Representing the Marginalized

A Critical Interrogation of (Self-)Representation

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This contribution connects post- and decolonial theoretical perspectives on "representation" with previous communications research to explore how journalism can—or cannot—produce spaces for subversive speaking and listening. Specifically, we focus on moments of tension and negotiation surrounding the reporting on colonial and racial injustices in German journalism. The article addresses two main questions: (1) What patterns of (post-)colonial representation appear in journalistic reporting on racist and colonial injustices? (2) How do these patterns shape the speaking positions from which formerly colonized subjects can or cannot speak and be heard in journalistic reporting? These questions are answered through two critical discourse analyses, focusing on coverage of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in Germany and the German-Namibian negotiations over reparations for colonial genocide. The analysis reveals three representational patterns that continue to restrict how members of Germany's Black community and Namibia's Indigenous communities are represented in German media coverage: homogenization, irritation, and containment. The findings highlight the urgent need to reorient contemporary journalism within the context of colonial power structures.

1. Introduction: Post- and Decolonial Interventions in Communication Studies

Can journalism provide space for subverting hegemonic knowledge orders? This question has gained increasing relevance in recent years, particularly in the context of global protests against colonial and racial injustices (Chakravartty et al. 2018; Chakravartty 2019; Blaagaard 2011; Dindler & Blaagaard 2021; Carney & Kelekay 2022). These movements have called for the perspectives of Black and African communities to be foregrounded in debates on colonial and racial injustice. In the research literature, the term "representation" has primarily been used to describe the (in)ability of individuals and groups to speak about their experiences (cf. Spivak 1988). Accordingly, this contribution critically examines representation in journalistic coverage of the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and the 1904–1908 Herero and Nama genocide and asks which representational structures shape their speaking positions of those affected in the reporting.

In line with Schaffer (2008: 15), we view representation as extending beyond depiction or visibility, conceiving it instead as a performative speaking position within the journalistic text. This builds on the idea that there is no causal relationship between the visibility or positive portrayal of groups and their actual power in society; in fact, frequent visibility can reinforce colonial stereotypes that contribute to their marginalization (Schaffer 2008: 12). As Spivak (1996: 292) has pointed out, representation is not only a matter of speaking,

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but also of being heard. Previous post- and decolonial research has shown that colonial subjects have historically been represented in contrast to an imagined (Western) norm (Said 1978; Hall 2019). Findings from communication studies suggest that former colonized subjects continue to be portrayed in journalism as "different, exotic, special, essentialized or even abnormal" (Fürsich 2010: 116). By examining two recent German debates, we explore how journalism shapes the conditions of (post-)colonial representation and, in moments of friction and tension, how these conditions may shift, potentially enabling new forms of speakership to emerge.

Hence, the key questions guiding this contribution are: What patterns of (post)colonial representation are found in journalistic reporting on racist and colonial injustices? How do these patterns shape the speaking positions from which formerly colonial subjects can, or cannot, speak and be heard in reporting? To address these questions, the contribution first connects post- and decolonial theoretical approaches, particularly Said's (1978) and Spivak's (1988) concepts of representation, with previous journalism research on German media content. This approach responds to growing calls within communication studies to engage with the ideas of postcolonial and decolonial thought in order to critically reorient journalism research (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede 2022; Shome & Hegde 2002; Shome 2016, 2019; Parameswaran 2008; Moyo 2020; Kumar 2014; Kumar & Parameswaran 2018; Lünenborg & Medeiros 2021).

Against this theoretical backdrop, the next section presents the results of two critical discourse analyses of German reporting: one on the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and another on debates concerning reparative and restitutive claims for the 1904–1908 Herero and Nama genocide, committed by German colonial forces in what is now Namibia. Both cases illustrate moments of friction and tension and thus offer insight into how normative positions are either challenged or reinforced through journalistic practice. Examining these examples side by side aligns with the previous research demonstrating that current journalistic institutions and representations are deeply rooted in the historical experience of colonialism (Fürsich 2010: 116). Rather than essentializing the spatial and temporal boundaries that are used to define, homogenize, and contain the speaking positions of subjects in reporting, this contribution shows how such boundaries are explicitly constructed and implicitly transcended through journalism. Our findings demonstrate that while colonial patterns of essentialization and homogenization are increasingly being disrupted, they nonetheless remain constrained by specific journalistic formats. Based on these findings, the final section offers a preliminary summary, discussion, and questions for future research. Rather than providing definitive answers about what mediated representation *should* be, this section reflects on the irritations, ambivalences, and moments of friction that shape representation and aims to use these as starting points for broader discussions within the field.

2. Representation in and through Journalism

Given our research focus, we adopt a post- and decolonial theoretical lens to examine how "representation" is used to shape mediated spaces of speaking and listening along colonial boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. These theoretical approaches are grounded in social constructivist traditions. Within this framework, representation is understood as a practice of signification through which societal groups and institutions assign meaning to the world (Hall 1997: 24). As a social practice, representation relies on the symbolic circulation of knowledge, which is encoded and decoded by and through the media (Hall 2019: 273). From this perspective, the media do not simply reflect preexisting meanings in society; rather, they actively produce meaning through the ways they represent the world

around them (Hall 2019: 258). This understanding draws on Foucault's (1981) discourse theory, which holds that subjects are produced through the ways in which they are spoken about. Representation thus functions as a discursive practice that makes various subject positions available within discourse (Hall 1989: 68).

The subject positions produced through practices of representation are closely linked to societal boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Marriott 2018). Therefore, from a post- and decolonial perspective, representation cannot be understood apart from the colonial power structures that shape the production of knowledge. Said (1978, 1997) exemplifies this in his studies about the academic representation of the historical Orient and the journalistic representation of the Middle East. In these works, representation is described as a practice of producing juxtapositional difference to maintain the West's positional superiority, "which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (Said 1978: 7).

