

What makes a spokesperson? Delegation and symbolic power in Crimea

European Journal of
International Relations
2024, Vol. 30(1) 27–51
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DOI: 10.1177/13540661231151233
journals.sagepub.com/home/ejt



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Abstract

This article argues that spokespersons who claim to speak on behalf of a social group cannot escape the structural problem of delegation whereby speaking in someone's name entails speaking instead of someone. This form of delegated and authorised silencing through the promise of empowerment imposes symbolic violence on a group which recognises the spokesperson as a valid representative, without recognising its own potential disenfranchisement. I build on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological writings on language and symbolic power to theorise the trajectories of authorisation of spokespersons. In doing so, I critically engage with theories in International Relations which rely on a separation between speaker and audience to analyse the legitimation of political speech. Instead, I reformulate the speaker/audience relation through the concept of symbolic power and introduce the category of the spoken-for. When spokespersons struggle over symbolic power, they seek to impose social classificatory categories on social groups and spaces. I illustrate these dynamics in the context of human rights politics in Crimea, showing how various spokespersons are engaged in a symbolic struggle over 'authenticity' of their speech and the 'universal' of human rights. I conclude by suggesting new lines of inquiry to analyse creative strategies to mitigate the spokesperson problem.

Keywords

Symbolic power, human rights, legitimation, minority, international political sociology, securitisation

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Introduction

On 9 August 2022, explosions were reported from Saky, a Russian military base in Crimea, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine entered its sixth month (Gillett, 2022). Following this incident, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy focused his daily video address on Crimea, marking an important turning point since Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The stakes had now extended to the peninsula which Russia annexed in early 2014. Then, it was Putin who claimed to speak with authority in front of a crowd of international and national journalists, explaining how the fate of the Black Sea peninsula was now tied with Russia which seemingly emerged victorious in this geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine (Kremlin, 2014). Now eight years later, after Russian military bases have been targeted in Crimea, it was Zelenskyy who reclaimed the right to speak for Crimea and its peoples.

The timing of the speech not only coincided with the explosions in Saky, but also with the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, as Zelenskyy highlighted. He proclaimed, as was widely reported, that 'This Russian war against Ukraine and against the entire free Europe began with Crimea and must end with Crimea – with its liberation' (Zelenskyy, 2022). But what is more, he tied Crimea's liberation to 'the struggle for rights and historical justice for the indigenous peoples of Ukraine – the Crimean Tatar people, Karaites and Krymchaks' (Zelenskyy, 2022). These remarks shifted the timeline of the Russian invasion of Ukraine to Crimea's annexation in 2014, extended its geographical remit to the peninsula, and, I argue, exemplify the power of the spokesperson who claims to speak with authority on behalf of peoples.

In reformulating the stakes of the war, from a military question to the struggle for justice of diverse peoples, I suggest that Zelenskyy claims to speak for Crimea from a position of 'authenticity' to articulate a 'universalism' as he seeks to amplify local human rights struggles. However, while empowering voices of Indigenous and minority groups in Crimea by speaking for them, he simultaneously fails to acknowledge Ukraine's own history of not recognising Indigenous groups prior to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Aydin and Sahin, 2019), as well as their rights struggles which have intensified since the annexation as a number of journalists and activists have been banned or imprisoned (Coynash, 2020). This example is illustrative of a general problem inherent in the figure of the spokesperson. Against this background, I propose to understand the struggle to speak with authenticity on behalf of Crimea's universal human rights struggles as a struggle over symbolic power. The symbolic power of the spokesperson, as this article will explore, is a world-making power which imposes a certain vision on the world and which, despite the potential of disenfranchisement, can be (mis)recognised as legitimate through its promise of empowerment.

Departing from these observations, this article reformulates the practice of speaking on behalf into a theoretical problem: What does it mean to claim to speak in the name of someone else? Speech on behalf of a people relies on a taken-for-granted social mechanism that authorises a spokesperson to speak with authority. I contend that the problem of the spokesperson is central for theoretical approaches in International Relations (IR) concerned with legitimacy of speech, the role of audiences and the power of the speaker. While these theories cover diverse empirical and theoretical ground, they conceive of

legitimation as a linguistic phenomenon captured by speech that takes place between a speaker and an audience. While critics and adherents alike have addressed some shortcomings, especially regarding the role and scope of political agency of audiences, the mutually authorising relationship between the speaker and the spoken-for is taken-for-granted. This leaves the problem of the spokesperson unexamined.

By lacking an account of the emergence of spokespersons, I argue that these theories miss important insights on the relations of power that are inherent between the speaker and spoken-for social groups or causes. Speech on behalf is not simply a rhetorical event but made possible by the political technology of delegation, coined by Bourdieu as the ‘mystery of ministry’, which entrusts the spokesperson with symbolic power to participate in a struggle over the boundaries of, for example, the legitimate people. In other words, a spokesperson lays claim over a social group by posing as its natural voice, which in turn brings this social group into being as one voice. However, this social process has an in-built structural problem of silencing of the spoken-for, as speaking in someone’s name entails speaking in their place (Bourdieu, 2005: 62). The spokesperson’s struggle for symbolic power, or their capacity to speak on behalf of someone else, is an expression of a kind of power which has the potential to silence and exclude some groups while remaining invisible if considered unimportant. No speaker is isolated from the broader social conditions which enable them to speak with authority.

This article problematises the separation between the speaker and the audience to unpack the relational and social processes which drive speech ‘on behalf’ as a form of symbolic power. This symbolic power, animated by the magic of the ministry, authorises someone to speak on behalf of a social group, but also in its place. This form of delegated and authorised silencing gradually imposes symbolic violence on a group which accepts the spokesperson as a valid representative without necessarily recognising, or having to recognise, its own disenfranchisement. This paradox of becoming silenced through the promise of empowerment is inherent in the social process of delegation and can remain concealed.

To make this argument, I dissect three interconnected social processes and categories that animate speech in the name of someone: delegation, classification struggles and symbolic power by building on Bourdieu’s sociological work on language and democratic politics. Unpacking the relationship between these processes offers insights into how the socio-political universe enables the mechanism of speech in someone’s name to operate, and how its own terms of reference are in turn constructed. I will theorise these social processes through a close examination of spokespersons in Crimea, focusing on local struggles over ‘authenticity’ of speech between politicians and activists, and struggles over ‘the universal’ between human rights missions. These spokespersons exemplify how notions of authenticity and universality are key stakes in a broader symbolic struggle to reformulate legitimate speech on behalf of Crimea.

The argument unfolds in three parts. First, I detail my contribution to theories in IR which rely on a speaker/audience divide to analyse political speech as a rhetorical event. The second part theorises the spokesperson and contextualises symbolic power in broader debates in IR and social theory, distinguishing the spokesperson as understood through symbolic power from Boltanski’s lens of disputes. The third part explores trajectories and struggles of various spokespersons who claim to speak on behalf of social groups in

Crimea. In their struggles for symbolic power, local spokespersons stake a claim over their authentic speech which seeks to capture Crimean voices, whereas human rights experts struggle over the symbolic power to represent Crimea as part of a universal struggle for human rights. Given the lack of success of legal and institutional political strategies, a focus on symbolic power and struggles helps shed light on the symbolic rewards actors seek in the pursuit of such strategies. The conclusion suggests broader insights into the problem of the spokesperson and creative strategies to mitigate it by critically engaging with Bourdieu's often-cynical analysis of the problem of speech on behalf.

