



Tracing museum exhibition reviews: References, replies and translations between the museum space and the mass media



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ABSTRACT

This paper traces how media dialogical networks are generated in interactions across different media. Reviews of a museum exhibition on public representations of immigrants in France and Germany serve as an example to follow connections between social interactions during guided tours in the exhibition space, comments written in the exhibition's guestbook and reviews of the exhibition published in newspapers. This contribution exemplifies how a contextualisation analysis allows us to disassemble how multiple voices and references are orchestrated in sequentially organised enunciations. The analysis shows, firstly, how journalists, museum staff, and visitors engage in face-to-face and written dialogues in which they refer to each other beyond co-present situations to politically position themselves, the museums and newspapers in relation to governmental politics; secondly, how members engage in disputes about networks' normative orders; and thirdly how multiple selection practices fundamentally change the meaning of enunciations in translations between modalities of the museum space and the mass media. Allegations of censorship give rise to professionals and laypeople in their reviews generating alliances and oppositions on the question how independent museums should be from the government.

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1. Introduction

Museum exhibitions constitute particular kinds of public forums. Exhibits commonly portray or symbolise aspects of the world from beyond the exhibition space in order to discuss that which is represented. In the case of national history museums, exhibitions are considered particularly important symbolic spaces that make claims about society and its evolution. Prominent exhibitions gain their symbolic relevance by visitors reading them not only as one individual curator's "speech act" (Bal 1996: 3f.) but as a collective statement, thoroughly researched knowledge, a legitimate selection of what is important, and – when combined with exhibits of art – of what constitutes respectable "high culture". When people disagree about whether exhibits in a national museum accurately portray national history or national culture museums constitute 'contested terrains' (Lavine/Karp 1991).

In this paper, I analyse reviews of an exhibition about public representations of immigrants in France and Germany. I ask how reviews connect individuals' readings of the exhibition to the public sphere. I firstly compare reviews written in newspapers to a press release by the French museum and a press conference in the German one. Secondly, I follow how visitors and museum staff

that guide them through the exhibition refer to exhibition reviews in guestbook entries and in guided tours. Thirdly, I compare social interactions between museum staff and journalists in the exhibition space with publications of these interactions in newspapers (and I mention how these compare to radio and TV broadcasts). My 'contextualisation analysis' shows that journalists, visitors and museum staff discuss who may legitimately contribute to public discourse on what kind of stage. Authors of exhibition reviews position newspapers and institutions in relation to the exhibition's political message and the French or German governments. Further, analysis reveals practices of preparation, selection, positioning, and re-contextualisation as participants of inter-personal communication take up enunciations from mass-media communication and vice versa. We can reconstruct this sequentiality as a debate "traveling" in a circular motion between the museum space and newspapers (the most common kind of reviews in the mass media). I draw on the concept of 'media dialogical networks' (MDNs) (Leudar/Nekvapil 2004), that is, of the connections made in the particular interaction format of mass media communication. In the mass media, publications make enunciations available to a potentially large audience and because interaction is not restricted to a present audience numerous journalists and other actors can reply to a journalist's utterance. In each reply, the utterance can be taken up in the context of different narratives, for different

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purposes, and its multiplication makes it appear more important. I propose to specify media dialogical networks as members' activities and constructs that socially, discursively and materially position people and institutions. I show how MDNs intertwine with interaction orders (Goffman 1983) beyond the mass media and how they involve an up-scaling effect that comes with translations between inter-personal and journalistic interaction orders. In this study, exhibition reviews serve to generate political camps, most notably concerning the question of how independent museums should be of the state.¹

2. The study: An exhibition on public representations of immigrants in France and Germany

The exhibition under study is entitled “À chacun ses étrangers ? France-Allemagne 1871 à aujourd'hui / Fremde? Bilder von den Anderen in Deutschland und Frankreich seit 1871”². It was produced by the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (“Cité”), the Deutsches Historisches Museum (“DHM”) and the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. It was shown 16.12.2008–19.04.2009 in Paris and 15.10.2009–21.02.2010 in Berlin. Among the exhibits were for instance war-propaganda posters or photos from border fences. In this paper, I explore semiotic questions of collective portrayal (e.g., of immigrants, the French, German or European publics and governments in the mass media), which provides us with insights about the nature and workings of MDNs. In addition, an analysis of journalists' interactions in the exhibition reviews makes clear that the selection of exhibits on immigration, their presentation and discussion are highly political, for instance regarding the question of who is allowed to speak in the name of whom (Porsché 2018: 28–30). In the reviews, most discussion concerned the exhibition's production, in the French case about what political intentions might underly the exhibition and in Germany about an allegation of censorship in the wording of a text panel on “Fortress Europe”. Similar to the way curators select a limited number of objects to place in spotlight showcases authors that contribute to MDNs select what issues merit public attention in the mass media. To some curators' dismay, reviews of this exhibition paid relatively little attention to the topic of the exhibition compared to political discussions surrounding its production.

3. The methodology: Microsociological contextualisation analysis

I integrate discourse analytical and ethnographic approaches in a ‘contextualisation analysis’ to analyse how participants refer to and generate context (Porsché 2018: 81–145). In this paper, I highlight the use of employing multimodal conversation analysis, which attends to different modes in which social interaction sequentially unfolds, and an analysis of polyphony in enunciations, which unravels the layers of voices that single enunciations orchestrate. This allows us to analyse what voices are (not) selected, heard, and how they are positioned in the exhibition reviews. I analyse reviews not only as published texts in newspapers, but also pay attention to the way they are generated and received in (social) interactions in the museum space. This sheds light on how institutional practices of journalism and museum work and visits intersect, which selection processes they entail, and which affordances come with different stages and modalities

¹ More comprehensive analyses of some of the following data that compare different institutions in which the exhibition under study was shown can be found in Porsché (2018).