This practice of representative knowledge production serves to uphold networks of colonial exploitation and power domination to this day. In the relational production of both the self and the Other, "two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other" (Said 1978: 5). *Othering* results from juxtapositional representational strategies that construct colonial subjects through the differentiation from a normalized self (Ashcroft et al. 2013: 158). Representation relies on the construction and maintenance of a system of relations between self and Other (Said 1978: 40). Journalism plays a key role in this process through its production and organization of knowledge. As Said (1978: 20– 21) writes: "Orientalism is premised on exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West." The focus here is not merely on depicting the subject, but on "render[ing] its mysteries plain for" an audience. Journalism performatively presents knowledge in ways that signal relevance to its audience. This signaling of relevance produces a relationship between the depicted subject and audience that can (re)produce boundaries between self and Other (Fürsich 2010: 119; Zelizer 2017: 2).

However, Said's concept of representation reaches its limits when applied to journalism. His approach has been criticized for being too static, focusing primarily on how depictions from the West are projected onto colonized subjects (Castro Varela & Dhawan 2020: 117). While Said does suggest that self-representation, or the ability of colonial subjects to speak for themselves, can serve as a means of resisting colonial knowledge regimes (Said 1978: 21), he does not develop this point in detail. As a result, important questions remain about the specific mediated conditions under which subjects can speak and be heard. These questions are particularly relevant in contexts such as the BLM protests or the negotiations on the Herero and Nama genocide, where formerly marginalized voices are increasingly cited and included in journalistic coverage.

Spivak (1988) addresses some of these issues in her work on subalternity[1], where she considers the impossibility of the subaltern to speak, despite their continued visibility in colonial texts. Drawing on the writings of Marx, Spivak (1988: 275) notes that the English translation of "representation" conflates two distinct German words: *Darstellen* and *Vertreten*. The former refers to practices of speaking *about* colonial subjects, while the latter refers to speaking *for* them. The conflation of these two modes of representation, when speaking *about* becomes a strategy for legitimately speaking *for* the interests of specific groups, underpins the colonial patterns of knowledge production and power relations

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1 As Persram (2011) notes, Spivak's conceptualizations of these terms evolved throughout her work. This study focuses specifically on the usefulness of her notion of representation for examining media content, rather than on the broader epistemic question of whether the subaltern can ever speak.

described in Said's (1978, 1993) work. Rather than asking whether a group is represented accurately or authentically, Spivak shifts her focus to the intersection of mediated depiction and the legitimacy of subject positions. Representation makes certain positions visible while simultaneously contributing to invisibility by implying that a given position can stand in for a specific group that, by definition, cannot speak for itself within the media text. This also means that representation is not a one-way process flowing from former colonizers to formerly colonized nations, but rather reflects broader conditions of mediated speaking and listening, conditions that determine how certain subjects are shown (Spivak 1996: 292).

Spivak's (1988, 1996) understanding of representation as simultaneously speaking *about* and *for* formerly colonized subjects adds nuance to Said's (1978) analysis of their depiction in Western cultural works. The continued portrayal of colonial subjects through juxtapositional difference produces speaking positions shaped by homogenization and essentialization (Said 1978: 101). When a subject disrupts or challenges these boundaries, their status as a subject becomes destabilized, as they can no longer be intuitively spoken for by an imagined group. This issue also has significant implications for understanding journalism as a site of social knowledge production. Through its reporting, journalism provides a space in which various perspectives are drawn upon to describe the world around us (Fürsich 2010: 113; Zelizer 2017: 2). In doing so, journalism plays a crucial role in amplifying or silencing different voices by selecting which individuals or groups are permitted to represent a position in media coverage. What journalistic practices underlie this selection process, and how might they reproduce or challenge the colonial structures described above?

To address this question, we now turn to the existing research literature on how German journalism represents formerly colonized subjects. The German context is particularly noteworthy, as Germany was explicitly *excluded* from seminal postcolonial analyses of representation and Orientalism due to the brevity of its colonial empire (Said 1993: 10), despite subsequent scholarship highlighting the influence of Germany's colonial imaginaries and experiences on cultural depictions of the "Other" (Castro Varela & Dhawan 2020: 37). Moreover, Shome (2018: 21) argues that Spivak's work is highly relevant to communication studies due to its focus on global structures of inequality and the challenges of representing alterity and otherness, especially from within academic discourse. How has German communication studies engaged with post- and decolonial theoretical approaches to analyze patterns of representation in German journalism? What points of connection exist, and how can they inform the analysis of media content?

Representative Strategies in German Media Content: Research Perspectives

Studies examining the construction and maintenance of relational systems between self and Other in German media content have predominantly focused on reporting about immigrants and refugees. While these studies do not always explicitly define the concept of representation, they nonetheless form the foundation of media representation research in Germany (cf. Lünenborg et al. 2011). In the following, we trace the development of this body of work, highlight contributions from postcolonial theory, and explore the further potential of post- and decolonial perspectives for the study of media representation in Germany.

In the early 2000s, studies showed that immigrants and refugees were often discursively constructed as threats in journalistic reporting (Jäger 2000: 22). This construction was reinforced through associations with crime, financial burden, and the use of delegitimating and stigmatizing language. In these mediated depictions, immigrants and refugees were portrayed as passive objects—spoken about, but without a voice (Müller 2005; cf. Delgado 1972; Duisburger Institut für Sprach- und Sozialforschung 1999; Geiger 1985; Hömberg & Schlemmer 1995; Merten 1986; Ruhrmann & Kollmer 1987). This pattern of representation

was particularly evident in portrayals of "migrants from the non-European 'third world,' but also from Turkey and the Balkan region" (Müller 2005: 101). Furthermore, refugees arriving in large numbers were described as "masses that hassle us, that abuse the basic law" (Jäger 2000: 21). These portrayals were accompanied by "flood and boat symbolism" and a "military symbol complex with which these people are met" (Ibid.).

