

## **MIGRATION, COMMUNICATION, AND ACTIVISM: PERSPECTIVES AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **MIGRAÇÕES, COMUNICAÇÃO E ATIVISMOS. OLHARES E REFLEXÕES**

**Isabel Macedo**

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

**Rosa Cabecinhas**

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

**Susana de Andrés**

Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Jurídicas y de la Comunicación, Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid, Spain

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According to data from the Agência das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados (United Nations Refugee Agency; <https://pacnur.org/pt>), it is estimated that there are approximately 120 million people in situations of forced mobility in the world. These populations are forced to leave their regions of origin due to situations of violence, armed conflicts, persecution, systematic human rights violations and/or in response to the impacts of climate change. Forced immobility as a result of protracted conflicts also affects millions of people, significantly restricting access to essential goods and, in many cases, constituting a kind of ‘open-air prison’ with devastating consequences. The impossibility of escape or mobility in conflict scenarios perpetuates a cycle of suffering, making opportunities for reconstruction and sustainable human development impossible.

In a speech at Oranienplatz, Berlin, Angela Davis (2022) highlighted that “when you think about classifications like ‘immigrant’ or ‘refugee’, you tend to think of them as definitions inherent to the person, but they don’t represent individuals. They don’t represent groups. They don’t represent communities. They represent State regulated relations of governance” (00:29:52). This statement is particularly poignant when considering the challenges humanity faces today. The traditional definition of a “migrant” — as someone who voluntarily leaves their country — is obsolete, particularly when a significant portion of forced migrants are neither eligible for nor classified under “refugee” status, leaving them in a limbo of impossibility.

In both media and political discourse, terms such as “migrants,” “ethnic minorities,” and “races” are often used interchangeably, with the concept of the “migrant” frequently understood as someone who deviates from the “norm” in racial and cultural terms. When skin colour is not explicitly used as a defining criterion, it is often operationalised through imagery, implicitly reinforcing processes of racialisation. Moreover, not all foreigners are perceived as “migrants,” and not all nationals are regarded as “citizens.” For example, in Portugal, Black and Roma people are often perceived as “migrants” regardless of their citizenship status, making them frequent targets of xenophobia (Cabecinhas & Macedo, 2019).

For a time, some of us may have held the illusion of living in a postcolonial or post-imperial world. However, the way in which the media frame migrations often obscures the historical processes and inequalities colonialism and imperialism have created, as well as the complexity of the political and environmental dimensions. Media portrayals of migration frequently renew power asymmetries that were established during European colonialism, reinforcing systems of international division of labour that perpetuate “old” colonial hierarchies and determine unequal freedoms of movement (Cabecinhas, 2022).

Engaging with historical memory and awareness is essential to effectively understanding and addressing the current “migratory crises.” Nevertheless, the terms used in the media, their social and historical construction, and their effects are rarely interrogated, leaving the afterlives of European colonialism in contemporary governance and environmental systems largely unexamined (Chakrabarty, 2020).

As Angela Davis (2022) asserts, “if we don’t challenge the powerful vestiges of colonialism, there will be no habitable future. ( ... ) It requires constant vigilance, constant struggles. Freedom is a constant struggle” (00:06:48). This struggle entails hope and collective action at various levels, aimed at dismantling deeply ingrained systems of oppression and forging paths toward social change and the construction of the common good. Davis (2022) further suggests that, through collective action, “we will generate hope for ourselves, we will generate hope for the planet, hope for the future. That very challenge extends into the future when we will be confronted with the task of continuing to generate hope in order to give rise to even more hopeful futures” (00:46:46).

The scientific knowledge we produce and the actions we undertake contribute to knowing and relating to one another and are fundamental to understanding life in all its complexities. Scientific knowledge, in conjunction with other forms of knowledge, enables mutual understanding and sharing. Thus, it becomes an ethical responsibility to generate knowledge that fosters hope for the common good.