² The literal translation would be “To each their own foreigners? France-Germany from 1871 until today / Foreigners? Images of the other in Germany and France since 1871”.

of interaction. Although journalists, museum staff and visitors locate different sorts of discourse – face-to-face conversations, official speeches, or newspaper articles – on different ontological levels, methodologically I understand all sorts of reviews as a dynamic network of commentaries (Foucault 1981[1970]: 56–57) with varying length and intensity on the same plane of social interaction (Latour 1996: 371f.). That is, I focus on the drawing, or not drawing, of connections between voices, issues and situations. I am interested in what enunciations participants deem important enough to take up, transform or strategically omit in their narratives. I do not distinguish between a lower, less important interactional micro sphere of conversations in contrast to a higher, more important discursive macro sphere of public discourse in the mass media. Thereby, I do not suggest we ignore participants' distinctions and attributions and treat them as inconsequential. On the contrary, only through detailed sequential analysis of how interactions are framed, which voices are admitted and heard on which stages, and how these selection processes incrementally build on each other do we capture how exhibition reviews in the mass media may provide an important and dynamic discursive context for interpreting museum exhibitions. In order to analyse MDNs as members' phenomena, I do not choose to draw a map of mass-media discourse – as done in content analysis or lexicometry (see e.g. Scholz 2019) – beyond the local construction performed by journalists, museum staff and visitors. Instead, I selectively draw on tools from multimodal conversation analysis (e.g. of guided tours, vom Lehn 2013), enunciative discourse analysis (e.g. Angermüller 2014), and institutional ethnography (e.g. Scheffer 2007; Smith 2005). The different schools' methodological heuristics associated with terms such as indexicality, recipient design, multimodality, polyphony, and matters of concern fit the methodological toolbox of an ethnomethodological perspective on extended and mediated institutional social interaction.

4. Media dialogical networks of museum exhibition reviews

Exhibition reviews in newspapers connect some of what is shown and discussed in the exhibition space with public discourse carried out before and elsewhere. In the mass media, reviews are made available to a potentially large audience and constitute a resource for future interaction. Research on MDNs has shown that through the multiplication of publications, interaction in the mass media appears more important – it acquires “gravitas” (Kaderka/Leudar/Nekvapil 2018: 230) – and in comparison to face-to-face interaction is characterised by a particular interaction format: numerous actors who do not need to be co-present can respond to a journalist's statement and connect it to a variety of contexts. In the tradition of ethnomethodological conversation analysis, Leudar and Nekvapil (2004) conceptualise MDNs as sequential and situated accomplishments carried out mainly, if not exclusively, in the mass media. In this paper, I build on this perspective to explore how in the case of museum exhibition reviews MDNs are generated. I do not reconstruct arguments of public debates on the subject matter of the exhibition – this would span interactions far beyond a single museum exhibition – or provide a systematic picture of what functions museums can serve in a political discursive landscape (but see Porsché 2018). Instead, I focus on members' “dialogical networking” (Kaderka/Leudar/Nekvapil 2018: 243, ital. in the orig.), that is here, on the sequential linking of tangible exhibits, individual people and collective imaginaries and audiences.

My contribution to refining the analysis of dialogical networking concerns social, discursive, and material positioning. Participants of interactions generate and orient to MDNs by summarising arguments and confronting others with discursive

positions that journalists, politicians or other representatives said before and elsewhere. To analyse how members take stances, or relate others, towards each other we can draw on (narrative) positioning theories (e.g. Bamberg 1997; Harré/Moghaddam 2003). In order to include positioning towards discursive constructions I propose that we build on Pêcheux's (1982) "preconstructs"³ and Potter and Wetherell's (1987) "interpretative repertoires"⁴ (see Porsché 2018: 95, 111-117). Curators, visitors, and journalists for instance treat practices associated with, and text and talk about, "Fortress Europe" as an institutional and ideological quasi-entity, i.e. a preconstruct. In the exhibition, guides teach visiting pupils about preconstructs such as Fortress Europe. In contrast, reviewers do not treat Fortress Europe as news and assume the general public knows about this preconstruct. Instead, they employ Fortress Europe as an interactional resource – i.e. as an interpretative repertoire – to discuss what stance museums, governments or other newspapers take towards this preconstruct or political questions associated with it. Thereby, reviewers establish links that, once made, invite others to orient to. Even if others negate certain connections, they invest some activity in trying to undo the connections previously made.

In addition, I aim to advance our understanding of dialogical networking by taking into account the materialities, modalities and selection processes involved in the generation of MDNs on different interactional stages. Newspapers, radio, TV, websites, guest-books, and face-to-face interaction provide both enabling and constraining contextual frames for the shaping of MDNs. On each stage, participants have different modes at their disposal to generate connections between actors and discursive positions or preconstructs. Participants can address audiences of varying scope and kinds, and with each stage come different normative interaction orders. Moreover, some elements are more likely to become part of a MDN than others. This can be a consequence of strategic selection or because certain exhibits due to their material affordances lend themselves better for reviewing than others.

Museum exhibition reviews can be understood as part of a particular journalistic genre of cultural critique or criticism of the arts. As such they serve "to express opinions about societal and cultural trends, issues and artefacts, to perform cultural gatekeeping and taste-making, and to counterbalance or challenge established hierarchies and power structures" (Kristensen/Haastrup/Holdgaard 2018: 4). Contemporary research on journalism highlights a blurring of boundaries between hard (political) news and soft news, between news and views, and between professional and non-professional actors contributing to this discourse – not least facilitated by processes of digitalisation (Kristensen/From 2015). According to Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), many arts journalists do not imagine their audience as a political entity, yet share other journalists' normative mission to act as "the extended eyes and ears of the public, to protect the public's right to know, to serve the public interest" (Carey 1987: 5). An emerging literature on the transformation of cultural critique discusses how professional and amateur reviewers act as cultural intermediaries that influence their audience's orientations (Maguire/Matthews 2012). In the following, we will see that the exhibition's topic of public representations of immigrants in museums and allegations of institutional censorship during its production make reviews highly political.

³ 'Preconstructs' organise the relation between propositions whose connections to speakers are no longer known or relevant (e.g. indicated through non-defining relative clauses, nominalisations or the suffix -ism that refer to anonymous institutional or ideological authorities, see Angermüller 2014: 51).

⁴ 'Interpretative repertoires' have been developed as a more interactionist terminology to describe how words or catch-phrases get sedimented in the sense that participants eventually recognise and understand them in roughly similar ways. Here, research focuses on how participants employ them as resources for action (Potter/Wetherell 1987: 138).