The speaker/audience relationship in IR

The figure of the spokesperson opens up new avenues to critically engage with IR scholarship which analyses international politics through language and audiences in legitimating a course of action. A wide range of theoretical approaches rely on the relationship between speaker and audience. For example, rationalist approaches offer game-theoretical mechanisms which are centred on domestic audiences in front of which crises and negotiations play out (cf. Fearon, 1994; Putnam, 1988). Fearon analyses how states face 'audience costs' when they choose to back down during international disputes as domestic audiences judge their leadership's skill and performance. Audiences are not only important in shaping how crises may unfold, but they also help states learn about their adversary's 'true intentions' (Fearon, 1994: 577). In his *Two-Level Games*, Putnam (1988) demonstrates how negotiations in conflict resolution occur both at the international and domestic level, as a chief negotiator seeks policy outcomes which are acceptable to domestic audiences and international demands. This model accounts for policy shifts through the entanglement between diplomacy and domestic politics (Putnam, 1988: 430). Although not referred to as such, the national leader in this model is a kind of spokesperson as they negotiate on behalf of a group or interest they claim to represent (Putnam, 1988: 460). In constructivist scholarship on discourse, emotions and identity, Solomon (2014) has developed the notion of 'affective investment' to theorise the affective underpinnings of soft power through the emotional pull of attraction on audiences. Audiences become bound to identities and discourses through the force of language infused with affect (Solomon, 2014: 729). These accounts are representative of a structural set-up in which audiences form a homogeneous bundle which can resonate, legitimate, judge or build coalitions with political leaders.

Securitisation theory and constructivist theories of rhetorical legitimation similarly rely on a language-centred conception of politics as taking place between a speaker and audience. However, both approaches have sought to introduce interdisciplinary tools to examine questions around the power and agency of audiences as the speaker seeks to win their support. As Côté (2016) has noted in a review of securitisation theory, it remains unclear who precisely audiences are and how much agency they have. In securitisation theory, audiences can affect politics as politicians seek to legitimate their security policies (Balzacq, 2010; Wæver, 2010: 468; see Williams, 2010: 214 for a problematisation). 'Audience' often represents the entire social sphere outside the speaker and the speech act (Williams, 2011: 456). A security speech act is successful if it can 'identify with the audience's feelings, needs and interests' (Balzacq, 2005: 184). For Balzacq

(2005), securitisation captures these processes by combining a focus on ‘persuasion and linguistic competence’ (p. 186) inherent in an ‘intrinsic force’ (p. 173) of language. He distinguishes ‘philosophical’ approaches to securitisation theory in which audiences are pre-given ‘in a receptive mode’ from sociological approaches which centre ‘the mutual constitution of securitizing actors and audiences’ (Balzacq, 2010: 2). The latter highlights the productive power of securitisation and the speaker/audience couplet which, as Williams argues, creates ‘*a receptive audience*, by bringing it to consciousness of itself as a unified audience’ (Balzacq, 2010: 215). But can anyone become an audience? Vuori (2008) notes that there is an implicit assumption that audiences constitute the broader public of a Western liberal democracy as in most examples of securitisation theory. In extending the theory to ‘non-democratic’ contexts, he interrogates the identity of the audience in political regimes, making explicit who exactly needs to be convinced in various contexts, such as the general public or elites.

Other scholars note the absence of heterogeneity of audiences and contexts in securitisation theory, as in many cases, audiences are addressed in a variety of ‘popular, elite, technocratic, and scientific settings’, as in Salter’s (2008) dramaturgical analysis of ‘who may speak, what may be spoken, and what is heard’ (p. 323). Despite attempts to pluralise actors and contexts, speech is still conceived of narrowly as a rhetorical act that takes place between a speaker, already authorised, and numerous possible audiences that need to be persuaded. To highlight the moral and symbolic dimension of securitisation, Balzacq (2015) connects it explicitly to legitimation through law or other practices of justification to mobilise public support. This opens up the possibility for contestation if the legitimation of security policy fails, allowing him to imagine social relations between speaker and audience beyond rhetorical persuasion. However, this falls short of considering speech on behalf of someone as a different kind of social practice, which introduces the category of the spoken-for which cannot be subsumed under the speaker/audience divide. This category, I argue, needs to be accounted for both in the spokesperson’s speech where it is represented as an existing reality and as heterogenous social forces. This relational form of power is captured by figure of the spokesperson and its trajectory of authorisation in relation to the spoken-for.

Audiences also play an important role in IR theories of rhetorical legitimation which centre the role of speakers and political rhetoric. These theories analyse how ‘a dominant political language constitutes the terrain of contestation’ (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2010: 127), enabling or denying a particular course of action. Legitimation for specific audiences is ‘the key concept’ in these theories because it is ‘ubiquitous’ (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2010). In previous work, Krebs and Jackson (2007) have analysed political speech as coercive rhetoric in which rhetorical materials are mobilised strategically by speakers. This language-focused framework seeks to explain the mechanism of political influence in debates between opponents in which one ‘can be rhetorically manoeuvred into a corner’ to endorse specific positions in relation to the public through the ‘real causal impact’ of language on political outcomes (Krebs and Jackson, 2007: 42). These dynamics between claims and counter-claims ‘alter the rhetorical environment within which political battle is waged’ (Krebs and Jackson, 2007: 44). But what allows these speakers to speak with such consequential authority and concentrate linguistic capital? This approach gives primacy to the internal structure of language rather than its foundations and social

conditions of production. As Bourdieu (1989) notes, any linguistic exchange is an expression of historical power relations which involves an authorised speaker, an audience which recognises this authority and, importantly, ‘the groups to which they respectively belong’ (p. 46). These groups point to the notion of spokespersons which animates the relationship between speakers and the audience.

Goddard and Krebs (2015: 6) analyse rhetoric and legitimation in the context of states formulating grand strategy. Legitimation strategies are of central importance for political actors to justify policy decisions with the approval and support of specific audiences. Legitimation, they argue, is a social process that must be studied by reference to the speaker, the context, audience, its content and technique (Goddard and Krebs, 2015: 28). Despite this attention to various facets of legitimation, the authors note that the audience ‘remains the most undeveloped of the factors [. . .], regrettably reflecting the literature as a whole’ (Goddard and Krebs, 2015: 28–29). Finally, they recognise that not all speakers are authorised to speak about a specific issue as authority can be derived from the institutional position or is the product of a speaker’s personal trajectory (Goddard and Krebs, 2015: 27). In this context, it is worth highlighting (Zürn et al., 2012) who have developed conceptual tools to study rhetorical legitimation and the politicisation of international institutions as a result of public awareness. They disentangle definitions of authority and legitimacy which are often conflated in existing scholarship. Instead, they showcase how various degrees and sources of legitimation of international authority can affect the form and scope of politicisation. The legitimation of political authority is a demanding task which involves both recognition by subjects and satisfying beliefs in how institutions must act to advance the common good (Zürn et al., 2012: 87). For Sending (2015: 4), authority is established through an ongoing competition between various actors who may construct, institutionalise and erode authority. As I seek to reformulate the speaker/audience relationship, my analysis of the authorisation of spokespersons builds on this sociologically informed account through the concept of symbolic power.