If “we are in the world to communicate, to engage in relations, to share” (Chaparro & de Andrés, 2022, p. 15), it is crucial to reconsider the meaning of relations in contemporary communication processes. According to Chaparro and de Andrés (2022), our society requires a theory of the human that is inseparable from nature, alongside a communication theory grounded in the common good — an “ethical, feminist, decolonial, ecological, socially just theory” (p. 17). The authors advocate for the recovery of communication as “feeling-thinking,” which, among other things, involves rethinking the relations and use of technologies to interconnect ecosystems and share knowledge.

It is essential, as Glissant (2005) proposes, to develop a “poetics of relation,” an approach to human relations that values diversity, dialogue, and the right of all peoples to “opacity” — the complexity and incomprehensibility of others. Embracing opacity, from this perspective, means recognising otherness and difference without attempting to dismiss them. In communication and relations between people, groups, and institutions, it is crucial to remember the “duty of memory” (Sousa et al., 2022). Challenging forgetfulness and invisibility, reconstructing memories and plural visions of the past offer potential pathways toward a poetics of relation.

In recent years, various social movements and epistemic projects in different parts of the world have confronted Europe's colonial "heritage" and rejected structural power asymmetries. These efforts contribute to active resistance against the "coloniality" of institutions, cultures, and disciplines. Scholars and activists agree that the legacies of imperialism, colonialism and slavery continue to shape the present, affecting both the formerly colonising and the formerly colonised peoples (Figueiredo et al., 2018). From Afro-descendant struggles against racism (Macedo et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2024; Roldão et al., 2023) to contemporary debates on human rights (Bethencourt, 2023; Monteiro, 2020), coloniality permeates cultures, identities, and relations, manifesting today in multiple ways (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

As a result, the decolonisation of public space, knowledge, and thought, as well as the decolonisation of the media, is viewed as an ongoing political, cultural, and ethical project. Drawing on the significant legacy of anti-colonial, postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1952; Hall, 1996; Mbembe, 2013; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988) and the critiques put forward by decolonial thought (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo, 2017; Quijano, 2007), the production of knowledge for the common good involves the de-Westernisation and decolonisation of communication and media studies (Chakravarty et al., 2018; Curran & Park, 2000; Mirzoeff & Halberstam, 2018; Moyo, 2020), prioritising alternative epistemologies and emancipatory methodologies.

Digital technologies and networks have introduced new opportunities for contact, participation (McDougall, et al. 2019; Pereira et al., 2021) and engagement. They are increasingly used to mobilise communities, disseminate messages, and advocate for social change (Jenkins et al., 2016). These technologies also facilitate connections for migrants, enabling them to access support networks, explore job opportunities, and obtain information about destination countries. However, they also play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of migrants. Shared images and narratives can foster empathy and acceptance, but they can equally reinforce stereotypes and prejudices, influencing intercultural communication, relationships, and public policies. The *World Migration Report 2024* (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024) highlights that disinformation campaigns against migrants are heavily aligned with right-wing political and media actors, including the resurgence of far-right, nationalist and xenophobic ideologies (p. 144). Moreover, media coverage often focuses on "negative" news, and disinformation tactics are increasingly employed, with detrimental effects at various levels.

In a context marked by numerous armed conflicts, growing migratory inequalities, climate change, and insecurity, human mobility faces urgent challenges that demand immediate action. Displacement caused by conflict and violence has led to a global increase in the number of refugees while existing solutions have proven insufficient to address these pressing needs (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024).

Simultaneously, digital technologies and social networks, which blur the boundaries between media producers and consumers, have enabled new forms of global mobilisation and the emergence of media activism (Pickard & Yang, 2017). These

technologies allow individuals to follow and engage with such initiatives almost daily. Historical struggles — such as anti-racism, the feminist movement, environmental activism, and the defence of Indigenous communities — challenge hegemonic imaginaries, reshaping political agendas and reinforcing the relevance of studying media, art, and culture as potential expressions of emancipation. Contributing to this debate, studies on activism (Babo, 2023) advocate for “interdisciplinary and multicentric perspectives, decentred (non-Eurocentric) points of view, and the intersectionality of discourses” (p. 17). Mnemonic activism, as conceptualised by Cabecinhas (2022), can generate new knowledge through music, writing, cinema, and diverse artistic forms. These creative expressions stimulate critical reflection on past events and their enduring influence on the present, encouraging a reevaluation of perspectives and fostering transformative worldviews. As such, they play a crucial role in building a critical and socially engaged education.

