

Synopsis of the project report

**BETWEEN THE CONFLICTING PRIORITIES OF
HEGEMONIC ATTRIBUTIONS:
THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANT
ACADEMICS IN AUSTRIAN NEWSPAPERS**

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Migrants with academic achievements are still highly underrepresented to even ‘invisible’ in today’s migration and integration discourses. Rather, in the speaking about ‘the others’, so-called ‘low-skilled’ migrants are demonstrably received on a more frequent basis (see Farrokhzad, 2010). Therefore, this research project subsequently addresses the question whether – and if yes *how* – a ‘Western’ hegemonic society – namely Austria – speaks apart these prominent topoi and tropes about persons who do not ‘fit’ in these discursive images due to their high qualifications?

From a theoretical point of view, we draw on the perspective of the discourse-theoretical construction of reality (see Foucault 1969, 2012/1972; Jäger 2006, 2012): By discursive modes of speaking – that construct and fixate specific categories of ‘how to be’ – certain possibilities to act develop for subjects by processes of subjectivation (see Hall, 1994), others are made impossible according to where in a society a person gets located and positioned. Especially for discourses on migration it appears important to analyse the construction of ‘otherness’ to examine social inequality and subsequently support unravelling hegemonic ways of speaking and strengthen the deconstruction of social hierarchies.

Regarding the empirical approach of this study, we conduct a qualitative-reconstructive study design by applying a Critical Discourse Analyses according to Jäger (2012). Especially, the representation of statistically relevant groups of migrants (see Statistik Austria, 2016) is analysed, namely ‘people of colour’, ‘Muslim’ migrants and migrants from the ‘new Eastern European accession countries’. To ensure timeliness of data, the – at the start of the project – past 9 months of the year 2017 are examined. This period of time encompasses the general election (*Nationalratswahl*) 2017 which can be seen as an important discursive event for the Austrian media landscape. Therefore, we anticipated that this event causes an increased density of the representation of migrants and migration per se.

Concerning the study design, we analyse the media reception of four different Austrian newspaper magazines, namely two daily ones: “Standard” and “Krone”; as well as two weekly ones, namely “Falter” and “News”. “Standard” and “Falter” are viewed as quality papers that report with similar liberal editorial policies; in comparison, “Krone” and “News” are considered tabloids. By the additional analysis of weekly media, we aim to shed light on the condensation of topics and rhetorical strategies.

In total, we examine articles of all kinds of text types (e.g. reports, analyses, interviews, commentaries, portraits, glosses, etc.) although we did not consider advertisements. This broad diversity of text types was anticipated to serve the detailed analysis and was considered important to provide a as complete picture as possible to answer the research question mentioned above. By sampling like this, we identified 59 articles during the phase of data collection (13 “Falter” texts, 20 ”Standard” texts, 14 “News” texts and 12 “Krone” texts).

By applying a Critical Discourse Analysis, the total sum of 59 articles is analysed regarding the identification of the discourse structure and to summarise important contents of the discourse extracts. Subsequently, we identify 16 representative articles (four of each newspaper) on basis of this structural analysis and examine these texts regarding the usage of referential strategies, attributions and action’s as well as processual representations in depth.

The first step of analysis – the structural analysis – reveals that academic migrants are in the examined sample frequently received as ‘objects’ of what we call a ‘peripheral-representation’. That means that they are frequently addressed in short clauses or on the edges of articles that do not primarily debate academic achievements but rather a lack of education. The topics of “education as a chance to develop” (where effects of education on migrants are discussed) as well as “migration as pos./neg. educational factor’ (where effects of migration on educational processes are debated) can be conceptualised as central focusses of the debates. Within these discussion, Austria simultaneously appears as a development worker and as *the* place of education; hence, the ‘Austrian’ position is constructed as ‘modern’ and ‘advanced’. When academic migrants do appear as main agents of articles – so to say as protagonists – they are frequently represented within a ‘heroes’/‘heroines’ topos (we called migrants represented in this topos ‘strong migrants’). Within structural analysis, it can be reconstructed that especially Muslim migrants seem to be frequented in this topos. Additionally, there was a frequency difference between the reception of migrants within Europe and academics outside of Europe: ‘strong migrant academics’ in Europe were more frequently received than academics outside of Europe. Regarding the specific media formats, it can be concluded that – in concordance with the different editorial policies – “Falter” and “Standard” represented academic migrants more visibly than “News and Krone”, although the medium “Krone” stronger frequents the

sample groups in comparison to “News”. Similarly, articles of the two weekly media differed in the strongest way. Congruently, the reports of “Falter” often marked a ‘unique’ position within the sample, as they addressed topics that no other medium covered. Importantly, there were more men than women represented as ‘strong’ migrants within the ‘heroes’/‘heroines’ topos and the only portrayed woman who was received by the whole sample as a ‘strong academic migrant in Europe’ was represented by “Falter”. In contrast, reports of News are nearly completely limited to articles of the ‘peripheral-representation’. Additionally, it can be shown that the three sample groups are also frequented differently: ‘Muslim’ migrants were represented with a comparatively high frequency, whereas migrants from the ‘new Eastern European accession countries’ were not as often received. However, Migrants ‘of colour’ were received with the lowest frequency of all. Most commonly, there were generalising referential strategies, such as “the migrants”, “the immigrants”, “the asylum seeker” or “the refugees”.

