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Re/Presenting Europe and Europeans in Twentieth Century Media

It is possible, in this third decade of the twenty-first century, to create and curate one's own media world, filling it with podcasts and media streaming, Netflix and ever-increasing suites of apps. Whatever we choose, few of us move through life without media saturation. In Europe, as elsewhere, this social context has become more pronounced in the last hundred years and our media-rich environment has (re)structured the social and representative possibilities open to individuals. The twentieth century, the time period under scrutiny in this special issue - which follows up on the call to pay attention to this oft-forgotten era in an recent agenda-setting special issue of *TMG Journal for Media History* -, much widely-accessible public media remained state-sponsored or dominated by powerful commercial interests. It was within these conditions that radio, television, and widely disseminated newspapers and magazines, produced and circulated information.¹ In that process they also shaped and transmitted dominant representations of who was European, what is Europe and who had a rightful place in Europe.

Looking closer at the conditions and characteristics of the dominant representations of who was - and can be - considered as European, it seems that the majority of these mediated representations were based on every day, historically anchored, specific markers - be they real or imagined - of belonging such as nationality, race/ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, physical appearance, and cultural affinity.² This variety of markers of belonging, and the interlinkages, reveal what is the 'somatic norm' of Europeanness and determine who can pass as 'true' European.³ These markers are also historically selected and constructed in opposition to colonial and postcolonial 'Others' who might be depicted as exotic or primitive, in a process of stereotyping, and reductive one-dimensional or monolithic representations.⁴ This rich scholarship has shown how markers of Europeanness are defined, (re)constructed and interrelated within hegemonic discourse and reflect a historically established image of what is considered to be Europe and who are Europeans.

Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens stress, however, that this does not imply that 'European' is a static, homogeneous category.⁵ It is, in contrast, open to change and transformation and contains internal variation.⁶ These features sit in tension with historically established and sedimented structures that limit access to 'Europeanness' as a widely recognised identity. Therefore, we can say that there are

various ‘shades’ of Europeanness that are constructed hierarchically and in relation to each other and that change over time. Where one stands on the hierarchical ladder towards ‘true Europeanness’ then depends on how one scores on the relevant (everyday) markers of belonging. While skin colour and being White have always functioned as (perceived) markers for ‘true Europeanness’, within hegemonic racialised discourses, they also intersect with other markers of belonging, most notably ethnicity, nationality and religion. Essed and Trienekens capture this phenomenon in their argument that Europeanness is about being ‘White plus something else.’⁷ Here one’s Christianity or secular humanism/atheism, or perceived ancestral membership of a nation fall within the (constructed) bounds of Europe and can be the ‘plus something else.’ The dominance of these everyday, rather banal, markers of belonging in media representations of Europe and Europeans in the twentieth century has minimised the awareness of the historically long term and complex flows of people in and out of Europe that have shaped its communities over time.⁸ The (continuous) construction and anxious maintenance of this constellation of markers, this imagined identity of European has therefore contributed to stereotyping portrayals of various Others and ‘othered’ groups that also contributed to European culture.

The high visibility of mainstream media and popular culture in current everyday European life then means that the question of who has a rightful place in Europe is connected to how and whether people recognise themselves in the constellation of these banal, everyday markers that are key in the dominant representations of Europe and Europeans. In addition to Europe’s *longue durée* diversity, well documented by scholars, this question has become particularly acute in the twentieth century. Who is recognised as belonging to Europe, and by whom, and how one might see oneself within the media representations of Europe and Europeans are pressing issues that affect people’s lives and sense of self. These questions have ongoing relevance due to the real and perceived migrations into Europe from all across the globe in the last century, among them the arrival of people who move from former colonies, and groups fleeing adverse conditions.

While there is a common conception that international migration has become more globalised since the 1960s, indicating that most European societies are nowadays confronted with ‘higher numbers of immigration as well as with an increase in immigrant diversity when compared to past levels of national immigration’, research shows this is a rather Eurocentric view.⁹ According to extensive (historical) research on international migration, the *absolute number* of international migrants has indeed risen in recent decades as well as that they seem to originate from a wider

diversity of countries. The *percentage* of people moving across international borders has, however, remained fairly stable during the twentieth and the twenty-first century; only three to four percent of the people in the world can be considered an international migrant.¹⁰ In terms of migration diversity, ‘the global migration map has become more skewed’ as migration seems to be more globalised from a destination country perspective when compared to a country of origin perspective.¹¹ This means that so-called migrant destination countries, which in the context of Europe are mainly (North)Western European countries like England, France, the Netherlands and Germany, have seen a diversification of their societies. In this issue we examine how these superdiversifications of European societies relate to dominant representations of Europe and illustrate the connections between media representation, and racialisation.¹² The articles in this issue explore these connections in relation to historical identity construction, migration and the legacies of colonialism.

