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“WE DO SOMETHING BECAUSE WE THINK THAT IT IS IMPORTANT
FOR SOCIETY AND THAT WE SHOULD BE HEARD”

Agency and Strategies of Empowerment of Community Media Producers in Germany
in Light of Experiences of Racism

Abstract

Media practices are often dominated by hegemonic discourses, and members of marginalised groups tend to struggle to get access to professional media production opportunities. In this paper, we present a study on agency and strategies of migrant media producers in Germany with a specific focus on experiences with racism, visibility of marginalised voices and negotiations of belonging in alternative spaces. Community media are media that are independent, non-commercial, organised from the community, and directed to the community. Their aim is to enable citizens to take control over their own representation, produce media content that is representative of a diverse society, and raise issues often overlooked by commercial and large-scale public-service media. Racism is understood in this study as a practice based on hierarchical oppositional distinction and connected to the practical effects of this distinction. Discriminatory practices denote the exclusion of individuals or groups because of prevailing prejudices linked to certain discrimination categories like age, sex, origin, appearance, language, sexual or religious orientation. Eight media producers living in Germany with refugee/migration backgrounds participated in two group discussions and an interview. The focus of the conversations were experiences of racism, individual experiences in Germany regarding acceptance, experiences with community media, perception of the public or mainstream media, structures within the radios and media projects, possible wishes, and strategies for dealing with racism in media, the topic of multilingualism and feedback of listeners. All recordings were transcribed, and the analysis focused on individual agency and strategies, (lack of) institutional support and social evaluations. The explorative, qualitative approach enabled deeper insights into the complex ways how discrimination is at play in society at large but also how these practices are encountered in ‘alternative’ spaces. On the one hand, the analysis reveals the effects of intersectional positions that media producers navigate when attempting to reach representation for themselves and for topics they find important. The results underline the importance of informal networks to access resources. On the other hand, forms of recognition for education and competencies (particularly those acquired outside of Europe) need to be in place for media producers to realise their potential.

Keywords

Community media; discrimination; media access; strategies.

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Link to related programmes (in several languages): <https://colourfulvoices.net/>.

Link to the radio broadcast (in German): <https://rdl.de/programmhinweis/sonder-sendung-community-media-als-ort-der-teilhabe>.

1. INTRODUCTION

While media reporting often focuses on sensationalist images of people crossing borders, the participation of migrants and refugees as media producers is rarely visible. In this paper, we present a pilot study on agency and strategies of migrant journalists in Germany, focusing on experiences with racism, visibility of marginalised voices, and negotiations of belonging in alternative spaces. The participatory approach of community media has led to long-lasting experiences with multilingual and interactive formats: since the 1980s they have developed contents as alternative spaces, and they have supported underprivileged or marginalised groups in media expression and media literacy, including through digital production tools. Moreover, in the last years, many community media developed an active policy and new approaches to involve newly arrived refugees and strengthen their access to local networks of communication. The relevance and continuity of this work – for migrants and non-migrants – is however only partially documented and mainly on a local scale. Therefore, we consider exploratory national results from this paper a relevant contribution to understanding how media pluralism can be achieved and how media practices can become accessible for persons with diverse experiences¹.

In this paper, we start out with an overview of media representation of refugees and migrants, followed by a brief introduction highlighting the differences between public and commercial mass media and community media on the other hand. The following section introduces our particular research context in Germany, in many ways typical for central European countries' approaches in dealing with migration, and in the last sections, we finally present the strategies of empowerment that are the result of our research and discuss their effects.

2. MEDIA AND REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND EXCLUSION

All in all, I wish for society [...] to know about migrants that are on the streets and who are interviewing, who are producing radio shows, who are part of [...] media.
[see excerpt 4 below]

¹ See also U. Doliwa, J. Purkathofer, "Community Media's Role in Changing Centre-Periphery Relations through Participatory, not-for-Profit Journalism", *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 17, 2 (2021): 161-182.

This first quote from a German media producer of migrant background already sets the scene for what is the aim of this contribution: to understand why and by which means migrant and refugee media producers manage to access the media landscape. Research on media and migrants or refugees typically covers two fields². On the one hand, it deals with experiences of racism and exclusion through media representation of migrants and migration in the mass media (as it is done through discourse analysis of media reports) and on the other hand, it researches participation of migrants and refugees in media production (drawing among others on sociological studies).