Symbolic power and the spokesperson

The theoretical approaches discussed in the previous section acknowledge an existing ‘gap between rulers and ruled’ (Williams, 2015: 116). This section shows how symbolic power can shed light on the relationship between the spokesperson and the spoken-for. While scholars have used symbolic power to analyse transformations of power and authority in IR, the figure of the spokesperson has received almost no attention in IR.¹

The lens of symbolic power offers a social theoretical toolkit which helps theorise processes such as legitimation and group formation. For example, Eagleton-Pierce’s (2013) study of the World Trade Organization (WTO) where symbolic power is closely tied to practices of legitimation in order to justify its exercise and conceal divisions. His account focuses on how language constitutes and reflects power in international trade relations. As a worldmaking power, symbolic power is also manifested in struggles over groups and their capacity for mobilisation. While his theoretical analysis of symbolic power draws on *doxa* or the taken-for-granted assumptions of the social world, the empirical focus shifts towards more visible trade negotiations which are more akin to

Boltanski's disputes which I discuss below (Eagleton-Pierce, 2013: 51). While my problematisation of the spokesperson builds on such works in IR scholarship, it is also distinct in its particular understanding and empirical focus on the spokesperson as both empowering and silencing. It goes a step further, analysing the mutually empowering relationship between spokesperson and spoken-for by highlighting how this promise of mutual empowerment is imbricated in the potential of disenfranchisement which is legitimated by the spoken-for.

Similarly, in Adler-Nissen's (2014: 659) work, a symbolic power lens helps explain the transformation of diplomacy and state sovereignty as a particular articulation of authority (cf. Adler-Nissen, 2013). She analyses the EU's External Action Service (EEAS) which challenges the state's monopoly over symbolic power (Adler-Nissen, 2014: 659). This plays out in a struggle to define the 'genuine' diplomat. Symbolic power makes visible how dominant actors can define categories of perception of the social world in a tacit manner. New and incumbent diplomats struggle over symbolic power as they enter the diplomatic field, accumulate diplomatic capital or engage in classification struggles over naming something as 'diplomatic'. I build on this understanding of symbolic power as the capacity to make exclusive groups in the context of struggles and transformations in professional spaces. However, it leaves us with the question of who is able to speak on behalf of a group such as diplomats or, as in the case of my argument, on behalf of human rights. By drawing attention to the figure of the spokesperson in my analysis of symbolic power, I identify how such struggles to speak on behalf play out over several symbolic dimensions, authenticity and universalism, which produce paradoxical effects of simultaneous empowerment and silencing.

Williams' (2006) work on culture and charisma is closest to my theoretical approach as he uses the spokesperson and symbolic power to analyse the relation between strategy and culture. He identifies cultural power with claims to expertise and knowledge while symbolic power is linked to authority, structures of perception and social classifications, with both forms of power often combined (Williams, 2006: 49). This form of power has the capacity to create social magic, or making a social reality by saying it (Williams, 2006: 64). Elsewhere, he studies Bourdieu's symbolic power in the context of culture and charisma (Williams, 2013: 132). By mobilising Bourdieu's mystery of ministry, he shows how a representative leader both imposes cognitive schemes on the social world and constitutes the group as a group.

The figure of the spokesperson is central in this process of group formation and charismatic leadership which allows individuals to see themselves as part of the group. As a 'somewhat paradoxical outcome', this creates a circular understanding of power as the spokesperson claims a power derived from the group which is exerted over it (Williams, 2013: 144). Through a case study of Al Qaeda, Williams (2013: 141) shows how some individuals become empowered to act on behalf of such groups which come into being through a compelling leader. While strategies such as violent terrorist acts and the use of visual media help create 'a group that can see itself as part of that community', its loosely organised and informal structure can negatively affect leadership succession as 'processes of authorized delegation are non-transparent' (Williams, 2013: 144). However, in his focus on the symbolic dimension of group-making, he stops short of finding a structural set-up of silencing inherent in speech on behalf as such which, I contend, is central

in any analysis of the spokesperson. My aim is to propose a more general theory of the spokesperson in IR scholarship.

In the following, I will engage with Bourdieu's accounts of symbolic power, language and classification struggles, and distinguish symbolic struggles from Boltanski's analysis of disputes and his alternative theorisation of the spokesperson. This helps contextualise uses of the spokesperson in its broader social theoretical context while demonstrating the purchase of a Bourdieusian-inspired understanding.

Symbolic power, language and classification struggles

In Bourdieu's writings, symbolic power is connected to the production of an unquestioned consensus, or *doxa*. It is a relational form of power which is produced through interactions between dominant and dominated social groups and (mis)recognised as legitimate. A key influence on Bourdieu's symbolic power is his critical analysis of 'pure' linguistics.² He describes symbolic power as 'a power to construct reality' (Bourdieu, 1979: 79). As a social type of power, it creates solidarities between actors when representations of a symbolic system are shared among them. These representations 'are arbitrary but not recognised as such' (Bourdieu, 1979: 80). Moreover, invoking Austin's performativity, Bourdieu (1979: 82) describes symbolic power as the 'power to constitute the given by stating it' which does not only 'confirm or transform the world view', but also circumscribes the possible strategic space for action on the social world.

At the same time, Bourdieu cautions us to identify the force of symbolic power solely in the force of speech, or the illocutionary force. Words themselves cannot produce a belief in their legitimacy and the authority of the person who utters them. In fact, rhetorical constructions are all strategies of the spokesperson to showcase authority and to conceal the *I* behind the *we*. Linguistic analyses of rhetorical strategies employed by spokespersons are only the first step to capture broader social relations of power. As Bourdieu (1991: 213) notes, we need to recognise linguistic takeovers of *form* as acts of *force*, unveiling rhetoric as a form of symbolic power. Language is therefore a key site in which struggles over symbolic power play out. Bourdieu engaged at length with linguistic theories as advanced by Austin, Saussure and Chomsky who grant language an illusion of autonomy. To Bourdieu, however, the meaning of linguistic utterances cannot be deduced from their formal structure such as grammar. A successful speech act has to be retraced in the trajectories of the authorised speaker as well as their social relations with an audience and social groups as 'even the simplest linguistic exchange brings into play a complex and ramifying web of historical power relations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1989: 46). The conditions of felicity in the Austinian speech act are *social* conditions, or 'acts of institution that cannot be sanctioned unless they have, in some way, the whole social order behind them' (Bourdieu, 1991: 74).

