

University of Groningen

Twittering for Peace: Narratives on Otherness and Social Leaders in the Colombian Post-Conflict Time

Pinilla Duarte, Elizabeth

DOI:

[10.33612/diss.979451962](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.979451962)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2024

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pinilla Duarte, E. (2024). *Twittering for Peace: Narratives on Otherness and Social Leaders in the Colombian Post-Conflict Time*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.979451962>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Chapter one. General introduction

1.1 Introduction

High-impact social conflicts, including those involving physical violence against others, can have diverse root causes, one of which can be thought of as the challenge of recognizing the rights and dignity of the Other, who may be perceived as an adversary or a means to an end. Additionally, acts of aggression against the Other are often supported by entrenched and institutionalized narratives that frequently rely on contrasting frames of war and peace, heroes and villains, or, more recently in the Colombian context, terrorists (Mesa, 2018; García, 2017). Alternatively, when the Other being marginalized and dehumanized (Tuktal, 2023) is not explicitly framed as the adversary in a war, subtler, everyday narratives that are publicly accepted and perpetuated can justify such marginalization. For instance, the widespread use of adjectives, nouns, and metaphors that categorize individuals based on their skin color, gender, or cultural background, or the practices of othering reflected in the omission of their mention in policy documents and laws (Guerrero &

2 General Introduction

Soler, 2020), can significantly contribute to the potential for violence and social injustice against the Other.

The Peace Agreement signed between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016 symbolized an effort to transform a conflict-ridden nation towards peace and social justice. Albeit the *Peace Agreement* (2016) was not the first attempt to negotiate with non-governmental armed groups, this negotiation encompasses singularities that might have led to the final signing by the two negotiating parties. According to the study by Ríos (2018), who compared one of those attempts named the *Caguán process*, started in 1999, and the *Peace Agreement* (2016), the first one failed primarily due to competitive strategies and mutual distrust, where the lack of cooperative mechanisms led both the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP to prioritize their own interests, resulting in the continuation of the conflict. In contrast, the author argues that the Havana process succeeded by adopting a cooperative strategy, driven by a mutually hurting stalemate that compelled both parties to find a cooperative equilibrium. This shift was facilitated by establishing a clear negotiation agenda, involving diverse societal actors, and selecting conducive venues for dialogue.

Furthermore, various studies have underscored the transformative nature of the *Peace Agreement* (2016) (Hernández & Gualdrón, 2022), emphasizing its inclusivity concerning gender perspectives (Salvesen, H. & Nylander, 2017) and minority groups (García, 2021; True & Riveros-Morales, 2019) and touching on complex issues such as land redistribution, agroecology, and the recognition of victims of the internal armed country. While the post-agreement period witnessed the emergence of new forms of violence within the country, this time is conceptualized as post-conflict for the purposes of this study. The rationale is that the agreement effectively led to the demobilization of the largest guerrilla group in the country, which had engaged in illegal military activities for over five decades. More critically, for the scope of this dissertation, the signing of the peace accord facilitated a new-found space to envision and advocate for peace, marking a shift in the national narrative and opening discussions around the reimagining of societal constructs such as Otherness in the context of a nation striving towards reconciliation.

Nonetheless, despite the theoretical promise of the *Peace Agreement* (2016), its practical implementation has encountered significant complexities. The accord, initially rejected in a national plebiscite and subsequently ratified by Congress, indicated a deep ideological divide within the country. Furthermore, the period following the signing of the document has seen a marked increase in the killings of social leaders— who exert leadership and often hail from marginalized communities such as peasants, indigenous peoples, and Afro-Colombians, representing non-governmental social organizations and playing central roles in their communities. Even though violence in different types of violence such as kidnapping and murder actually and significantly decreased (Albarracín et al., 2023; Valencia, Valencia & Agudelo, 2019), targeted assassinations of social leaders have increased and remain unpunished. According to reports, over 1200 activists were killed from the time of the signing of the peace document to the end of 2022 (Indepaz). Scholars identify several reasons for these assassinations, linking them to the fact that social leaders often resist extractive industries, illegal crops and claim for the accomplishment of the goals of the *Peace Agreement* (2016). This positioning places them in a precarious situation, caught between powerful interests and the vulnerable communities they represent (García, 2021, Ávila, 2020).

In post-conflict societies, the transition towards peace and justice presents considerable challenges, particularly in the realms of transitional justice (Gómez & Montealegre, 2021; Zukerman, 2018) and societal transformations following peace agreements. In this context, emerging narratives such as the *Peace Agreement* (2016) have the potential to induce a qualitative and symbolic paradigm shift, fostering a rejection of physical violence and social injustice against the Other. This shift could signify a transformation in societal *habitus*. However, even though societies constantly change (Braudel & Siân, 1975), the perception of such shifts may not be as mitigating as when the decision is made to end a long-standing conflict and build a different world than the one the conflict provided. Resistance to change, especially on the part of the entrenched narratives, the material conditions and power structures that contributed to giving meaning to the conflict, can acquire an even more visible and equally powerful dimension than the conflict resolved by a peace agreement. Considering these dynamics, how can the notion of the Other be

4 General Introduction

reframed when facing powerful challenges that may still include physical violence in a post conflict society?

