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# Distinction within the ‘global north’? A Bourdieusian approach for analysing development discourse: The case of U.S. and E.U. relations with the Colombian state (2016–2022): A comparative analysis

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**Abstract**

The paper conducts a comparative analysis of EU (91 texts) and US (93 texts) discourses concerning post-peace accord Colombia (late 2016 to mid-2022). Employing a Bourdieu-influenced methodology, our proposal aims to reconcile Post-Development theories with International Relations research. This innovative and multidimensional approach illuminates both discursive continuities within Global North while concurrently providing a framework that allows to identify and interpret internal political divergences. Our findings highlight a shared commitment to a liberal conception of peacebuilding, alongside internal distinction strategies employed to legitimize respective policies towards Colombia.

**Keywords**

Development, post-development, discourse, field, distinction, peacebuilding, Colombia, EU, US

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Since the 1980s, the Post-Development (PD) movement has drawn attention to the persistent continuity between colonial and developmental epochs, revealing how a discourse ostensibly dedicated to poverty alleviation inadvertently perpetuates relations of domination between the designated 'Global North' and 'Global South'. In parallel, international relations (IR) empirical studies have discerned a broad spectrum of cooperation policies, shedding light on the internal diversity of each 'global' side. Among the various case studies, US and European policies regarding the Colombian conflict have demonstrated markedly distinct approaches to peacebuilding. While the European Union has adopted an 'integral' perspective, the US has resolutely focused on security concerns. However, these studies tend to be overly descriptive and have only superficially addressed the discursive and symbolic dimensions linking Northern actors. Ultimately, the internal limitations of these research fields are partly due to the gap that separates them. In order to bridge this gap, we propose conducting a comparative analysis of US and EU discourses regarding the Colombian state. The emphasis on discourse seeks to rectify the oversight of symbolic dimensions within IR, while the comparative approach aims to mitigate PD's limitations in discerning political divergences within the 'global' North.

This disciplinary bridge will employ a Bourdieu-inspired methodology, notable for its ability to harmonize empirical underpinnings (IR) with a constructivist-critical perspective (PD) (Bigo, 2011). Leveraging Bourdieu's concepts of *field* and *distinction*, we shall locate and analyse common defence and distinction dynamics in Northern agents' discourses on Colombia.

## Post-development: Contributions and limits

Post-development is a post-structuralist philosophical current that critically exposed the colonial ideological underpinnings and detrimental socio-political effects of development. It conceptualizes development primarily as a discourse grounded in the ontological dualism between the 'developed' Global North and the 'underdeveloped' Global South. PD denounces development for its *Eurocentrism*: the sole envisioned pathway to alleviate poverty is the integration of southern economies into the global capitalist market, supported by dominant Northern institutions (World Bank, IMF, UN, etc.). Additionally, it highlights the *depoliticizing* effects of development: the poverty of the South is characterised by deficiencies (Hall, 1992) to be addressed through the importation of expert knowledge and technologies from the North (Sachs, 1992), rather than acknowledging it as a consequence of the systemic exploitation of Southern land and workers by Northern actors (Rahnema, 1997). Furthermore, PD highlights the *authoritarian* implications of development: indigenous knowledge is marginalized as irrational beliefs to be transcended to pursuit 'true' development (Castro-Gómez, 2000; Ferguson, 1994; Sachs, 1990; Spivak, 1988; Ziai, 2013).

During the 1990s, the foundational dualisms inherent in development discourse underwent erosion, leading to the emergence of globalization discourse. This new framing portrays the international order as comprising equal and interdependent actors engaged in global competition. Characterized by the widespread application of free-market principles across all facets of social life, this paradigm shift led to the integration of development into the overarching rationale of economic growth (Ziai, 2016).

The major contribution of Post-Development lies in its illumination of the highly political nature of a discourse that presented itself as depoliticized and morally superior. Through the deconstruction of development's ideology – exposing the construction of a benevolent 'We' and a deficient 'Other', elucidating the arbitrariness of knowledge and representation regimes engendered by its discourse – PD has offered a profound and pioneering understanding of the shared rationality among Northern actors and of their discursive-symbolic strategies for legitimating their domination and actions.