5. Analysis: Institutional and personal positioning in the exhibition space and the mass media

5.1. Institutional positioning in written exhibition reviews

In both the French and the German settings, the museums' public relations departments paid close attention to all press coverage about their respective versions of the exhibition. They archived all newspapers to inform their curators and interested researchers like me. About the French version of the exhibition fewer than 30 articles were published, most of which merely announced it. The few more elaborate articles discussed what position the French museum, which had only recently opened, was taking towards the French government of Nicolas Sarkozy and its restrictive immigration policies. In contrast, in the German version – which I will focus on in this article – museum staff archived more than 100 articles. Most of these addressed allegations of censorship regarding the above-mentioned text panel on "Fortress Europe". To different degrees and with a different focus the two versions of the museum exhibition thus each became part of a MDN. Although we might conceive of museum exhibitions as spaces that are intriguingly different to other spaces in society – heterotopias (Foucault 1986: 26) – they are by no means free-floating monads. The museums' public relations departments' activities indicate an awareness that the exhibition's perception and impact cannot be reduced to the perimeter of the exhibition's rooms. The following examples show how exhibition reviews in newspapers potentially shape visitors' perspectives on what they will see in the exhibition. Although many readers of the newspaper reviews will never see the exhibition (and many people who attend the exhibition will only read one review, if at all), the newspaper reviews enlarge the exhibition's scope in terms of how it contributes to public discourse.

The press reviews in France present opposing conclusions about what image the exhibition paints of French, German and European identity. Whereas some see the exhibition's message to be depicting the European societies as being open to diversity, others state that both nations have little reason to be proud of the way they historically treated foreigners. A reason for the opposing conclusions can be found in the French museum's press release (*dossier de presse*), which it handed out to journalists. The press release provides negative as well as more positive statements – which journalists in some cases literally reprinted in their reviews. Several journalists also copied and pasted headings or images provided by the French museum. In the *DHM* case, journalists were not given a press release and hence no comparable circulation of the same sentences and pictures occurred.

The French journalists were given a "helping-hand" to write their reviews. This means the MDN's first link is not only based on journalists' personal perceptions of the exhibition but also mediated by proposals by the public relations department. The press release offers a way to narrow down how to interpret the exhibition. The review then narrows it down even further for its readership. In other words, in the exhibition historians and curators suggest a way to condense almost 150 years of history in the exhibition spaces; then the museum's public relations department proposes a few sentences as possible interpretations to pass on to the mass media audience.

How did the German museum design the first link between the exhibition and the mass media? Firstly, the museum director offered a press conference. In this, he compared his museum to the French one and portrayed his own more established museum as superior. He did so, for instance, by pointing out that their collection is much larger and by claiming that the *DHM* has an excellent reputation in France – that people in Berlin are, in his view,

perhaps not aware of. Journalists, in turn, asked how culturally and politically recognised a collaboration partner the young French museum is. Against this background of negotiating the (lack of) prestige, and differences in political positioning that come with the institutional cooperation the interactionist concept of ‘recipient-design’ (cf. Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974: 727) is at work in a double sense: in addition to the conventional meaning by which journalists and museum staff shape their utterance to suit the present audience, the museum director attempts to steer the museum’s reception to an “overhearing audience” (Heritage 1985: 99f.) of not-present review readers. He does so by connecting French and German MDNs and constructing an image of how French people supposedly review the German museum.

Secondly, the *DHM* invited journalists to the exhibition’s opening. Although the director tried to avoid controversies a speech at this occasion gave rise to dialogues that challenged the museum’s reputation and made its political positioning a matter of public debate.⁵ Untypical for a speech at a vernissage, Ingeborg Berggreen-Merkel, a governmental spokesperson who replaced the minister for culture Bernd Neumann, not only praised but also criticised the exhibition. According to her it put too much emphasis on discrimination in Germany and did not sufficiently recognise achievements of integration. Not only the occasion at which the spokesperson articulated this criticism but also its timing came as a surprise to many of the museum staff. Already before the opening, this ministry had complained about the text panel on “Fortress Europe” that highlighted discrimination in Germany and Europe. As a response and to the displeasure of his staff, the museum director had ordered the modification of the text to a wording that presented the current German government in a more favourable light. In an interview, one of the historians from the scientific commission told a journalist about what changes had been ordered. This sparked off a debate about censorship which focused on the replacement of the passage

“While in Europe boundaries disappear, the EU community increasingly shuts itself off from the outside. ‘Fortress Europe’ should be closed for refugees”

with

“The federal Office for Migration and Refugees since then has offered government support for the integration of immigrants in Germany”.

In the context of the discussion about censorship, journalists also quoted Berggreen-Merkel’s speech. If there had not been accusations of censorship her speech probably would not have been discussed in the media at all.

We can conceptualise the back and forth between, and pre-emption of, presentation and reception as a sequential presentation-reception-presentation cycle in which actors anticipate how their actions will contribute to the next steps. At each stage of this process, and on its different stages in terms of participatory frameworks and modalities, different actors have different rights and duties as well as different material possibilities and constraints. Compared to presentation activities by the museums and the governments’ spokespeople in the subsequent reception journalists commonly employed a stronger axiological positioning

⁵ The director for instance declined a curator’s wish to invite the Muslim intellectual Navid Kermani as a speaker. Museum staff assumed this decision was taken so that the museum does not get involved in debates that Kermani was wrapped up in with the conservative politician Roland Koch. The debate was about a newspaper essay by Kermani in which he wrote about his ambivalent feelings towards the Christian cross.

and focused on scandals surrounding the exhibition’s production process.⁶ Here, journalists usually claimed to be representing the one and only visitors’ perception evaluating the exhibition. In a museum space, visitors are surrounded by exhibits that curators had carefully arranged to fit their narrative. In the mass media, journalists arrange previous debates and positions which they respond to, revise or reject.

In the French case, debates mainly concerned the opening of the museum one year before the temporary exhibition. Despite efforts of the *Cité’s* director – who was a right-wing politician before he was appointed museum director – to keep the museum out of politics, articles depicted the museum as a “theatrical stage of politics” (*Evene.fr*, 11.12.2007). Journalists for instance noticed that President Sarkozy was absent on the day of its inauguration and understood this as a sign of his disapproval. A journalist of *Evene.fr* suggested that future temporary exhibitions might clarify the museum’s position in relation to the conservative government. At the time of the temporary exhibition project, this newspaper website presented the *Cité* as irreconcilable with the French government’s stance towards immigration (*Evene.fr*, 1.7.2009).