According to the research by Albarracín et al. (2022), the assassinations target social leaders from rural peripheries that have “historically been marginalized from local, regional and national decision-making” (p. 143). Furthermore, social leaders have historically been stigmatized, labeled as dubious figures linked with guerrillas or criminal activities, creating a public cognition that vilifies rather than empathizes with their causes. Other scholars have also found that:

Individuals of every gender have been subjected to death threats, and the criminalization and stigmatization of their social and political activities. Human rights defenders, particularly leaders of women’s and LGBTI organizations, labor and peasant leaders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, journalists, magistrates, and leftist politicians are among those targeted for their work.” (Bouvier, 2016; Programa Somos Defensores, 2015)

Despite these challenges, widespread mobilizations demanding protection for social leaders emerged in various Colombian cities and internationally. These movements found a voice on social media platforms such as Twitter, which according to scholars, “exhibits key elements of narrativity” (Sadler, 2018; Page, 2013). This thesis, therefore, interrogates whether narratives of social protest on Twitter have contributed to the transformation of interpretative frames of the Other and to redefine the identity of social leaders within the post-conflict landscape of Colombia.

In this dissertation, social leaders are considered to embody the concept of the Other, primarily because they typically hail from peasants, black and indigenous communities. Moreover, several of them are women. Consequently, throughout the ensuing chapters, I will explore the narrative of Otherness in post-conflict Colombia and its interconnection with the *Peace Agreement* (2016) narrative. I contend that the examined narratives of social mobilization, advocating for the recognition of the Other, are closely intertwined with the opportunities for redefining Otherness.

1.2 Scope of the study. Framing the Other in post-conflict Colombia: Narratives on social leaders and the path to peace

In this doctoral dissertation, I undertake a multifaceted examination of Twitter narratives on Otherness that weave through the complex landscape of post-conflict Colombia. This work is based on an understanding of narratives and storytelling as playing a crucial role in human cognition and collective processes of meaning-making (Bruner, 1986; Sadler, 2018). According to several studies, narratives can be considered a means through which humans make sense of the world, time, and space, weaving isolated events into coherent networks and plots (White, 1980; Todorov, 1981; Pujante & Morales-López, 2017). As such, the construction of the Other can be posited as intricately linked to the narratives surrounding them according to the dynamics of historical and cultural events. However, as existing scholarship has suggested, the process of othering and the ensuing perceptions of the Other may also be increasingly pursued by capitalist and consumerist frameworks (Baudrillard, 1998), casting Otherness in the light of an exotic other—a notion not unfamiliar in the Colombian context. Still, other narrative dynamics may emphasize the recognition of the Other as ontologically different in a relational sense, which is the perspective that this dissertation aims to explore.

My inquiry unfolds in two distinct yet interlinked stages. First, I delve into the role of Twitter narratives of social mobilization, particularly focusing on how these narratives frame Colombian social leaders, who I posit here as embodying Otherness. The second stage shifts the lens to the critical juncture of presidential elections, drawing on the resonance and representation of Otherness within the electoral discourse. This bifocal approach is designed to uncover the nuances of a potential contribution of Twitter narratives to the (re)framing of collective consciousness, thereby catalyzing support for social leaders and weaving their recognition into the fabric of Colombian societal imaginary.

As such, this thesis defends several key arguments, as a contribution to the academic debate on social media in post-conflict contexts. On the one hand, I suggest that online narratives of social mobilization play a central role in mobilizing support and the collective (re)framing of the Other and social leaders in the context

of the Colombian post-conflict social media debate. Protest movements often contest established power structures and seek to redefine societal norms and values (Snow and Benford, 1989; Castells, 2015). According to Goffman (1974), “collective action framing” is an active process of agency and contention at the level of reality construction, which frames an interpreted schemata that actors can “locate, perceive, identify, and label within their life space” (as cited in Benford & Snow, 2000). Therefore, reframing involves not only challenging existing frames but also performing new ones that resonate with the target audience and mobilize them for collective action.

On the other hand, the potential role of female social leaders in Colombia is a topic that demands closer attention when examining this transitional narrative. The participation of women and women's organizations in the crafting of the *Peace Agreement* (2016) and their ongoing struggles align with women's endeavors for peace in various regions of the world. Extensive research consistently highlights the significant contribution of women to global peace agreements (Brannon, 2022; Krause, Krause & Bränfors, 2018; Anderson, 2016; Anderlini, 2007), as well as the instrumental role played by women's organizations in reshaping policy discourse related to women's rights (Bell & Kitagawa, 2023). Even when their formal participation in peace negotiations is constrained, women exert substantial informal influence within the realm of peace talks (Dayal & Christien, 2020).

In the case of Colombia, women were initially underrepresented in the early stages of peace talks between the government and FARC, which began in 2012. However, existent research indicates that by 2015, women, including those from the FARC's ranks, played a significantly larger role (Bouvier, 2016; True & Riveros-Morales, 2019). Furthermore, women's organizations in Colombia have long been engaged in community-driven peace-building initiatives, addressing various issues discussed in the negotiation process (Carvajal & Álvarez-Vanegas, 2018; Paarlberg-Kvam, 2020). Furthermore, as pointed out by Webster, Chen & Beardsley (2019), “reforming institutions and mainstreaming gender during peace processes have important legacies for gender power relations in post-conflict societies, although additional effort may be needed to sustain momentum for reforms and establish

more permanent equilibria" (p. 2). Has the role of women in reshaping narratives surrounding the Other persisted and resonated in post-peace agreement narratives?