However, PD has also faced criticism for being overly deterministic, discourse-centred, relativist and oblivious to differences (Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996; Kiely, 1999; Nederveen Pieterse, 2010, 2011; Peet and Hartwick, 1999). While Ziai has extensively discussed these critiques (Ziai, 2016: 211–237), the call for a more multidimensional understanding of power relations in discourse analysis remains unaddressed. Although former colonial powers structurally occupy dominant positions in the international field, they do not all possess equivalent power and do not exert it in the same manner. Their political capital relies on distinct legitimation strategies, which, in the case of Europe as we will see, even highlight their differences and uniqueness. In summary, Post-Development theory sheds particularly bright light on the structural domination issues but proves incapable of simultaneously understanding the internal competition dynamics within dominant positions. Additionally, some methodological elements inherited from a certain understanding of Foucault's archaeology also contribute to the homogenization of differences.

Foucault's notion of discourse (Foucault, 1971, 1972) requires looking beyond its manifestation. He regards discourse analysis as an *archaeology*, a meticulous work regarding the evolution of *archives* in order to unveil the rules governing the formation of an area of knowledge (human sciences, biology, medicine, etc.). The question at hand is not about discerning truth from falsehood, but rather about understanding the factors that lead a set of statements to be established – at a given historical moment and within a specific sociopolitical-geographical context – within the realms of Knowledge. For example, what prompted the emergence of development as a distinct subject in international relations? How did this peculiar framing of poverty give rise to a certain form of science intended to address it? The key point here is to draw attention to the fact that the Foucauldian tradition focuses on discourse as a hidden, underlying fabric of meaning that ultimately governs the social world, not discourse as it is uttered in the phenomenal world. This is reflected in Post-Development's methodology focused on zones of hermeneutic density within discourse – some specific words or expressions, often quantitatively limited, but highly meaningful in that they allow the illumination of this hidden layer.

By focusing mainly on discreet highly significant signs, this method leaves in the shadows the vast textual mass upon which the archaeological work relies. Arguably, the archive also unveils its internal logics outside its zones of hermeneutic density, through occurrences of certain signs. Words or expressions that, through their repetition, proximity, or mutual distances in the texts, reveal the delineation of a certain thematic structure. Yet, this perspective on discourse, as we shall demonstrate, can also prove illuminating for understanding its internal dynamics. In essence, PD focuses on quantitatively restricted hermeneutic density zones and draws inferences about the overall nature and

evolution of discourse. We argue that integrating quantitative textual data, which enables us to comprehend the thematic structure of discourse, allows a more in-depth analysis. Therefore, alongside hermeneutic density zones, our approach involves comprehending and exploring the phenomenological layer of the social world: the quantitatively salient characteristics of discourse as well as more empirical findings on the same topic.

In summary, our assertion posits that the homogenization of differences within the North is rooted in one conceptual and two methodological limitations. The conceptual limitation arises from the binary nature of the North/South dualism, which fails to account for diversity of practices and the multidimensionality of power relations among international actors. Methodologically, there is a conspicuous minimal emphasis on quantitative textual data, a corresponding neglect of the structuring properties of thematic delineations, and a too scarce presence of IR's empirical findings in the interpretation framework.

## Approaching discourse with Bourdieu's methodology and concepts

Adopting a Bourdieusian perspective enables us to bridge discourse analysis with empirical research, while also providing, through the concept of *field*, a multidimensional framework for understanding interstate relations. Despite certain ambiguities, particularly in his undefined notion of discourse, Bourdieu provides fundamental insights for a better understanding of discursive dynamics through their connection with their enunciative context.

Bourdieu strongly rejected the pragmatist conceptualization of language that grants it intrinsic power. According to him, the power of an utterance does not reside in language, but rather in the social structure that legitimizes it as valid, that is, socially authorized to produce its effects (Bourdieu, 1982). He argues that power emanates from the objective social hierarchy, with language serving merely as a reflection of the social structure (Adler-Nissen, 2013), whereas Foucault situates power directly in discourse. Yet they eventually never engage in dialogue with one another. Foucault, by subverting the distinction between text and context, abstracts himself from the tension between sociology and linguistics, historically structuring in discourse analysis (Robin, 1986), whereas Bourdieu precisely incarnate the sociological pole of this tension.

Bourdieu's critique of linguistic illusion has held significant resonance in discourse analysis. French discourse analysts have often applied his concept of *field* to better grasp discursive variations in relation to the context of enunciation, especially in political discourse (see for instance Le Bart, 2003). The field is defined as a 'social space structured along three principal dimensions: power relations, objects of struggle, and the rules-taken-for-granted within the field' (Bourdieu, 1993 [1980]: 72–77). Each field is characterized by its own rules, stakes, and relative autonomy from other fields. Discourse uttered within obeys those rules, which thereby emerge as foundational explanatory principles for representations (Bourdieu, 2021: 563). This concept operates as both a *constructive principle* in shaping research object (here, international relations envisioned as a relatively autonomous social field where agents compete for dominant positions) and an *explanatory factor* for individual and collective behaviours, including discourse practices.