The problem of the spokesperson is a central conundrum in Bourdieu's analysis of language and symbolic power. The magic of performative utterances lies in the 'mystery of ministry' (Bourdieu, 1991: 65). He borrowed this play on words from Kantorowicz's (1957) political theological analysis of the state as mystery, a 'legal fiction' produced by 12th-century English medieval canon lawyers who appropriated theological concepts to conceptualise the king's transcendent body politic after the death of the king's body

natural (Bourdieu, 2014: 34). This analysis highlights the magic of ‘the office’ which, through the social process of delegation, creates the spokesperson. Later, Bourdieu (1991) affirms that the power of words ‘is nothing other than the *delegated power* of the spokesperson’ (p. 107). For example, Neumann (2007) shows how diplomatic speech writing is a practice of ‘ministerial identity building’ (p. 194) which produces speech that allows the ministry to speak with one voice.

Symbolic power is built in struggles through which spokespersons emerge and impose their representations of social spaces which become (mis)recognised as legitimate. Approaching these dynamics through the audience or the speaker as ‘one enunciator doing a successful speech act’ does not capture the competition between numerous figures who try to wield power through speech or practices which draw social lines of exclusion and inclusion (Bigo, 2012: 118). Posing the figure of the spokesperson as a theoretical problem can thus illuminate the stakes in situations where actors such as experts, activists or politicians claim to speak with authority. Following spokespersons’ trajectories of authorisation can give us a deeper social understanding of this figure, the mutual process of authorisation with the spoken-for and how this struggle over symbolic power is staged between spokespersons.

Symbolic power is also the power to impose and naturalise social classificatory categories, as any social space can be constructed ‘according to different principles of vision and division’ (Bourdieu, 1985: 196). Bourdieu highlights three points around the issue of classification. First, classifications have unequal social weight as not everyone has equal ability to make social classifications. Second, when studying, developing and imposing classifications, academics find social groups which are already classified. In other words, ‘the objects classified also classify in their turn’ (Bourdieu, 2018: 31). Third, social classifications emerge through a struggle between different classifying authorities, but also between theoretical categories and practical understandings of classification. We will see in the example of Crimea how the European Council human rights mission report was challenged and rejected by local activists. Both groups of actors mobilised different understandings of objectivity which provided the basis for their reporting: A sustained local presence as opposed to a short visit, and links with local human rights struggles as opposed to a top-down application of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Distinguishing symbolic struggles from disputes

Classification struggles are among key concerns for sociological investigations of the making and breaking of social orders. Boltanski, critical of Bourdieu’s approach, proposes a different entry point to these questions. As he notes, it is imperative to examine reflexive activity and forms of knowledge that underpin such practices (Boltanski, 2011: 16). This is inherent in the possibility of critique, which can both justify or subvert existing orders and which he locates in the context of disputes between actors. To conduct this analysis, he distinguishes Bourdieusian critical sociology from his pragmatic sociology of critique. The theorisation of domination of actors in critical sociology relies on ‘illusio’ and ignores actors’ critical and reflexive capacities while placing strong emphasis on dispositional properties. This ‘mode of existence in a practical [Bourdieuian] register’ (Boltanski, 2011: 66) seeks to give a full explanation of behaviour as a result of

internalising dominant norms.³ Critical sociology, to Boltanski, poses a clear split between reflexivity in sociological science and ordinary knowledge. However, when disputes come to the surface, they can undo tacit agreements or *doxa*, crossing ‘a certain *threshold of tolerance*’ (Boltanski, 2011: 67). In a dispute, various often incompatible truth claims are opposed. For example, in the context of mass surveillance, Smith Ochoa et al. (2021) and Aradau and Mc Cluskey (2022) have employed Boltanski’s pragmatic sociology to analyse how various actors justify or critique practices and understandings of surveillance.

These dynamics of critique occur in institutions and their embodiment in spokespersons who lend them their speech and thus make them fragile. Spokespersons appear to have two bodies, their ordinary body and the body which represents the institution. This creates a tension for people as ‘belief in the institution and critique of the institution form an indissoluble couple’ (Boltanski, 2011: 85). Boltanski calls this dilemma the ‘hermeneutic contradiction’. On one hand, disputes pose the danger of reviving doubts and uncertainty about the content of reality as posited by institutions (Boltanski, 2011: 86). On the other hand, delegating speech on behalf of institutions to spokespersons causes unease over the extent to which spokespersons are truly the voice of an institution or simply their own interest (Boltanski, 2011: 86). Boltanski (2011) argues that this is the reason why violence is tacit in institutions as they ‘struggle against the unmasking of hermeneutic contradiction’ (p. 95).

To contextualise this critique of Bourdieu, it is important to distinguish disputes from struggles over symbolic power, as Martin-Mazé (2017) has done aptly. Disputes unfold over concrete issues while symbolic struggles have higher stakes and take place at larger scales. Disputes seek resolutions while struggles are continuous, as actors compete over the accumulation of different kinds of capital – symbolic, material and so on – which are unequally distributed. In other words, actors do not share the same resources to engage in disputes and therefore also struggle over the redistribution of power (Martin-Mazé, 2017: 213). Symbolic struggles are centred on the schemes of perceptions themselves that animate conflicts between actors. To return to the example of Crimea, the stake, albeit very high, is not only about Crimea’s status as Ukrainian or Russian, or the recognition of group rights, but the notion of universalism itself and who can articulate it. Spokespersons therefore are not merely the embodied manifestation of an institution that can represent claimants in disputes, but capable of embodying, creating and speaking on behalf of abstract symbolic orders.

They have various strategies at their disposal and compete over the monopoly to impose the principles of perception of the entire social universe. This is enabled through the social process of delegation. Delegation enables a structural relationship of mutual authorisation and is best captured in a dynamic spiral which Bourdieu (1990) refers to as a structural, rather than consciously enacted, ‘bad faith of the spokesperson [. . .] which includes, for instance, the permanent shift from *I* to *we*’ (p. 213). This embodied identification with the group is nicely captured in the French original of the same passage, which refers to it in a double entendre as ‘ce double jeu – ou je’ (this double game or ‘I’), underlining how usurpation of speech is not a deliberate act but a possibility in this structurally in-built problem of silencing.

Human rights struggles in annexed Crimea offer an insightful illustration of symbolic power, animated by dynamics of delegation and classification struggles between spokespersons. In the following, I will demonstrate how the ability to speak on behalf arises from a broader set of power relations in the social universe. Reconceptualising it as symbolic power helps overcome dichotomous understandings between speakers and audiences.

Who speaks for Crimea? Struggles over symbolic power

Since Crimea's annexation in early 2014, only few international actors have been able to travel there in official capacity to construct a narrative on the situation from the ground. The boundary line between Crimea and Ukraine has become an everyday symbol of this geopolitical conflict. In order to officially cross in and out of Crimea, individuals need to obtain official authorisation from the Ukrainian side and a Russian visa, a dire process for many people, whether local residents, journalists or international organisations (see OSCE, 2015).