Research on media representation of refugees and migrants has seen a number of reporting cycles, most recently linked to the horrendous events at the Polish-Belarusian border and the war in Ukraine. Before that, the debate around media and migration witnessed a resurgence after the events of 2015, when, due to the war in Syria and to conflicts and crises in other parts of the world, European countries have been faced with the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees and migrants. Due to the high number of research publications on this period, we use it as one example here – knowing that the processes that guided the media decisions back then are still in effect. When reporting on arrivals of refugees and migrants to Europe throughout 2015-2016, media have played a central role in framing these events as a 'crisis'. This perspective contributed to negative and sometimes hostile attitudes amongst the public toward the newcomers. The report *Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective*³ is one of several studies which examined the narratives developed by print media and how they contributed to the public perception of unfolding events, shifting from careful tolerance to a securitisation of the debate and a narrative of fear. Throughout, there has been a limited opportunity in mainstream media coverage for refugees and migrants to present their own views and concerns, and little attention was paid to the individuals' suffering or the global and historical context of their displacement. Refugees and migrants are often portrayed as an indistinguishable group of anonymous and unskilled outsiders who are either or at the same time vulnerable and dangerous. The dissemination of such biased or ill-founded information contributes to perpetuating stereotypes and creating an unfavourable environment not only for the reception of refugees but also for the longer-term perspectives of societal integration. In accordance with other research, the authors Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski find that divisive narratives focusing on threats to the security, welfare and cultures of European societies have contributed to the spread of hate, hostility and disinformation related to migrants and refugees in the eight European countries of their study.

In the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations' report on migrant voices in British media⁴, the authors further noted that nearly half of all articles framed migration as a threat, and migrants as 'villains', actual or potential. Only rarely are migrants interviewed as experts of their profession – be it engineer, schoolteacher, architect, or doctor. The report also points to other studies that have found the same effect concerning female participation in the media: women are overly represented as victims and those affected by policy

² For a recent overview, see K. Smets, K. Leurs, M. Georgiou, S. Witteborn, R. Gajjala, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*, London: SAGE, 2019.

³ M. Georgiou, R. Zaborowski, *Council of Europe Report: Media Coverage of the 'Refugee crisis': A Cross-European Perspective*, Council of Europe DG1(2017)03. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/refugees/7367-media-coverage-of-the-refugee-crisis-a-cross-european-perspective.html> (Accessed 11.10.2021).

⁴ H. Crawley, S. McMahon, K. Jones, *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media*, Coventry: Coventry University - Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, 2016. URL: <http://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/research-news/2016/victims-and-villains/> (Accessed 11.10.2021).

decisions. They are seldom invited to give expert opinions. For Germany, Müller⁵ brings the results of several research groups together and comes to the same conclusion as the British colleagues: migrants are under-represented, linked to criminal acts more often than the case numbers would justify, and female migrants are almost absent in the media. Even if traditional media is making efforts to improve portrayal of people of different backgrounds or from underrepresented groups, such as women or persons with disabilities, the overall picture is still quite unsatisfactory⁶. According to Joy Francis, Trustee of the Media Diversity Institute and core member of Words of Colour, despite global social movements like Black Lives Matter, “*The pace of change remains ‘snail-like’*”⁷.

A more recent area of research is linked to the use of smartphones, digital tools and social media by refugees and diasporic communities⁸. Whereas these studies offer interesting perspectives in relation to self-representation and access to different types of media content, the impact of such media practices on mainstream public opinion remains limited.

As the treatment of migration by the mass media directly impacts both social debate and public opinion, media professionals should offer an accurate picture of immigration, avoiding sensationalism, trivialisation, or paternalism. In addition, informing about the cultures of origin of the main migrant communities and the normal aspects of the migration phenomenon in society can contribute to overcome refusal and diffidence⁹. Journalists can play an important role in avoiding the spread of xenophobia by communicating universal values shared across cultures. However, until a more substantial involvement of all minorities (ethnic, religious, cultural, or other) in the media is achieved – as media professionals and as established sources of information – representation of diversity is bound to remain partial. Studies on organisational structures of media production give insights into the participation of migrants and refugees¹⁰. The focus on diverse editorial groups is driven by the assumption that diversity will increase balanced reporting and equal representation of migrant and refugee topics¹¹. The same assumption is prevalent regarding other marginalised groups, such as women or persons with disabilities.

European projects¹² started to engage with training for journalists to set a focus on

⁵ D. Müller, “Die Darstellung ethnischer Minderheiten in deutschen Massenmedien”, in *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland*, edited by R. Geißler and H. Pöttker, Bielefeld: transcript, 2005: 83-126.

⁶ GMMP, *6th Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP 2020) https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GMMP-2020.Highlights_FINAL.pdf (Accessed 22.2.2022).

⁷ J. Francis, *Diversity and The Media: Ten Years In Review*, 2022. <https://www.media-diversity.org/event-on-9-february-diversity-and-the-media-ten-years-in-review> (Last access 22.2.2022).