Some scholars have undertaken the task of adapting Bourdieu's concepts and methods to IR's domain (Pouliot, 2013; Pouliot and Mérand, 2013). Studies on security (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2002; Leander, 2005), diplomacy (Neumann, 2002), foreign policy (Hopf, 2002; Jackson, 2008) and global environmental politics (Epstein, 2008) have gained fresh insights, incorporating, among other elements, discursive aspects of international relations (Adler-Nissen, 2013). However, the structured analysis of text corpora remains infrequent. Paradoxically, despite the acknowledgment of discourse's importance in building agents' legitimacy, there has been no significant interdisciplinary shift towards more structured discourse analysis.

The concept of field enables us to transcend the dualism between the Global North and the Global South while maintaining a focus on relations of structural domination. By conceptualizing interstate relations as a field, we can better understand the multidimensionality of power dynamics, encompassing not only post-colonial domination but also competition among dominant actors. In this field, development projects function as mechanisms for converting economic capital into symbolic capital, allowing former colonial powers to legitimize their broader political agendas in the Global South. Within this competitive arena, discourse assumes paramount importance as a means of translating political actions into symbolic power (Kauppi, 2003). Discourse becomes a strategic instrument for competition, particularly effective when distinct elements are introduced - discursive components through which diverse actors present innovative, pertinent and ultimately more effective approaches to specific issues, such as peacebuilding.

## **Distinct perspectives on the Colombian conflict**

Throughout the 20th century, the United States and the Colombian State oscillated between periods of robust cooperation and more distant relations (Tickner, 2000; Tokatlian, 2000). Nevertheless, their cooperation in the war targeting communist guerrillas in the 1960s and subsequently narco-trafficking in the 1980s eventually solidified their ties into a strategic and stable military alliance. The Colombian state sought external interventions to strengthen its position in the territories (Borda, 2012), while the US capitalized on the Colombian state's dependence to establish itself in the country on a long-term basis, safeguarding its economic interests and securing a strategic ally in the Andean region (Stokes, 2005). This double-edged game labelled 'intervention by invitation' (Tickner, 2007) reached its peak with the strong security alliance of the Plan Colombia (1999–2015). Despite encompassing various facets, security has consistently stood out as the primary concern in their collaborative efforts, especially since the Cold War.

The EU shares a more recent history with the Colombian state. The ratification of the first trade agreements in 1983 and the implementation of development projects during the same decade marked the commencement of a systematic and structured cooperation. They embraced what they termed an 'integral perspective' on the conflict, addressing not only security considerations but also its broader social and environmental root causes (Puyo Tamayo, 2002). This approach was most clearly embodied by a cooperation program called 'Laboratorios de Paz' (2002–2012), which aimed to support citizen participation movements for peace by facilitating dialogue and coexistence while protecting civilian populations (Castañeda, 2009). Although the effects of the

laboratories remained mitigated, it represented a success in the EU's diplomatic strategy by demonstrating a clearly identified and distinct diplomatic doctrine (Castañeda, 2012; Galvis and Socha, 2016; Petiteville, 2006). However, the EU faced criticism for adopting an ambivalent stance towards the conflict, advocating for peace in official statements and undertaking ambitious development projects, while some of its prominent members (France, Italy and Germany) were supplying weapons to the Colombian state (Bocchi, 2009; Gomis, 2015).

The traditions of cooperation within the Global North are thus not homogenous, seamless, or stable. However, the United States and the EU have both implemented diplomatic policies that, while distinct in their aims and instruments, are subtly marked by a 'liberal' conception of peace: a Western hegemonic conception of peacebuilding that seeks to universally promote representative democracy, human rights and the market economy (Richmond, 2011). Adherence to the liberal peacebuilding approach, alongside distinct diplomatic traditions has ultimately classified the US and the EU policies in Colombia as 'analogous and opposed at the same time, both in their goals and their instruments' (Taborda and Riccardi, 2019).

## Data and method

The corpus was constituted from databases that capture the executive power of each agent: the European Commission (EC), the White House (WH) and the Department of State (DS) official websites.<sup>1</sup> The temporal scope spans the post-agreement period under the governance of the Colombian conservative right, commencing from the signing of the Havana agreements on November 24, 2016, to the election of Colombia's first left-wing president, Gustavo Petro, on June 19, 2022. In total, the corpus comprises 184 texts: 91 from the EU and 93 from the US. It contains conventional press releases, releases tailored directly for websites, and reports on events related to international cooperation. The average length of the texts is 750 words for the EU and 870 words for the US.