On basis of the in-depth analysis of the 16 representative articles and in light of the research question “how are academic migrants – as counterparts to the commonly received ‘less educated’ migrant –represented medially?” it can be additionally shown that:

- a. the academic achievement of migrants is overall blurred and ambivalently represented; therefore, the representation is fuzzy and diffuse (due to a high heterogeneity in education-terms it is mostly unclear and underdetermined what ‘high education’ or ‘educated’ actually mean),
- b. being educated is not only a key for participation (although being educated is hardly ever debated without being less-educated!) and an economic asset but also something jeopardising/threatening if education is something that threatens Europe/Austria if it falls into wrong hands outside of Europe/Austria.

Regarding the second central research question, namely “which hegemonic images of academic migrants are constructed in Austrian debates?” it can be reconstructed that:

- c. when migrants are received as ‘strong’ heroes/heroines (and therefore as an exception), mostly Muslim migrants are addressed and – importantly – not their concrete academic agency, their educated position is emphasised, but rather their political or affirming agenda. That means that they are not primarily represented as academics who talk about their area of expertise. Rather, they appear as political

resistance fighter or activists against a rigid Islam (political agenda) and/or agents who are beneficial to the 'hegemonic' society (affirming agenda).

- d. especially when migrants from the 'new Eastern European accession countries' are addressed, they are received in a quite similar way as Austrian academics; however, they are also often constructed within precarious life and working contexts which is why they are frequently 'objects' of political analysis (especially in the critical counter-discourse).
- e. Migrants 'of colour' are neither received as 'strong' in the 'heroes'/'heroines' topos nor within precarious life and working contexts. Rather, they are addressed as 'objects' of the 'peripheral-representation', that means that they are received in short clauses or on the edges of articles that primarily debate a lack of education and success in education. What seems especially problematic for this sampling group is that the only article that represented educated 'people of colour' as a main topic debated them as a threat for 'Europe' and applied racist modes of display.

As a résumé, we conclude that the heterogeneity and ambivalence of the education/qualification terms and concepts is a major obstacle in the representation of academic migrants: On the one hand, the many manners of using concepts and terms that signify education produce unclarity and thus impair the visibility of academic migrants. The underdetermination of academic achievements thus recurrently leads to the fact that highly educated persons cannot become visible or are unilaterally fed into debates that do them no or only little justice. Also, the linkage of the educated position with a political resp. affirmative one seems to comprise potential danger because academic migrants are precisely not becoming visible as educated and knowing persons but as politically active – thus always more activists than educated experts. Furthermore, it can be shown that the examined debates on education often remain agent-less and abstract. This finally culminates in the fact that the discussions are non-concrete and de-personalised. This leads us to the suggestion to foster and increase the visibility of academic migrants by addressing these dangers as follows:

- a. In a first step, it appears necessary that public debates strive for a higher clarity in how higher education of migrants is phrased and termed – therefore, we suggest strictly orient to pointing out concrete higher educational qualifications.

- b. It also seems important to address and receive academic migrants in a more visible way – especially by focussing on their specific expertise and academic practice. That means that we suggest to bridging the gap between representations of hegemonic academics and migrant academics by – for instance – installing regular ‘Uni-Series’ that feature hegemonic and migrant academics in equal shares.
- c. Especially, the specific blank spaces need to be addressed, that means that the group of migrants ‘of colour’ need to be frequented more visibly.
- d. Last but not least we propose that the creation of a more open and direct space to speak for migrants could be fostered if there was a dialogue – in form of a workshop – with journalists to collectively work out ways of interviewing that contribute to a more open understanding of academic migrants’ positions. Although framing cannot be avoided this way, it can at least be consciously addressed and reduced.

As processes of subjectivation (i.a. Hall, 1994) open up certain possibilities to act for subjects and on the other hand also makes other possibilities impossible to access, a shift in the discourse (e.g. from deficit/homogenisation to positive/differentiation) has consequences and effects on the experience and actions of persons concerned. A discourse that increases the visibility of migrants can thus provide new rooms for manoeuvre as well as experiences to this societal ‘group’. The aforementioned list of interventions suggests first steps in this direction.