⁸ See among others K. Kaufmann, “Wie nutzen Flüchtlinge ihre Smartphones auf der Reise nach Europa? Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Interview-Studie mit syrischen Schutzsuchenden in Österreich”, *Sws-Rundschau*, 56 (2016): 319-342. and K. Leurs, S. Ponzanesi, “Connected Migrants: Encapsulation and Cosmopolitanization”, *Popular Communication*, 16, 1 (2018): 4-20.

⁹ N. Bellardi, *Interview with the Council of Europe. Speak out against Discrimination*, 2009. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/anti-discrimination-campaign/ressources/Interviews/interview_bellardi_en.asp (Accessed 11.10.2021).

¹⁰ M. Lünenborg, K. Fritsche, A. Bach, *Migrantinnen in den Medien: Darstellungen in der Presse und ihre Rezeption*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2014 and B. Röben, “Migrantinnen in der Medienproduktion”, in *Handbuch Medien und Geschlecht*, edited by J. Dorer, B. Geiger, B. Hipfl, V. Ratković, Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2019: 11-12.

¹¹ R. Geißler, H. Pöttker, eds., *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2005 and C. Horn, “Mehr Vielfalt in die Medien. Journalisten mit Migrationshintergrund in Deutschland - eine quantitative Befragung”, *Communicatio Socialis*, 45, 1 (2012): 3-17.

¹² European Commission, *Media4Diversity: Taking the Pulse of Diversity in the Media*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009. DOI 10.2767/12042 and Council of Europe, *Media Diversity Inclusiveness Outcomes Survey. Does It Have an Impact?*, 2014, <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/mars/mediane/source/index/OSIOCHRU-MDI-Does-it-have-an-impact-OK.pdf> (Accessed 11.10.2021).

balanced reporting but also to foster participation and exchange with different groups and members of society. Council of Europe's projects such as *Media against Racism in Sports* (MARS) and *Media in Europe for Diversity Inclusiveness* (MEDIANE) found that diversity is best represented and communicated by those who embody it, so it needs to enter into newsrooms and even more in decision-making posts. Facilitating the recruitment of media professionals of different backgrounds or minority groups should be an objective of traditional media. Minority associations also need to be proactive, for example, by producing and updating lists of qualified professionals and freelancers to be diffused through trade unions and universities.

A successful example at the national level is the German initiative *Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen* (literally New German Media Producers), an association of diverse journalists aiming to represent change in the German media landscape, imagined as homogeneously white and upper-class. NDM hold workshops and training and have produced glossaries to enhance reporting on diversity issues (migration, racism but also gender issues etc.). Furthermore, since 2018 the Berlin-based organisation Mediendienst Integration coordinates the *Media and Migration in Europe*-network¹³, an informal community bringing together nearly 80 members across 19 countries. As an expert network, MME has the know-how to support media in doing a better job covering migration: it can provide up-to-date information, link journalists to practitioners and researchers in the field, and share best practices of fact-based coverage.

In the recent edition of the Media Pluralism Monitor¹⁴, evaluating the four areas of fundamental protection, market plurality, political independence and social inclusiveness of European media landscapes, the situation for Germany is generally rated at low risk, but access to media for minorities scores above the average and tends towards a medium-risk evaluation. Access to media for women is effectively rated at high risk, with a significant lack of women in management positions accounting for parts of this evaluation¹⁵. In light of these results, we are particularly interested to see how participation for migrant and refugee women is reflected upon by media producers in our sample and which strategies are effectively employed to gain access and persevere in a professional media environment.

3. FINDING SPACES TO SPEAK UP: COMMUNITY MEDIA

Media practices are often dominated by hegemonic discourses, and members of marginalised groups tend to struggle to get access to professional media production opportunities¹⁶. For many members of migrant communities, the lack of proper infrastructure, money, and trained personnel signify major drawbacks for them to broadcast information on their realities. In addition, they are rarely considered and addressed as relevant

¹³ M. Otwinowski, "We Need to Support Migration Journalism", *Media Migration in Europe*, 2021, <https://mediendienst-integration.de/artikel/we-need-to-support-migration-journalism.html> (Accessed 11.10.2021).

¹⁴ MPM, *Media Pluralism Monitor 2021*, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/mpm2021-results/> (Accessed 11.10.2021). For the German results: https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/71947/germany_results_mpm_2021_cmpf.pdf (Accessed 11.10.2021).

¹⁵ MPM 2021, 16-17.

