

Research Paper

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B(U)ILD-ing an image of Africa

A discourse analysis of representations of Africa in the newspaper *BILD* in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic

Abstract: This paper is a discourse-analytical study about the portrayal of Africa in German newspaper *BILD* in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim will be to uncover underlying racist, colonial, and thus domination-asserting logics inherent in such coverage. In this context, journalism is considered a discursive instrument of power that can either stabilize or challenge existing power structures. My empirical analysis will also show opportunities for subversive effects and the social responsibility of journalism.

The current COVID-19 pandemic not only entails a host of threats and challenges, but also holds new possibilities and opportunities.

In hegemonic discourse, Africa is portrayed as an isolated place »of failure and poverty« (Ferguson 2006: 2), devoid of structure, agency, and ethics. In this current pandemic, this image can be reinforced by mobilizing the racist and colonial discourse with an exclusive focus on African dependence on aid and helplessness in dealing with the current situation. This hegemonic discourse can be dismantled by shifting the focus on the global spread of the disease and thus Africa's central role in fighting the virus. In this study, journalistic reporting is considered a discursive instrument of power that can have both a stabilizing and a subversive effect and therefore bears social responsibility.

The present study is an analysis of the 17 free-access *BILD* articles published by 3 July 2020, as returned by a search for the terms »Africa« and »Corona« in the *BILD* homepage search box. I derived the following research questions based on Michel Foucault, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe:

- Which characteristics and events does *BILD*'s discourse associate with Africa?

- What are the logics and rationalities behind these representations?
- Where do *BILD*'s representations fall in the conflict area between hegemony and antagonism, domination, and subversion?

Power and discourse

In order to comprehend and analyze the potency and functioning of *BILD*'s representations, I will combine postcolonial perspectives with a Foucaultian notion of power and discourse. This combination is quite common in postcolonial studies (cf. Bayart 1989; Hall 1992; Linnemann/Reuber 2015), but I will expand it to include Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony. These theoretical tools will help us understand both the mechanisms of African representations inherent in the discourse and the social effects of the *BILD* articles on processes of subjectivation and the accompanying (de)construction of racist and colonial logics and states of domination. First, I will explain the core concepts of Foucault's notion of power (state of domination, technology of government, strategic relations, subjectification, dispositive, discourse) and relate them to each other as well as to Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony. In the following section, I will fill this abstract-theoretical framework with postcolonial perspectives in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, operationalize it, and derive the research question.

Michel Foucault (1985: 27) distinguishes between three levels of power: strategic relations, technologies of government, and states of domination. Strategic relations refer to all forms of power that are »pervasive« and generated by any interaction or communication between individuals (Foucault 1983: 94). They are dynamic and, in principle, changeable. In contrast, states of domination are situations in which strategic relations have manifested themselves and stabilized (Foucault 1985: 26). The level of technologies of government lies in-between the two previous levels. As an »essential technical instrument« (Foucault 2004: 162), it includes the dispositives, which are made up of »discourses, institutions, architectural facilities, regulative decisions, laws [...]« (Foucault 1978: 119). The dispositives structure the various strategic relations, which in turn generate states of domination. An important means of structuring strategic relations consists in subjectification via dispositives. Identities and associated boundaries and hierarchizations are constructed by way of discourse (Butler 1991: 17; Gramsci 1971: 366; Wullweber 2012: 34), influencing people's perceptions of their relationships with their environment and other individuals, and potentially producing racist and colonial notions in the process:

»[T]he project progressively put into place a series of mechanisms through which ordinary French people were brought to constitute themselves,

sometimes without realizing it, as racist subjects, as much through the way they looked at the world as through their gestures, behaviors, and language.¹¹« (Mbembe 2017: 123)

Referencing Foucault, Stuart Hall (1992: 203) points out the extent to which discourses are associated with power and knowledge, and thus have a subjectivizing effect. According to him, journalistic reporting is always a form of exercising power, as it associates different elements, characteristics, and events in an open system, thus forming its own logics and rationalities (ibid: 202). As subjects internalize these logics and rationalities, they adopt a specific perspective on the world. Accordingly, Foucault also refers to states of domination as »regimes of truth« (quoted after Hall 1992: 205), since a hegemonic discourse produces a certain knowledge and certain truths associated with it. Building on this, Achille Mbembe writes (2017: 106) that language is »the very system of life«. Accordingly, the language constituted by hegemonic discursive logics is not only a form or an image of reality, but constitutes reality itself. This understanding highlights the relevance of my analysis of the *BILD* articles.