A pivotal moment in recent history concerning the representation of migrants was the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015. Initially, German media portrayed a very positive image of Germany's *Wilkommenskultur* ("welcome culture"), evoking understanding, sympathy, and empathy for refugees by reporting on individual stories and the suffering caused by the war in Syria (Tränhardt 2018: 18–20). However, following the incidents at Cologne's station square on New Year's Eve in 2015/16[2], representations of threatening (male) migrants came to dominate the coverage (Haller 2017: 139; Tränhardt, 2018: 19–20). Media attention focused heavily on (sexualized) crimes allegedly committed by refugees, reinforcing and normalizing these representations (Bielicki 2019: 187–188; cf. Dhawan & Castro Varela 2020: 315), and emphasizing ethno-sexist discourses (cf. Dietze 2016). Holzberg et al. (2018) argue that the crisis discourse in German media coverage of migration and refuge in 2015 and 2016 reproduced border discourses and constructed images of the "(un)deserving refugee" around themes of "economic productivity; state security; and gender relations" (Holzberg et al. 2018: 534). These studies highlight the intersectional nature[3] of inequality-producing social constructions in representations of the self and Other in German media content (cf. Crenshaw 1991).

Additionally, Müller (2017) notes that refugees in German media reporting are typically associated with Islam. Within the representative structures outlined above, Islam is used as a foil to Christian Europe, and its cultural compatibility with German society is questioned. This reflects the patterns of Orientalism described by Said (1978), even if his theories are not explicitly cited. Müller's (2017) study also demonstrates that media discourse frequently links Muslim refugees with terrorism, portraying them as a security threat to Europe and Germany. In this context, a "heterogeneous group of persons with a migration background" is reduced to a single feature, in this case, being Muslim (Schneider et al. 2013: 4). The problematization of this feature is used in a process of "excluding demarcation," legitimizing forms of social exclusion (Kloppenburg 2014: 137-138).

Another strand of German communications research on representation stems from gender media studies (Maier 2018: 77). While studies from the 1970s and 1980s often focused on stereotypical misrepresentations or the complete absence of representation as a misalignment with social reality, more recent constructivist approaches emphasize reciprocal relationships between media and society (Maier 2018: 77–79). This shift is particularly useful for connecting with the postcolonial theories discussed above, as the media are now understood as both producing and reproducing societal realities shaped by power

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2 On December 31, 2015, and January 1, 2016, hundreds of women were robbed, sexually assaulted, and harassed in Cologne's central square (Bielicki 2019: 184).

3 The term intersectionality refers to a range of "reciprocally constructing phenomena," such as class, age, gender, sexuality, 'race,' nation, and ethnicity, that together "shape complex social inequalities" (Hill Collins 2015: 2; cf. Crenshaw 1991). The concept emerged in the 1970s through the work of Black U.S.-American feminists, who challenged dominant strands of feminism for centering on the experience of white, middle-class women while excluding the realities of less privileged groups. Intersectionality is therefore grounded in a difference-theoretical approach and seeks to capture the entanglement of multiple power relations, symbolic representations, and identity constructions (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; hooks 2000: 101; hooks 2015; Kerner 2009: 32; Räthzel 2010: 283; Winker & Degele 2009: 11–15).

structures, ideologies, and social contexts (cf. Klaus & Kirchhoff 2016: 529; Klaus & Lünen-borg 2012: 204; Mikos 2023: 122). Critical analyses grounded in this understanding have challenged empirical traditions by exploring "anticategorical" approaches to studying social inequalities, methods that avoid reproducing binary or essentialist assumptions (Klaus et al. 2018: 13).

The concept of intersectionality has advanced the methodological debates outlined above (Ibid.) while also contributing to the research literature on mediated representations of (forced) migration. For example, Lünenborg et. al. (2011) expand earlier research that focused primarily on a "male prototype in reporting" by examining the media representa-tion of female migrants. Their study finds that portrayals of female migrants as oppressed and needy often serve to complement "threatening concepts of masculinity" associated with male migrants within the "hegemonic media discourse" (Lünenborg et al. 2011: 144). While local reporting occasionally offers positive representations of female migrants (such as the famous figure, the neighbor, or the successful woman), political reporting frequently relies on negative, conflict-oriented, and stereotypical depictions (Lünenborg et al. 2011: 145).

Gender functions as a "regulatory norm [in] organizing valuable and non-valuable images of 'the other' as well as the German 'self' in problematizing discussions about Islam (Lünenborg 2019: 169). In this context, German society is broadly portrayed as a guarantor of women's rights through a logic of juxtaposition (Dhawan & Castro Varela 2020: 307; Lünenborg et. al. 2011: 144), positioning it in contrast to communities from which victimized and needy female migrants must be 'liberated' from "the (gendered) restrictions of their community" (Lünenborg 2019: 169). This dynamic reveals forms of cultural racism, rooted in the construction of naturalized and allegedly incompatible cultural differences (Balibar 1991: 20–22; Grosfoguel 1999: 431; Salem & Thompson 2016). Through the repeat-ed visual marking of these alleged 'others', negative stereotypes are reinforced, contributing to discrimination and producing "specific material inequalities" for those believed to belong to such groups (Kloppenburg 2014: 137–138; Schneider et al., 2013, 5).

This research highlights the rich potential for analyzing how the colonial production of transnational Otherness (cf. Shome 2018: 21) intersects with the journalistic representations of marginalized groups within the nation-state. While many of the studies cited above draw on postcolonial concepts such as *Othering*, they rarely position themselves within a postcolonial paradigm. Their findings, however, often reflect influences from other eman-cipatory research traditions, including feminist media studies and Critical Race Theory, particularly in their critique of intersectional injustices reproduced through media repre-sentation. In this article, we seek to contribute to these critical perspectives by explicitly situating our work within a post- and decolonial framework. Spivak's (1988) understanding of representation adds a valuable addition to existing research on German media content—not only showing how journalistic practices reinforce hegemonic depictions of migrant Others, but also in questioning how these practices function to produce positions of (il)le-gitimate speakership when previously marginalized groups are, at last, afforded the ability to speak. In the following section, we draw on this theoretical foundation to analyze the representative practices in journalism across both national and transnational settings. How does journalism represent those subjects who are selected to speak about colonial and racial injustices?