¹⁶ See N. Bellardi, B. Busch, J. Hassemer, H. Peissl, S. Scifo, *Spaces of Inclusion: An Explorative Study on Needs of Refugees and Migrants in the Domain of Media Communication and on Responses by Community Media*, Council of Europe, 2018 or K. Leurs, E. Omerović, H. Bruinenberg, S. Sprenger, "Critical Media Literacy through Making Media: A Key to Participation for Young Migrants?", *Communications*, 43, 3 (2018): 427-450. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2018-0017>.

parts of the audience¹⁷. However, access to media and the real possibility of involvement in media production and consumption can empower disadvantaged social groups. By enabling this access and providing the necessary training, community media play a crucial role in encouraging participation of migrant and ethnic minority groups along two dimensions: participation by becoming part of the audience and participation by becoming part of media production¹⁸. According to *Spaces of Inclusion*, this, in turn, supports their social inclusion and democratic rights.

Community media are media that are independent, non-commercial, organised from the community, and directed to the community¹⁹. In Europe, they take the form of local radio, TV and online multimedia projects. They provide digital media skills and ethical journalistic training to a variety of age, language and minority groups, including people with special needs. The term ‘community’ refers to local, geographic communities, minority ethnic and language communities, as well as to communities of interest (for example, LGBTQI+ activists, artists, musicians, etc.). The aim of community media is to enable citizens to take control over their own representation, produce media content that is representative of a diverse society, and raise issues often overlooked by commercial and large-scale public-service media²⁰. In this way, community media can be seen as communities of practice²¹, connected not necessarily through a shared national or language background, but rather through shared knowledge about media practices and citizen journalism skills. Community radio activists from around the world, especially from Latin America, Iran and Kurdish-speaking regions, have been involved in European community media projects as ‘migrant producers’ for many years, enriching these projects with experiences of activism from their countries of origin. Topics such as social justice, human rights and gender equality are high on the agenda of many minority groups, and community media is a very effective outlet to address these issues and network with global social movements.

Programs in the languages of minorities and migrants started appearing in European community radios in the 1980s. Underrepresented and marginalised by private and public service media, migrant groups identified alternative media projects as a relevant channel to reach out to their communities. Producers were either individuals or associations, aiming to share relevant information and news in their shared languages and clearly addressing the diaspora community as their target audience. Community radios reflected the diversity of the multicultural cities in which they were based, with several cultures and languages coexisting next to one another but not necessarily communicating with one another. To foster dialogue between the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as with a broader audience, some European community radios later started developing specific training formats to promote multilingual programming and exchange. In the late 1990s, a group of radio activists from Austria, Germany and Switzerland began promoting closer cooperation between radio producers of different cultur-

¹⁷ B. Busch, J. Hassemer, “Section II: Study Based on Interviews with Refugees”, in *Spaces of Inclusion*, edited by N. Bellardi *et al.*, A Council of Europe report prepared by COMMIT – Community Media Institut: 14-26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ N. Carpentier, *Media and Participation: A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle*, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2011.

²⁰ J. Purkathofer, “You Can’t Tell My Story for Me! Community Media as a Means of Expression in Multilingual Local and Globalised Contexts”, in *Transnationalizing Radio Research*, edited by G. Föllmer and A. Badenoch, Bielefeld: transcript, 2018: 59-64.

²¹ J. Lave, E. Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355>.

al and linguistic backgrounds through multilingual programming. It became evident that intercultural programming could bring several benefits to volunteer-based organisations like community radios: stronger cooperation between different groups within the radio, a shared sense of responsibility for the organisation as a joint project and the facilitation of participatory processes.

Nowadays, most community media deal with digitalisation and cross-media – in different ways and with different intensity. Stations are represented on the internet with their own websites. The terrestrial and cable programs are offered as livestreams and podcasts. Social media are used as promotion channels, but also as networking instruments. In Austria, for example, many particularly successful young producers who first found their audience on the internet later became active in community media²². The use of digital tools is an integral part of the media literacy training provided to marginalised and non-marginalised groups, including a more critical use of social media, drawing attention to issues such as data privacy and copyright.

Through the EU-funded project *New Neighbours*, a further step could be taken in 2019-2021. Exchange and learning took place between community media intercultural editorial teams in Austria and Germany and community media in other EU Member States (in this case, Spain, Italy, and Slovenia) where community radios/TVs are active but struggle with resources to train and involve migrants. Through these exchanges and dedicated training, participants collected relevant recommendations for planning new intercultural editorial groups involving migrants and refugees. One of the project outcomes was a multilingual storytelling podcast (*ChiacchieRE*) produced by *Fondazione Mondinsieme* in *Reggio Emilia*, an area with over 100 different nationalities and almost twice the percentage of migrants compared to the Italian average of 9%. The intercultural centre *Mondinsieme* has been promoting active participation through various activities, including journalism, communication, and social media projects. As a result of *New Neighbours*, a test phase for a local community station also started, based on the recognition that a *physical meeting place* for different migrant groups was needed to pursue the intercultural programming further – regardless of the technical platforms used for content distribution.