In light of the intricacies inherent in our approach, we have opted for a rather homogenous corpus and a synchronous analytical framework. The construction of the corpus thus adheres to a logic of limiting internal variation factors. Only three enunciative institutions (EC, WH and DS), a homogenous temporal period (post-agreement under conservative right), and two text genres (releases and reports). Occurrences throughout the analysis will be formatted in italics, either within indexes or in brackets following the respective form or expression. The boxed sections contain excerpts from the corpus.

As we aim to reconcile the precision of interpretative work with attentiveness to quantitative textual data, our methodology employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches. We will utilize lexicometric programs, IRaMuTeq (Ratinaud, 2018; Reinert, 1983) and TXM (Heiden, 2010), which offer statistical insights into the corpus. These tools enable to identify quantitative salient elements in the textual mass, facilitating an elucidation of its thematic structuration before engaging in more qualitative analysis. This two-fold approach corresponds to the division aforementioned between the phenomenological layer of the corpus and its zones of hermeneutic density. The former predominantly concerns the general characteristics of the corpus, including its most visible elements such as the most recurrent lexemes and prevalent themes. It constitutes an

approach to the corpus through its textuality, encompassing its quantitative and statistical features. The latter involves an approach to the corpus through discursive formation, delving into its ideological underpinnings and the significant traces it leaves scattered throughout.

Section 5 is dedicated to exploring the phenomenological layer of discourse. Its analysis will involve the utilization of both hierarchical indexes and Reinert's classification. The hierarchical indexes group the most recurrent nouns and adjectives of each corpus, excluding the titles used in the introduction of certain speeches (e.g., president, secretary). Reinert's descending hierarchical classification is an algorithm that automatically divides the corpus into thematic clusters based on the proximity of lexical forms and their degree of co-frequency throughout the corpus. The value of employing these statistical data in tandem lies in the ability to derive, through interpretative work, principles and rules for delineating and hierarchizing themes within discourse.

The analysis of the thematic structuring will enable us to shed new light on the discursive shifts regarding the integration of development discourse into globalization discourse. We will achieve this by evaluating the prominence of North/South dualism, appraising the significance of the role attributed to the market, and juxtaposing the development/globalization division emphasized by PD with the segmentation of our corpus produced by Reinert's classification. The existence of dualism suggests an association with development discourse, whereas its absence implies alignment with globalization discourse. The significance of the market in the thematic structuring will also be evaluated.

Sections 6 and 7 delve into a zone of hermeneutic density: the discursive interactions between development and economic policies. Using TXM, these sections conduct a qualitative analysis of particularly significant lexemes and expressions related to this intertwining. Adopting a more interpretive stance, Section 6 focuses on explicit references to this intertwining, while Section 7 delves into more discreet yet significant traces of this interaction: concession markers. Concession markers are linguistic cues aimed at mitigating conflict by appending a concessive adjective to a contested term (Krieg-Planque, 2010).

The application of the Bourdieusian approach will traverse the analysis. Methodologically through the integration of quantitative textual data and empirical research into our framework. Conceptually, by applying the concepts of *field* and *distinction* to interpret differences and continuities between northern agents' discourses. We envisage that this novel perspective will both enhance the understanding of discursive-symbolic aspects of IR and solve the homogenization problem inherent in Post-Development theories.

## **Navigating the phenomenological layer: Maintaining differentiation between development and economy**

Numerous scholars have predicted the imminent or realized demise of development. According to them, the neoliberal counter-revolution has dissipated long-standing dualisms, giving rise to a universalizing discourse blind to inequalities (McMichael, 2000;

Toye, 1987). Some argue that globalization and development have undergone a process of hybridization, with economic liberalization becoming the central stake of international cooperation (Ziai, 2016). In an attempt to shed new light on these transformations, this section aims at delving into the quantitative characteristics of discourse.