Minorities, such as Crimean Tatars or Ukrainians, appear to have little room for manoeuvre as they find themselves excluded from depictions of Crimea as the homeland of Russian people. However, some spokespersons of minoritised groups have insisted on their universal human rights and represented their fights on international stages. A different picture of the struggle over Crimea emerges which challenges claims of one social group to speak as the legitimate voice for the peninsula. I focus on this symbolic struggle which plays out locally among actors such as activists, lawyers and politicians, and between international organisations which claim to speak in the name of universal human rights norms.⁴ While those who claim rights are ignored or criminalised by the local Russian authorities as acts of terrorism (see Savchuk, 2019), local voices have built alliances with United Nations (UN) human rights experts to write themselves into a global fight for human rights claims. I will analyse two fault lines of this struggle over symbolic power: Between local spokespersons of a dominant pro-Russian faction and the Crimean Tatar minority over 'authenticity', and between spokespersons of international organisations over articulations of 'the universal'.

Research strategy: capturing symbolic power relations

To analyse these symbolic struggles, I conducted 13 biographical interviews between 2019 and 2020 online and in person in Russian and English with two different groups of people: first, local actors in Crimea including activists, human rights lawyers and investigative journalists, and second, representatives of international organisations such as the UN human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, the Council of Europe and UN special rapporteurs who visited Ukraine since the annexation.

Three of these are directly quoted in this article. The trajectory of this research began with an unease over the geopolitical framing of the annexation of Crimea. Instead, I sought to analyse alternative framings which centred on human rights struggles. My initial selection of interviewees focused on actors who produced official reports on the human rights situation in Crimea, both at a distance and from within. Given the complex

legal and political situation at the boundary line between Crimea and mainland Ukraine, the number of investigative journalists from Ukraine or representatives of international organisations was limited. Those who were caught by the Russian authorities received lengthy bans from entering Crimea over several decades (Coynash, 2020). But by connecting with representatives from local and international human rights organisations, I was able to access firsthand accounts of human rights work on Crimea.

Representatives from international organisations were selected due to their long-term presence in Ukraine since March 2014 with regular reports on Crimea (such as the UN human rights monitoring mission) as well as representatives from bodies which provided ad hoc reports with unprecedented direct but short access to Crimea (the Council of Europe) or without access (UN special rapporteurs). In order to complement the perspectives of these actors, I identified local voices in Crimea through investigative journalist articles published in openDemocracy or RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. In a second step, these actors connected me to other local voices who have been at the forefront of organising their struggles as lawyers or community leaders and who provided regular updates to organisations such as the UN. Some local activists and lawyers were mentioned as important voices by both journalists and UN representatives, which underlined their status as recognised spokespersons across professional and local communities. I supplemented this with a reading of local Russian-speaking news articles. This approach was the best way of overcoming the limitations of not being able to travel to Crimea.

At the same time, I did not interview political representatives in Crimea, voices of pro-Russian groups or persons who were neither lawyers nor activists as my focus was on struggles over human rights. Future research could consider those actors. I focused on spokespersons who positioned themselves against the illegal annexation or suffered as a result of it and made claims to human rights to articulate this position. This approach revealed transnational connections through an analysis of the relationship between local and international human rights spokespersons and their various claims on behalf of groups (Hoffmann, 2021: 7).

The selection of these interviewees and sources shaped the argument and analysis in important ways. As I conducted the interviews, the initial focus on legal strategies and day-to-day practices in all interviews inevitably shifted to narratives of who can be trusted as a reliable spokesperson on the situation in Crimea, for example, by virtue of their proximity to marginalised social groups, legal expertise and professional experience in human rights work. I interpreted these as different examples of symbolic power. In my analysis, I was guided by Bourdieu's methodological reflections on how to locate each actor in a social space with a specific point of view. Instead of claiming to do justice to all points of view, my aim was to make visible how speaking as a spokesperson entails generalising a specific point of view to include various voices. This analysis of the social space was first done by mapping relevant actors and reports. Subsequently, my interviews allowed me to analyse actors' biographies and their strategies to make claims and speak on behalf of groups. To produce an in-depth understanding of multiple perspectives, the interviews were read in relation to each other.

Each viewpoint in the social space has 'distortions that necessarily result from the particular character of their own point of view' (Bourdieu, 1999: 5). This includes the researcher. The interview as a method produces a particular social relation between

interviewer and interviewee which gives rise to an array of practical and theoretical issues.⁵ Therefore, an analysis of the researcher's positionality is done through 'participant objectivation' whereby the object under analysis and one's own relation to the object is objectified (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1989: 33). As a consequence, the researcher's analysis of the research object needs to be seen as 'a point of view on a point of view' (Bourdieu, 1999: 625). At the same time, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1999: 625–626) insists that this objectification of viewpoints in the social space enables the researcher to put themselves in their place.

In my interviews, I sought to give a 'sense of social ease' and 'guarantees of sympathetic comprehension' through expressions of solidarity with the struggles and human rights work done by actors. At the same time, I sought to demonstrate knowledge on the subject and social conditions of my interviewees by reviewing existing reports, social media reporting by activists and conducting the interview in their native language (Bourdieu, 1999: 612–613). The interview, then, can 'create the conditions for an extraordinary discourse' as a kind of 'induced and accompanied self-analysis' performed by the interviewee (Bourdieu, 1999: 614–615). By reading these interviews in relation to each other, as collective and heterogenous discourses on the situation in Crimea, I was able to construct an analysis which showed how human rights fights were ongoing struggles over their universalism and the authenticity of the voices who can articulate it.

This interpretation of my data is guided by a theoretical gaze, involving 'inevitable acts of construction' which orients the reading towards a particular interpretive framework (Bourdieu, 1999: 624). For the purposes of the argument in this article, which focuses on delegation, classification struggles and symbolic power, I first analysed interview quotes and professional biographies which retrace the authorisation of spokespersons in relation to each other. Second, I focused on various actors' strategies to reproduce or challenge an existing symbolic order. Third, I focus on overt positionings as spokespersons and how actors justify this claim to symbolic power. As such, the analysis focuses less on the success of various legal or political strategies in concrete disputes or on everyday voices and the extent to which they see themselves represented by lawyers, activists or politicians. In order to mitigate my own position as an academic spokesperson, I shared quotes and contexts with my interviewees so they could decide on the level of anonymity or if any changes are necessary.

'Authentic' spokespersons: challenging the boundaries of 'the people'

The lens of the spokesperson helps reread claims to 'Crimeanness' and rights claims by minorities as part of a broader struggle over 'authenticity' of speech in the making of a people. Such open disputes are but an entry point to analyse the taken-for-granted notion of 'authentic' representation by one voice. When Crimea was annexed, Putin produced narratives on the 'peaceful' transfer of the peninsula, the 'brotherly' union of its peoples and consecrated the new Prime Minister of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, who seized power 2 weeks before Crimea's absorption into Russia. Aksyonov's election, Putin claimed, 'complied with all the procedures envisaged by the law; there [was] not a single violation' (Kremlin, 2014). Aksyonov was not a newcomer to the political scene. He had already participated in local elections in Crimea where his Russian Unity Party, running

on the platform of integrating Crimea into Russia, scored 4.02% and finished fifth overall. This is far from representing a natural and pre-existing pro-Russian position in Crimea (Shuster, 2014).

