

Critical Discourse Analysis on Venezuela's Indigenous Media: The Influence of the "New Media Nation" in Countering Negative Representation

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Keywords	Abstract
indigenous peoples of Venezuela, media representation, critical discourse analysis, theory of representation, cultural identity, hegemony	This article examines the visual and discursive communication strategies employed by Indigenous peoples in Venezuela to counter negative representations constructed by non-Indigenous, particularly Western, media. Utilizing a qualitative approach through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and visual semiotic analysis, this study focuses on two primary data sources: social media posts by President <i>Nicolás Maduro</i> and the Indigenous organization <i>CONIVE</i> (<i>Consejo Nacional Indio de Venezuela</i>). The research aims to explore how Indigenous communities construct counter-representations in response to colonial stereotypes such as exoticism, primitivism, passivity, and marginalization, which are frequently perpetuated by global media narratives. Framed by Hall's theory of representation, Geertz's concept of cultural identity, and Gramsci's hegemony, findings show that Indigenous groups resist colonial stereotypes through media activism, cultural expression, and political advocacy. These efforts redefine Indigenous visibility and assert agency within global discourse. The study highlights the strategic role of community media in reclaiming narrative power and calls for stronger support for Indigenous communication rights.

INTRODUCTION

In today's modern era, the media has become a useful tool for shaping public opinion, especially in the lives of indigenous peoples in the Latin American region (Borofsky, 2005; Darmastuti, 2013; Graham, 2003). As if it has been endorsed as a mainstay weapon in shaping new stereotypes, the media often portrays bias against certain groups, such as indigenous groups in Latin America (Dyer, 2017; Hale, 1997; Hirschfelder & Molin, 2018).

When talking about the media, like films or other cultural products, especially the American media often shapes public perception of indigenous peoples. For example, the film *Little Big Man* (1976) depicts indigenous people as "the wise elders"; *Pocahontas* (1995) depicts Indian women as princesses; and *The Lone Ranger* (2013) depicts indigenous people who are used as funny and mystical characters for white heroes. This image has also indirectly taken root in the consciousness of North Americans (IWGIA, 2024).

Furthermore, in the world of Hollywood, film activists often make the image of Westerners or whites as the winner and the strongest figure in the film. Sadly, some indigenous characters in cinema are usually played by non-indigenous actors such as Ricardo Montalban, Burt Reynolds, Raquel Welch, and others (Martinez, 2016; MediaSmarts, 2018).

The depiction of indigenous peoples as primitive, weak, passive, and obedient entities is widespread in films, books, comics, and TV shows (Mongabay, 2019; Mosonyi & Luque, 2023). It can be seen that the Western media, especially in the Americas, is still thick with *white supremacy* values that make indigenous people tend to be considered weak, when in reality this is not the case (Munfarida, 2024; Murillo, 2018).

The representation of indigenous peoples in the Americas is still not completely 'independent'. The use of the word 'free' here refers to the plight of the Indians whose land has long been exploited by Europeans, even today they still have to fight against the actions of white Americans who marginalize indigenous peoples. Thomas King (2012) in his book entitled "The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America" also emphasized how all this time the audience has been played by the false stories of white people who are heroes, while Indians are considered as a lower caste who deserve to be their followers.

Venezuela, one of the countries in South America that has 30 indigenous groups, also experienced a similar problem. Venezuela's indigenous people have long faced negative representation in the *mainstream* media, which often reflects colonial, stereotypical, and sometimes aberrant views related to their lives and struggles (HRW, 2024). Some examples of negative representations that often arise are stereotypes about poverty, underdevelopment, and dependence on the state or foreign aid.

Since European colonization in Latin America, indigenous peoples have been victims of degrading representations, describing them as "primitive", "backward", or uncivilized (Nurcahyono, 2021). The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (*iwgia*), a human rights organization dedicated to defending the rights of indigenous peoples, also highlighted the situation of Venezuela's indigenous people who continue to struggle against social marginalization and exclusion from political and social life. This representation continues in today's mass media, especially foreign media that often adopts narratives from major countries with political and economic power. In this scientific research, the author describes the phenomenon of international media discrimination faced by the indigenous people of Venezuela into some of the issues below.