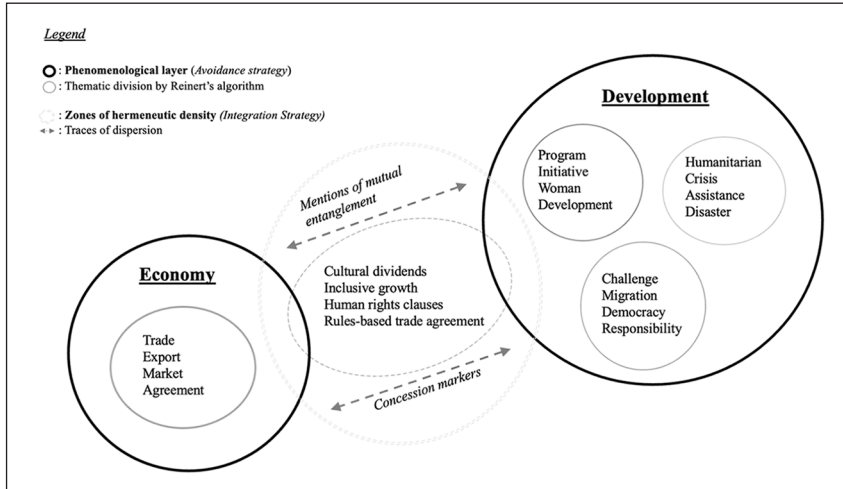
EU's hierarchical index			US's hierarchical index		
EU	Lexeme	Occurrences/text <sup>2</sup>	US	Lexeme	Occurrences/text
1	European [Union]	3.40 [1.46]		Colombia	5.06
2	Millions	3.14		United [States]	3.02 [2.97]
3	Support	2.95		Countries	2.75
4	Humanitarian	2.67		People	2.10
5	Colombia	2.50		Support	1.76
6	Trade	2.42		Government	1.66
7	Global	1.67		Migration	1.48
8	Development	1.66		Security	1.41
9	People	1.48		Economic	1.27
10	Education	1.43		Energy	1.27

Words associated with international aid, such as ‘millions’, ‘support’, ‘humanitarian’ and ‘education’, highlight the continuation of a salient donor-recipient relationship with the Colombian state. By depicting their partner as the recipient of their assistance, the US and the EU implicitly portray their Colombian partner as subordinate, thereby perpetuating the dualism of development. However, the prominence of this asymmetry appears more pronounced in the European hierarchical index and discourse, where typical development expressions, such as ‘*humanitarian aid*’ (78) and ‘*education in emergencies*’ (38), are particularly prevalent.

In terms of the significance ascribed to the market, lexemes associated with economic policies are far from outnumber those related to development. Reinert’s classification (visible in Figure 1) displays a thematic structure notably marked by a clear delineation between the two. Put simply, when development policies are addressed in a particular speech, trade deals are typically not, and vice versa. However, the fact that the market doesn’t appear as the primary theme in the discourse does not imply that its underlying principles do not expand beyond the boundaries of their specific themes. Rather, it signifies that discourse, when uttered in the phenomenal world, remains marked by a clear delineation between economic and development policies, with a more pronounced prevalence of development words and themes. Quite evidently, this discursive delineation is linked to institutional delineations. Yet, distinguishing development policies from economic policies is not inherently evident, as both are implemented on the same terrain and eventually come into interaction: development policies aim to stabilize potential external markets, while economic policies seek to benefit from the access to external markets (Duffield, 2007).

The hierarchical indexes reveal a continued significant quantitative predominance of terms associated with development. Reinert’s classification further emphasizes that the





**Figure 1.** Discursive structure of the corpus.<sup>3</sup>

separation between development and economic themes organizes the enunciative structure of discourse. Hence, the assertion that development has vanished is far from being substantiated by this initial section. On the contrary, development themes and terminology remain largely prevalent. The hybridization of development with globalization is also not observed in the thematic structure. These initial findings however, rather than contradicting the propositions made by PD, complement them by underscoring the imperceptibility of these ideological shifts on the phenomenological layer of discourse.

### **The vulnerability of mutual entanglements: The avoidance strategy**

While discourse generally keeps development and economy separate, occasional explicit references to their interconnection can be observed in the European corpus.<sup>4</sup> This section aims to analyse this zone of hermeneutic density in order to dive into the underlying ideology of discourse and, thereafter, to propose a retrospective understanding of the motivations behind thematic delineation.

'I have seen with my own eyes the immense positive impact that comes with building trade relationships with our global partners. There is an economic dividend, of course, but there is also a social and cultural dividend that benefits us all'.

'There are already numerous examples of positive collaboration on issues going beyond trade liberalization that have been made possible thanks to these agreements. The EU could for instance engage on issues such as freedom of association, violence against members of trade unions, child labour, labour inspections, collective bargaining, tripartite consultation, health and safety at work'.