Alongside our focus on dominant representations of Europeanness, and their limits, we also foreground media’s history of hosting counter-narratives and perspectives in this issue. Stuart Hall, among others, rightly pointed to listener’s, or viewer’s ability to take a variety of analytic modes when ‘decoding’ such dominant representations produced and circulated by media creators.¹³ He suggests that the recipient of media messaging can either decode and accept the producer-creator’s intention, which so often convey dominant understandings of ‘race/ethnicity,’ nation and class, or that a viewer-receiver could decode and oppose (oppositional reading or reading against the grain), or decode and negotiate the dominant representations encoded by media producers. His insights acknowledge the recipients’ agency. From the involvement of athletes in political protest, to the scholarly analysis of Dutch hip hop’s origins that emphasize its complexity and connection to the (Dutch) Caribbean (rather than America), the articles in this issue consider how audiences have decoded and negotiated or decoded and contested dominant representations. They present counter-representations, diverse narratives, and productions that decentre or challenge key markers of Europeanness.

In order to show how this process of counter-representations to Europeanness works, our special issue focuses on media representation in sports and popular music as these are sites of powerful representational impact.¹⁴ While European popular culture has received ample academic attention since the late 1970s, the case studies presented here collectively address and redress how twentieth-century media has represented individuals and communities who may not meet some of the (key) constructed historical markers of belonging to Europe. The scholars who contributed to this

issue offer complex and nuanced analyses that show how media representations have undergirded societal structures of exclusion and also how communities have responded.

Three of the scholars whose work appears in this issue analyse popular music. Benjamin Torres compares how two popular music journals reported on the rise of reggae in the UK. He shows how the differential responses by each magazine reveal acceptance or ambivalence about this musical form in the UK and argues that this relates to racialisation. Moreover, there were also mixed responses to reggae being an artform practiced by citizens from former colonies. Schaap's work takes up the rich understanding of reggae as a site of colonial encounters, resistance, and joy independent of these colonial roots. His work on reception and reporting adds to our understanding of a diasporic form that has been profoundly influential, an intrinsic part of the UK music scene, and an overtly politicised one.¹⁵ In his paper on popular music, Dastan Abdali looks at practices and early performance contexts in Dutch hip hop that challenge received notions about its rise in the Netherlands. He shows how the early Dutch hip hop scene flowed through and from the Dutch Caribbean and connected communities throughout the Netherlands and beyond key Dutch cities that later became associated with the genre. Abdali's account of Dutch hip hop and rap as a local-global site of encounters (where some aspects of the genre were very local with local meaning-making and societal ties, and others very globally shared) theorises it as rhizomatic.¹⁶ He documents how it generated powerful representations that constitute and contest Dutchness, and what it means to be European. He explores how 'othered' communities in the Netherlands, such as Black peoples, have through hip hop created counter-narratives and sites of conviviality.

Both of these musical genres are simultaneously transnational and also locally inflected and have circulated knowledge and story-telling around the Black Atlantic and now are also distinctly part of European musicking.¹⁷ Reggae and rap had substantive symbolic power within the colonial and racial politics of Northern Europe in the early 1980s.¹⁸ Moreover, both forms of music are highly influential and commercially successful. Reggae in the UK and its former colonies, also show the fluid connections between performance, representation and racialisation. Both music genres embed claims to belonging, critiques of racism and have generated media representations of liberatory joy that perpetually disrupt the work of 'race/ethnicity', racism, and racialisation.¹⁹

Moving forward in time and geographically further South, Greg Cotton's analysis of the pop culture juggernaut, the Eurovision Song contest, delves into its entanglement with Portuguese racial and ethnic representations. He reveals that despite Eurovision's claims of inclusivity and diversity,

the notorious song contest that launched a thousand ABBA imitations still celebrates Europe as a normatively White space. Selecting Black performers to represent the country in the contest during the 1990s, Portugal intended to send out the signal of its supposedly tolerant and multi-racial culture. However, Cotton argues that to varying degrees all the Portuguese performers produced performances reproducing the ideas of Lusotropicalism; the idea that the Portuguese were better colonisers than the other European powers. His work contributes to the vital and growing study of the Eurovision as a political as well as cultural entity, with great signifying power.²⁰

Turning to sports, the article by Blum, Awad, Diallo and Van Sterkenburg hones in on the interaction of sports, athlete activism, and racial politics. Their article examines sports as a site of anti-racism protest where media, sports and athlete activism meet and exposes the seeming ‘race-neutrality’ on the sports field. Where racism is concerned, sports institutions and sports fans are anything but colour-blind as numerous incidents have shown, up to and including the present. What has been under-researched is where professional athletes situate themselves in the politics of racism; a rather sensitive question in the context of sports as it is characterised by commercialisation and hyper-representation. The authors offer a grounded analysis on the anti-racism activism of former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. They embed their findings into a wider media-ecology perspective, and connect their insights to the European sports context. Their analysis, in particular, discusses how a changing media environment provides opportunities for a re-emergence of athlete activism at the highest sports levels.