In the *DHM* press corpus, I also came across the question of what position the museum takes towards the government. The *DHM* was opened to the public more than 20 years ago, and discussions about the museum’s founding were no longer in the public eye (yet we find occasional reminders in the press⁷). At the time of the exhibition, most of the press reviews concentrated on the issue of censorship. The following examples show that journalists frequently quoted each other and used this incident as an opportunity to position the museum in relation to the government and the reporting newspapers. The article that fellow journalists as well as visitors and museum staff most referred to is the following one. Based on an interview with a historian from the exhibition’s academic advisory board Dieter Gosewinkel, the journalist Timm first reported on Berggreen-Merkel’s speech.

Censorship

Federal commissioner for propaganda

[...] [Ingeborg Berggreen-Merkel] now criticised the hard work of the curators before the assembled audience. [...] Dieter Gosewinkel of course does not mind public criticism of his work. But what the historian heard later that evening in a conversation, made him doubt the independence of museums in this country. [...] With that act of censorship the federal ministry had not only violated German Basic Law, but it also harmed the museum. A museum whose view is imposed by a ministry cannot be taken seriously. For state propaganda, if one wanted to have it, in this republic there exists the federal press office. (Timm, *DIE ZEIT*, 12.11.2009, Nr. 47, all translations are mine)

Following this publication, journalists, readers, visitors, and museum staff discussed the question of whether a museum exhibition is a legal and an appropriate forum to express governmental interests and to modify or censor the exhibition. In this extract, Timm states that only an independent museum can be taken seriously. He also indicates that in an exhibition he does not wish to be presented with state propaganda. He does so by employing nega-

⁶ In a rare example *Der Spiegel* (04.01.2010) commented on how an issue of its own magazine was presented in the exhibition, yet without situating this within the exhibition’s larger narrative. In contrast to what the magazine read as a negative portrayal of their publishing house, the magazine quotes other newspaper’s voices to defend and complement itself. For an analysis of how this polyphony positions the museum as routinely portraying the supposedly well researched magazine in a bad light see *Der Spiegel* (2010).

⁷ The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (30.11.2009) links the debate about censorship to a prior debate about whether the *DHM’s* purpose is to present history in a way the German government would like it to be presented, which occurred at the time of its foundation (see Stölzl 1988).

tion and irony, respectively – markers of polyphony that bring to the stage hypothetical speakers who would want the opposite (Ducrot 1998[1972]; see Angermüller 2014: 27–30, 43–53). For the hypothetical speaker who might want state propaganda he suggests the government's press office as an appropriate venue. Here, the normative order of MDNs turns into a matter of dispute for participants. Professional journalists like Timm distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate sites for political positioning. Timm would expect and accept a biased political positioning in a publication by the government's press office (similar to the way journalists considered it normal that a museum's press office offered material that presents how the museum would like to have its exhibition reported on by journalists). However, in terms of MDNs, a museum should in his view present a position that is independent from the government.

In contrast to the journalist Timm in *Die Zeit* saying that the ministry even violated the Basic Constitutional Law, the journalist Bahners in the more conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* (13.11.2009) together with other authors (e.g., Benedict in the *Grafschafter Nachrichten*, 12.11.2009) argues that the government had the right to modify the public display:

A judgement regarding the accusation of censorship presupposes clarification of the question of who the speaker actually is whose speech is said to have been censored. The curators? The advisory board? To whom is the wording of a text panel in a museum exhibition attributed? It does not bear an author's name. The speaker is the one who gave the instruction to hang up the text panel. The DHM is a foundation under public law funded by the Federal Government of Germany. [...] In American free-speech jurisprudence, the kind of speech in question here is called "government speech". Here, an institution within the state's sphere of responsibility is speaking, and in doing so mediates the state. [...] In exhibitions of a state-run history museum the appropriate place for polemical assessments of the legal situation is not the anonymous text panel, but the "critical" catalogue essay. (Bahners, *Frankfurter Allgemeines Zeitung (FAZ)*, 13.11.2009)

In Bahners' perspective, the forum of a national museum is a legitimate mouthpiece of the government – which he does not call "propaganda" but an instance of "government speech". In his understanding it would be asking too much of the government to tolerate the criticism articulated in the panel's first version. In effect, the government would make fun of itself. In Bahners' view, the museum is not supposed to engage in a dialogue with, or about, the government but merely express the state's perspective. Bahners suggests that academics', in his view polemical, criticism should not be carried out on anonymous text panels in the exhibition space but in – less prominent and less accessible – essays in the exhibition's catalogue. By means of negation and the use of quotation marks in the extract's last sentence Bahners distances himself from journalists who share Timm's view about the museum's purpose and the academics' critique, respectively. In response to Bahners – or more precisely to the *FAZ* whom he is understood to be representing – the historian Kocka in *Die Zeit* (19.11.2009) and Schulz in *Der Tagesspiegel* (18.11.2009) maintain that the museum should not be run by the state. Like Timm, these authors consider a prerogative of interpretation by the state dangerous.

The differentiation between sites and a dispute about which kinds of critical discourse they should legitimately entail firstly shows that here questions of authorship and stages of enunciation – with their different affordances (Latour 2005: 72) – intertwine since certain stages are equated with certain institutional speakers. Journalists stating that the museum either clearly is, or is not, con-

trolled by the state neglect the complexity of this question, considering that the government financially supports the museum yet cannot entirely control its boards' activities.⁸ Secondly, connected to this and due to museums' position at the crossroads of academia, politics and the mass media (see Porsché 2018: 37–60), we see that journalists and academics do not agree on which rules should be associated with which stages. They make competing claims about which of the different museum stages – the text panel or the catalogue essay – are appropriate for an exchange of academic arguments and which should entail whose strategic selection and omission for political reasons. Similarly, in a comment section of a review on *Die Zeit-Online* (12.11.2009) editors deleted some comments and asked commenters to watch their language. Following this, commenters discussed how the editors' intervention compares to the museum director's intervention. Thereby, journalists and readers use newspaper reviews as venues for metapragmatic discussions, i.e., reflections about how discourse is carried out. Here, participants discuss who has the right to speak about what and in what manner on, and at, the MDN's different stages. Thirdly, analysis shows that the different reviews situate the exhibition – yet not the entire *DHM* – as left wing and position the reviewing newspapers in relation to the exhibition, the museum, its director, and his staff (see Porsché 2018: 297–302).⁹ Reviews thereby contribute to generating their respective political audiences: even though the texts are still open to be read in different ways, their existence is consequential since they provide the possibility for, and claim the existence of, a certain readership.