This thematic issue brings together diverse contributions from various disciplinary perspectives and geographical contexts, enriching the debate on migration, communication, and activism. Topics such as film festivals, films, digital platforms, cultural expressions, digital social movements, museum transformations, and higher education access policies are explored, always in dialogue with migration, the decolonial debate, and processes of resistance. Although scientific research on migration representation in the media and the political, social, economic, and cultural consequences of migratory processes has grown (Collado et al., 2024), there are far fewer studies on the participation of migrants and racialised people in media production. This is one of the subjects addressed in this issue — several relevant topics remain underexplored and could be deepened in future publications. These include comparative studies on media practices in migration communication, the use of digital technologies in migration and border governance, management, and surveillance (e.g. Khan et al., 2022), challenges in methodologies for communication and forced migrations (e.g. Mattelart, 2019), or studies amplifying the voices of migrants and/or racialised individuals regarding their active interventions in public spaces. Processes such as “cimmigration” (e.g. Amelung, 2021), the role of the current media ecosystem, and the *modus operandi* of “big tech” in reinforcing the afterlives of colonialism, as well as recent developments in artificial intelligence, are also discussed. These pressing topics, touched upon in this issue, will merit further study in the future.

As outlined at the beginning, this issue contributes to reflecting, from a multiplicity of perspectives, on the role of the media and institutions (e.g. universities) in the processes of social change.

The issue opens with Liliana Azevedo’s critical reflection on grey areas and blind spots in studies of Portuguese intra-European migrations. The author interrogates the categories of ‘emigrant,’ ‘age,’ ‘life journey,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘ethnicity’ commonly used in migration research, advocating for a reflexive approach to the concept of “Portuguese emigration” and the knowledge production process itself. While focused on Portuguese

migration, the theoretical framework and reflections she offers are highly relevant to migration studies more broadly, particularly in their intersectional dimensions.

Lidia Peralta García and Lhoussain Simour examine the CineMigrante Film Festival (Buenos Aires, Argentina), highlighting its disruptive and innovative approaches to engaging audiences. Their analysis explores how this and similar film festivals promote social justice, encourage community involvement, and advocate for migrants' rights. Using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, they discuss the festival's programming, media engagement, interactions with local community organisations, and communication strategies.

Drawing on research conducted within the *MigraMediaActs* project, Patricia Posch, Gessica Correia Borges, Chisoka Simões, and Carla Cerqueira present a mapping of alternative digital media outlets in Portugal that incorporate migration-related themes into their work. These outlets feature teams composed of migrants and/or racialised individuals. The authors critically address the participation of these communities in news production, emphasising the need for a more inclusive, heterogeneous, and representative media ecosystem that reflects Portugal's social and cultural diversity.

In the following article, Sara Mehrgut examines the relationships established with traditional dolls in Kenya. She argues that dolls, across different historical periods, have alternated between embodying female figures shaped by societal norms defining womanhood and serving as symbols of resistance against cultural hegemony through mnemonic activism that counters colonial-era racialisation. The article also addresses the contemporary production of dolls reflecting the country's diversity, highlighting the challenges producers face due to market constraints and lingering colonial power asymmetries.

Drawing on the notion that art provides fertile ground for resisting imperialism and hegemonic thinking, Elaine Trindade and Moisés de Lemos Martins explore key concepts such as interculturality, decoloniality and post-museality. They reflect on how certain museums are transforming their exhibitions and narratives to rethink and reconstruct discourses about their collections and histories. Their analysis highlights changes at the Africa Museum in Belgium and the Pitt Rivers Museum in Great Britain while also examining collections published in the Virtual Museum of Lusophony. This discussion is framed within the post-museum paradigm and the concept of a museum without objects. The authors also address the activist role played by collectives of African descent in the decolonisation of museums, particularly emphasising the contributions of Afropean guides conducting tours at the Africa Museum.

Constanza González-Véliz investigates how social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean utilise digital technologies. She asserts that these technologies have reshaped the region's political and social landscapes by facilitating organisation, mobilisation and citizen participation. Her analysis explores strategies employed by social movements to advance social justice while acknowledging the challenges and obstacles they encounter.