Despite the availability of other (media) channels for self-representation, what community media offer is still unique. Social media platforms might allow voicing of individual opinions and networking around specific issues but aren't necessarily representative of the points of view of communities. As structures with physical meeting places, community media remain a crucial point of contact, mediation, and training. Community radios also offer self-organised spaces for encounters between generations and cultures and spaces of participation. The radio premises generally play an important role; in rural areas, they often fill a gap as meeting places for many people who would not otherwise meet at any other location. The radios also invest time, money, and space in a variety of social events that are not directly linked to radio production: some even claim that it's 80% about community, 20% program. The radio tries to provide human contacts and exchanges, for example, by organising parties in asylum residences or through side events and invitations, to build trust with those sceptical towards media after having experienced authoritarian regimes. As an Austrian media producer states, the radio offers space and opportunities and tries to be "an open and accessible place, a

²² Okto-TV, *BürgerInnenjournalismus 2.0. Perspektiven und Strategien von Community-TV*, Wien: Medienhaus Wien, 2014.

learning place”. Networks are established and maintained through “private and personal relationships, through the radio program itself, open editorial meetings, cultural events that we host and side projects we are involved with”²³. The radio offers an open space also to non-radio related projects and ideas.

Finally, community media can act as catalysts for further (multi)media initiatives and projects led by migrants and refugees. Several refugee journalists are currently working in community radios, hoping to later continue a professional career. Research projects in Switzerland and Austria showed that regardless of whether they later pursued a ‘professional’ media career, migrants have been able to engage on equal terms in society and improve their professional and social integration skills thanks to their work in community radio²⁴.

4. RESEARCH CONTEXT, METHODS AND DATA

Research on racism has long been marginal even in the social sciences²⁵, and research on community media was equally considered a peripheral topic with few but very devoted researchers²⁶. Recently, however, research on both topics intensified, with a heightened awareness for diversity and thus also increasing funding opportunities. In 2020, public funding was made available in Germany to start the first national monitor on racism, and the DEZIM Institute (German Center for Integration and Migration Research, <https://dezim-institut.de/>) was tasked with the research. In addition to a large-scale survey, a call was launched for short-term projects acting as pilot endeavours to explore research on racism in different universities. This pilot study – *Strategies of Recognition. Community Media as a Space for Potential Participation and Perspectives on Experiences with and Counter-Strategies to Racism*²⁷ – was one of 34 pilot studies of the National Racism Monitoring of the DEZIM, funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Between November 2020 and March 2021, the authors were able to work on experiences of racism: after an initial research phase on the media context in Germany, a small empirical study with research participants who are actively involved in alternative media projects followed in December 2020. Eight people living in Germany, each with a refugee/migration background, were recruited over networks and contacts and took part in two group discussions and one interview. Most participants were between 25 and 35 years old. Men and women were equally represented, and all had either completed their university studies or were still in the process of finishing their

²³ Radio B-138, *Wirkungsradios. Freie Radios im ländlichen Raum*, Kirchdorf/Krems: B138, 2016. <https://www.radiob138.at/index.php/downloads/category/3-wirkungsradios?download=33:wirkungsradios-freie-radios-im-laendlichen-raum-up7-4> (Last accessed 22.2.2022).

²⁴ L. Vasella, *Das Lokalradio als Weltempfänger. Eine Untersuchung zur Integrationsleistung von Sendungen für sprachkulturelle Minderheiten*, Bern: Dept. for Social Anthropology, Univ. Bern, 2007.

²⁵ S. Kooroshy, P. Mecheril, S. Shure, “Rassismus in der Migrationsgesellschaft”, in *Rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit*, edited by K. Fereidooni and St. Höbl, Frankfurt/Main: Wochenschau: 15-33.

²⁶ i.e. C. Atton, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*, London: Routledge, 2015; O. Bailey, B. Cammaerts, N. Carpentier, *Understanding Alternative Media*, Open University Press, 2007; R. Day, *Community Radio in Ireland. Participation and Multi-flows of Communication*, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2008; G. Föllmer, A. Badenoch, eds., *Transnationalizing Radio Research*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2018.