As this discussion will delve into in the next section, preliminary studies and ongoing research suggest that Colombian women might be playing an increasingly significant role in reimagining perceptions of the Other (Bouvier, 2016; Paarlberg-Kvam, 2017). This (re)framing perspective could, for instance, lead to the development of more inclusive policies that better represent the complexities of a post conflict society. As noted by Bouvier (2020) in her paper for the United Nations Global Study:

In Colombia, women have increasingly articulated the particular impacts of the war on children, women, and more recently, LGBTI persons. They have raised awareness about the extent of sexual and gender-based violence and its impact on the victims, their families, and their communities. In their efforts, women have both contributed to and drawn on international human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as the norms, conventions, and laws favoring women's rights. In addition, women's groups have increasingly sought to create global alliances and engage international support in their struggle. (p. 19)

As such, within this broader context, this dissertation investigates the case of the former social leader Francia Márquez and the resonance of her discourse on Twitter during the 2022 presidential elections in Colombia, when she was running for the vice-presidency of the country.

This study also undertakes a methodological inquiry, delving into the complexities of contemporary digital humanities to uncover the enactment of possibilities for meaning-making. I specifically examine the potential of online platforms such as Twitter to shape and reflect societal narratives and perceptions. At the heart of this inquiry lies a methodological investigation, designed to parse the complexities of digital communications and to unearth the myriad ways in which meaning is constructed and disseminated in the digital age.

As such, central to this study is an analysis of Twitter's communications, through which I endeavor to trace the poetic meaning (Mohr, Wagner-Pacifici &

Breiger, 2015) of online networked narratives. This analysis is anchored in the study of word association patterns, which serve as a potential representation of cultural cognition (Basov et al. 2017). To navigate this intricate digital terrain, I have adopted a multifaceted methodological framework that integrates computational hermeneutics, critical content analysis, constructivist grounded theory, and computational text mining. Combining these methodologies contributes a unique lens through which the digital narrative landscape is viewed and interpreted, allowing for a new dimension of analysis in our understanding of the narrative landscape.

Employing the insights of computational hermeneutics (Romele, Severo, & Furia, 2020; Mohr, Wagner-Pacifici & Breiger, 2015), this research delves into the meanings that underlie digital narratives, with a particular focus on the subtle nuances and complex layers of online communications on platforms such as Twitter. Complementing this perspective, a critical content analysis is conducted to scrutinize the framing, reframing and resonance processes within Twitter narratives, particularly examining the evolution of topics and concepts, such as the shifting perception of social leaders in Colombia.

Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Bryant & Charmaz, 2019) underpins the methodological framework of this study, guiding it towards an empirically driven understanding of emerging themes and patterns. This approach ensures that the analysis remains firmly grounded in the data, lending credibility and depth to the conclusions drawn. Concurrently, computational text mining is used to efficiently process and analyze the voluminous text data generated on Twitter, enabling a systematic examination of word association patterns and their implications for cultural cognition and societal perspectives.

The integration of these diverse methods enables a comprehensive analysis of digital narratives, offering insights into the structural and thematic aspects of these narratives (Page, 2013; Sadler, 2018) and ensuring that the interpretations are empirically grounded. This research specifically applies this methodology to examine the role and impact of Twitter hashtags in shaping public discourse during social movements and presidential campaigns, revealing the potent influence of digital platforms in shaping social dynamics. For instance, by examining how narratives around social leaders have shifted from being perceived as "dubious

individuals" to "agents of rights, change, and life," the study suggests the potential of these combined methods to uncover significant societal insights and the proactive engagement of the public.

In the forthcoming sections of this introductory chapter, I will first outline the Colombian context, setting the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the overarching goals and thematic directions of my doctoral thesis. This contextualization will include an exploration of the socio-political landscape of Colombia, providing a background for the ensuing analysis. Following that, an examination of the concept of Otherness is presented, laying a theoretical and philosophical foundation for my study. This groundwork contextualizes the concept within the research scope and offers an interpretive lens for subsequent chapters.

Thirdly, the composition and vision of the chapters that form this dissertation will be presented. While each chapter stands as a distinct case study with its unique focus and methodology, collectively they contribute to addressing the central research question of this thesis. I will discuss how these diverse chapters weave together to form a cohesive narrative and collectively advance the understanding of the primary research inquiry. Finally, I will introduce the specific research questions that guide this thesis and outline the structure of the dissertation. This structural overview will provide a clear roadmap of the study, detailing the logical progression of arguments, methodologies employed, and the anticipated contributions of the research to the broader field of study. This last section of the introduction is intended to give readers a concise overview of what to expect in the subsequent chapters and how each part contributes to the overarching objectives of the thesis.

1.2.1 Analysing Twitter discourse

Based on the above discussion, this doctoral research will explore Twitter narratives attempting to frame the perception of an endangered Other within Colombian post-conflict society. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of the Other, as applied in this context, may present challenges as it can risk falling into the realm of "othering" practices. Indeed, the study I am conducting is inherently intertwined with these practices, involving narratives aimed at exposing acts of violence against

those regarded here as embodying the Other. However, the basic notion I highlight here is of the Other as encompassing a holistic understanding centered on the recognition of difference. In the subsequent section, I delve into the concept of Otherness understood as *difference*, which holds significant relevance for the development of the research presented herein.

Taking into account the potential opportunities and limitations presented by the *Peace Agreement* (2016), along with the relevant impact of social media, this study asks how a nuanced concept of "the Other" might unfold within online narratives. Social media platforms such as Twitter have amplified these dynamics by enabling users to share their narratives and interpretations of events in real-time, influencing the formation of publics, shaping identities, and interpreting experiences in protest movement narratives.