*Speech by commissioner Phil Hogan at e-sharp! event on global trade/report (2019); EU trade agreements in place deliver tangible benefits (2017), European Commission*

In these excerpts, trade agreements are portrayed as multifaceted political instruments. Their function extends beyond mere exchange of material goods and financial products, now encompassing the creation of 'cultural and social dividends'. The economic stimulus generated by the implementation of free trade is believed to enhance overall wealth and living standards, thereby contributing to the general pacification of societies. However, the political leverage promised by these agreements does not stop there, as they also incorporate human rights clauses. These clauses include provisions for the suspension of agreements in case of human rights violations occurring within the territories of the involved parties.<sup>5</sup> The rise of the global market to the forefront of policy rationale and ideology is evident here. International trade liberalization is portrayed as exerting a fundamentally positive and extensive influence on vulnerable populations. However, as Colombia's history has consistently demonstrated, opening up to foreign investment can also result in an escalation of violence within exposed territories and populations.<sup>6</sup>

Civil society (social movements, NGOs, academics, etc.) has frequently voiced criticism regarding the inconsistency of cooperation policies pursued by both the EU and the US towards the Colombian conflict. They condemn free-trade policies for exacerbating social conflicts, while simultaneously expecting development policies to contribute to peacebuilding processes. This critique, aimed at the very foundational idea of liberal peace, is nonetheless never directly addressed in state discourses. Even more widely, as aforementioned, the mere intertwining between development and economic policies is generally avoided. This defensive avoidance strategy can be understood as stemming from the fact that the positive intertwining typically constitutes what Bourdieu calls a rule-taken-for-granted within the field: an often-implicit but essential principle governing the field. Indeed, challenging the effects of liberalism on peace, in other words, questioning the framing through which discourse derives its rationality, would inherently lead to a legitimacy crisis within the international field. Civil society thus serves as a heteronomous pole of the field of international politics. The critique addressed to its core rules impact its discursive dynamics, and the agents adopt homologous defence strategies. The first and commonly adopted (even if with greater radicality in US corpus) is the avoidance strategy; the delineation between development and economic policies on the phenomenological layer of discourse. The second defence strategy, which we shall denote as the 'integration strategy' is nested in zones of hermeneutic density. It entails the subtle incorporation of criticisms by creating concepts designed to mitigate their subversive potential.

### **Facing criticism with concession markers: The integration strategy**

Key critiques addressed towards development policies centre around their ecological non-viability and their detachment from the needs of targeted populations. In response, discourse has gradually introduced corresponding concepts of '*sustainable development*' (118) and '*inclusive development*' (40). Without engaging in an in-depth debate around these issues, these concessive formulations enable its discourse to neutralize criticism. By incorporating sustainability and inclusiveness into the development framing, states

conserve and defend their symbolic capital by demonstrating a willingness to adapt and respond to the concerns raised by civil society.

'We work in partnership with civil society, the private sector, and other countries in and outside the region to promote human rights, social inclusion, inclusive security, and prosperity for all'.

'These are just a few examples of how the United States can be, wants to be your partner not only in facilitating development assistance but in increasing investment so that we can together lay a foundation for a long-term inclusive growth across the Americas'.

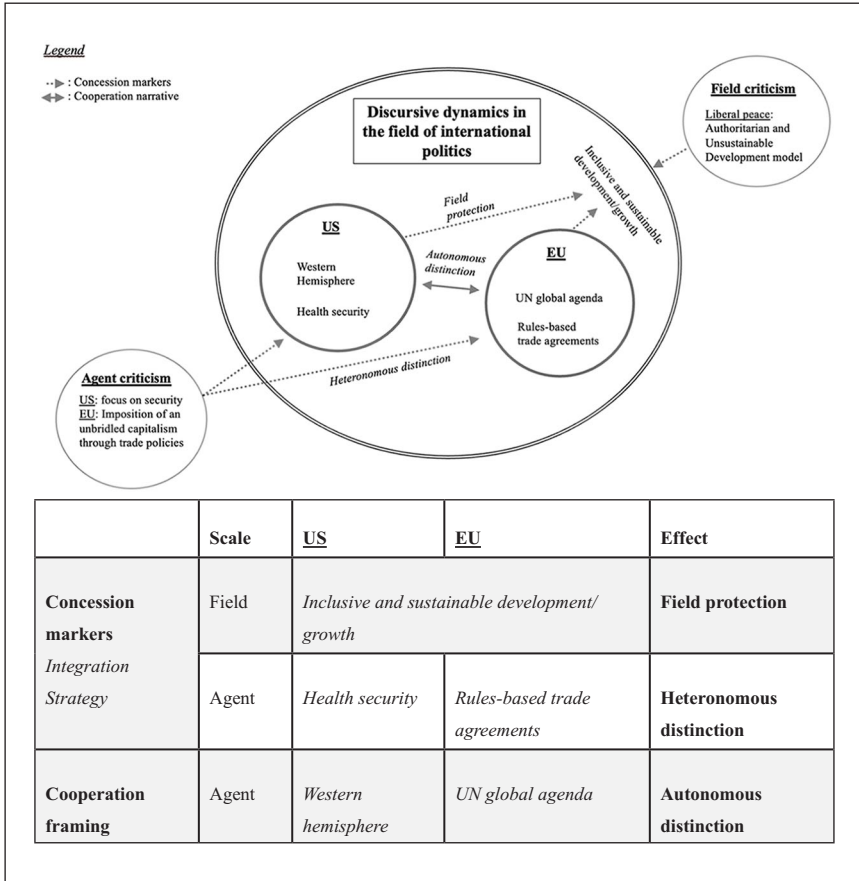
*Social inclusion and access to opportunity for all/ Secretary J.Blinken remarks at the regional migration ministerial, Department of State (2021)<sup>1</sup>*