An analysis of the sequentiality and polyphony of interaction in a MDN shows whose voices are connected to fabricate a contribution to a "collective public sphere". In the *Cité's* version of the exhibition, reviews were concerned with the indecisive line of the institution in relation to the contemporary government's cultural and immigration politics. Political influence in the French case that was more subtle and occurred earlier in the planning of the exhibition was only discussed among the *Cité* staff and not in the press (see Porsché 2018: 185 ff.). In the *DHM*, in contrast, the issue of censorship provided an occasion for journalists and ministry spokespeople to position themselves to the exhibition. The unclear definition of what forum the museum constitutes – in terms of whose voices it presents to the public¹⁰ – is tied up with the positioning and stance taking: The ministry and a right-wing newspaper – in different ways and for different reasons – made sure to distance themselves from the exhibition in case visitors understand the museum as a mouthpiece of the state or as an independent portrayal or voice of the public. Although the ministry had intervened in the production process it presents the museum as an independent institution. The right-wing newspaper claims that the visiting public disagrees with a supposedly inaccurate portrayal of the German and European publics. In the French and in the German case, journalists – and, as the next section will show visitors – identified internal frictions between the respective directors and their museum staff, which provided an opportunity for newspapers with different political orientations to position themselves in this debate.

⁸ In legal terms, the *DHM* is a foundation under the public law with a governmental board of trustees, which elects a president and appoints an advisory scientific board. The museum receives financial subsidy by the ministry for culture and media.

⁹ For instance, the *Junge Freiheit* (Neujahr, 27.11.2009) – a newspaper with a reputed right-wing orientation –, *Lafontaine's Linke* – a left-wing blog –, and the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* (Mönch, 30.11.2009) paint maps of different press camps, ranging from some supporting and others being sceptical towards the *DHM*. *Der Tagesspiegel* (Schulz, 18.11.2009) mockingly points out that the newspaper *Die Zeit*, which is now defending the *DHM*, used to oppose the museum in the past. The newspaper's line of argument is thereby presented as inconsistent.

¹⁰ See Porsché (2018: 321–340) on the different political functions of the museums of this case study.

5.2. Personal positioning in guestbook entries and guided tours

Museum exhibitions provide visitors with a rare infrastructure to personally “encounter” otherwise abstract notions such as the collective public sphere. In a physical space with tangible objects visitors can – thanks to the way curators arranged the exhibits – interact with a proposal of how to represent collective practices and concerns in a condensed format. In this section, I will present how in guestbooks and guided tours visitors can comment on these portrayals. In this connection we will see how visitors and guides occasionally import press reviews from the previous section to the exhibition space.

Guestbook entries have certain modalities of enunciation in common with the press, while not sharing others. In guestbooks, visitors are, in addition to commenting on the exhibition, also able to reply to comments previously made in the guestbook or in reviews in newspapers. Since comments in both the press and guestbooks can be made and read without the other participants’ co-presence, interaction can stretch out longer over time, i.e., a visitor might, for instance, comment on someone else’s comment that had been made days before. Yet, the status attributed to these two interaction formats are very different: the press is often attributed the status of speaking with a professional, collective voice, in contrast to which guestbook entries articulate individual visitors’ personal comments.

Like the press reviews, guestbook entries in the *Cité* also make visible the tensions, debates and ambiguities of the museum institution. Some visitors applaud a more balanced official portrayal of history than in other museums. Others suspect that missing lighting in some showcases etc. indicate little support by the government. Several visitors ask how a director who supports Sarkozy’s anti-immigration policies can in this museum present immigrants in a positive light. Some take up terms discussed in newspaper reviews and for instance maintain that this museum is at odds with governmental policies and is only tolerated for “good conscience”. For others, the museum is a product of Sarkozy’s nationalist ideology. In their view, it does not (sufficiently) treat problematic aspects of French colonial history. They ask when the museum will muster up the courage to approach these topics. Occasionally, comments by one visitor are followed by an approval by the next commentator with their name and occupation. Ratifications such as these are like political petitions. Such practices contribute to defining this museum space as a political one of citizens taking stance towards the museum and the government. Other ways of engaging in a written dialogue with previous comments

include indicating disalignment by crossing out comments previously made by others or relating comments by means of arrows. Guestbooks are here used to draw connections between what is (not) shown in the exhibition, French history and contemporary politics – and to engage in a dialogue about these questions.

In the *DHM*, several commenters quote the term ‘government speech’ that was discussed in the press. In the following example, the author is sympathetically taking sides with the museum, which she or he indicates by praising the exhibition (see Fig. 1). The author expresses hope that the museum can in the future defend its autonomy. This implies that it succeeded or at least tried to do so up until now. The author draws a divide between the institution, on the one hand, and the funding bodies (most notably the state) and the hasty defenders of ‘government speech’ (e.g., journalists), on the other. The author is thereby commenting not only on the museum exhibition but also on the museum’s relation towards the government and the debate taking place in newspapers. The drawing of a political map with different camps resembles interactions in newspapers, yet with a crucial difference: although anonymously written on paper and thus no longer bodily present the author’s use of a pronoun indicates a personal stance towards the debate.

“Nice exhibition; I hope that this house can defend its autonomy in the future – against the financial sponsors and the hasty defendants of a ‘government speech’”

An even stronger personal positioning is found in the following example, in which a visitor pasted the newspaper article that sparked the debate – by *Die Zeit* (Online), Tobias Timm – into the guestbook (see Fig. 2).