Furthermore, social media platforms have emerged as significant battlegrounds for public opinion regarding these complex issues. On one hand, they perpetuate marginalizing narratives against social leaders and the *Peace Agreement* (2016), echoing traditional biases. On the other hand, they also serve as platforms for social mobilization against the killings of social leaders and for the broader human rights agenda. Thus, they have become a double-edged sword, revealing both the entrenched prejudices and emerging solidarities that characterize contemporary Colombian society. Analyzing these digital narratives can provide critical insights into the struggles and opportunities that Colombia faces in its journey towards lasting peace and social inclusion.

A significant portion of this doctoral research involves the analysis of tweets that engage with hashtags related to social mobilization. Twitter, established in 2006, is a microblogging and social media platform that initially imposed a 140-character limit on messages, which was increased to 280 characters in 2017. Notably, in 2023, Twitter introduced a feature allowing its paid members, known as "blue members," to use up to 4,000 characters for their posts. In the same year, the platform underwent a rebranding to "X". Twitter, now known as X, introduced a feature for its paid "blue members," allowing posts of up to 4,000 characters. However, throughout this dissertation, the platform will be referred to as Twitter, as the research focuses on a period when it was still known by this name.

This platform has introduced various multifunctional tools, including the use of mentions (identified with the symbol @) and hashtags (identified with the symbol #), among other features. In the Colombian scenery, according to findings from the 2022 Digital News Report by the Reuters Institute, 72% of Colombians rely on social networks as their primary source of information, surpassing other traditional media channels. Within this context, approximately 30% of this reliance is dedicated to the use of Twitter (Digital News Report, 2022).

As recent scholarship has posited, social media platforms such as Twitter are means to provide marginalized communities and peripheral actors with a platform to express their voices. In this line of thought, hashtags have played a crucial role in promoting rallies and protests globally (Mahin & Strand, 2021). In terms of their role in meaning-making, hashtags and hashtagging are studied from several standpoints, such as the way they facilitate conversations, spread and diffuse, or they are considered as markers of the subject matter of the text (Zappavigna, 2015). As such, hashtags have been posited as fostering the formation of communities (Yang et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2013) or publics (Bruns and Burgers, 2011) or as playing a role in interpersonal aspects of meaning-making, such as enhancing visibility and validation (Page, 2012). Additionally, research has shown that different types of hashtags serve different linguistic functions, operating as both metadata and integral components of linguistic structure and discourse semantics (Kuo, 2018; Zappavigna, 2015).

In the context of collective action, hashtag use can facilitate the creation of collective meaning and frames that transcend the aggregation of individual subjectivities (Snow & Vliegenthart, 2023; Mahin & Elstrand, 2021; Bastos et al., 2015). Furthermore, in this context, hashtags are employed to (a) highlight injustice, (b) reframe discourse, and/or (c) advocate for policy change, such as #BlackLivesMatter or #MeToo (Kuo, 2018, p. 496). Hashtags are synthetic, abstract, and culturally resonant, promoting the dissemination of framing discourse and narratives that articulate experiences and observed events (Kuo, 2018; Snow and Vliegenthart, 2019). As such, throughout this dissertation, I delve into the affordances of hashtagging in shaping meaning and framing social leaders.

Moreover, along with hashtags, this work mainly approaches tweets themselves. In chapters two and three the discussion revolves around the interweaving of narratives, the tracing of changes and patterns in the narrative networks. In chapter four, I discuss the reception of narratives, their interpretation, and their resonance. This interpretation is posited according to the analysis of other narratives through the active participation of readers-commenters. Scholarship has pointed to the need of revisiting the concept of narratives when considering the changes produced on virtual spaces (Ryan, 2019; Sadler, 2018). Importantly, narratives in the virtual world are theorized as different because they do not have a unique narrator and they are not ready-made stories; otherwise, they are collectively made. Furthermore, as pointed out by Sadler (2018) and Page (2013), even though narratives on Twitter keep spatiality and temporality as narrative features, they are open-ended, fragmentary, unpredictable, and require the creativity of the reader to produce the sense-making of the plot. Accordingly, in this work I trace what the collective highlights about social leaders from a fragmentary narrativity and the creative interpretation of the reader/commenter (Sadler, 2018).

1.2.2 Navigating the Complexity of "Otherness." From Ontological Weight to Relational Ontology

The study of Otherness presents a multifaceted challenge, given its inherently complex nature that spans multiple dimensions. My research project started with an exploration of the possibilities and challenges of discussing the Other as distinct from the self. This trajectory of inquiry was inspired by the insights of Donald Davidson (2004), who postulated that the legitimacy in articulating the Other diverges fundamentally from that of expressing the self. Davidson highlighted an intrinsic asymmetry in authority when articulating self-versus Other. He asserted that although we ascribe beliefs and desires to both us and others, the authority of these attributions is markedly more pronounced in the context of the self than in relation to others. Central to this examination is the human endeavor to understand ourselves and others. Key considerations here involve discerning our articulations,

interpreting the words of others, and determining whether our comprehension of our own thoughts is rooted in a singular, non-transferable subjectivity.