3. Methodology and the two analyzed cases

To address this question, we draw on two case studies developed as part of dissertation projects at the Free University of Berlin. Both projects investigated media reporting during moments of societal negotiation around colonial and racial injustice. The first project

analyzed talk shows and social media formats following the 2020 BLM protests, while the second examined newspaper reporting on the German-Namibian government negotiations concerning colonial reparations. By analyzing these cases in parallel, we ask: Which representative patterns emerge across both contexts? And which colonial structures of representation continue to shape how specific communities and individuals are portrayed?

Societal power structures that are (re)produced in media content are also reflected in media and communication research itself (cf. Ng et al. 2020). A critical engagement with power in the media therefore also requires a critical examination of media research and a reflection on the positionalities from which such research is produced. For us, this reflection translates into a praxis of transparency (cf. Weiß 2025: 5). In addition to clarifying this article's theoretical and methodical approach, it also involves openness about the sources of our epistemological interest and intellectual positioning. We share the assumption, rooted in democratic thought, that social justice requires fair representation in both media and political systems. This political standpoint shaped both dissertation projects as well as our collaboration on this article. Importantly, our academic socialization within media and communication research has taken place within European research contexts. We recognize the importance of interrogating the normative assumptions, methodological traditions, and interpretative frameworks shaped by this positioning—particularly when studying unequal power structures. Our engagement with post- and decolonial theory is thus part of a broader effort to critically examine the entanglement of social power structures in shaping both our lived realities and their mediated representations. This article is therefore part of an ongoing negotiation and self-reflection on what it means to be critical.

3.1 Methodology

Both projects relied on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as their method of investigation. CDA is premised on the assumption that "power is transmitted and practiced through discourse" (Machin & Mayr 2012: 4–5). CDA focuses on pressing issues situated within specific temporal and spatial contexts (Jäger 2015: 93) and analyzes the range of statements that can be made about these issues as discourse. CDA thus serves as a tool to uncover the conventions, practices, and ideological strategies that shape representations of people and events. Central to this approach is the analysis of how those "power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse" (Machin & Mayr 2012: 4–5). This focus on societal power structures introduces a normative dimension to CDA, enabling critical reflections on the content and relations revealed in the analysis. Importantly, CDA does not aim to uncover an objective truth; rather, it seeks to expose those assumptions that are presented as objective and universal (Jäger 2015: 8). This makes CDA particularly well-suited to the postcolonial theoretical framework outlined above.

Jäger (2015) proposes dividing the analysis of societal discourse into two steps: (1) an analysis of the discourse's structure and (2) a subsequent in-depth content analysis. The structural analysis of the discourse's structure involves preparing and organizing the material to identify statements and discourse positions within the broader discourse (Jäger 2015: 97). This step forms the basis for selecting typical cases for more detailed examination in the subsequent *Feinanalyse* (in-depth analysis) (Jäger 2015: 97). According to Jäger (Ibid., own translation), only the combination of structural and in-depth analysis can disclose "a discourse strand as a whole." We followed this procedure in our analysis. All material was analyzed using MAXQDA, which was particularly useful as it allowed for the simultaneous examination of both video material and corresponding transcripts.

3.2 Description of the first case: The public debate about racism in Germany after the Black Lives Matter Protests in summer 2020

The global Black Live Matter (BLM) protests in summer 2020, which followed the killing of George Floyd in the United States, sparked a mainstream discussion about racism in Germany. Prior to this, Germany had conducted relatively little explicit research on the topic and had only hesitantly engaged in public debates about racism (Çaglar and Sridharan 2021: 61–62; Salem & Thompson 2016). When public debates on racism did occur, they typically focused on right-wing extremism or were dominated by a U.S.-American perspective. The BLM protests are therefore often regarded as a "turning point" in Germany's engagement with racism (Milman et. al. 2021: 12). Although early coverage of the BLM protests in Germany was largely "sympathetic" to the movement (Ibid.), various social media platforms became venues for critiques regarding the alleged exclusion of people experiencing racism in traditional media outlets. In response, content creators began publishing formats that complemented, critiqued, or countered the engagement of mainstream mass media.

To examine the dynamics between social and traditional media, and the range of perspectives expressed on the topic of racism, this project posed the following research question: *How are legitimate knowledge and legitimate speaker positions about racism constructed in political talk about racism in German talk shows following the BLM protests in summer 2020?*

Political talk shows were selected as the object of investigation because, as Goebel (2017: 404) argues, such formats reproduce hegemonic discourse as well as dominant and subdominant (though not subaltern) perceptions. The sample consisted of 44 talk show episodes, including broadcasts on German public television (*Markus Lanz*, *Anne Will*, *Maischberger*, *hart aber fair*, *Maybritt Illner*) as well as talk shows distributed via YouTube and Instagram, both in collaboration with public broadcasting (*Five Souls*, *Auf Klo*, *deep und deutlich*[4]) and independently of it (*Sitzplatzreservierung*, *Die beste Instanz von Enissa Amani*, *Karakaya Talks*).

The episodes were obtained through various means: by purchasing them from public broadcasting institutions, receiving them free of charge upon request, downloading them from the public broadcasting archives, or accessing them via YouTube and Instagram. The sampling period spanned from May 25, 2020, to November 11, 2021. The start date marks the killing of George Floyd, while the end date was determined during the sampling process and justified by the point of data saturation as well as the practical feasibility of analysis (cf. Meyen 2013: 54–55).

3.3 Description of the second case: The Herero and Nama genocide reparations case, 2015–2021

The Herero and Nama genocide occurred between 1904 and 1908 in German South West Africa (GSWA), present-day Namibia. Since 2014, the German and Namibian governments have been engaged in negotiations over potential reparations for the genocide. Although a preliminary agreement was announced in May 2021, it was rejected by members of the Herero and Nama communities, who criticized both the monetary amount and the lack of direct community participation in the negotiations. As of now, the agreement remains unsigned.

