been analyzed in its totality. Additionally, the cover of the corresponding Saturday magazine was also analyzed because it is fully dedicated to the feature article about Mujica. Apart from photos by Campodónico, the story also has several pictures derived from international press services.
- ² For an analysis of Swedish news journalism on cannabis legalization, including reporting about Uruguay, see Abalo (2019).
- ³ All excerpts have been translated from Swedish by the author and are from the analyzed feature story.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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