These abstract contemplations invariably led me to broader inquiries regarding interactions with others and the rationale behind the selective endorsement of certain narratives. Theoretical deliberations of this nature gained tangible significance in the aftermath of the *Peace Agreement* (2016), particularly considering the escalating social unrest and news reports about the assassinations of activists. A focal point of debate was the polarized public discourse surrounding these killings. This realization steered my research focus towards understanding the Other within the context of difference. The central question revolved around the degree to which protesters as well as voters position the Other in terms of difference, particularly in a country as culturally rich and diverse as Colombia. To what extent do Twitter narratives against the endangering of social leaders could contribute to re-frame the Other as ontologically different in Colombia rather than as an amalgamation of exotic attributes?

However, the concept of difference is intricate and contested, influencing social, political, and academic dialogues. It serves as a subject of study across various scholarship disciplines, where researchers continually re-evaluate its implications and manifestations in a globalized world characterized by complex interplays between identity, culture, and power dynamics. In recent times, there has been a call for a deeper, more critical comprehension of difference, transcending superficial acknowledgments of cultural diversity, cultural relativism, and the premises of multiculturalism. Several studies point out such conventional conceptual frameworks as risking and trivializing the Other by emphasizing distinctions from dominant cultures. As such, scholars underscore the necessity of revisiting the concept of difference, alongside related notions such as culture (Alian & Wood, 2021; Kramvig & Flemmen, 2019) and multiculturalism. This trend advocates for alternative frameworks founded on ontology and relationality. Žižek (1999) and Baudrillard (1998) made noteworthy contributions to this discourse. Žižek characterized multiculturalism as a form of 'racism with a distance,' where respecting the Other's identity entails maintaining a separation facilitated by one's privileged universal standing. In his words:

multiculturalism involves a patronising Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture . . . In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which the multiculturalist maintains a distance made possible by his/her privileged universal position. (Žižek, 1999, p. 216)

Baudrillard, on the other hand, discussed how consumption in capitalist societies is governed by a system of codes that shapes our comprehension and appreciation of 'identities' and 'differences.' This system influences not only our consumption patterns but also our understanding and responses to broader societal issues, including multiculturalism and racism. According to Baudrillard, our modern interpretation of 'identity' and 'difference' fortifies capitalist structures and exacerbates problems such as racism. He suggests that overcoming these challenges might require moving beyond these concepts and opposing the codification of the Other with special-natural needs (Alian & Wood, 2021). In the Colombian milieu, where diverse populations coexist due to a combination of socio-historical factors and geographical positioning, the construction of the Other has given rise to stratifications between 'us' versus 'them,' often underpinned by systemic narratives centered on status and skin color (Castro, 2005). In this context, as posited by Guerrero and Soler (2020), institutionalized narratives in Colombia frequently depict the Other as exotic (ethnic), which can be translated as a lacking subject. In contemporary discourse, the term 'ethnic' is often conflated with notions of exoticism and folklore, implying a diminished value.

Accordingly, the perspective underlying the analyses in the present dissertation was about the possibilities that Twitter narratives could open to construct the other as *difference* in an ontological but non-essentialist sense. Recent scholarship has proposed notions related to the redefinition of difference, such as the ontological turn. Kramvig and Flemmen (2019) see this ontology as pendant of other concepts such as worlds instead of cultures and perspectives. As an example, the authors highlighted the controversies surrounding the use of traditional

indigenous objects in Norway and the recognition boundaries extended by the modern state to its 'others.' They argued that these controversies should be viewed as events of ontological disagreement that reveal the limitations of recognition as a relationship offered by the modern state to its 'others'. They posited that interpreting differences as other worlds, rather than as distinct cultures or perspectives, contests the erasure of differences through translation and analogies. Consequently, Kramvig and Flemmen proposed an ontology as a more comprehensive concept than culture and tradition for articulating the Sámi's quest for recognition, advocating for a 'pluriversal world' as a strategy for decolonizing academic engagements. Could this notion of pluriverse encompass a ground for the conceptual foundation of the Colombian post-conflict imaginary on Otherness?

Maggie Fitzgerald (2023) significantly advanced this discussion by introducing the concept of radical deep ontology, interpreted as an ethic of care for the Other. She also proposed a dichotomy between universalism and pluriversalism, arguing that in a pluriversalist approach, such deep ontology could be recognized. In her words,

Difference, from the vantage point of pluriversality, carries an ontological weight (Holbraad et al., 2014) – it is not simply a matter of various traditions, cultures or viewpoints on some existing and shared world. Instead, the pluriverse, as a political decolonial project, affirms that unique worlds are produced and reproduced through complex relations, practices, collectives and the agents therein. In short, differences, here, are at their most deep and pervasive, and these differences, I believe, pose an even more robust challenge for researching, thinking about, and doing global ethics.” (2023, p. 2)

However, as Jabri (2023) contends, the concept of 'deep ontology' and its potential contradictions is problematic when acknowledged through epistemological methods. Jabri questioned the feasibility of fully understanding the essence or 'deep nature' of things using established ways of knowing without encountering contradictions. Instead of relying on established epistemologies, she suggested a relational ontology that considers different positionalities in relation to symbolic,

normative, and material continuities. She critiqued the 'ontological turn' in terms of 'pluriversality' and emphasized the importance of Derrida's 'différance' for emancipatory politics. Derrida's 'différance' disrupts traditional notions of meaning, identity, and presence by challenging binary oppositions and hierarchies, emphasizing the relational and contingent nature of meaning, and critiquing the privileging of presence over absence (1983). Ultimately, *différance* challenges fixed meanings, stable identities, and existing power structures, opening possibilities for new ways of thinking and being. Jabri also opposed reducing difference to 'culture' and highlighted that differences in positionality relating to domination structures are influenced by a complex topography of resource access, vulnerability to harmful practices, and access to public infrastructure and political institutions. Approaching the Twitter debates that I will discuss in the subsequent chapters, departing from a critical position vis-a-vis difference, allows me to highlight the ongoing negotiation and ontological tensions in defining Otherness, even in the context of narratives that seek to recognize them.