Representations of Indigenous peoples in Venezuela in Western media are often filled with stereotypes that reduce the complexity of their identities and lives. American media frequently portray Indigenous peoples as marginalized groups, merely as passive victims or guardians of nature, without recognizing their political and economic rights to land. In coverage of environmental destruction caused by the *Arco Minero del Orinoco* (AMO) project, for example, the media tend to highlight global environmental damage rather than the struggle for land rights by Indigenous peoples, thus shaping their image as weak parties who only protect nature.

Additionally, Indigenous peoples in Venezuela are often represented as victims of political and social conflict. Western media coverage of Venezuela's humanitarian crisis, such as hunger and lack of medicine, often presents Indigenous peoples only as affected groups, without highlighting their struggle to defend their customary rights or access to healthcare. Their active role in fighting for rights and preserving culture is often overlooked, so the narrative constructed tends to marginalize their voices.

Exotic and primitive representations are also commonly found in reporting. The Yanomami people, for instance, are often made objects of anthropological studies and media portrayals that depict them as living a "primitive life." Such representations are harmful

because they emphasize backwardness without understanding their complex social dynamics. This reinforces the stereotype that Indigenous peoples are irrelevant to modern progress.

Often, the voices of Indigenous peoples are ignored in media coverage. They are positioned as subjects of crisis without the power to voice their rights, even though many Indigenous communities in Venezuela have long been involved in political struggles, resistance to land destruction, and cultural preservation. Western media tend to place them in a passive context, as if merely waiting for outside help, while they actively fight for their rights and voices.

To analyze Indigenous resistance to negative representations in Western media, several main theories are used. First, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) highlights the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power in texts and social practices. CDA enables in-depth analysis of the internal structure of discourse, discursive practices, and their connection to broader social structures, including ideology, hegemony, and coloniality.

Second, the Theory of Cultural Identity according to Clifford Geertz emphasizes that culture is a symbolic system that shapes behavior and social interaction. Cultural identity is formed through symbols, language, and the meanings given to cultural practices, as well as through processes of resistance to external cultural domination. In the context of Indigenous peoples, cultural identity is often closely tied to their relationship with nature and spiritual rituals, which are part of their resistance to negative representations.

Third, Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation highlights how media and popular culture shape society's worldview and self-perception. Representation is seen as a social construction through language and symbols, which often reinforce dominant ideology and hegemony. This theory is an important framework for understanding how Indigenous peoples in Venezuela build counter-representations through digital media, cultural activism, and political symbolism, as well as how they challenge colonial stereotypes such as exoticism, primitivism, and marginalization that continue to be reproduced by global media narratives.

The objective of this research is to critically analyze the ways Venezuela's indigenous communities are represented in international (Western) media and how they employ cultural, symbolic, and digital strategies to resist marginalizing narratives. The study aims to contribute to postcolonial media studies, decolonial discourse analysis, and indigenous media advocacy. It is expected to benefit scholars of media and communication, journalists, and indigenous rights activists by highlighting systemic bias in global media and presenting indigenous-led alternatives for self-representation and cultural resilience.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research approach used in this study is qualitative research, because the data obtained is not in the form of calculation or number accumulation elements. However, the sources obtained by the researcher are in the form of explanations or explanations.

This study uses qualitative methods in the form of critical discourse analysis and visual communication analysis with a semiotic approach. The data analyzed were two types of digital uploads: (1) President Nicolás Maduro's thread on account X (formerly Twitter) related to Venezuelan culture and indigenous peoples, and (2) a cultural content campaign on CONIVE's official Instagram account. These two samples were chosen as examples of contrasting visual representations (*state-led* vs indigenous communities). An in-depth analysis was carried out (close reading) on the composition of the image, symbols (e.g. national symbols, traditional motifs, traditional clothing), caption text, and the context of the publication.

The data in this study consisted of visual uploads obtained from two main social media sources: (1) President Nicolás Maduro's official Twitter account (@NicolasMaduro), specifically uploads related to indigenous Venezuelans; and (2) the official Facebook page of Conive Comunicación, an indigenous organization of the Consejo Nacional Indio de Venezuela (CONIVE), with a focus on posts related to indigenous culture, identity, and rights.