Whereas the author of the previous comment positioned him or herself in relation to the museum and the debate, which are spoken *about*, the author in this example personally addresses the *DHM* with a term of endearment that is conventional in writing letters: “Dear *DHM*, why?”. This also positions this writer as generally sympathetic with the museum, yet at the same time confronts the institution with the newspaper article. The utterance “why?” presupposes that the events happened as described in the article. Furthermore, two sentences in the article have been underlined which highlights them as particularly relevant: “In the version now exhibited the last two sentences are missing. [...] One cannot take seriously a museum whose perspective on things is dictated by a ministry.” Whereas the newspaper article with the title “Federal Commissioner for Propaganda” addresses – or speaks about – the minister, the highlighted sentences together with the added head-

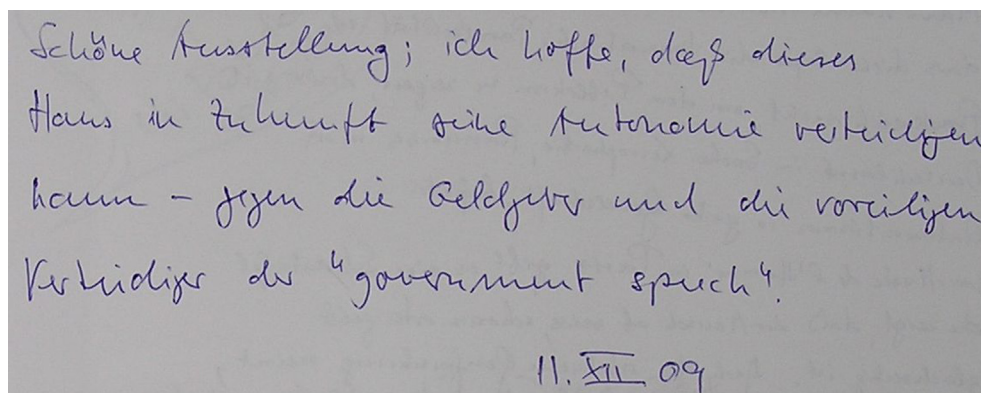


Fig. 1. *DHM* guestbook: government speech.

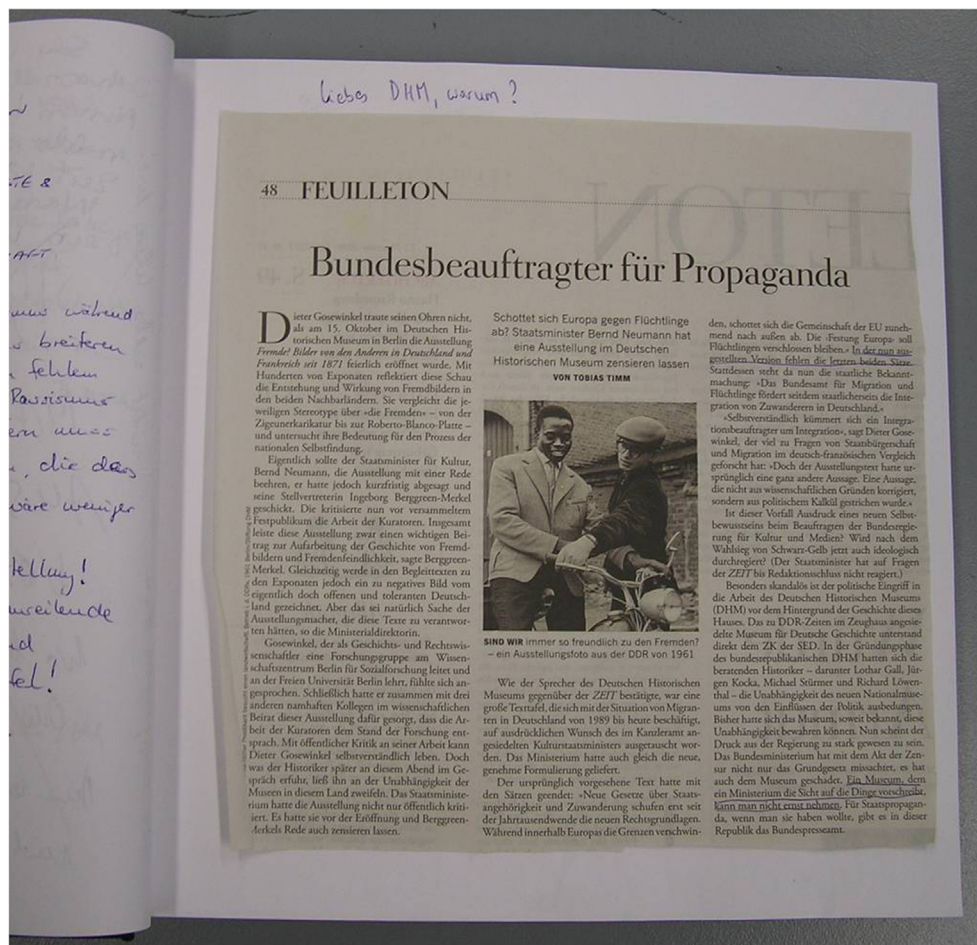


Fig. 2. DHM guestbook: federal commissioner for propaganda.

ing foreground the museum as a recipient. The museum is confronted with a criticism that it did not fight for an independent point of view. Intriguingly, the visitor did not choose to rephrase his/her message to the museum in his/her handwriting. Instead, s/he underlines the passages s/he deems important in the article. The article of the renowned intellectual newspaper *Die Zeit* thus serves as a piece of evidence – or, more accurately, an “under-enunciation” (Rabatel 2007: 90, 95) in which the commenter in the guestbook positions him/herself as a supporter of another more authoritative voice of the journalist, yet taking a more sympathetic stance towards the museum than the journalist. The article is assumed to be based on thorough research and possibly understood to be summarising the public voice – which the visitor’s personal handwriting would not be able to represent. Since the guestbook is fixed on a table inside the exhibition for everyone to read it becomes part of the exhibition – a way of legitimately inscribing (cf. Bounia 2011) one’s own view on what has been presented and on debates surrounding the exhibition. Guestbook entries here share with press reviews the format of a comment:

authors situate themselves as observers of the MDN while at the same time contributing to it. Yet, they do this on playing fields of different sizes, with different players, and different audiences.

Debates about censorship were eventually – after some visitors had read about them in the press – also mentioned in guided tours. The following example shows how a visitor broaches the topic after a tour, yet the guide does not seem surprised by this. The MDN had thus been constructed in the press and constitutes a resource, or pressure, for visitors and museum staff to relate to – a curator told me that once reported on in the press the incident appeared to be standing in the room “like an elephant”. However, far from a clearly defined object, how participants relate to and thereby re-enact and contribute to this network is a situated activity that draws the net from a specific – in the case of guided tours personal and embodied – perspective. The following epilogue is an “offstage” performance in Goffman’s (1959) sense of actors meeting people from the audience for other purposes than the team’s when performing on the front stage, i.e. here they engage in more confidential talk.