At this point, I will complement the Foucaultian notion of power with the hegemony theory by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to reveal the political negotiation and inner dynamics of discourses. Building on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971), Laclau and Mouffe study the process of how a discourse becomes hegemonic. In this context, a discourse consists of a series of representations, each of which puts elements from the environment in relation to one another to form a chain of equivalence that corresponds with a certain interpretation and perspective of the world (Laclau/Mouffe 1985: 105f.; Wullweber 2012: 39). The so-called realm of the political negotiates how the elements relate to each other and thus how the world is perceived, interpreted, and understood. Different discourses compete with each other until a discourse asserts itself, »sediments«, and embeds itself in the social realm: The negotiation is completed, the discourse becomes hegemonic, and the knowledge about the world that was generated by this discourse is no longer challenged (cf. Laclau 1990: 34). However, antagonistic representations that are excluded and marginalized can still challenge the hegemonic discourse, break the chain of equivalence, and return the discourse to the realm of the political (cf. Wullweber 2012: 37). Such a political reactivation of a hegemonic discourse can be triggered, for example, by unpredictable events, subversive practices, or alliances of antagonistic actors. The COVID-19 pandemic is such an unforeseen event that gives rise to both new practices and alliances. It thus has the potential to disrupt the existing racist and colonial state of domination and its associated »regime of truth«.

1 <https://criticaltheory.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/achille-mbembe-critique-of-black-reason.pdf>

Postcolonial perspectives in the context of COVID-19

Before we address the subversive potential of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must first describe the existing state of domination. For this purpose, we will rely on the analyses of postcolonial theorists Jean-François Bayart, Achille Mbembe, James Ferguson, and Stuart Hall. Lastly, I argue that the *BILD* articles should be analyzed as a dispositive that provides a discursive response to a specific problem in order to stabilize the existing state of domination.

According to Achille Mbembe (2017: 110f.), the existing racist and colonial state of domination originates in the rise of European Modernity in the late 18th century. He emphasizes that the »the coming of modernity coincided with the appearance of the principle of race and the latter's slow transformation into the privileged matrix for techniques of domination, yesterday as today«. [Blackness] and Africa thus become »fated to be not common nouns, or even proper nouns, but rather mere indicators of an absence of achievement.« (Ibid: 32). Furthermore, Africa is Modernity's name for the »figure of the human as an emptiness of being, walled within absolute precariousness [... and] societies judged impotent« (ibid: 100) and thus corresponds to the »simulacrum of an obscure and blind power, walled in a time that seems pre-ethical, and in a sense prepolitical« (ibid.: 101). Thus Mbembe (see also 2016: 91) refers to Hegel (as does Bayart 1989: 3), who denies the existence of African history and its embeddedness in a global system. This state of domination, which is produced, reproduced, and manifested not only by way of discourse, but also, among other things, with physical and economic punitive violence, creates an isolated Africa devoid of history, dynamics, and structures, populated by inhabitants without ethics, strategy, and agency. Africa becomes a »place of absence« (Ferguson 2006: 2).

My hypothesis is that the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to challenge the existing racist and colonial state of domination and break the hegemonic chain of equivalence, for three reasons:

Firstly, during this pandemic, it is becoming apparent that Africa is not isolated, but central and crucial to »[the] destiny of our planet« (Mbembe 2016: 96). Because as long as the virus is still active in any one place in the world, the entire global population is potentially at risk. The centrality of Africa in the context of COVID-19 is particularly evident in the viral variant B.1.351, which was first discovered in South Africa and, due to its greater transmissibility, now also impacts the incidence of infection in Germany (cf. Robert Koch Institut 2021). Furthermore, the immense financial and technological disparity between Africa and the Global North, especially in the distribution of vaccines, is becoming apparent in the fight against the pandemic: According to a study by the British think tank The Economist Intelligence Unit (2021), most African countries will not be able to access vaccines at a scale to sufficiently meet their needs until 2023. Secondly, it

further accentuates the power asymmetry produced by the state of domination. Thirdly, the same applies to the strategies and innovative action capacities of African actors (cf. Bayart 1989: 37), who were better able to control case numbers than many had previously assumed for a long time during the period of our study, despite more difficult conditions (Schlichte/Reinhardt 2020).