In an analysis of German and Namibian newspapers between 2015 and 2021, this dissertation project examined how the Herero and Nama genocide is constructed in cultural

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4   *deep und deutlich* is released both on German public television and across different online platforms.

memory and how this shapes the Herero and Nama communities' ability to legitimately assert demands in the present. The study conducted an in-depth CDA of 177 articles in four leading German newspapers: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (*FAZ*), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (*SZ*), *die tageszeitung* (*taz*), *Die Zeit*, one German news magazine: *Der Spiegel*, and four leading Namibian newspapers: *Allgemeine Zeitung* (*AZ*), *The Namibian*, *Namibian Sun*, and *New Era*. The data were collected from databases including *FAZ Biblionet*, the internal archive of the *SZ*, Nexis Uni, and WISO, as well as from physical archives at the Namibian National Library and the Namibian Resource Center in Windhoek. In this article, the primary focus is on German newspaper reporting. This case thus illustrates how Herero and Nama discursive positions were constructed through practices of representation in journalistic coverage of the genocide, often involving spatial dimensions of difference not found in the prior case study.

4. Findings

In the following sub-chapters, we examine the representative overlaps identified between both projects. Despite differences in media types and practices of (trans-)national Othering present in each case, both studies revealed similar modes that shaped the available spaces for speaking about and challenging colonial power structures in journalism. We present our results through four typical cases that exemplify broader patterns found throughout the sample, following Jäger's (cf. Jäger, 2015: 97) approach to selecting representative cases. Each case below stands for a range of instances encountered in both cases but condensed here for brevity. We begin by illustrating a form of representation with an example from the Herero and Nama genocide case, then demonstrate how this representative strategy is reversed in an example from BLM coverage, and finally show how both cases exhibit similar formal distinctions that perpetuate the representative strategies discussed.

4.1 Homogenization: Representation through equivalence

The first example of (self-)representation identified across our cases echoes a strategy discussed in chapter 2: homogenization. In this strategy, groups are constructed as unified entities through a single essentializing descriptor, a key representative practice historically applied to colonial subjects (cf. Said 1978: 102). In our analysis, we examined how such homogenizing depictions of marginalized communities influenced the legitimation of speakers and their inclusion in media coverage.

A typical example illustrating this strategy appears in German newspaper coverage on colonial reparations. Here, speakers from the Herero and Nama community were primarily introduced by their ethnicity, a descriptor that preceded and often overshadowed other personal characteristics. For instance, in an article on a 2019 restitution ceremony in the German newspaper *taz*, cultural editor Andreas Fanizadeh frames the event around two representatives:

"The European Theresia Bauer, born in 1965, is Minister for Science, Research and the Arts in Baden-Württemberg in the cabinet of Winfried Kretschmann. The African Ida Hoffmann, born in 1947, fought for the liberation of the country in the 1980s with SWAPO. She belongs to the Nama ethnic group, which, like the Herero, is now a minority in the Ovambo-dominated Namibian society." (*taz*, 09.03.2019)[5]

Both Theresia Bauer and Ida Hoffmann are described using continental descriptors ("European" and "African"). However, Bauer is represented solely through her political

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5 All subsequent quotations have been translated from German to English by the authors.

office, while Hoffmann's political role is framed by her involvement in the liberation struggle and immediately followed by a reference to her ethnic identity. This ethnic marker is portrayed as a minority status, implying relative discursive marginalization. Notably, the article omits Hoffmann's position as a member of the Namibian parliament representing SWAPO at the time. Instead, Hoffmann is depicted primarily as a representative of the Nama people. The function of this form of representation is particularly evident later in the article:

"'None of us thought,' Ms. Hoffmann said to Ms. Bauer [...] 'that the day would come when we would stand here together.' And she continues: 'It is your responsibility to better inform yourself and your citizens [...] so that we can gain a new perspective together.' To which Ms. Bauer responded: 'All institutions in Baden-Württemberg will receive a letter from me.'" (*taz*, 09.03.2019)

Hoffmann's use of the personal pronoun "us" signals that she speaks not merely for herself but on behalf of a broader community. Her subsequent demand to "better inform yourself" is thereby positioned as a collective demand of those she represents. However, due to the earlier framing, these represented individuals are implied to be defined primarily by shared ethnicity rather than by a political constituency. In response, Bauer states that "institutions in Baden-Württemberg will receive a letter." Bauer is not portrayed as a representative of "the" German people, thereby deflecting responsibility for future action onto unnamed institutions.

The quotes above illustrate a common dilemma in journalism's institutional production of knowledge: journalists cannot interview every member of a group and must therefore select individuals to represent the broader community. However, problems arise when this representation is reduced primarily to ethnic identity markers. This strategy anchors speakership in presumed shared experiences that justify an individual's authority to speak for an entire community. Yet, it often obscures the underlying power dynamics of "geopolitical awareness" (Said 1978: 12) that influence which speakers are chosen. By limiting legitimate representation to ethnic or racial markers, journalism conflates speaking *about* a community with speaking *for* it, thereby positioning certain individuals as the community's legitimate voice (cf. Spivak 1988). Such patterns restrict the ability of group members to dissent without challenging the legitimacy of their group identity.

This dynamic is particularly evident in German media coverage of Vekuii Rukoro, Paramount Chief of the Herero, who is frequently quoted in German newspapers. Rukoro led one faction of the Herero communities that chose not to participate in the government negotiations. In the coverage, he was commonly described as "contested", and this contestation was used to delegitimize his role as a speaker: "However, the heads of the traditional royal houses did not recognize him as Paramount Chief of the Herero, a chief elected for life." (*FAZ*, 02.10.21). By framing Rukoro through traditional ethnic markers rather than his leadership in a lawsuit against the German government, the media portrayed him as failing to meet ideals of homogeneity, thereby undermining his legitimacy.

At first glance, this strategy appears to reflect journalism's conceptions of its audience, which is assumed not to share the same experiences as the depicted subjects. From this perspective, any member of the depicted group could serve as a representative, since their experiences are seen as distinct from the audience's imagined norm. Consequently, it may not be surprising that, in English-language Namibian journalism, Herero and Nama speakers are introduced by their specific political party, family, or traditional organization. However, a similar individualization was also extended to German speakers, who are almost always identified through their specific political party affiliations, such as Left or Green (cf. *Namibian Sun*, 03.09.18). This complicates the earlier assumption and highlights how the distribution of geopolitical power relations shape representation across national borders.