Accordingly, the enduring question is how to discuss difference without succumbing to cultural relativism and the antinomy of us versus them. How can we conceive of the Other as an irreducible Other? Furthermore, if difference cannot be defined ontologically, how should it be defined? In this dissertation, I investigate the Other as possessing significant ontological weight, but through an alternative ontological framework based on a relational ontology, as suggested by Jabri. This framework must address the intricacies of varying susceptibilities, questions related to knowledge and ethics-politics, and the political nature of difference. This perspective acknowledges that difference is not simply assumed or predetermined ontologically but is constructed by the individual and a broader spectrum of narratives and institutional practices.

1.3 Tracing narrativity and metaphoricity in online public opinion formation: A case study of social mobilization hashtags on Twitter

Recent research indicates that the digital era has significantly altered narratives and narrativity, as evidenced by works such as those by Sadler (2018), Alexander &

Levine (2008), and Ryan (2019). This transformation has spurred a variety of research methodologies focusing on narratives within digital platforms. For instance, Castaño (2022, 2017) utilizes discourse analysis and frame metaphor analysis to investigate patient subjectivity and perceptions in illness narratives shared on blogs. Similarly, Semino et al. (2023) examine the influence of online narratives in shaping vaccination decisions. Moreover, experimental approaches have been conducted to understand how internet technologies may reshape storytelling. An example is the research by Maxwell, Speed, and Pschetz (2017), who adopt an interdisciplinary method, integrating blockchain technology with creative writing to investigate emerging narrative forms. In the context of Twitter, Ross and Bhatia (2019) analyze how tweets employ metaphors and parodic styles in political discourse, thus reflecting and amplifying discursive illusions about the partisan divide in American politics. These diverse research paths provide complementary perspectives on the complexities of public opinion formation. Narratives, particularly cultural narratives, are instrumental in shaping human thoughts, social interactions, expectations, and behaviors, as they frame and potentially reform beliefs and behaviors (Goffman, 1974). In virtual environments, Ryan (2019) asserts that narrativity involves interpreting, attributing, and reordering spatial and temporal elements, which are crucial for sense-making and narrativization. However, the challenge remains in how to effectively trace, analyze, and explore these narratives.

Building upon the various methodologies and insights outlined in recent research, this dissertation delves deeper into the realm of digital narratives and their impact on public cognition. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I provide an in-depth analysis of the hashtag #NosEstánMatando [#TheyAreKillingUs], with the primary objective being the identification and examination of metaphors, particularly exploring metaphoricity as a mechanism in shaping public cognition regarding social leaders. This investigation is predicated on the hypothesis that, although social mobilization efforts are geared towards recognizing the Other, they are frequently enmeshed within prevailing metaphorical paradigms. However, these narratives also present alternative cultural interpretations and metaphorical frameworks, thus enriching the understanding of the Other. The *Peace Agreement* (2016), signed

between the FARC and the Colombian government, is a pivotal element in these narratives, with metaphors related to war being especially significant.

The theoretical framework of the second chapter posits that the role of metaphoricity in crafting cultural narratives is crucial for comprehending the dynamic interaction of elements that contribute to the formation of alternative cultural and political imaginaries. This analysis integrates concepts such as narratives, framing, and metaphoricity to decode online messages concerning social leaders. Within this framework, the study of metaphors, as an integral aspect of the broader concept of metaphoricity, becomes a vital tool for understanding how the Other and social leaders are framed and reframed. Drawing on existing literature, this chapter asserts that metaphors transcend mere linguistic expressions and fundamentally structure our cognition, actions, and social interactions (Olson, 2018; Musolff, 2006; Gibbs, 2017; Valdivia, 2018). In the context of post-conflict Colombia, for instance, metaphors that portray social leaders as 'heroes' or 'warriors' can instigate admiration and solidarity, whereas those framing them as 'agitators' or 'rioters' might provoke fear and distrust. Therefore, this study contemplates metaphoricity as pivotal in understanding how metaphors influence thought processes and perceptions (Valdivia, 2019; Jensen, 2017). Furthermore, I posit that the interplay between narrativity and metaphoricity in digital spaces such as Twitter is instrumental in shaping public identities, interpretations, and experiences within protest movement narratives.

Chapter two specifically focuses on how metaphoricity molds Twitter narratives about Colombian social leaders as representations of a broader concept of Otherness. It uncovers that the perception of social leaders is malleable and context-dependent, shaped by ongoing socio-cultural processes. The analysis reveals a profound connection between narrative structures and metaphorical frameworks, particularly those relating to war. These narratives often metaphorically correlate the effects of war with the repercussions of assassinating social leaders, thus deeply embedding these associations within public discourse.

Social leaders are metaphorically and metonymically linked to the nation, implying that any harm inflicted upon them is a direct harm to the country itself. The study identifies prevalent associations with the term "asesinato" (murder),

resonating with García's (2017) findings, yet without pinpointing specific perpetrators. This metaphorical framing accentuates the severity of the experiences of social leaders, with a particular emphasis on the heightened vulnerability of female leaders, who are often portrayed as needing both protection and recognition.