²⁷ J. Purkarthofer, N. Bellardi, E. Domke, Ö. Zar *Briefing Notes: Strategies of Recognition. Community Media as a Space for Potential Participation and Perspectives on Experiences with and Counter Strategies to Racism*, Berlin: DEZIM, 2022.

higher education. The interview and one group discussion were carried out in English according to the wishes of the interlocutors; one group discussion was carried out in German. Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed for analysis. The focus of the conversations were experiences of racism, individual experiences in Germany regarding acceptance, experiences with community media, perceptions of public service and commercial media, structures within studios and media projects, potential wishes, and strategies for dealing with racism in media, multilingualism, and listener's feedback. All recordings were transcribed, and the analysis focused on individual agency and strategies, (lack of) institutional support and social evaluations. Racism is understood in this study as a practice "that is carried by a symbolic scheme of hierarchical oppositional distinction and is connected to means that make this distinction practically effective"²⁸. Discriminatory practices denote the exclusion of individuals or groups because of prevailing prejudices linked with certain discrimination categories like age, sex, origin, appearance, language, sexual or religious orientation.

The explorative, qualitative approach enabled deeper insights as well as individual, diverse emphases. Similarities and differences have been elaborated in the process of building categories²⁹. Four categories were deemed particularly relevant in the data (subcategories presented in order of frequency):

- Community Media characteristics (including access, belonging, boundaries/hurdles, participation, and networking);
- Exclusionary mechanisms (such as material resources, language, access, and symbolic resources);
- Discrimination strategies (like origin, appearance, language, and names);
- Counterstrategies (in the form of participation, networking, awareness-raising, gaining access, intercultural activities, and education).

In the following section, we will elaborate in particular on the final category, namely strategies to access media and to persevere despite institutional and interpersonal racism.

Our analysis and the interview and group discussions results were returned to the participants for feedback and comments. Within the context of community media, a special program was arranged and broadcast by one community radio in March 2021, including interviews with the authors and first results of the research. In this paper, we focus on participants' strategies to make use of their media experience to learn, speak up, and build their careers, ultimately aiming at success in the media. The goals of the participants are, however, quite different, and thus the strategies cannot be interpreted as ways towards the exact same goal.

We are aware that the participants' experiences in our study are limited in scope, speaking about Germany and from a particular type of media context. However, we follow Rodriguez et al.³⁰ and others in critical pedagogy who highlight the need for locally grounded experience to understand broader social challenges. To avoid unjust bias towards certain national and cultural contexts, we argue for constant monitoring to

²⁸ Kooroshy, Mecheril, Shure, "Rassismus in der Migrationsgesellschaft": 17.

²⁹ Cf. A. Karabulut, *Rassismuserfahrungen von Schüler*innen. Institutionelle Grenzziehungen an Schulen*, Cham: Springer, 2020.

³⁰ C. Rodriguez, D. Kidd, L. Stein, eds., "Creating New Communication Spaces", Volume I of *Making Our Media: Global Initiatives toward a Democratic Public Sphere*, Cresskill, NJ: Euricom Monographs, Hampton Press, 2010.

ensure long-term changes in structures and sustainable development of a more inclusive media landscape overall.

5. STRATEGIES OF ACCESS AND PERSEVERANCE: SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY MEDIA

In this section, our goal is to present findings related to strategies of access, and we have structured it as follows: we will start with experiences of racism before presenting opportunities of action and alliances, and we close with the media producers' evaluations of their paths and the professional and societal goals they want to achieve.

5.1. *Everyday racism*

All participants recall instances of racism linked to their origin, appearance, or language. While reports about corporal violence are rare in this selection (which might be due to the topic and setting), many speak about experiences that highlight differences in an unjustified manner. In excerpt 1 below, the participants report questions that they have been asked – implying that their life before the flight was genuinely different than that of German acquaintances.

Excerpt 1:

Yes, for example, do you have this, do you have PlayStation, do you have this, do you have that... Such things that are asked, that are hurting a little bit and you think, yes, I come from a country that had everything. There was war, and these people had to flee, it doesn't mean that they didn't have money, cars, houses, apartments.

(Group discussion 2, translated from German)

Others speak about seemingly well-meaning compliments, like speaking good German. However, by commenting on a person's language skills, the underlying message is that these skills are unexpected, as they are considered foreign - particularly hurtful to those who have grown up in Germany and learned German as (one of) their first language(s).

5.2. *Opportunities to speak up: action and alliances*

While instances of everyday racism are frequent, most participants stress the generally favourable conditions in community media. These particular environments are described as a 'friendly bubble', and fellow media producers are perceived as less racist than other member of society. For some of the participants, this leads to the conclusion that it is vital to raise awareness within these institutions and not to overlook the ones who can act as supporters:

Excerpt 2:

I think that this situation got the society to know that the racism is real, and people should maybe take care about this. Also, they should be vorsichtig [careful] they should take care not to continue. Also, they should take care in institutions in everyday lives in also, in everyday relationship, in every relationship.