The Namibian examples suggest an alternative to the patterns found in German journalism, where speakers are primarily introduced by their ethnic identity. They demonstrate that journalistic decisions about what is "too complicated" for readers reflect underlying geopolitical power structures.

In the following chapter, we turn to another speakership position that irritates this notion of homogenization.

4.2 Irritation: Representation through controversy

The second representative pattern found across our cases is termed *irritation*. This pattern centers on controversy and, in contrast to the homogenization described above, seeks to highlight heterogeneity within a marginalized group. Here, a subject's speaking position is legitimized precisely by breaking through the audience's expectation of homogeneity and challenging the assumptions tied to that group's position. In this way, the represented subject often reaffirms the dominant norm by embodying what Spivak (2003) refers to as the "native informant." However, unlike in previous patterns where a voice may have been unheard, this representative strategy suggests that these perspectives have previously been silenced because they are seen as an irritation to "their" own social ingroup and defy established "expectations". The selected individuals are typically portrayed as conciliatory figures, helping to reconcile the dominant group to itself (cf. Ahmed 2014: 35). Moreover, these subjects are usually depicted as separate from the group they supposedly contradict. They rarely appear in solidarity with others in the marginalized group, but instead address the audience as "outliers" or exceptions within that community.

To illustrate this pattern, we selected an example from the first case: an episode of the talk show *hart aber fair* that aired on German public television on October 5th, 2020. In this episode, the participants discussed the use of (sometimes covert) discriminatory language. The arguments ranged from conservative calls to retain existing terminology to progressive demands for including marginalized voices in the debate over which terms should be used or avoided. While the first half of the episode mainly focused on exchanges among the panelists, the second half featured a dialogue between the host Frank Plasberg and Andrew Onuegbo, a cook and restaurant owner. In the following, we concentrate specifically on this dialogue.

Andrew Onugebo is introduced by host Frank Plasberg as a subject intended to illustrate the complexity of the debate—or, in Plasberg's words, to "confuse" the audience—as a "complicated" example in which "the discriminated, those who are meant to be protected from discrimination feel discriminated against because something is not granted to them" (Plasberg in *hart aber fair*, 05.10.2020, min 00:50:52–00:51:11). In doing so, Plasberg immediately sets the boundaries of what is considered normal or abnormal, without reflecting on who holds the authority to make such distinctions. Onuegbo is thus framed as someone presumed to be affected by discrimination, while simultaneously positioned as an exception to this category. Although the specific type of discrimination is not initially stated, Onuegbo is visually presented as a Black, male-presenting person[6]. It is therefore implicitly understood—an inference later confirmed by the content of the show—that he is presumed to experience racism. This framing significantly shapes Onuegbo's representative position within the episode.

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6 This observation is addressed more explicitly over the course of the exchange, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate.

A short video trailer introduces Onuegbo as a cook who opened the restaurant *Zum Mohrenkopf*[7] in the city of Kiel. Critical scholars and activists argue that the term M* is a racist designation for Black people and People of Color and advocate against its use. Although the term is widely recognized as outdated, it remains visible in public spaces, for instance, in street and store names (Arndt & Hamann 2021: 649–653). The first staged conflict in Onuegbo's constructed identity as a person facing discrimination is established through the name of his restaurant. His decision to name the restaurant as such, along with his public defense of that, is presented in contrast with his assumed position as a victim of discrimination. This tension is heightened when the trailer ends and Onuegbo begins speaking in the show. He reflects on the reactions he received regarding the restaurant's name and expresses his incomprehension for and rejection of arguments stating that the term M* has racist origins and should therefore no longer be used:

"[...] I'm surprised when some people get upset because we, the Blacks, have no ... it's only mongrels [Mischlinge] that were born here – I'm not sure if you can still say that – but we, the Africans, we take this easy." (Andrew Onuegbo in *hart aber fair*, 05.10.2020, min 00:52:50–00:53:17)

Referring to himself as part of "the Africans", Onuegbo constructs an outlook that positions him as external to German debates on racism. In doing so, he simultaneously engages with and reproduces the strategy of homogenization described above. By emphasizing the difference between "the Africans" and Germany, Onuegbo adds a geospatial dimension to his argument and presents these as mutually exclusive entities (cf. Said 1978: 12). On the one hand, he does not address the context-specific conditions of racism in Germany but instead reduces the debate to individual predispositions—those of "the Africans" versus those born in Germany. On the other hand, he reinforces what Said (1979: 141) refers to as an "imaginative geography", a mode of establishing "geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary [...] [and] is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours'" (Said 1979: 141). Onuegbo here draws an arbitrary distinction between the population of an entire continent and Germany, constructing the experiences and concerns of Black Germans as separate from—and ultimately incomprehensible to—his own socialization. He emphasizes this distance both geographically and symbolically. As a result, although Onuegbo supports conservative German arguments[8] in rejecting the racist origins of the term M*, this standpoint is concealed by his alleged outsider position. Plasberg's introduction of Onuegbo as an atypical figure, combined with Onuegbo's own distancing from Black Germans, frames him as occupying a unique speaker position, one that legitimizes his ability to speak and be heard within the talk show format. While this performance of contrast challenges the assumption that non-white people constitute a homogeneous group, it simultaneously anchors the truth-value of his statement to his social identity: if a Black man claims the word M* is not racist, it implies there must be some validity to that view.

Onuegbo's distancing from Black Germans, while simultaneously marking himself as Black, creates a complex interplay of subject-object relations within the episode. As Fanon (1999: 417) writes, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to

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7   The term will from now on referred to as M*.