Contrary to initial expectations, the study observes a weaker than anticipated correlation between the concepts of war and peace. This suggests an emerging necessity for a narrative shift in social mobilization efforts. The use of metaphorical language is found to be crucial in conveying the deep-seated trauma experienced by conflict victims, with a special focus on the collective and individual suffering of women.

In summary, while themes of war and murder form the core of narratives surrounding social leaders, serving as a call to action for their protection and to honor their experiences, there exists a counter-narrative centered around life and collective mobilization. This counter-narrative challenges traditional marginalized perspectives and offers a more inclusive viewpoint on collective action.

1.4 Analyzing Twitter narratives and mechanisms of communication. The role of hashtags and mentions in framing social leaders and Otherness

Employing social network analysis, the third chapter of the dissertation delves into the impact of Twitter-specific attributes, such as hashtags and mentions, on the construction of narratives and the identification of metaphorical elements in tweets related to the hashtag #LíderesSociales [#SocialLeaders]. The analysis explores how hashtags not only serve as meta-commentary, defining the interpretative context of tweets, but also act as rallying calls that galvanize support and solidarity for various causes or movements.

The methodology adopted in this chapter is tailored to explore Twitter as a multifaceted platform that significantly influences the interweaving of narratives around 'otherness.' This is particularly pertinent in the period following the *Peace Agreement* (2016), where Twitter emerged as a key platform for voicing social opposition to the endangerment of social leaders.

The study focuses on the framing of social leaders within the hashtag #LideresSociales [#SocialLeaders] on Twitter. Here I delve into the dynamics of Twitter frame building in relation to social leaders, examining connections, topics, and the potential impact of co-occurring words, hashtags, and mentions (Hellsten & Leydesdorff, 2019). The aim is to discern regularities and shifts in associations within Twitter debates, social mobilization lemmas, and the audiences that may influence the framing of social leaders or their endangerment.

To analyse the ongoing dynamics in social media narratives across the years 2018, 2019 and 2020, this study uses a longitudinal approach. My research focuses on tracking and analysing the development of discussions, identifying key topics, and examining the interconnections among these topics over time. The selection of specific software tools, namely Pajek (Batagelj & Mrvar, 2006), Mozdeh (Thelwall, 2018), Nvivo (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019), and VOSViewer (Van Eck & Valtman, 2010), is strategic for their specialized capabilities. Pajek provides extensive network analysis, Mozdeh excels in analyzing Twitter data, NVivo is adept at qualitative data analysis and thematic exploration, and VOSViewer is effective for visualizing complex data networks and patterns. Each of these tools brings unique strengths to the analysis, enabling a detailed and graphical depiction of the interconnectedness and evolution of the data. In addition to the software, I use statistical methods such as connection ratio calculations and the z-test for differences in proportions to confirm the significance of the observed narrative shifts over the study period. This blend of specialized software and statistical techniques is expected to provide a comprehensive and precise analysis of the dynamic trends in social media conversations. The analysis reveals that the framing of discourses about social leaders on Twitter is profoundly affected by cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, results show that the framing process varies across different sub-datasets and changes over time, influenced by sociocultural events such as the pandemic and cultural productions.

The research identifies two main trajectories in the reconfiguration of concepts surrounding social leaders and Otherness. First, the structure of the debate aligns with the macrostructural categories of diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation, as proposed by Snow & Benford (1989), but these frames shift annually

in response to sociocultural changes. The use of hashtags and mentions is instrumental in structuring these networks and shaping the narrative, especially during periods when street mobilization was not feasible. The study notes a shift from focusing on specific social leader groups to broader entities such as communities, people, life, and truth, underscoring a perception of social leaders as integral to their communities.

Second, the research highlights a shift in semantic fields and connections, particularly those relating to the traditional discursive fields of war and peace. This shift suggests a framing of social leaders within a paradigm of protection and recognition, extending semantically to include communities and life, indicative of a changing interpretation of Otherness.

1.5 Election narratives and Otherness on Twitter: Analyzing the 2022 Colombian presidential campaign

The fourth chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the 2022 presidential elections in Colombia, focusing on the campaign of Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez, candidates from the progressive left-wing party, Colombia Humana. Their rhetoric, emphasizing infrastructure development in rural areas, transitioning to a green economy, and adopting dialogue-based approaches to address issues with illegal armed groups, encapsulated the concept of "paz total" or "total peace." In their narrative the candidates highlighted the need of revitalizing the *Peace Agreement* (2016) and their plans to engage with various armed factions for peace negotiations.

Chapter four of the study examines the impact of the campaigns led by Petro and Márquez on discussions on Twitter, with particular emphasis on the representation of 'Otherness' by Márquez. The research posits Francia Márquez, an African-Colombian environmental activist from the economically marginalized region of Cauca, characterized by its extensive legal and illegal extractive activities, as a symbol of 'Otherness' in Colombian society. This study evaluates the resonance of their campaign narratives on Twitter, focusing specifically on the influence of Márquez on public cognition. The analysis is grounded in frame resonance theory,

as proposed by Gamson and Modigliani (1989), and investigates homophilous patterns in Twitter networks.

The study analyzes a dataset of tweets mentioning Márquez during the last week of the election's second round, employing content analysis via topic modeling (Stelmach and Boudet, 2022) and social network analysis of hashtag co-occurrences, along with the external-internal index for detecting gender-based group embedding (Esteve del Valle, 2022; Esteve del Valle & Bravo, 2017).