Aksyonov's biographical trajectory gives insights into how he sought to ground his authority to speak authentically for Crimea as a Crimean. In an investigative article, Shuster (2014) examined Aksyonov's family history, tracing a deeply rooted intergenerational commitment to the Red Army. Especially his father, who was stationed in Moldova in the 1980s, is said to have had a major influence on him. As members of the Russian minority in Moldova, his father and other Russians started a movement for their rights. Aksyonov himself was trained in the college for Soviet military engineers in Crimea in 1989, shortly before the breakup of the Soviet Union. When it collapsed, he refused to serve in the Ukrainian army. Instead, he was involved in criminal business activities in the 1990s. He turned to politics in 2008 and joined a group which advocated for the secession of Crimea from Ukraine and its integration into Russia. This group was accused of training separatist militias, which was illegal under Ukrainian law but never faced any charges. Two years later, Aksyonov founded the Russian Unity Party which won three out of 100 seats in parliamentary elections. Shortly after he came to power in Crimea, he proclaimed that 'Crimean order would only be restored by Crimeans themselves' and public servants who refused to follow this order were invited to write their resignation letter (allcrimea.net, 2014). His seizure of executive political power is therefore also seizure of symbolic power as he monopolised the right to speak for Crimea.

This arrival of a new spokesperson for the 'Crimean people' had a profound effect on local institutional politics as the then chairman of the Supreme Council of Crimea, Vladimir Konstantinov, chose to support Aksyonov and to amplify pro-Russian voices. Adopting this clear position was not an obvious move when considering his political trajectory in Crimea to that date. Only 2 years before, Konstantinov faced a similar choice but reportedly opposed calls of pro-Russian separatists for Crimea's integration into Russian jurisdiction, condemning the separatist group and calling it 'marginal' (Dobrokhotova and Bigg, 2016). However, as the symbolic order shifted in 2014, so did his position.

This new social reality has hardened classification struggles among social groups in Crimea, now obliged to identify themselves in relation to clear social classificatory categories. Dissenting voices use human rights to challenge this social reality and to struggle over the authenticity of local voices to speak on behalf of 'Crimeans'. Crimean Tatars have been at the forefront of these fights, abstaining from the referendum and resisting the annexation. Local human rights lawyers and activists, in particular, have become voices of minorities and universal human rights. In 2017, Crimean lawyer Emil Kurbedinov received an award from the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Front Line Defenders which he accepted in the name of all human rights defenders in Crimea: 'This is not my award, this is an award to all human rights defenders, civil society activists' (Kurbedinov, 2017). This collective claims a shared commitment to human rights rather than unity in nationality or ethnicity, providing an alternative narrative to imagine union in rights struggles. In a short time, a team of lawyers emerged as a body of human rights experts and built a network of social relations with affected residents.

To illustrate the symbolic importance of this development, I will follow the trajectory of a local human rights lawyer, part of Kurbedinov's team, who occupies an important position both locally with lawyers and activists and internationally cooperating with international organisations. Their professional trajectory shows how they have gradually become an authorised spokesperson for local voices. International human rights frameworks and their position as 'insiders' of their communities are important symbolic tools to engage in classification struggles. The lawyer notes how since the annexation, people kept arriving 'every day, in big groups who tried to get legal counsel' (Personal interview by author, October 2019). After mass arrests of Crimean Tatar activists, they began to specialise in criminal cases and legal consultations concerning questions of harassment based on nationality and religion. As the lawyer speaks on behalf of rights struggles, they narrate the close relation between the spokesperson and the spoken-for social groups. Another strategy is to position themselves as spokespersons on the international stage which allows social groups to have a voice on a higher scale. As the lawyer notes, 'my colleagues and I always look for methods to find effective means to [. . .] bring these cases to new levels and also get the attention of international civil society [. . .], especially concerning Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians' (Personal interview by author, October 2019). Importantly, they claim to speak for both groups.

This symbolic struggle unfolds in courts as lawyers seek to reformulate categories of perception. These fights, while necessary, are not decisive. As they note, 'in a court case we can show the absurdity [in a particular case] but unfortunately this has little effect on the negotiations. [. . .] Everything is prewritten and already decided' (Personal interview by author, October 2019). This conscious politicisation of legal fights is important to note, as political voices tend to be written out in human rights reports by international organisations, as will be seen in the next section. Thus, it is a form of resistance against being silenced in reports who claim to narrate the local situation and speak on behalf of local voices.

In light of these dynamics, actors seek to legitimate their position as spokespersons by claiming authenticity. Various interviewees perceived a social position of proximity to the community as important. The lawyer compares Crimean Tatar political leaders who are exiled in Kyiv with those present locally: '[. . .] maybe those are gaining in popularity who stayed among the people, those people who are constantly helping to solve problems' (Personal interview by author, October 2019). Nevertheless, they have regular meetings with Crimean Tatar political leaders in Ukraine to consolidate their powers and to speak with one voice across social spaces. Maintaining this position produces, in their view, credibility among their local communities and international human rights monitoring missions who validate their symbolic power as spokespersons by repeatedly calling upon them to report. Such alliances with actors from international organisations 'interlock' local struggles with global fights for human rights. This does not mean, however, that all speak in unison with the voice of one human rights universal. Spokespersons of human rights have diverse views on events in Crimea and might diverge on what counts as systematic human rights violations (see Madsen, 2011: 263).

Spokespersons of 'the universal': expert struggles for human rights

In this section, I explore a different facet of the spokesperson by focusing on positionings as intermediaries and amplifiers of voices as a form of symbolic power. I analyse the presence of two monitoring missions by the UN and the Council of Europe as a symbolic struggle to speak on behalf of the universal. The UN, which conducts monitoring at a distance, is more easily recognised as legitimate by local Crimean voices whereas the Council of Europe mission, which visited Crimea in January 2016, was rejected by local NGOs who did not feel accurately represented in the report.

In March 2014, the UN deployed its human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) at the request of the Ukrainian government without direct access to Crimea. It has produced regular accounts on the situation in Crimea through remote monitoring and a specific methodology from a 2001 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Training Manual which relies on identifying and interviewing local spokespersons and amplifying local voices. Human rights officers need to first consider whether a specific human rights violation covers their mandate and if so, break 'down the definition of the particular right into its component elements to determine if it fits the situation' (OHCHR, 2001: 95). Certain violations need to be prioritised over others and the manual recommends a strategic approach that focuses on cases with the greatest impact and a visible success (OHCHR, 2001: 97). Such cases are 'representative of the problems which others are suffering, and likely have a positive result in a relatively short period' (OHCHR, 2001). Ethnic discrimination is a particularly pertinent example: 'The human rights operation might focus on the dismissal of a highly visible member of an ethnic group from the employment at a major factory for reasons which are clearly related to ethnicity' (OHCHR, 2001: 97). The work, then, requires finding a prolific member of a social group who can serve as a spokesperson for the problem as a whole. The UN human rights officer is thus transformed into an intermediary between the local and the international community and an amplifier of a local spokesperson.