All three points highlight Africa's place in a globalized world with all its political, economic, and social interconnections and inequalities (cf. Ferguson 2006: 5). The COVID-19 pandemic helps us see elements in new connections and develop a subversive antagonistic discourse that breaks the sedimented hegemonic chain of equivalence of the racist and colonial state of domination, returning it to the field of the political, and this way, transforming the power-charged strategic relations between individuals.

Michel Foucault defines dispositives as technologies of government that respond to specific problems (Foucault 1980: 195) to safeguard the state of domination by structuring strategic relationships. The problem relevant to this study is the above-described danger of breaking the hegemonic chain of equivalence and creating new discursive associations between elements. Accordingly, the discursive technologies of government must stabilize and reproduce the old connections in order to secure and manifest the hegemonic racist and colonial discourse (cf. Bayart 1989: 11). I will analyze the *BILD* articles about Africa in the context of COVID-19 from this perspective.

B(U)ILD-ing an image of Africa

To answer these questions, I analyzed all freely accessible online *BILD* articles on the topic of Africa and COVID-19, from the first instance of coverage on 16 February 2020 to 3 July 2020.

BILD is known for its very short articles and often incomplete chains of argumentation. This affects the methodology and results of my analysis in several ways: Since the articles offer no explicit assumptions about and classifications of Africa, we must derive them by condensing topic selection, wording of headlines, photographs, and implicit assumptions and assessments. While this makes the methodological evaluation more work-intensive, it yields results that go beyond the explicit text, revealing underlying logics and rationalities, comparable to Clifford Geertz's »ethnographic algorithm« (1973: 315) as well as the corresponding »regime of truth«.

Methodically, I will conduct my analysis with a summarizing content analysis according to Philipp Mayring (1991), first paraphrasing the articles, then, in a second step, generalizing them based on theory, and finally, assigning them to categories. Taking an inductive approach, I derived seven categories from the

articles: Africa without structures, Africa without agency, Africa without ethics, Africa as an apocalyptic place (cf. Mbembe 2016: 93), Africa as a danger to Germany, the helping West as a counterpart to vulnerable, suffering Africa (cf. Linneemann/Reuber 2015), and cracks in this image. Regarding the theoretical make-up, I had decided that my categories must relate to portrayals of Africa so they can be interpreted and embedded in the context of the discursive techniques that were used. This procedure reveals interactions and relationships between the individual techniques (e.g., between headline and title picture), allowing me to characterize the manner of representation and the associations created between the elements. It would not be expedient to align the categories with the individual techniques, since the discursive dispositive of *BILD* only unfolds its full effect in the combination of techniques.

B(U)ILD-ing a hegemonic image

I classified the dominant patterns in *BILD*'s representation of Africa into six categories. The first four (Africa without structures, Africa without agency, Africa without ethics, and Africa as an apocalyptic place) refer explicitly to Africa, while the last two (danger to Germany and the helping West) address Western perceptions of and reactions to Africa. Finally, I will draw an interim conclusion and show that *BILD*'s dominant representations emanate from racist and colonial logics, thus reproducing and reinforcing the hegemonic discourse.

Africa without structures

This first category included all representations that portray Africa as a place without (sufficient) structures. According to Bayart (1989, 14, 27), the Western construct of a structureless Africa and a disregard of its particular internal mechanisms amounts to a colonial and racist perception. On the one hand, the benchmark is Eurocentric notions of what constitutes »sufficient« structure. On the other hand, Europeans fail to recognize structures that are unfamiliar to them. This becomes clear in *BILD*'s representations of the health system, protective equipment, and protective measures against COVID-19 in African states: It argues that health systems are too weak, protective equipment is unavailable, and protective measures cannot be implemented in »Africa's townships and slums« (BILD 2020_e).

For weeks, the WHO has been working to prepare countries with weak health systems in Africa and elsewhere for a possible COVID 19 outbreak. (BILD 2020_a)

And this is especially true when it spreads to areas with weaker health systems. (BILD 2020_a)

UNECA is calling for a rescue package of at least \$100 billion for the 54 African countries, as well as medical equipment. (BILD 2020_f)

But according to *BILD*, deficient structures affect not only health care, but also education. In rural areas, in particular, not enough students are graduating from school (BILD 2020_p). Also, *BILD* states, COVID-19-related school closures and suspended school lunch programs cause nutritional problems (BILD 2020_l). The photo used in the article (BILD 2020_p) shows students raising their hands in a classroom, with the camera focus on a single white hand in the foreground and darker-skinned hands blurry in the background. This creates a distinction between the well-educated West and uneducated Africa in keeping with Stuart Halls's (1992) »The West and the Rest«.