Contrasting with Esteve del Valle and Borge's (2018) study on Members of Parliament (MPs) and brokers in Catalonia, in which a discernible trend was noted in part of the timeline showing men forming more communicative connections than women, the study presented in chapter 4 presents a different perspective. The preliminary findings from my research suggest that gender-based homophilic tendencies are not significantly evident. However, there is a notable ideological alignment with Francia Márquez's framing, particularly among women. This variance highlights the complexity of gender dynamics in political communication and networking, diverging from the patterns of gender disparity observed in the context of political brokerage in Catalonia. My study further emphasizes the critical role of narratives in peacebuilding, particularly underscoring the significance of Otherness and citizen participation in peace processes, as highlighted by Rodríguez (2020), Hass, Hartzel & Ottmann (2022), Ditlman et al. (2017), and Balcells & Justino (2014). This exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between gender, political ideology, and communication within the realm of social and political discourse.

In the broader context, the study presented in chapter 4 contributes to understanding public attitudes towards Otherness, particularly during elections and within the post-conflict scenario in Colombia. Furthermore, the study also examines the framing of female presidential candidates and the emergence of new interpretive frames recognizing victims in national narratives post-Peace Agreement (Rodríguez, 2020; Gibbons, 2022; Hernández & Gualdrón, 2022).

The results reveal that Petro and Márquez's campaign messages, particularly those advocating for social and environmental justice, resonated with the Twitter audience, with women showing a stronger alignment with Márquez's rhetoric.

Overall, this research contributes to the exploration of new cultural pathways in Colombia, highlighting the dynamic political and social landscape in the digital age. Additionally, the analysis offers insights into the dynamics of political messaging, societal norms, and individual beliefs, providing a deeper understanding of the campaign's impact and reception on Twitter.

1.6 Research questions and structure of the dissertation

This doctoral dissertation focuses on the impact of Twitter narratives on the renovation of the interpretative frame of the 'Other' in post-conflict Colombia. As such, the central research question is **to what extent do Twitter narratives about social leaders contribute to potential interpretative *frame renovation of the "Other" in post-conflict Colombia?*** The dissertation is divided into two sections: the first explores social mobilization narratives concerning endangered social leaders, and the second analyzes Twitter discourse during the 2022 Colombian presidential elections, with a focus on gendered alignment to discussions of Otherness. Each chapter addresses a central question, which collectively form the overarching inquiry of the dissertation.

Chapter two focuses on the following questions:

- To what extent do Twitter narratives take on Otherness when depicting social leaders?
- What metaphorical configurations underpin these narratives, and how do they contribute to (re)framing the notion of otherness and social leaders in the studied debate?

Chapter three addresses the next question:

- What discursive patterns and dynamics represent the studied narratives when approaching social leaders on Twitter?

Finally, chapter four centers the analyses on the questions below:

- To what extent does the rhetoric by Francia Márquez on the Other resonate in the public debate around the elections?

- Is there a gender homophilic effect in the Twitter network on occasion of the Presidential elections?

The second chapter analyzes the hashtag #NosEstanMatando [#TheyAreKillingUs], originally associated with violence against women but subsequently expanded to denounce the assassination of social leaders and the complexities surrounding the *Peace Agreement* (2016). The study posits that while social mobilization narratives seek to acknowledge the Other, they often align with established national metaphorical frameworks. However, they may also lead to differentiated cultural interpretations. One of the key findings is the strong connection to war metaphors in the studied narratives. This framing reflects a national narrative equating effects of war with challenges faced by social leaders. However, the anticipated correlation between war and peace narratives was weaker than expected. Additionally, the research underscores a distinctive narrative approach towards female social leaders, often characterized by narratives that affirm life and challenge traditional dichotomies.

The third chapter examines tweets with the hashtag #LideresSociales [#SocialLeaders] using several methodological approaches, including matrix analysis and visualization, tie strength ratio computation, and co-word analysis. The chapter aims to understand the significance of changes in connection strengths between nodes and the statistical significance of changes in yearly data. The analysis in this chapter suggests that the framing and interpretation of discourses about social leaders on Twitter are deeply influenced by cultural and historical contexts. Key findings show a shift in the structure of debates, aligning with three main categories: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation, which change annually due to sociocultural factors. Hashtags and mentions played a crucial role in shaping the narrative, especially during periods when street mobilization was restricted. Over time, the focus transitioned from specific social leader groups to broader concepts such as community and life, indicating a perception of social leaders as integral to their communities, and indicating a shift in public imaginary.

The fourth chapter investigates the narratives of politicians Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez during the 2022 presidential elections and examines the potential frame resonance of political narratives addressing the need to

acknowledge the Other in Colombia. Specifically, the study explores whether Francia Márquez's narrative resonated more with women than men, indicating a homophilous effect in Twitter discussions about the elections. Results showed diverse mention patterns without a significant gender bias, challenging earlier assumptions of gender-based homophily. Women showed a greater resonance with Márquez's rhetoric, though overall alignment with key campaign themes such as peace was weak across genders. The narrative framing of the campaign effectively tapped into cultural narratives and inclusivity, especially regarding environmental issues and marginalized communities. Additionally, network analysis highlighted ideological homophily, with users from both genders actively discussing political issues and frequently mentioning activists and social movements.

Overall, the dissertation contributes to the understanding of the role of social media in framing the public imagination and collective action in post-conflict Colombia, and to explore potential dynamics in the framing of the collective imaginary and the construction of Otherness.