Extract 1, DHM: Offstage epilogue on allegations of censorship

1	Visitor:	(Where is it now) the eh disputed corpus delicti [of
2	Guide:	[Oh yes, yes]
3	Visitor:	censorship? And I do not know, if, I haven't got an audio guide now, it was
4		said it had not yet been ((both walk to the text panel))
5	Guide:	It is really only eh the last sentence there (.) that was changed. It is now
6		[there]
7	Visitor:	[and] that is no longer the original
8	Guide:	No!
9	Visitor:	This is what we, that here now has been replaced?
10	Guide:	That has been replaced.
11	Visitor:	Aha. [This is]
12	Guide:	[you are not filming] any longer just now, are you? ((smiling))
13	Author:	Eh yes, still just now ((laughing)) I am filming, yes, but I know that already
14		anyway, yes, yes ((laughing))
15	Visitor:	Yes, yes, that was now in the newspaper [and]
16	Guide:	[yes, yes]
17	Visitor:	And there was thus a somewhat more critical sentence, or what?= =So here it was (.) originally written
18	Guide:	[...]
19		[...]
20	Guide:	that Germany (.), well >within the European< Un(.)ion= =mhm= =though Schengen and so on the internal borders fall, >so that you <u>no</u> [longer]
21	Visitor:	[mhm]
22	Guide:	control people at the borders eh that but Germ- eh, that Europe increasingly
23	Visitor:	[seals itself off] from
24	Guide:	[seals itself off] yes
25	Visitor:	the outside. That was originally written there.
26	Guide:	Mhm
27	Visitor:	Mhm
28	Guide:	And that had to be changed and now thi:s sentences is written here. And in the
29		audio guide you hear
30		[...]
31	Guide:	And eh, yes. That was now changed and it was of course initially not supposed
32		to be given to the press, that was then launched under the table
33		[...]
34		[...]
35	Guide:	that is of course fallen asleep again a bit. That was for a short time= =Aha, ok= =has that been boiled up
36	Visitor:	Mhm
37	Guide:	Mhm
38	Visitor:	Mhm
39	Guide:	Ehm, what <u>would</u> have been interesting about which we of course spoke, eh what
40		recently happened in the ZDE, there, one could have also= =Ah= =a, with Brender, no? you <u>could</u> also have [yes] drawn a <u>connection</u>
41	Visitor:	[yes, yes]
42	Guide:	eh, and one- and based on that <u>could</u> have draw the appropriate conclusions.=
43	Visitor:	=mhm= =This apparently, >as far as I know<, did not happen.
44	Guide:	
45		
46		

In lines 5–10 the guide and the visitor collaboratively save face by avoiding the need for the guide to use the word “censorship”. Instead, she only states what is written in the current version of the text panel and confirms that it had been replaced (in its written form, but not in the audio guide). This tiptoeing is followed by the guide asking whether I stopped filming to which I respond that I already know what is being said. The visitor elaborates that the issue had been already raised in the press thus framing what is being said as public and no longer secret knowledge.

At the end of the guide’s account the teacher joins in finishing the guide’s sentence (line 26). By doing so, the teacher indicates that she knows what the guide is referring to, namely a discourse about “Fortress Europe”. Instead of focusing on the content of this ‘preconstruct’, the interaction revolves around the question who takes what stance towards this critique of European policy and how much attention it receives. In the utterance “and now thi:s sentences is written here” (29) the guide uses an ironic tone of voice as a contextualisation cue (Gumperz 1982: 131) which here serves the purposes of Goffman’s (1974: 43) ‘keying’. This is an ingenious way of, on the one hand, innocently stating that “now this sentence is written here” while at the same time giving a dismissive hint. The guide illustrates that the incident was made into a big deal (“has that been boiled up” 37) and that the discussion

calmed down again (“fallen asleep again”, 35) by raising and lowering her arm. This contextualisation thus serves to endow an incident or a discussion with different aggregate states or degrees of activity that describe them as “macro” discourses in the press or “micro” interactions in a semi-private conversation between three people in the museum.

The guide points out that she regrets that a possible, even evident (“of course”, 39), connection to another scandal of informational cultural politics, which had occurred around the same time in connection with an allegation of political influence, had not been made: At the time of the exhibition, a work contract of Nikolaus Brender’s, the then chief editor of the ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, i.e. the second national TV channel) was not extended by politicians in an administrative board. Brender and others believe this happened because Brender threatened to make phone calls public in which politicians called the TV channel to politically influence the broadcast. By pointing out that a connection to this incident had not been made (in the wider public, the press) she was of course performing this connection herself. Her point, however, was that this connection should not only have been made by the staff but elsewhere in order for it to become acknowledged and politically relevant (see the ‘self-repair’ from an impersonal pronoun 44: “one-”[’s] to a general or factual utterance “the appropri-

ate conclusions”).¹¹ Which interaction counts as being made in the collective public sphere thus depends on where exactly it is being voiced, by whom, in the presence of which (filming or note taking) audience, with which tone of voice, and at what point in the public interaction sequence. From one instance to the next the presentation of an issue can oscillate between constituting a mere replacement, on the one hand, and a ridiculous or scandalous (and thus not approved of) instance of censorship, on the other.

5.3. Selection on the way from personal to mass media communication

Representing the reverse direction of the last section, in the following example, interactions in the exhibition space influenced the press. This section also closes the circle by returning to the first section’s question of how MDNs are generated before journalists begin responding to each other.

In the following example, a journalist took up a *DHM* guide’s hint that despite the ministry’s interference the recording of the audio guide had been left untouched. This article got published in two newspapers that are run by the same publishing house. One of the newspapers decided to add certain words which I have highlighted.

The spoken word counts. Bone of contention migration. How the office of Culture minister Neumann puts pressure on the German Historical Museum. [Did Culture minister Bernd Neumann censor an exhibition at the German Historical Museum?]

[...] In the presence of the *Tagesspiegel*, museum staff confirm that Neumann’s apparatus exerted [massive] pressure, even though the official story is a different one. One feels patronised and the action is understood as an affront, staff say. The new formulation on the panel in any case is not written by the organisers of the exhibition. Revealing is also the text that you get to hear in the audio guide. Because this one has presumably not been revised. [...] Has this articulation been overlooked by the *DHM*-boss Ottomeyer? Is this an act of subversive resistance? A historian who gives a tour through the exhibition in any case encourages the audience softly [with a wink] to thoroughly compare the printed text to the spoken text. (Lichterbeck/Müller, *Tagesspiegel*, 12.11.2009 / *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 12.11.2009)

A shift of terms in the heading turns what in one version is a question of whether there was any censorship into a statement that the exhibition had been censored (“Did ... censor?” vs. “How ... pressures.”). Further, an ironic contextualisation, which is indicated by the guide supposedly encouraging visitors to compare the modified text panel with the unmodified audio guide “with a wink” and which found its way only into one of the newspaper versions, together with the emphasising “massive” before the word “pressure” contributes to presenting the modification as certainly not legitimate, i.e., as an act of censorship. This way, even in the newspaper version that in its title leaves the question open, the cues frame this as a rhetorical question.