BILD represents Africa as a place without rule of law. Several articles devote detailed coverage to abuse of power, police violence, and arbitrariness. Tourists travelling Africa are warned to expect police harassment. Minorities, *BILD* writes, are violently mistreated by the police and the even the mayor – apparently without the perpetrators being accountable or answerable to anyone.

Every few miles, I came across police or military road posts. Each time I had to stop and answer questions. It took me a few days to cover 600 kilometers. (BILD 2020_n)

Disturbing scenes: Police drive people off the streets with batons. (BILD 2020_j)

Shocking: During the arrest, district mayor Haji Abdu Kiyimba picked up a baton and personally beat the residents of the emergency shelter. The police supported the brutality. (BILD 2020_d)

Africa without agency

A second dominant *BILD* representation is that Africa has no strategy to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, that its actions are neither proactive nor innovative, and that it thus lacks agency. Postcolonial writers Achille Mbembe (2016) and Jean-François Bayart (1989) debunked this representation of Africa as inaccurate and as a colonial and racist strategy »to confiscate social change and modernity« (Bayart 1989: 11). Yet *BILD* continues to characterize Africa in this way: Libyans fighting in the civil war are letting themselves be »used as pawns« (*BILD*

2020_h), those affected by COVID-19 rely on aid from the West (BILD 2020_f), and the only innovative strategy for dealing with the pandemic in Africa that was covered by *BILD* stems from two Western entrepreneurs (BILD 2020_i). Furthermore, *BILD* argues, the closure of shops is difficult to implement, as many Africans live »from hand to mouth« (BILD 2020_f) and accordingly have not developed any long-term strategies and plans.

Africa without ethics

A third dominant line of *BILD* representation falls under the category »Africa without ethics«. I refer to Mbembe (2017: 100f.), who deconstructs European modernity's use of the term Africa as synonymous with the »figure of the human as an emptiness of being« and as a »simulacrum of an obscure and blind power«. The West thus represents Africa as a place without individual self-fulfillment, rationality, and enlightenment, and is imagined as »pre-ethical«. Ethics, in the classical sense, is associated with the search for a »good life«. Accordingly, in the colonial and racist perception that can also be found in the *BILD* articles I analyzed, Africa offers no prospect of such a good life. The articles therefore pick up on themes such as superstition and apparent irrationality, which is especially evident in the second quote in the choice of the preposition »despite«.

Fear of COVID among the population is further stoked by untruths: Evangelical fundamentalists claim that homosexual practices are the cause of the pandemic in Africa. 23 people have been arrested and charged with bringing »the curse of the virus« over their village. (BILD 2020_d)

The civil war in North Africa has re-intensified – despite the Corona virus and the Berlin Declaration, signed in January, that calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities. (BILD 2020_h)

BILD quotes the Ugandan government spokesman, portraying his reference to colonial laws as unacceptable and irrational by adding »What he means by that is«.

»Existing provisions in criminal law are sufficient,« Opondo affirmed. What he means by that is that according to a law dating back to British colonial times, same-sex sexual acts are illegal in Uganda and punishable by up to 14 years in prison. (BILD 2020_d)

In addition, the article »I finally want to live the way I am« (BILD 2020_o) addresses homophobia and the violent repression of homosexual lifestyles in Africa, suggesting that free self-fulfillment is impossible. This is done by con-

trasting the situation in Africa with the supposedly open, tolerant, and diverse West, as evidenced by the following quote: »Okello’s only shot at a truly better life would be moving to a Western country.«

Africa as an apocalyptic place

Under the fourth category, »Africa as an apocalyptic place«, I have grouped *BILD*’s representations that imply an »apocalyptic view« of Africa in the context of the pandemic (Mbembe 2016: 93). As Mbembe (2016), Hall (1992), and Ferguson (2006) point out, such representations serve to construct a negative contrast to the West. According to the notion that »it is never just Africa, but always the crisis in Africa, the problems of Africa, the failure of Africa« (Ferguson 2006: 2), the West, by comparison, is never in crisis, has no problems, and does not fail. Since the discursive construction of a strong West can be considered particularly important during a pandemic due to its stabilizing effect, it is not surprising that many *BILD* representations paint the picture of an apocalyptic Africa. This is already evident in the headlines that make readers anticipate a dramatic and deadly COVID nightmare in Africa:

How dramatic would an outbreak in Africa be? (BILD 2020_a)

Will Africa be the new COVID epicenter? (BILD 2020_f)

COVID plane crashes – 6 dead (BILD 2020_k)

When will Sasha’s desert nightmare end? (BILD 2020_n)

Nine of the sixteen articles do in fact address theft, war, looting, terrorism, and flight (BILD 2020_b, 2020_d, 2020_g, 2020_h, 2020_j, 2020_k, 2020_m, 2020_n, 2020_q), either explicitly, as in the first two of the following quotes, or implicitly, as in the last quote, where a likely theft is suggested by referencing the value of the cars.