'Our engagement to achieve true gender equality, conflict prevention, sustaining peace and realizing the 2030 agenda for sustainable development is at the heart of our daily work. [. . .] Along with our active contributions to tackling the root causes of conflict, we will continue to address inequalities and to help build peaceful and inclusive societies'.

*Joint statement on the international day for elimination of sexual violence in conflict, European Commission (2017)<sup>1</sup>*

However, in addition to these frequently articulated formulas, others bear a more discernible imprint of the agent targeted by the critique. Terms like '*inclusive security*' (2), '*health security*' (18) or '*security and prosperity*' (11) are typical to US discourse. The creation of these expressions allows to maintain a significant occurrence of security issues, extends the logics of security beyond the realm of physical violence, and concurrently demonstrates receptivity towards the critiques they have faced. On the other side of the Atlantic, European civil societies have criticized the implementation of free-trade policies with foreign partners, often perceived as the imposition of unbridled capitalism on a global scale. As a result, European discourse has created expressions such as '*rules-based trading system*' (6) or '*inclusive trade policies*' (2) that enable to portray their economic policy as distinct from a globally unregulated capitalism that benefits multinational corporations, while keeping the significance of establishing free-trade policies.

In summary, concession markers impulse two different discursive dynamics within the field. When the critique targets a rule-taken-for-granted, the corresponding concession marker does not operate any clear distinction. Development becomes sustainable and inclusive quite irrespective of the agent speaking. Yet, if the critique is directed towards a specific agent, when this latter is held accountable for specific actions and policies, his discourse incorporates concessive markers that establish distinction. In these dynamics, civil society assumes the role of the heteronomous pole of the field, exerting external pressure that influences internal discursive shifts. Yet, the nature of the critique is also influenced by the originating territory (security concerns for the US, critiques of free trade policies for Europe). Consequently, the heteronomous distinction dynamic is rooted both in institutional externality (civil societies) and territorial differentiation (distinct grievances in US and European societies). Despite those diverse uses, all concession markers operate on a common principle: integrating criticism to neutralise



**Figure 2.** Integration strategy and autonomous distinction within the field.<sup>8</sup>

their subversive potential. They are used by agents for both defending the legitimacy of the field and their own symbolic capital.

Besides concession markers, distinction between the agents can also manifest through their framing of international cooperation. In US’ discourse, expressions such as ‘*regional cooperation*’, ‘*across the Americas*’ or ‘*Western hemisphere*’ (44) underscore a Pan-American perspective, aiming to position themselves as Colombia’s historically privileged partners. The strategic significance of the bilateral relationship is emphasized within the context of a geopolitical chessboard marked by the growing presence of foreign powers in the region, notably China (Strüver, 2014). Conversely, European discourse aligns itself with the framework outlined by the United Nations (‘*2030 agenda*’<sup>7</sup> (9)), adhering to the primary global development strategy and thereby adopting a less divisive approach to international cooperation. In essence, the agents autonomously distinguish themselves by adopting a Pan-American regionalist frame on the one side, and a global, more consensual frame on the other (Figure 2).