Meanwhile, Hall's theory of representation and Geertz's cultural identity are used to interpret the overall narrative: whether the uploads represent indigenous peoples from a dominant perspective (e.g., national patriotism) or open up a counter-narrative space for indigenous identity. The focus of the analysis includes: (a) the explicit vs. implicit message of the image; (b) the selected visual and linguistic code; (c) target audiences and their effects on indigenous representation discourses. The results of the analysis were compared with the literature on public media and representation theory to ensure the validity of the interpretation.

This study uses primary and secondary data sources. The primary data in this study was obtained through visual documentation from Nicolás Maduro's official social media accounts in X and the CONIVE organization on Facebook and Instagram. Secondary data include theories from the academic literature such as the work of Fairclough (1995) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), as well as report articles such as Mongabay (2019) that provide socio-political context on environmental policies in Venezuela

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the background presentation, it is known that the phenomenon of negative representations of Venezuela's indigenous people caused by non-indigenous media often appears in the form of degrading stereotypes. Venezuela's indigenous people have long faced such challenges, such as social and cultural tensions that include discrimination and stereotypes (IWGIA, t.t.). The tension in question is that indigenous peoples are seen as "primitive", "passive", or simply objects of "folklore" by some non-indigenous peoples, including in representation. In the face of stereotypes propagated by non-indigenous media, Venezuela's indigenous people also responded to the dominance of narratives that often demean or stereotype them.

Stuart Hall (1997) argues that media can create meaning about social, cultural, and individual groups through visual, narrative, and linguistic representations. Representation not only reflects reality, but also forms social meanings that influence how people see and treat certain groups. In this context, the media's representation of indigenous peoples shapes a social construct about them more, rather than describing their actual lives. In other words, non-indigenous media often simplify the complexity of indigenous peoples' struggles and devalue and their cultural relevance, which ultimately reinforces their marginalization (Munfarida, 2024; Nagle, 2018; Salas, 2005).

In addition, it should be emphasized that the indigenous people of Venezuela have a cultural identity that is closely related to the land, traditions, and way of life that has existed for centuries (Creswell, 2014; Salas, 2005; Tomaselli, 2020). They use cultural symbols such as rituals or traditional ceremonies as a way to communicate their cultural meaning. However, the media often portrays them in a derogatory form, so their cultural identity becomes vague. This, according to the author, can actually change the perspective of the indigenous people of Venezuela, so that they are more pro-active in fighting against these negative representations. The following are some of the responses of the indigenous people of Venezuela found by the author and their relation to hegemony theory, representation theory, and cultural identity theory, including:

Use of Alternative Media as *Counter-Representations*

The development of media among Latin American indigenous peoples is becoming more massive, so this phenomenon is known as "The New Media Nation." Alia (2010) states that in some regions, especially in North America, an international movement of indigenous peoples called "New Media Nation" has emerged related to the explosion of news media, information technology, cinema, music, and other indigenous peoples' artistic and cultural developments. This is supported by the fact that indigenous media has reached the stage of 'progress'. The progress in question is the collective resistance and strength that continues to oppose the hegemonic power of non-indigenous media over their rights (Alia, 2010).

Venezuela's indigenous people are also increasingly relying on alternative media to correct negative stereotypes posed by non-indigenous media. Various *platforms* such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or X provide space for indigenous people to share their own stories, focusing not only on suffering, but also on their rich cultural identities, ecological knowledge, and political activism.

For example, Nicolás Maduro, a leader of Venezuela's indigenous people, uses social media to document the daily lives of indigenous peoples, highlighting their cultural diversity and showing how they play a role in nature conservation as well as natural resource management. Here are some examples of Nicolás Maduro's social media posts related to Venezuela's indigenous people.



Figure 1. Screenshot from Nicolás Maduro's X Account

As the official representation of the state, President Maduro's uploads often raise the theme of national pride in cultural diversity, including indigenous peoples. Semiotic, images or videos uploaded usually show themselves with traditional figures or cultural symbols (e.g. traditional clothing, CONIVE logos, national flags). Its denotative meaning indicates official support for indigenous customs. Its connotative meaning can be interpreted as a narrative of unity and togetherness a political attempt to draw indigenous communities into the legitimacy of the regime.