Eyewitness accounts suggest: The plane, chartered by an aid organization, was deliberately shot down! (BILD 2020_k)

Millions displaced in Syria, bombing and starvation in Yemen, and bloody proxy battles in Libya – the three worst wars of our times. (BILD 2020_h)

Their five vehicles [...] are worth a total of one million euros. Wöhler: »We can’t just leave them in the Sahara and fly to Germany.« (BILD 2020_g)

The apocalyptic portrayal of Africa is complemented by references to famines and food shortages (BILD 2020_f, 2020_l) and by the choice of images: All but one of the photographs that feature People of Color in the foreground depict menacing and violent scenes (BILD 2020_d, 2020_j, 2020_k). The use of words such as »stranded« (BILD 2020_g) and »nightmare« (BILD 2020_n) also illustrates Africa's supposed remoteness from the West, making it appear as a place far removed from Western civilization and reality.

Danger to Germany

It seems that keeping this distance is necessary for the safety of Germany and its citizens: Under the fifth category, I have gathered representations that imply dangers to Germans emanating from this apocalyptic Africa without structures, agency, and ethics. In addition to the mysterious disappearance of a Germany-bound shipment of protective masks in Kenya (BILD 2020b), three of the seventeen articles describe seemingly unpredictable dangers for German tourists in Africa during the pandemic (BILD 2020g, 2020m, 2020n).

Lockdown! Rudimental vacation camp locked down by police! Cabin fever!
(BILD 2020_n)

Without this document, his trip would have been a punishable offense. Sascha K. even witnessed an arrest because of this: »I don't know what became of that tourist.« (BILD 2020_n)

»I would have been left homeless and penniless in Cairo if they had cancelled my return flight again.« A nightmare of being left with no money in a foreign country. (BILD 2020_m)

The airline employees involved in the repatriation of tourists were hailed as »flying heroes« (BILD 2020_c) as if they had to rescue Germans from Africa. The corresponding headlines also dramatize the story by personalizing and sensationalizing the situation:

Daddy, come home! (BILD 2020_m)

When will Sasha's desert nightmare end? (BILD 2020_n)

The helping West

Despite this danger emanating from Africa, *BILD* articles portray the West as helpful, magnanimous, and forgiving. The West is presented as the »helpful us« in contrast to the vulnerable and »suffering them« (Linnemann/Reuber 2015). This juxtaposition reproduces colonial dependencies and racist hierarchies and embeds them firmly in the hegemonic discourse. *BILD* reports on aid, consisting of funding and technology (*BILD* 2020_a, 2020_f, 2020_l), with a tendency to overstate assistance from Germany. This overemphasis becomes particularly clear in the following quote, in which the work of an African institution is reduced to its reliance on the innovative capabilities of a German company:

The pan-African health authority wants to make available one million tests to support African countries in the fight against the pandemic. These had been ordered from a company in Germany and are to be allocated to the countries in the coming days [...]. (*BILD* 2020_f)

The racist dichotomy created by *BILD*'s narrative of »sufferers« and »helpers« is particularly evident in the photo used in this same article: A Person of Color is standing there, arms hanging at his side, passively waiting while a white hand actively points an infrared thermometer at him.

Interim summary

Before I move on to the next section to discuss cracks in these representations and the resulting subversive potential, I would like to draw a brief interim conclusion. So far, my analysis has shown that *BILD*'s representations create discursive associations of Africa with the attributes of suffering, hopelessness, violence, danger, and unpredictability. At the same time, any associations of Africa with structure, strategy, agency, reason, and ethics are cut from the discourse. Germany and the West, on the other hand, are associated with helpfulness, kindness, innovation, and strength. This way, Africa is construed as an inversed mirror image of the West, which reveals the underlying colonial and racist logics and rationalities. Accordingly, *BILD*'s dominant representations fit seamlessly into the hegemonic chain of equivalence, reproducing the existing state of domination. In doing so, they act as a racially subjectivizing technology of government that combats potentially subversive discursive associations and seeks to safeguard the colonial state of domination.