(Group discussion 1)

While allies and alliances are desperately needed, excerpt 2 also calls for caution when it comes to the role of institutions in continuing exclusionary practices. In relation to media production, funding and the distribution of resources were important topics.

Excerpt 3 gives an example of the very practical hurdles one has to overcome:

Excerpt 3:

With Migration Self Organizations, it is always an issue that you have projects, and you have like a funding for projects, and this funding ends and this funding gives you the possibility to bring people in. For example, for me, if I want to do something, I need to have a space, and I need to have Kinderbetreuung [child care]. Because otherwise, it makes no sense to invite mothers for this [...]. Or for me even too or for a refugee mum to travel to interview other mums, this is money. Or to give people education like how to use this.

(Group discussion 1)

European funding has been made available over the last years to promote diversity and inclusion, and often, migrants were asked to join these projects as participants in a voluntary capacity. However, they are usually invited to contribute contents – often exploiting their own histories and stories – while the organisations employ non-migrants for paid training and management positions. The unequal distribution of power that comes with such arrangements was a cause of concern for the participants in our study, as they all were and are qualified media producers themselves. Some were finally able to secure paid positions at radio stations and cultural institutions over the years, but they describe the struggle to reach those positions. These findings were also confirmed by another recent study, exploring the role of community media in working towards the recognition of participatory, not-for-profit journalism, more diverse discourses and enhanced participation, especially in relation to minorities³¹. Real and imagined language barriers and institutional hesitations lead to slow employment. In mainstream media, the recognition of skills is still very much dependent on having been to the few German journalism schools that traditionally cater to a non-migrant public, due to access barriers linked to language requirements and the missing recognition of previous studies. Through internships and skills acquired and recognised in community media, some participants were able to start working with private and public service media, thereby drawing on networks they have built while still in the non-commercial sector. Personal recommendations prove to be very relevant door openers, and these contacts are hard to establish initially in a new place.

What is also apparent in excerpt 3 is the intersectional nature of exclusionary practices and the gendered effects of discrimination. While some women describe particular solidarities, for many female media enthusiasts, gendered expectations (i.e., related to speaking up and pursuing a highly visible professional career) make it harder to develop their full potential. Pan-European networks are seen as one highly relevant strategy to make the best use of resources and promote each other's work across borders.

5.3. Professional and societal goals

Most participants in our study have either finished their university studies or are still involved in education. Their professional goals are thus ambitious, but they are also

³¹ Doliwa, Purkarthofer, "Community Media's Role in Changing Centre-Periphery Relations through Participatory, not-for-Profit Journalism".

concerned with the effects of their work in society. The following three excerpts (4, 5 and 6) speak to this goal:

Excerpt 4:

All in all, I wish for society [...] to know about migrants that are on the streets and who are interviewing, who are producing radio shows, who are part of German media. And that this is supported, for example by German media, the big media companies, radio, TV, so that we are represented better.

(Group discussion 2, translated from German)

In excerpt 4, the representation of migrants is explicitly addressed as part of the contents but in particular as part of the content creators. Finding a space in private and public media for migrants to act as responsible media producers, be the ones with the microphones and cameras, and report about others from their perspective is seen as a necessary development to ensure better representation and coverage.

In the following excerpt 5, however, the focus is also on the satisfaction to create media contents – even if external recognition is not a given. Being satisfied with one's work is described by several participants as one strategy to persevere despite throw-backs.

Excerpt 5:

[...] one should, as I said, try to get recognition, and one should/ one should not just stand there and don't do anything about it. One should be active, even if it is not rewarded in this very moment. It's also for oneself to be satisfied with what one does.

(Group discussion 2, translated from German)

Ultimately, as expressed in excerpt 6, the goal is visibility in society – as migrants but also apart from the migrant role, as members of society at large.

Excerpt 6:

The main thing is to contribute our perspectives and to empower ourselves, also because we are doing something that we think is important for society and that we should be heard.

(Group discussion 2, translated from German)

Participants express their wish to develop their capacities, ranging from specific media skills to transferable knowledge like project management and leadership. Projects that include different national and European partners can act as a form of capacity building, but often enough, these projects are only temporary and bring little sustainability to build a career. Through participation in projects, media producers can gain recognition and collect symbolic resources: language skills, including for example the skills necessary to apply for European project funding, but also knowledge about national and international funding schemes and support structures. For many, these activities can help to secure semi-regular income and provide means to pursue a career in the media.