8   This becomes even more apparent in Onuegbo's use of the word "mongrels," which reflects an essentialist understanding of supposedly homogenous races that can be mixed to produce a blend. The term itself—originally used in the context of animal breeding—carried inherently dehumanizing and derogatory connotations. These connotations are further reinforced by Onuegbo's visible uncertainty about whether the term is still appropriate to use.

the white man [...] The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man". In this framework the Black man is rendered an "object" whose bodily consciousness is dependent on the gaze of others (Fanon 1999: 417). This logic is echoed in Onuegbo's initial introduction by the host Plasberg as a "confusing" example of a person affected by discrimination (min 00:50:52–00:51:11). Onuegbo is visually and verbally represented as non-white and becomes the object through which the ambivalence and contradictions of public debates on discriminatory language are illustrated. Yet, by explicitly constructing "Black Germans" as distinct from himself, Onuegbo claims a separate subject position, one that analyzes and evaluates the behavior of this objectified group. This rhetorical move grants him interpretative authority and enables him to perform the position of a detached outsider.

To briefly summarize, although it performs a shift in perspective, the pattern of irritation ultimately reinforces the notion that marginalized subjects belong to a cohesive and homogeneous group. The appearance of diversity, represented through the figure of the "irritating" subject, serves to reaffirm the assumptions of the dominant group and thereby reproduces existing structures of marginalization. Similar to the pattern of homogenization, irritation produces subjects through essentializing descriptors. However, unlike the playing out of homogenization, the selected subject does not speak *for* their presumed group, but rather *against* it.

4.3 Containment: Representation through exclusive formats

A third representative strategy considers the broader conditions that shape the possibilities of speaking and being heard in journalistic discourse. This perspective helps explain why, despite the increasing visibility of marginalized speakers in media coverage, their participation often remains constrained by the limits outlined in the previous sections. In both of the selected case studies, speakers were not only thematically restricted, but also frequently positioned within media formats that signaled their exclusion from the normative reality of the presumed audience. This strategy of spatial and symbolic distancing results in a process of containment (Stewart 1991), whereby marginalized voices are included only within bounded, exceptional formats that underscore their difference and limit their capacity to shape dominant discourse.

This journalistic strategy is perhaps most visible in the formats through which the Herero and Nama genocide is reported in German journalism. In many cases, Herero and Nama speakers are editorially separated from articles that primarily feature German perspectives. This editorial division reinforces an imagined spatial and symbolic separation between speakers from the Global South and those from Germany. A striking example of this can be found in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* (SZ) coverage following the joint declaration by the German and Namibian governments in 2021. On May 29, 2021, the *SZ* dedicated the entire second page of its politics section to the agreement. The page featured three separate articles and one information box. Two of the articles, written by German political journalists, focused on Germany's willingness to address its colonial past and quoted extensively from the German special envoy to the negotiations (*SZ*, 29.05.21). The third article, entitled "The choir of the neglected" (*SZ*, 29.05.21), appeared as a sidebar written by the paper's Africa correspondent and contained quotes from Herero and Nama organizations critical of the agreement. Despite sharing the same page, these three articles were not integrated into a coherent narrative. Instead, they stood side-by-side, with the critiques of Herero and Nama representatives presented separately from the German perspective, reinforcing their marginality and containment.

While the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* example is particularly vivid, variations of this representational pattern appeared across all analyzed German newspapers. Across outlets, an invisible boundary emerged between articles that quoted Herero and Nama demands and those that conveyed German "solutions." This editorial separation was not always marked by formal rubrics ("culture" or "politics"), but was often embedded in the geographic framing of the article, distinguishing whether events were located in Germany or Namibia. These patterns suggest a structural challenge to the production of transnational knowledge in German newspapers, where the location of the correspondent implicitly determines whose voices are heard. This segmentation reflects an implicit imagination of the "home" audience (cf. Nothias 2020), presumed to be more attuned to German than Namibian concerns. Tellingly, this imagined audience becomes especially evident when it is disrupted, as during the BLM coverage in Germany, where producers preemptively constrained their imagined audience in a markedly different way.

As a second example of the containment pattern, we draw on the show *Sitzplatzreservierung* from the first case. *Sitzplatzreservierung*, which translates to *seat reservation*, is an Instagram live series launched by the two Black German journalists Aminata Belli and Hadnet Tesfai. The series adopts a talk show format in which Belli and Tesfai speak with Black Germans about their experiences and perceptions of racism in Germany. From the outset, the hosts clearly state that the intended audience of the show is Black people living in Germany:

"[...] We address a Black audience. And anyone else who's listening and takes something from it: cool. But we first and foremost think of each other and our conversation partners. However, we of course know that this is not happening in a vacuum space." (*Sitzplatzreservierung 6a*, 04.08.2020, min 00:13:34–00:14:32)

Sitzplatzreservierung successfully shifts the focus of knowledge production by centering the perspectives of Black people in Germany. In doing so, it fosters a sense of community and intimacy based on shared social positioning. While this creates an important space for exchange, it also risks reinforcing hegemonic boundaries of difference that frame Black subjects as separate from the societal norm. This illustrates a core tension: acknowledging and responding to unequal power structures while also navigating the potential for reifying essentialist narratives of belonging.
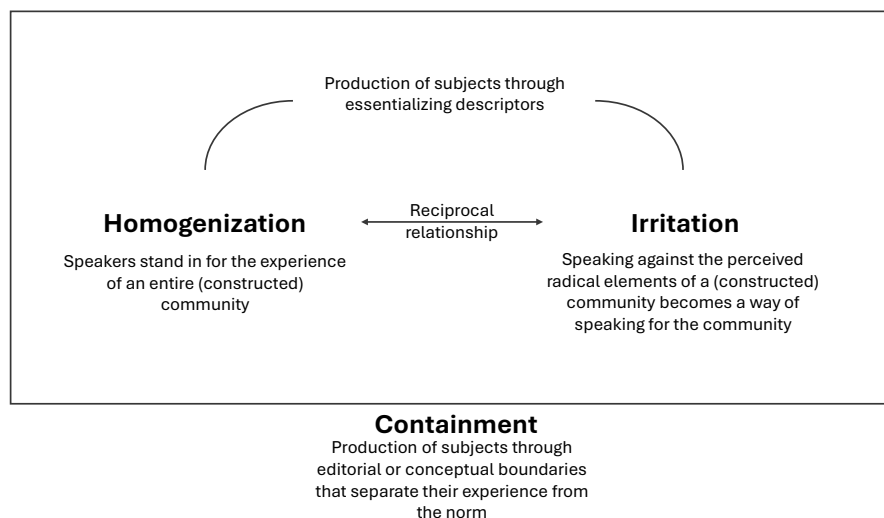
4.4 Summary