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Figure 2. Screenshot from Nicolás Maduro's X Account

This representation if analyzed using critical discourse analysis, it can be seen that the framing is highly controlled by the state's point of view. For example, in Figure 1.1. The *caption* emphasizes the government's role towards indigenous peoples, which underscores the "success" of government policies in embracing them.



Figure 3. Screenshot from CONIVE's official Facebook page

Meanwhile, the shape *Counter-representation* by the natives themselves can be seen from the use of Facebook social media by CONIVE—Consejo Nacional Indio de Venezuela. In Venezuela itself, some indigenous communities also use the media to *self-determination*.

This is based on Article 16 of the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which protects the right of indigenous peoples which reads "to form their own media in their own language and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination" (Lehman, 2012). CONIVE often uploads anything that focuses on cultural diversity, land rights struggles, and social life indigenous people who are not often reported by non-indigenous media. CONIVE is an indigenous people's organization that actively uses social media to fight for the rights of indigenous Venezuelans that was established in August 1989. CONIVE also aims to promote the participation of indigenous communities in the socio-economic environment of the country as well as strengthen their cultural identity (Salas, 2005).

CONIVE uploads (Facebook and *website*): use visuals that feature more traditional ceremonies and autonomous community practices. *Regional* language or rights-based captions (territorial, spiritual, ecological) emphasize the agency of indigenous peoples. From the official website titled "Conive Comunicación," all of the content displayed is taken from the perspective of the indigenous community itself. For example, photos and videos that record traditional rituals as shown in Figure 1.3. When viewed from visual elements such as traditional clothing, dances, and cultural symbols are uploaded to build the meaning of cultural authenticity. From Hall's perspective, this post is a form of *counter-representation*—an alternative media that explicitly challenges stereotypes by presenting an independent narrative.

For example, *Spanish captions* are often accompanied by translations into their traditional languages or explain the cultural context, emphasizing the native language/sounds of indigenous communities. Thus, the followers of the Facebook page (both local and global) are brought to a meaning formed by the indigenous community itself, not by the *mainstream media*. This clarifies the concept of the New Media Nation: indigenous peoples are using Facebook as part of a global network to redefine their identities.

Based on the official CONIVE website (2024), it can be seen that CONIVE often echoes the importance of fighting for the rights and culture of indigenous peoples and fighting against exclusion in the national development process. CONIVE also showcases their cultural richness, including traditional ceremonies, art, and local wisdom that are not highlighted in the global media. Thus, it can be said that CONIVE uses the media as an alternative to digital campaigns to highlight their cultural identity in order to erode negative representations from the outside against them.

In this context, the author analyzes that the phenomenon *Counter-representations* carried out by the indigenous people of Venezuela through the use of alternative media, when reviewed using the theory of critical discourse analysis, is very related to how representation in the media not only reflects reality, but also builds social meaning that affects public perception. In the analysis in the image above, Venezuela's indigenous people seem to want to try to fight back and rebuild their representation, which is often looked down upon by non-indigenous media.

Overall, compared to old media, digital *platforms* like these are effective at connecting marginalized communities to a wide audience. As noted in a study in Latin America, community digital media can activate supporters and open up the voices of communities that have been marginalized (Lupien, 2024). Visual analysis of the two examples above shows that the use of cultural symbols and alternative political language plays an important role in countering negative representation. Although both parties (governments and indigenous organizations) promote indigenous cultures, the context and purpose of communication are

different: official uploads tend to be assimilative, while CONIVE uploads are more "decolonial" and expressive.

In a report by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), it was stated that social media and other digital platforms provide space for indigenous people to "take over" their narratives, breaking the dominance of mainstream media that often focuses only on negative aspects of their lives (IWGIA, 2023). Using this medium, they can apply *counter-representations*, depicting their richer and more complex lives than simply being objects of suffering.