## Conclusion

Applying the Bourdieu-influenced methodology and his concepts for analysing Global North discourses has enabled to elucidate both their continuities and internal political differences. Methodologically, the grounding in textual data, utilized to unveil the common thematic structure of discourses, provided new insight regarding the evolution of development discourse towards globalisation discourse, while the contextual data from the empirical literature allowed to understand the motivation behind the avoidance strategy. More broadly, by leveraging both empirical findings and constructivist theories, our methodology has provided a new perspective and a deeper understanding of development discourse dynamics. Additionally, the conceptual substitution of the North/South dualism with the multidimensional notion of field has enabled to elucidate the common defence of the field and auto/heteronomous distinction dynamics. Following the analysis, our conclusion inevitably unfolds with nuance.

Each agent advocates for a liberal conception of peace and development, which stands as a core rule of the field. We identified two discursive strategies aligning with its defence: the avoidance strategy and the integration strategy. Analysis of the phenomenological layer of discourse, especially its thematic structure, has revealed a general avoidance of explicit mentions concerning the intertwining of economic policies and development policies. This intertwining, often criticized, has become a discursive vulnerability that agents seek to safeguard. The integration strategy consists in mitigating the subversive potential of critiques by introducing concessive formulas that subtly incorporate critiques without suggesting any clear or explicit political shift (*'sustainable and inclusive development'* for addressing sustainability and inclusiveness issues in development projects).

Both discursive strategies are employed by Northern agents as they allow for the defence of rules-taken-for-granted within the field. However, they do not manifest with equal prevalence or consistency. The avoidance strategy was systematically employed by the United States in the corpus, evidenced by the absence of any mention of the intertwining of development and economic policies. Whereas on the European side, although it also constitutes a discourse's structuring principle, occasional references to the presumed positive dynamics of liberal peace were noted. The integration strategy is utilized for defending the field, but also for defending a specific agent. When a critique targets a specific agent, corresponding concessive formulas appear in its discourse, creating *heteronomous* distinctions between agents (US' *'inclusive security'*, EU's *'rules-based trade agreements'*). Ultimately, *autonomous* distinction was observed through the framing of the cooperation with the Colombian state: regional and strategic for the US, global and consensual for the EU.

Since June 2022 however, the discursive dynamics described and analysed in this paper may have been leaning towards more dissensus. For the first time in decades, the Colombian central government is asserting unique positions on the international stage. Gustavo Petro, emerging from the wave of South American 'New left', like many of his counterparts, has taken a cautious stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, diverging from European and US diplomacies. The EU-CELAC Congress in July 2023 was quite revealing of the growing disparities between the old and new continents (Parthenay,

2024). More recently, Petro drew the ire of US diplomacy for refusing to condemn Hamas and for characterizing the civilian massacres perpetrated by the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip as genocide. Through these instances, it is primarily the selective indignation of Northern states that is highlighted and criticized by the new president.

The current administration seems to be veering away from the traditional alignment with Western powers and forging its own foreign policy oriented towards emerging alternative powers. However, questions persist regarding whether and how agents of the Global North will adjust their discourses and practices in response to these new criticisms, which now emanate not solely from external civil societies outside the political field but also from new contenders and structurally dominated states within the international political field.

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### **Notes**

1. All the texts are freely accessible on the official websites of the respective institutions.
  - European Commission: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en-WhiteHouse>
  - White House: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/>
  - Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/Links> accessed on March 18, 2024.
2. Total number of occurrences of the lexeme divided by the number of texts per sub-corpus.
3. The division and proximity of thematic sets are directly determined by Reinert's hierarchical classification. The lexemes presented therein are the most specific to each thematic set and are also given by the algorithm. Zones of hermeneutic density and the expressions constituting them were identified through a concordance analysis. Unlike thematic division, zones of hermeneutic density were not directly provided by an algorithm; rather, they result from a more qualitative interpretative process that we conducted ourselves in sections 6 and 7.
4. Instances of entanglements between economic and development policies are absent from the US discourse.
5. Despite their introduction in 2008, there has been no systematic verification of compliance, and they have never been activated (Campling et al., 2016).
6. To explore the connections between economic liberalization and human rights violations in Colombia, refer to: (Beuf, 2021; García, 2014; Reyes Benavides, 2017; Torres Mora ÁG, 2020; Vélez-Torres, 2014).
7. 2030 agenda is the UN program for global development which has for purpose to 'Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet' (UN, 2014)
8. This figure provides a schematic synthesis of the results presented in this section. It encapsulates the discursive dynamics observed within the field, with a particular focus on elements of

distinction among agents and the common defence of the field. The lexemes presented on the figure are representative examples of each of the dynamics depicted.

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