In all, then these contributions are both deeply local, and yet reflect larger European processes of representation, counter-representation and racialisation. The four case studies selected by the editors show the entanglement between media representations in European history and they invite us to reflect on the ongoing legacies and lived consequences of those representations. The articles are insightful, provocative, and collectively show how media representations shape our realms of both symbolic and social possibilities. We hope you enjoy reading them.

Notes

1. Jesper Verhoef, "A 1980s and 1990s Media History Manifesto," *TMG Journal for Media History* 26, no. 2 (2023): 1-34, <https://doi.org/10.18146/tmg.878>; Jesper Verhoef and Tom Slootweg, "Gone but Not to Be Forgotten: 1980s and 1990s," *TMG Journal for Media History Histories'* 26, no. 2 (2023): 1-6, <https://doi.org/10.18146/tmg.882>.
2. Bart Bonikowski, "Nationalism in Settled Times," *The Annual Review of Sociology* 42 (2016): 424-49, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074412>; Michael Skey, *National Belonging and Everyday Life: The Significance of Nationhood in an Uncertain World* (Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2011); Jacco van Sterkenburg, Rens Peeters, and Noortje Van Amsterdam, "Everyday Racism and Constructions of Racial/ Ethnic Difference in and through Football Talk," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22, no. 2 (2019): 195-212, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418823057>.
3. Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (Berg, 2004).
4. Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Sage, 2021); Rachel Gillett, *At Home in Our Sounds* (Oxford University Press, 2021); Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Duke University Press, 2016); Francio Guadeloupe, *Black Man in the Netherlands: An Afro-Antillean Anthropology* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022); Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Cornell University Press, 2018).
5. Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens, "'Who Wants to Feel White?' Race, Dutch Culture, and Contested Identities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 52-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701538885>.
6. Puwar, *Space Invaders*.
7. Essed and Trienekens, "'Who Wants to Feel White?'"
8. Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (Sage Publications Ltd, 1995).
9. Mathias Czaika and Hein De Haas, "The Globalization of Migration: Has the World Become More Migratory?," *International Migration Review* 48, no. 2 (2014): 283-323, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12095>; Gijs van Campenhout, *A Team of National Representatives?: A History of the Football World Cup, c. 1930-2018* (Erasmus University, 2022), 28.
10. Stephen Castles, Hein de Haas, and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Palgrave Macmillan Higher Education, 2014).

11. Czaika and De Haas, “The Globalization of Migration,” 315; Martin, L. Philip, Pia M. Orrenius, and James Frank Hollifield, *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective* (Stanford University Press, 2014).
12. Superdiversifications used in this sentence refers directly to Vertovec’s term ‘superdiversity’; Steven Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).
13. Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the “Other,” in ed. Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Sage, 1997), 265-269.
14. Simon Frith, *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (Routledge, 2004); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993); Arne van Lienden, *Between the Lines: Discursive (Re)constructions of Race/Ethnicity in Polish Televised Football* (Erasmus University, 2024); Jacco van Sterkenburg, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Sport Media* (Pallas Publications, Amsterdam University Press, 2011).
15. Sonjah Nadine Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto* (University of Ottawa Press, 2010).
16. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2 (University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Édouard Glissant, *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, vol. 1 (Liverpool University Press, 2020).
17. Gillett, *At Home in Our Sounds*; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.
18. Karim Hammou, “Rap et banlieue: crépuscule d’un mythe?” *Informations sociales* 190, no. 4 (2015): 74-82; J. Griffith Rollefson, *Flip the Script: European hip hop and the politics of postcoloniality* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); Stanley-Niaah, *Dancehall*.
19. Guadeloupe, *Black Man in the Netherlands*; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and black study* (Autonomedia, 2013).
20. Jochen Hung and Rachel Gillett, *Popular Culture*, in ed. Jochen Hung, *Bloomsbury History: Theory and Method* (Bloomsbury, 2022); Catherine Baker, “The Molitva Factor: The Eurovision Song Contest and ‘Performing’ National Identity in World Politics,” in ed. Adam Dubin, Antonio Obregón, and Dean Vuletic, *The Eurovision Song Contest as a Cultural Phenomenon*, (Routledge, 2022), 96–110.

Biographies

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<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/at-home-in-our-sounds-9780190842703?cc=nl&lang=en>&
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