The short film *Hermanos, Aquí Estamos* (Brothers Here We Are; 2021) by Jade Rainho serves as the starting point for Emile Nicole Botelho Rodrigues dos Santos, Alessandro Mateus Felipe and Cristóvão Domingos de Almeida's reflection on the daily lives of Venezuelan migrants in Cuiabá, Brazil. The film foregrounds migrant women, who narrate their stories and expose the social issues they face in Brazil.

Finally, Efrén Xavier Alvarado Cevallos, Alexandre Anselmo Guilherme and Enrickson Varsori present a systematic literature review on migratory phenomena and the opportunities for migrant and refugee students to access higher education. The authors examine how state policies and institutional practices influence access, equity and exclusion for migrant students. They also underscore the role of non-state organisations in this process, highlighting efforts aimed at fostering structural change through advocacy and support.

This issue includes "Who Are The Beasts?", a reading by Fátima Martín on the film "The Beasts" (2022) by Rodrigo Sorogoyen. The film delves into themes such as belonging, globalisation, and the relationship between humans, animals, plants, and the environment. It also offers new ways of representing rurality, showcasing a diversity of genres, accents, landscapes and sensibilities. The author employs the metaphor "the cow, like all other beasts, is not from where it is born but from where it grazes" to explore the experiences of migrants striving to build new lives and contribute to their surroundings despite the resistance they encounter.

The interview with Amparo Marroquín Parducci, conducted by Manuel Chaparro, concludes this thematic issue. It explores the history of Central American migration through the lens of political decisions that have shaped migrants' routes and conditions, as well as the media's approach to migration. Drawing on her extensive research experience, Marroquín has recently focused on the evolving role of the "coyote" (guide/smuggler) as a mediator of the risks migrants face on their journey to a new country. The author observes two dominant narratives in media discourse: one celebrates migration as a heroic act, while the other frames it as a dangerous endeavour. According to Marroquín, news narratives often resemble melodramatic stories, alternating between epic tales and tragic accounts. She emphasises the need for policies that encourage more inclusive discourse and amplify a diversity of voices and experiences in media reporting.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Isabel Macedo is an assistant researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho. She holds a PhD in Cultural Studies and a BA and an MA in Educational Sciences. Her current research intersects intercultural communication and decolonial perspectives, focusing on contemporary migration challenges and cinematic representations. Isabel Macedo is the co-coordinator of the project *Migrations, Media and Activism in Portuguese: Decolonising Media Landscapes and Imagining Alternative Futures* (Foundation for Science and Technology, 2022–2026) and the director of the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, a platform fostering academic cooperation in science, education and the arts across Portuguese-speaking countries. She is also a member of the international project *CONCILIARE – Confidently Changing Colonial Heritage* (Horizon Europe). Her work has been published in national and international journals, covering topics such as cinema, interculturality, memory, (anti)racism and education.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4107-3997>

Email: [d3812@uminho.pt](mailto:d3812@uminho.pt)

Address: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga

Rosa Cabecinhas works at the Department of Communication Sciences and a researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS) at the University of Minho. She has conducted interdisciplinary research and coordinated various national and international projects on social memory, migrations, intercultural communication, and social change. Currently, she is the Principal Investigator of the project *Migrations, Media and Activism in Portuguese: Decolonising Media Landscapes and Imagining Alternative Futures* (Foundation for Science and Technology) and coordinates the UMinho team in the European project *CONCILIARE – Confidently Changing Colonial Heritage* (Horizon Europe).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1491-3420>.

E-mail: [cabecinhas@ics.uminho.pt](mailto:cabecinhas@ics.uminho.pt)

Address: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga

Susana de Andrés holds a PhD in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. She is a professor of Communication Ethics and director of the Audiovisual Communication and Hypermedia Research Group GIR GICAVH at the University of Valladolid. She is also a board member of the Gender Studies Chair and the International Development Cooperation Observatory at the same university.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3015-9971>

E-mail: [susana.andres@uva.es](mailto:susana.andres@uva.es)

Address: Universidad de Valladolid, Campus de Segovia, Spain



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