As for these *counter-representations*, the author sees that the indigenous people of Venezuela are no longer positioned as objects of suffering, but as "agents of change" that have a great contribution to social and cultural diversity. This is in line with Hall's (1997) view that identity is always related to power and how represented groups can reclaim control over their own representation. In addition, within the framework of Hall's representational theory, it is an example of how *encoding* and *decoding* in media play an important role in the construction of social meaning, as well as how the hegemony of non-indigenous media can be challenged through *counter-representations*.

Advocacy and Activism: Fighting Discrimination and Injustice

Venezuela's indigenous people have made various advocacy efforts to counter the negative representation they face in the international media. One example is the formation of CONIVE, as previously described, which actively voices the rights of indigenous peoples at the national and international levels, as well as against narratives that degrade them (Conive, 2024). In a Human Rights Watch report, CONIVE is one example of Venezuelan indigenous organizations that often protest their marginalization in global news, as the media more often highlights their negative sides, such as poverty or conflict, without providing a broader context about the conditions and struggles of Venezuela's indigenous people for political and cultural rights.

If analyzed from the research sample above, it can be seen that Facebook is used by CONIVE not only as an information medium, but also as a tool for mobilization and collective awareness. Their posts inform the location of the protests, commemorate human rights violations against indigenous leaders, and call for participation in the legislative agenda. This demonstrates the role of social media as a "space of indigenous activism" (Wilson & Stewart, 2008), which allows indigenous communities to build solidarity. The content of CONIVE shows that indigenous peoples in Venezuela are demanding not only recognition of identity, but also historical recognition of colonization, land grabbing, and state violence.

In addition, other movements are also carried out by the indigenous people of Venezuela by conveying their aspirations on an international scale. In the article "*Indigenous Struggles at the United Nations: A Global Perspective*," David Martinez (2016) describes how delegations from Venezuela's indigenous communities played a role in highlighting the injustices they faced as a result of reporting by non-indigenous media. At various meetings organized by the United Nations, one of which is the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), Venezuelan indigenous activists have consistently demanded changes in how the global media portrays their lives. Not only that, these activists also emphasized the importance of acknowledging their long history of struggle, not just their image as victims or a left behind community (Martinez, 2016).

CONIVE's Facebook posts can be categorized as a strategic form of visual and verbal activism against discrimination and injustice against Venezuela's indigenous peoples. Visual analysis reveals the use of symbols, gestures, and narratives that empower their position.

Discourse analysis revealed that the language used contained resistance to representational and structural dominance of the state. In the digital era, CONIVE shows that social media is not just a tool of expression, but a political tool and a space for struggle. Under the framework of the New Media Nation, Venezuela's indigenous peoples autonomously shape their own discourse, identity, history, and future. In the theory of cultural identity, Geertz (1973) reveals that there is a process of symbolic resistance carried out by individuals and groups to create new meanings. This could be the reason why Venezuela's indigenous people seek to form a more accurate meaning of their existence and define themselves, as opposed to the portrayal presented by non-indigenous media.

Resistance through Arts and Culture

In the history of the struggle of indigenous peoples, art and culture have not only been part of the expression of identity, but also a means of resistance against colonialism, marginalization, and forced assimilation. In Venezuela, this form of resistance is increasingly prominent through the use of social media by organizations such as CONIVE, which presents rituals, traditional symbols, traditional dress, and local languages as narrative strategies to defend existence and rights.

As already explained, Geertz (1973) defines culture as a symbolic system used by people to communicate, maintain, and develop their knowledge about the world. Geertz also argues that culture is the way people give meaning to their life activities, which is reflected in symbols such as language, art, customs, and rituals. In the context of Venezuela's indigenous peoples, art and culture serve as a means to defend and convey their identity, while countering negative portrayals by global media.

In further analysis of Venezuela's indigenous peoples, as shown through CONIVE's social media posts, the authors see that they actively display **traditional rituals**, tribal symbols and traditional languages in the digital space. The use of this visualization is a strategy to reject cultural assimilation by the current of Western globalization and affirm their cultural existence. Use of *the mother tongue* (as in Figure 1.3.) in social media *captions*, official statements, and CONIVE's digital campaign show resistance to the dominance of the colonial language (Spanish). In Hall's theory of representation, language is not just a means of communication, but a way of thinking and shaping the world. By continuing to use customary/regional languages publicly and digitally, Venezuela's indigenous people reject the epistemic dominance of the West that imposes a single knowledge system and erases local knowledge.