A representative of the mission highlighted that with these methods they were able to gradually build a network of lawyers and activists in Crimea to identify victims without direct access (Personal interview by author, September 2019). They paint a heterogeneous image of victims which does not only pertain to one single profile of social group: 'We have quite a lot of Crimean Tatars as victims, but, again, I wouldn't say this is the predominant profile' (Personal interview by author, September 2019). Forced conscription of male residents into the Russian armed forces has also been a central violation and does not necessarily concern Crimean Tatars only. They are able to reach people through technological means or conduct interviews with people who left Crimea, meeting them at the administrative boundary line every few months.

Their self-assessment of the monitoring mission is very clear: 'in terms of international organisations, I would say that we are the primary holder of knowledge on Crimea. [...] the only systematic reporting on the human rights situation on Crimea comes from OHCHR' (Personal interview by author, September 2019). Their central tasks include building a knowledge data base on Crimea and speaking directly to victims, with or without access to Crimea. The UN mission is thus depicted as an intermediary and

objective knowledge producer which advocates on behalf of a diverse set of victims without powerful spokespersons, such as forced conscripts.

While the HRMMU is reporting at a distance, the Council of Europe managed to send an ad hoc mission to Crimea in January 2016. As then Council of Europe Secretary-General Jagland announced in his press release:

More than 2.5 million people live in Crimea, they are all covered by the European Convention on Human Rights and should be able to benefit from it. [. . .] The mission will be conducted with full independence and will not deal with any issue related to the territorial status of Crimea

in order to ‘make sure the people of Crimea are not forgotten’ (Council of Europe, 2016a). This was an astonishing announcement as no foreign delegation had been admitted to the territory since 2014.

The mission was led by Swiss ambassador Stoudmann who was accompanied by three representatives of the Council of Europe with legal and political expertise. Their symbolic power to construct a narrative on Crimea through the lens of the universalism of the European Convention on Human Rights was built on their diplomatic skills, field mission experience and human rights expertise. The Convention served as a symbolic source for the terms of reference to represent Crimea’s social space, dismissing political voices as irrelevant to the human rights assessment and parting with accounts of local NGOs. The mission was therefore to remain ad hoc as their narratives were not validated by those in whose name they claimed to speak.

The mission was placed carefully between the Ukrainian and Russian state parties through skilful political negotiations led by the Council of Europe authorities (Council of Europe, 2016b: 1). Conceived of as an ad hoc mission, rather than treaty-based, the mission reported directly to the Secretary-General. It sought to avoid dealing with any political questions on sovereignty or Crimea’s territorial status, while affirming a regional human rights imaginary that encompasses Crimea.

The mission was concerned with the human rights situation of minorities and political dissidents as well as everyday life on the peninsula. Crimean Tatars, in particular, were central to the report. Under Ukrainian jurisdiction, they were given de facto political rights through the Mejlis, a political representative organ led by Crimean Tatar political leaders (Shcherbyna, 2014). Their status, however, was not legally enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution. Long before the annexation, there was already an active movement for recognition as Crimea’s Indigenous people by acceding to international treaties on Indigenous rights, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Ivzhenko, 2013). A few months after, the Council of Europe delegation visited Crimea the Mejlis was declared illegal and closed by the local authorities. Prior to this, the delegation had noted that repression in Crimea, up to this point, was directed at individuals ‘whether they are Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians or others, rather than reflecting a collective repression policy against the Crimean Tatars as an ethnic group’ (Council of Europe, 2016b: 4).

This particular observation was to become a point of contention for some Ukrainian human rights NGOs. The Council of Europe mission mobilised objectivity of the Convention on Human Rights as symbolic power to break with existing local narratives. However, the report anticipated the potential closure:

In this sensitive context, the procedure aiming at declaring ‘the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people’ an ‘extremist organisation’, should it lead to a court decision on a ban, would indicate a new level of repression targeting the Crimean Tatar community as a whole. (Council of Europe, 2016b: 4)

The report further pointed to a perceived split between the political leaders of the Crimean Tatar community, where some occupy high political posts under the Russian authorities and others in exile or in prison (Council of Europe, 2016b).

This split between Crimean Tatar leaders is also connected to a spokesperson’s specific location vis-à-vis the spoken-for as analysed in the previous part and noted by Ambassador Stoudmann. In his account, this was mirrored in local residents’ main concerns which were not necessarily linked to geopolitical questions. In this context, the Crimean Tatar mufti appeared to him as the most ‘authentic’ and trustworthy spokesperson:

the mufti was for me one of the most interesting contacts I had. [. . .] And he told me, my place is not in exile somewhere, my place is here in Crimea with my people. [. . .] I’m not a politician, I’m a religious leader, and I think first of my people. (Personal interview by author, December 2019)

Upon concluding the mission, the local reception of the report was negative. The Ukrainian human rights NGO Center for Civil Liberties, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022, published an open letter to Secretary General Jagland, expressing its disagreements with some of the findings: ‘For more than two years, we have continuously monitoring respect for human rights in Crimea. That is why we are well aware of the difficult working conditions and the significance of your contribution’ (Euromaidan press, 2016). Some of the issues pertaining to the European Convention on Human Rights remained undescribed, such as the conclusion on repression against Crimean Tatars which, they argue, ‘contradicts the assessment of international and local human rights organizations’ (Euromaidan press, 2016).

The Council of Europe mission entered a space of classificatory struggle that had already been inhabited by local activists, UN monitors and human rights lawyers. Officially, the mission remained ad hoc for a different reason, however: The Ukrainian side argued that a follow-up mission ‘would be a bad precedent and it would lead to a de facto, step-by-step recognition of the status quo’ (Personal interview by author, December 2019). These examples show how the capacity to speak on behalf of Crimea’s human rights struggles is at the same time a fight between various spokespersons to articulate the universal.

Implications

At first glance, the pursuit of legal and institutional political strategies, which many actors know are likely to fail, might appear puzzling, especially from the perspective of disputes or norm contestation. However, as is evident from the interviews, many actors continue to struggle over symbolic power to speak on behalf of Crimea, creating

dynamics of simultaneous empowerment and silencing of the spoken-for. In other words, Crimea's struggles are as much about human rights and its political status as about the accumulation of symbolic power to speak on behalf of its social space and to impose categories of perception. Actors strive for symbolic rewards which authorise them to speak with authority on behalf of social groups. In this broader symbolic context, spokespersons seek to legitimate their speech on behalf and develop narratives about their authority and tight-knit relations with spoken-for social groups. Such strategies, as Bourdieu noted, seek to hide the 'I' behind the 'we'. For some, this concealment of silencing is more successful than for others. Paying attention to the practice of speech on behalf helps uncover how symbolic orders and their stakes can become reformulated as speech becomes delegated to a powerful spokesperson. At the same time, it is important to remain attentive to the structural problem of silencing inherent in delegation which poses a paradox for the spokesperson who cannot resolve but only mitigate it through creative strategies. The conclusion will develop this contention further and open up lines of inquiry.