The readership does not know whether the guide in fact spoke with an ironic undertone since it does not have access to the contextualisation cues that the journalist claims the guide made. In fact, in analyses of interviews where I was able to compare the face-to-face interaction in the museum space to the broadcasts on radio and TV, I found revealing selection and modification processes (without, however, following the process of journalistic production): in the radio case several lines of a project manager’s talk were cut out mid-sentence without this being noticeable in the

audio broadcast. Analysis of how the interview was conducted further shows how the interviewer only selected certain exhibits to speak about and from these only selected certain ones for his recording (Porsché 2018: 303-307). In the case of a TV interview, mid-sentence cuts would have been difficult to disguise. Yet, analysis here shows that encouraging nods by the interviewer geared the interview. It seems like the interviewer anticipated which answers she could use well in her broadcast considering that in the end she selected the ones where she nodded for the broadcast (Porsché 2018: 307-310).

Despite important selection occurring in these professionally anticipated translation processes, the last newspaper example presented shows that at least some (versions) of social interactions in guided tours and interviews found their way into the press. In contrast to guides in the museum dealing with this issue as a topic to be treated off stage, here the question of censorship becomes centre stage. Unlike museum staff, who told me that they did not want to appear disloyal to their superiors, the institutional task of these journalists – and thus their way of contributing to the shaping of MDNs – includes the highlighting of controversies.

Following the last extract, the authors conclude by referring to a French newspaper – *Le Monde* –, which is found as an exhibit in the museum:

The exhibits themselves, by the way, paint a very critical picture of German integration politics. You find caricatures of Fortress Europe next to photos from border fences in the Spanish exclaves Ceuta and Melilla. An essay from the newspaper „Le Monde“ is also shown, which describes how the EU seals itself off from refugees. (Lichterbeck/Müller, *Potsdamer Neueste Nachrichten*, 12.11.2009)

This is a rare instance in which the journalists explicitly refer to the subject of the exhibition. They also refer to another newspaper that wrote about this topic. They thus reproduce, and contribute to, a wider MDN that transcends the exhibition space in a way that fits art critics’ preferred *modus operandi* of referring to other newspapers. In the *Tagesspiegel*-version the journalists spell out why they consider the rewording of a text panel in the production of the exhibition to reveal a general problem worth being pointed out to the public: “[T]he interference might appear like a petty little matter. Yet it reveals that the state apparently considers it its domiciliary right to paternalize an independent institution.”

6. Conclusion

In this article, I asked how MDNs are generated in the case of museum exhibition reviews. I presented a circular journey of how a temporary exhibition on public representations of immigrants was reviewed in newspapers; how, in turn, these reviews were made relevant in the exhibition space; and finally, how these interactions were again reported on in newspapers.

I argued that exhibitions should not be reduced to interactions in the museums’ buildings, nor should MDNs be reduced to newspapers. Despite participants treating MDNs and social interactions as separate spheres they appear to be intertwined: Museum staff and journalists shaped MDNs already in dialogues at press conferences in the museum and public relations departments present a polyphony of possible readings of the exhibition in their press releases. And journalists engage in embodied social interaction when attending guided tours which they subsequently report on in newspaper articles.

MDNs are professionally designed yet contingent products of multimodal interaction with their lay audiences – including the question of whether, and if how, to distinguish between and relate different MDNs. Previous research on MDNs has shown that mass

¹¹ See Porsché (2018: 259-267, 253-259) for a more comprehensive analysis of this excerpt and for another example of how this issue was talked about in guided tours.

media communication is not only a matter of presenting information to a mass of people, but a particular interaction format. This article showed that MDNs are – despite journalists' love of cross referencing and positioning newspapers – generated through, and tied to, interaction beyond the mass media – in this case the museum space. Here, people interact face-to-face with other people and exhibits with all the material affordances, discursive pre-constructs or interpretative repertoires, social expectations and tasks at hand that come with guided tours. So, MDNs constitute a case and context specific mix of professional design, laypeople's constructs, and practices of networking.

In the exhibition about how the French and German publics represent and treat immigrants guides and visitors refer to debates in the mass media and elevate the debates to the status of an imagined collective public sphere. When placing something in a museum and even more when introducing it to mass media interaction participants are “upscaling” an issue to a matter that is politically relevant to a (e.g. national) collective. In the case of this exhibition, politicians, museum directors and staff, and journalists and visitors engaged in a struggle about what should be placed in the museum. The fight continued about how to select, frame, and read exhibits once they were placed in the museum. Journalists in newspapers drew connections and carried out dialogues that served their specific audiences. What qualified for mass media coverage – and thus collective remembrance and generation of audiences – was thus the result of a multi-layered process of selection, interpretation and contextualisation.

In order to analyse the generation of MDNs, I suggest methodologically scrutinising details of contextualisation in interaction (see Porsché 2016). This reveals that conventions and modalities allow for certain MDN-construction practices, while making others more difficult. Selection of what is made relevant in/for a MDN, of whether the positioning is of institutions or people, and how this is done are thus matters of political calculation enmeshed with practical, context-specific questions of interaction. Differences between reviews of the French and German versions of the travelling exhibition indicate that a fabrication of MDNs with the same exhibits can take on different forms. Although public relations departments, museum directors, ministries or interviewing journalists attempt to shape this process, no institutional actor is holding all the threads in its hands.

My analysis showed that it is worth analysing how different interaction orders intersect in the generation of MDNs. To analyse this, we need to go beyond reconstructing positions in mass media debates. Instead, I suggest we analyse the positioning and selecting involved in laypeople and professionals referring and contributing to (the definition of) different “collective public spheres”. This sheds light on how individuals debate representations of collectives and institutional infrastructures that portray them, and how interaction generates political audiences that for instance in the case of public representations of immigrants will treat these people very differently.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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