

“We are dining with our grandparents’ oppressors”: how reactions on social media shape the representation of postcolonial relationships in DRC, Puerto Rico and Kenya

The commemoration of past events is the occasion to (re)produce particular representations of a nation (Spillman, 1997). In the case of colonial history, the visits made by monarchs from former colonial powers (FCP) to former colonies (FC) certainly play a similar role, generating discourses that, windowing the attention on certain parts of the past (Talmy 2000), frame the imaginary of the postcolonial relationship. In this regard, the question of who is represented as responsible for the (perceived) positive/negative sides of colonisation is central. Our study applies this question to a corpus of social media reactions written by inhabitants of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Puerto Rico and Kenya on the occasion of official visits of representatives of their FCP, namely the current Belgian, Spanish and British kings. We approach this responsibility from the perspective of *agentivity*, defined by De Cock & Michaud (2024) as the “causal relation between an agent entity, an intentional action and the state of who is affected by the effects of the action” and constructed for each actor in a discourse through multiple linguistic means (i.e. syntactic and semantic roles, syntactic position, etc.). We draw three comparisons: i) between the FCP and the FC (we expect FCP’s agentivity to be greater than FC’s agentivity), ii) between the three countries (we expect differences in the representation of responsibility due to different (post)colonial histories) and iii) between social media discourse to official visits (this study) and speeches by the kings during those visits (Niclaes & De Cock, 2024).

References:

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