Conclusion

IR theories that centre the audience/speaker relationship in analyses of the legitimation of political speech need to grapple with the problem of the spokesperson. This article critically engaged with securitisation theory, constructivist theories of rhetorical legitimation and rationalist approaches which define political speech as a linguistic phenomenon taking place between a speaker and audience. As I showed, audiences fulfil various functions in these accounts, highlighting the importance of domestic politics, legitimising or resonating with political speech, or being coerced rhetorically into a course of action. However, the speaker's speech on behalf has the potential to inflict symbolic violence on spoken-for social groups and spaces which might go unnoticed. Instead, I analysed the capacity to speak on behalf as a form of symbolic power which can reformulate categories of perception, impose social classifications on social spaces and draw lines of inclusion and exclusion. To approach the spokesperson as a problem entails unpacking the social mechanism of delegation and its structurally in-built problem of silencing despite the promise of empowerment of those who delegate their speech to someone else.

Building on Bourdieu, I showed how language needs to be seen as a key site of symbolic power relations in which rhetoric can be part of a broader set of strategies for the spokesperson to manifest their authority. However, existing work needs to go further and analyse a spokesperson's trajectories of authorisation, how they justify speech on behalf and their positioning as a spokesperson in relation to the spoken-for. This analysis unveils how various actors are engaged in symbolic struggles which, more than rhetorical fights or disputes, are about the redistribution of symbolic power and the reformulation of the terms of reference of symbolic orders. As such, I distinguished my analysis of the spokesperson from Boltanski's understanding of disputes and the spokesperson as an embodiment of an institution. Using the example of Crimea, the article analysed authenticity and universality as two stakes in symbolic struggles between spokespersons to speak on behalf of someone else. In these symbolic struggles, spokespersons seek to reformulate

the situation in Crimea from a geopolitical conflict over a piece of land as the rightful homeland of one people to the universal human rights struggles of minorities.

In the concluding paragraphs, I want to suggest future lines of inquiry into creative strategies to mitigate the problem of the spokesperson. One possibility is offered in Hayat's (2022) work on the refusal to be a spokesperson in the context of the French Yellow Vest movement. Leaders of the movement made what Hayat terms 'unrepresentative claims' and refused representative mandates conferred onto them while simultaneously embodying a people with a shared identity. I want to suggest a different possibility emerging from the strategies of alliances and internationalisation mobilised by spokespersons as seen in the example of Crimea. Such alliances forge links between spokespersons that are engaged in different kinds of symbolic struggles. This can create the potential to break 'the miracle of a sincere and successful ministry', or the seemingly 'natural' alignment of interests between the delegate and the spoken-for (Bourdieu, 1991: 215). Bourdieu notes that this game can be briefly interrupted with the arrival of a new spokesperson in the formation of a rival organisation. However, a real interruption of this game would deconstruct the logic of aggregation, which reduces political practice to individual aggregates of opinions, to a more deliberative, collective choice in which the social conditions of constructing choices are determined through a dialectical confrontation between all (Bourdieu, 2005: 62). This brief discussion opens up creative strategies to 'master' a spokesperson's speech in democratic politics. This might entail translating claims of amplifying voices or lending one's voice to someone else into concrete acts in which powerful spokespersons can choose to let others speak in their place.

The 'entry' of Indigenous peoples' human rights struggles into the UN offers an interesting illustration of this. In 1971, the UN commissioned special rapporteur Martinez Cobo to write a report on the situation of Indigenous peoples which was published between 1981 and 1983. By using the social space of the UN strategically, the study enabled participation of Indigenous leaders despite a lack of mandatory official accreditation. UN lawyer Augusto Willemsen Diaz, in charge of the study, built alliances with accredited NGOs which yielded some of their speaking time to Indigenous voices (Willemsen and Diaz, 2009: 20). Speech on behalf of human rights struggles was translated into the capacity to occupy a social space with multiple voices. While Indigenous leaders themselves were chosen as spokespersons for their people, this example mirrors how 'speech on behalf' is produced and contested in processes of aggregation and disaggregation through creative alliances. While not a solution to the problem of the spokesperson, it showcases human rights lawyers' reflexive awareness as some 'layers' of spokespersons can be removed in the struggle for Indigenous rights. As this article aimed to show, the problem of the spokesperson raises profound theoretical and practical questions for legitimacy of speech, representative democracy, transnational solidarities, social movements and beyond.

Acknowledgements

The author wants to thank Tarak Barkawi, Hager Ben Jaffel, Didier Bigo, Kerry Goettlich, Stefano Guzzini, Jef Huysmans, Emma Mc Cluskey, Sebastian Larsson, George Lawson and two anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful and generous comments which have greatly improved the manuscript at various stages.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by the London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Programme through an ESCR grant (reference number ES/P000703/1).

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Notes

1. Scholars have drawn from Bourdieu's work to capture, for example, the logic of practices (see Adler-Nissen, 2013, 2016; Leander, 2008), the formation of transnational fields of power (Bigo, 2011; Krause, 2018) and professional guilds (Bigo, 2016), reflexivity (Madsen, 2011) or the emergence of experts and elites (Dezalay and Garth, 2002; Kauppi and Madsen, 2013). Recently, French political theorists have analysed spokespersons, their historical genealogies and contexts in which they claim to embody claims of a multitude (Hayat et al., 2022; see Hayat, 2022, for strategies of denial to speak on behalf of someone else).
2. Other key influences are Bourdieu's ethnographic studies of Algeria, in collaboration with Abdelmalek Sayad, and his close engagement with Max Weber's sociology of religion which unveiled to him the importance of the symbolic dimension of social life.
3. A similar critique of the durability and homogeneity of dispositions was also made by Bernard Lahire, who as Boltanski collaborated with Bourdieu. In proposing his dispositional and contextual sociology, Lahire (2011) dissects Bourdieu's premise of singleness of dispositions and critiques the homogeneous understanding of *illusio* as the 'complicity between mental structures and the objective structures of the social situation' (p. 43). Instead, he analyses dispositions as plural and heterogenous which surface in different social situations.
4. Critical constructivist scholarship on norm contestation has developed theoretical lenses to investigate struggles over definitions and validity of norms, their application in international institutions and whose voice can be heard in practices of norm change (Lantis, 2017; Wiener, 2018). While focusing on sites of human rights struggles, my analysis focuses less on concrete norm contestations and more on how such struggles are an expression of broader symbolic power relations which take the capacity to speak on behalf for granted.
5. See Bourdieu (1999: 607–626) for a more detailed discussion.

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