Cracks in *BILD*'s image

Nevertheless, among the dominant hegemonic representations in the *BILD* articles I analyzed, I also found a few representations with subversive potential. They are summarized in the category »cracks in the image« and might – at least theoretically – form the basis for a possible antagonistic discourse. While this is not the case in the articles analyzed, they nevertheless show that the colonial and racist state of domination can, in principle, be challenged and changed through journalistic reporting.

Above, I argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to generate subversive representations that might challenge the existing state of domination, for at least three reasons: First, the pandemic makes it clear that Africa is not isolated or peripheral, but a central part of a globalized world. This is also evident in a statement by Melinda Gates, quoted by *BILD* as follows:

»COVID in one place in the world means COVID all over the world,« Gates said. (*BILD* 2020_e)

Second, the pandemic has the potential to highlight the power imbalance between the West and Africa produced by colonial and racist domination. This is articulated in the headline »COVID threatens to exacerbate inequalities« (*BILD* 2020p) and in the following text excerpt:

COVID-19 hits the most vulnerable disproportionately harder, she says. »We need to help them first and foremost.« Therefore, the money will be used primarily in Africa and South Asia. (*BILD* 2020_e)

Thirdly, COVID-19 reveals or heightens the visibility of strategies and innovative capacities of African actors (Bayart 1989: 37), who were able to control case numbers relatively well during the study period despite more difficult conditions (Schlicht/Reinhardt 2020). There are no representations about this aspect to be found in the *BILD* articles I analyzed. They merely reference the situation in »Africa's townships and slums«, which *BILD* claims make »measures such as social distancing« (*BILD* 2020_e) impossible. Nevertheless, innovative strategies can be developed even under these conditions: In Nairobi, for example, graffiti is used to warn of the dangers of the virus and educate about safety measures to halt its spread (Holzwarth 2020).

These three representations, which are partly also found in the *BILD* articles, all have the potential of emphasizing Africa's »place in the world« with its political, economic, and social interconnections and inequalities in a globalized world (Ferguson 2006: 5). This can give rise to an antagonistic discourse to counteract

hegemonic racist subjectivizations, change the power-charged strategic relations between individuals, and thus break the colonial state of domination.

Conclusion

According to the theoretical framework I developed, journalism is considered a powerful discursive instrument, which allows us to examine it from a postcolonial perspective. Furthermore, the approach is open to a variety of perspectives, so it also lends itself to other fields such as gender or disability studies.

A summary of the results of this analysis yields a mixed picture that features both hegemonic racist and colonial representations and antagonistic subversive representations, with the former clearly predominating. *BILD*'s dominant representations are based on racist and colonial logics, reproducing the existing state of domination. However, I also detected a few subversive approaches, although they are barely elaborated any further. Thus, in the conflict area between hegemony and antagonism, *BILD* falls squarely on the hegemonic side, supporting domination and making subversion more difficult.

Nevertheless, there is a certain heterogeneity and incoherence to *BILD*'s reporting, which could be due to different authors who are subjectivized and embedded in strategic power relations in different ways. The resulting logics and rationalities constitute their perception of Africa in the context of COVID-19 and thus also their reporting, which in turn has a subjectivizing effect on the readership, reproducing certain logics and rationalities. It is important to understand this in order to interpret the results of this study correctly: The conclusion here is not that *BILD* writers are overt racists who deliberately publish racist and colonial representations in order to manipulate their readers. Rather, the insight of my analysis is that the majority of authors have probably themselves been racially subjectivized by hegemonic discursive dispositives and are reproducing the associated logics and rationalities without reflection.

This is where, based on the results of my analysis, I raise my criticism of *BILD*. The newspaper has one of the largest readerships in Germany and a strong opinion-forming function. Although *BILD* is a tabloid, published by a for-profit publishing house, its powerful position should entail an awareness for the impact of its reporting and a willingness to take journalistic responsibility to initiate social change. *BILD* is not assuming this responsibility. Instead, it reproduces hegemonic representations, curbs any subversive potential, structures strategic power relations through racist subjectivation, and maintains the colonial state of domination. Responsible journalists, however, ought to question their own subjectification and power relations, perceive the impact of their representations and, in keeping with Foucault (cf. 2007: 282), develop an aesthetic of writing.

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