In addition, the networks founded in such projects can give access to additional material and symbolic resources, like credibility and reputation. This is true in particular under the condition that project planning is respectful of people's resources and abilities and avoids tokenistic and pseudo-inclusive practices. These practices can be understood as such: depending on funding policies, certain target groups are identified, and funding is made available under the condition of inclusion of these groups. Be it women, refugees or members of Roma minorities, the participants are typically targeted as part

of groups and their needs are rarely taken into account – instead, they are defined as ‘deviant/divergent’ from society at large and processes of othering come into effect³². Several of the participants in our study report that they were approached as refugees or migrants for the purpose to cooperate on media projects, finding their role to be rather unsatisfactory and often unpaid. In contrast, they voice the need for inclusive projects that rely on the knowledge of minoritized groups already in the planning and then management of projects, giving equal access to the paid project positions and intellectual outcomes of the project.

6. CHALLENGING SPACES: “WE ARE NOT JUST CHANGING THE BUBBLE”

Drawing on the results from this small-scale study, we are aware of the limitations regarding the national context and the diversity of persons involved in community media and other media outlets. However, the explorative, qualitative approach enabled deeper insights into the complex ways how discrimination is at play in society at large but also how these practices are encountered in ‘alternative’ spaces. On the one hand, the analysis reveals the effects of intersectional positions that media producers navigate when attempting to reach representation for themselves and for topics they find important. The results underline the importance of informal networks to access resources. On the other hand, forms of recognition for education and competencies (particularly those acquired outside of Europe) need to be in place for media producers to realise their potential. Personal recommendations are still relevant in media practice, and access is thus a key element to entering this profession.

Changes are needed in formal settings when it comes to recognising formally acquired competencies (not the least in immigration offices and employment agencies), but private companies and associations also need to revise their hiring policies to value abilities over a narrow set of formalised education trajectories. Learning from the experiences of the research participants, as well as from the findings of other recent studies³³, it becomes obvious that also ‘alternative spaces’ need a form of monitoring with regard to exclusionary practices and policies that might hinder women, persons of colour and/or persons with disabilities from having equal access. “When planning projects we should avoid tokenism – the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups. We should be aware of the fact that when we are talking about the empowerment, the financial inclusion is also one of the issues”³⁴. As explored in the Spaces of Inclusion study, even if conditions for accessing community media appear favourable, access must constantly be renegotiated at the individual level. Therefore, it is relevant to ask for each media-related project, how accessible it really is to non-professionals, and how much it responds to the needs of a specific audience. In the dimension of professional development, it is important to keep in mind the precarious positions entailed in volunteer work. Questions to be derived from this are: how can transition into regular media-related employment be facilitated? Which

³² See among others A. Fresnoza-Flot, “Othering Mechanisms and Multiple Positionings: Children of Thai-Belgian Couples as Viewed in Thailand and Belgium”, *Civilisations*, 68 (2019): 139-162.

³³ Busch, Hassemer, “Section II: Study Based on Interviews with Refugees”; Doliwa, Purkarthofer, “Community Media’s Role in Changing Centre-Periphery Relations through Participatory, not-for-Profit Journalism”.

³⁴ Doliwa, Purkarthofer, “Community Media’s Role in Changing Centre-Periphery Relations through Participatory, not-for-Profit Journalism”, 172.

resources can be provided for such a transition (within or outside community media)? In terms of institutional representation, it should not be forgotten that an established ‘space of inclusion’ could become a site of exclusion when that space lacks recognition from the outside. A political strategy that acknowledges the needs of refugees and enhances their access to basic communication rights must also seek their recognition as agents and audiences in the mainstream media.

Different communities find their space in community media – linked by language or ethnic origin, gender or sexual orientation, political ties, lifestyle, or artistic and musical tastes – and with distinct social, religious or cultural backgrounds. With such a diverse backbone, the challenge for most community media organisations remains how to create a ‘sense of community’ across the multitude of sub-communities and languages – some community radios airing programs in more than 20 different languages³⁵. Ideally, gathering allies, skills and networks in those alternative spaces can enable persons to move on to other employment or take up other roles within the organisation. However, for this to be effective, changes are needed on a broader societal level – the importance of professional mentors (and their networks) becomes apparent in the discussions.

³⁵ N. Bellardi, “Escape from the ‘Filter Bubble’: Intercultural Tips and Tricks for Journalism and Communication”, *Medium*, 2016. <https://medium.com/@nadiabellardi/escape-from-the-filter-bubble-intercultural-tips-and-tricks-for-journalism-and-communication-cd5eb8ffa468> (Accessed 11.10.2021).