Cultural resistance by indigenous Venezuelans to discrimination and injustice caused by negative representation in non-indigenous media can also be analyzed from Geertz's theory of cultural identity. Through culture—whether in the form of language, art, literature, or media—indigenous peoples not only maintain their identities, but also strive to create alternative narratives that defy the dominance of outside cultures. In this context, culture becomes a tool to break down existing hegemony and build new spaces for indigenous peoples to define themselves independently.

In the social media visuals of Maduro and CONIVE, they clearly "show off" tribal clothing, ornaments, and special motifs—which in Western culture (dominant) are often used as exotic objects. But in this context, the representation of clothing and ornament becomes a cultural sign that has a political function: claiming the media space usually occupied by Western symbols (suits, state flags, military uniforms) and replacing them with a living and dignified image of community. The author reviews that this symbolism serves as a counter-narrative to Western culture, which is in many ways secular, individualistic, and capitalistic. In this case, culture and/or art become a political statement, not just decoration.

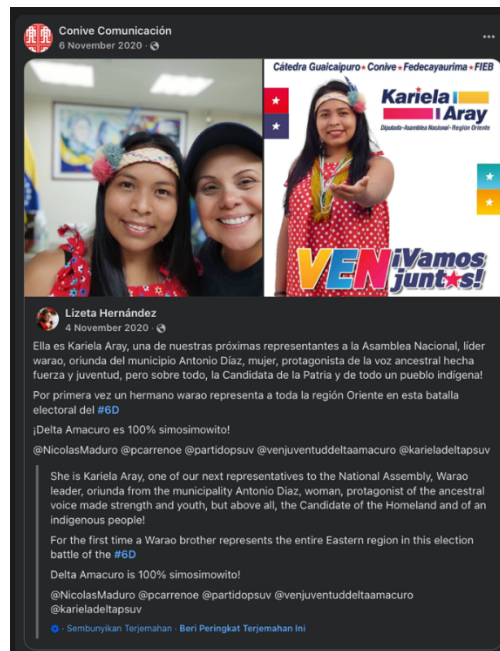


Figure 4. symbolism

Involvement in Indigenous Politics and Rights

Hall (2003) in representation theory argues that in unequal societies, representations can be a form of social control, as they shape public perceptions of who is in power and who is not. In this context, the author finds the existence of a political struggle and the right of the indigenous people of Venezuela to obtain a fairer representation in state politics (domestic politics). In the Human Rights Watch report (2024), there is recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, including land rights, the right to manage their natural resources, and the right to defend their culture.

It is not uncommon for them to have representatives in the Venezuelan National Assembly to fight for indigenous interests and break the dominant narrative that ignores their contribution to the life of the Venezuelan people. Despite the recognition of indigenous rights in the Venezuelan constitution, there are still many challenges that indigenous peoples face in gaining the recognition they deserve in international media and in domestic policy.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this research concludes that Venezuela's Indigenous communities are actively countering the negative and reductive portrayals often produced by non-Indigenous Western media. Their resistance is multifaceted—ranging from cultural preservation and political engagement to the strategic use of digital media—which marks a shift from passive subjects to empowered agents of narrative transformation. Drawing on the theories of representation (*Hall*), cultural identity (*Geertz*), and hegemony (*Gramsci*), this study highlights how Indigenous voices, once marginalized, are now reshaping discourse through visual storytelling, symbolic language, and community-driven content, particularly through organizations such as CONIVE. The comparison between government-driven and grassroots media narratives underscores the capacity of Indigenous communities to construct authentic and dignified representations that challenge the dominant ideological framework of global media. This re-articulation not only affirms cultural identity but also strengthens political agency in the digital age. For future research, a longitudinal study of Indigenous media

initiatives across various Latin American countries is recommended to identify common strategies and regional differences in media resistance. Future studies could also explore the reception of Indigenous-produced content among mainstream global audiences to assess its effectiveness in dismantling stereotypes and influencing broader public opinion. Including interviews with Indigenous media creators and audience analysis will further enrich the understanding of how digital platforms are redefining power dynamics in cultural representation.

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