The findings outlined above demonstrate how journalism helps maintain existing power structures by reproducing (trans-)national boundaries. As a result, meaningful dialogue across spatial or mediated divides becomes essentially impossible, placing Herero, Nama, and Black German speakers in an impossible bind. When controversy arises, it is often framed as undermining their legitimacy. Yet, due to the formal constraints of media formats, these speakers are typically only allowed to speak *to* and *among* themselves within journalistic contents. This illustrates how the three representative structures discussed—homogenization, irritation, and containment—work together to regulate speakership in ways that reinforce exclusion from the imagined audience, even as they help uphold its normative construction.

The figure summarizes the representational strategies we identified across our cases:

Figure: Modes of (self-)representation in the analyzed cases

Production of subjects through
essentializing descriptors

Homogenization ←— Reciprocal relationship —→ **Irritation**

Speakers stand in for the experience
of an entire (constructed)
community

Speaking against the perceived
radical elements of a (constructed)
community becomes a way of
speaking for the community

Containment
Production of subjects through
editorial or conceptual boundaries
that separate their experience from
the norm

5. Conclusion: (Self-)representation in post-/decolonial contexts

This article has examined the representative patterns that shape available speaking positions in German journalistic reporting on colonial and racial injustices. Building on prior research, we have shown that increased visibility does not necessarily translate into meaningful speakership and can, in fact, serve to reinforce existing power structures (Schaffer 2008: 15). As Spivak (1996: 292) has argued, the central question is not simply whether marginalized individuals or communities *can* speak, but also whether they *can be heard*. It is in this relational space between speaking and listening that journalism assumes a pivotal role, one played out through the performative circulation of knowledge between producers and audiences (Hall 2019).

At a time when members of marginalized communities increasingly demand access to and participation in public discourse and media spaces, we have considered how journalistic representation maintains and challenges colonial power structures. This occurs through the construction of boundaries and relations between self and Other (Said 1978, 1993), shaping whose voices are legitimized, under what conditions, and to whom they can speak.

In this way, this contribution adds nuance to previous research, which has often focused on how migrant Others are depicted in German news coverage, by shifting the focus to the conditions under which Black and indigenous individuals are positioned to speak, particularly in moments of tension and negotiation surrounding colonial and racist legacies. Despite the differences between the two analyzed cases—the 2020 BLM protests and the German-Namibian negotiations over reparations for the Herero and Nama genocide—we identified recurring representational patterns. This suggests that journalism's construction of transnational Others is not confined to foreign contexts but also functions to reinforce Otherness within national boundaries (cf. Shome 2018: 21). Moreover, the findings show that colonial logics of depiction and positioning continue to shape the conditions of speak-

ership for both Black Germans and Namibian Indigenous communities through a persistent presupposition of difference. Across both cases, we identified three representative patterns that reinforce this construction: homogenization, irritation, and containment.

Homogenization constructs speakership through a journalistic expectation that a single subject can represent an entire, predefined group. This representational strategy often erases "geopolitical awareness" (Said 1978: 12) by reducing individuals to essentialized traits that fix them to a particular (often foreign) location or community. When subjects deviate from these group expectations, they are framed as irritations—figures whose dissent appears to challenge group homogeneity but ultimately serves to reaffirm dominant interpretive frameworks. Finally, our analysis of containment shows how increased visibility does not necessarily equate to expanded agency. Journalism formats often sequester marginalized speakers into separate spaces—"for them" and "about them"—which limits the potential for broader dialogue with the imagined mainstream audience. Notably, this same strategy is also repurposed by media actors on social media to demand more representational space. This ambivalence—between restriction and strategic appropriation—is a recurring thread in our findings. Many of the very practices that limit speakership are also employed by speakers to legitimize their right to be heard, often through explicit references to speaking for, to, or against a particular community.

Our results show that while the inclusion of marginalized communities and perspectives in reporting is undoubtedly an important first step, it cannot be the end of the conversation. The representational strategies we identified reveal tangible and persistent constraints within journalistic practice. By nature, journalistic formats are limited: It is not feasible to include every voice from a given community. Decisions about whom to speak to are shaped not only by editorial judgements but also by assumptions about the intended audience. These selections are further constrained by structural conditions—economic pressures, newsroom routines, and journalism's continued orientation toward and consumption by societal elites (Fürsich 2010: 116). As such, representational practices do not simply reflect but actively reproduce hierarchies of visibility and voice.

Breaking through these representative patterns requires rethinking how speakers are selected and introduced in journalism. This could mean portraying speakers as situated within multiple overlapping roles and interest positions in society. Rather than diminishing the importance of identity, such an approach could foreground the relational and contextual nature of representation—highlighting that every subject, including the imagined audience, is embedded within broader fields of collective interest. Additionally, relocating these stories to more prominent formats, such as front-page news or central positions on talk show panels, could shift the perceived relationship between speaker and audience, enabling different representative strategies to emerge.

This also signals a crucial direction for future research: Beyond moments of public friction or acute controversy, it is essential to investigate how journalism addresses colonial and racial injustice over time. Longitudinal analysis can reveal whether and how representative structures evolve or reassert themselves. This will demand a sustained engagement with "questions [of] power, identity, and politics" (Ng et al. 2020: 143), not only in media representations but also in media and communication research itself, including the positionalities and epistemologies from which knowledge is typically produced.

In this sense, and in line with the aims of decolonial studies, the findings presented here should be understood as one contribution to an ongoing process: a process continuously interrogating and critically dismantling colonial boundaries of representation, both in media content and in the scholarly practices that seek to understand it.

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