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REIMAGINING NARRATIVES ON MIGRATION The Role of Media, Arts and Culture in Promoting Transcultural Dialogue

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This special issue – stemmed from a three-year-research program funded by Università Cattolica that provided encounters, research networks and opened perspectives and collaborations –¹ starts from the assumption that migration is a historical and natural phenomenon, but its definition is political, linked to the time frame and socio-economic context, and influenced by the media, as the infrastructure that constitutes the world, in material and symbolic ways. Today, both social interaction and cultural reproduction pass through the media. Whether analog or digital, media contribute to the process of construction of reality by people, as well as to the formation of shared imaginaries and social representations. By suggesting to us what and how to think, old and new media – together with a multiplicity of institutions, subjects, sources, tools and communicative practices that coexist rather than replace each other – shape our common sense of the world². Sometimes fueling fear of the other and legitimizing its criminalization, sometimes stimulating curiosity and empathy³ toward the other and the elsewhere.

Migration has been a phenomenon throughout human history. From the very beginning of human existence, humankind has had both the reason and the means to travel from one place to another⁴. Migration has always been part of human life as it is an essential part of humanity's processes of adaptation to different social and physical environments⁵. However, as a result of economic hardship, conflict and globalization, in the last decade there is an obsession with immigration, even in the case of a reduction in arrivals. The “migration crisis”, instrumentally constructed by politicians and media

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¹ The program was a “university interest project” for the years 2016-2019. *Migrations | Mediations. Arts and Communication as Resources for Intercultural Dialogue*. (P.I. Ruggero Eugeni) about which see: <https://www.migrations-mediations.com>.

² N. Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, London: Sage, 2010.

³ F. Colombo, *Imago pietatis. Indagine su fotografia e compassione*, Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2018.

⁴ S. Castles, M.J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

⁵ M.L. Bacchi, ed., *Demografia del capitale umano*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010.

which benefit from it, feeds on the fears of citizens and deepens divisions by providing simple (static) and exclusive answers⁶. Hence, migration becomes a “weapon of mass distraction” for political leaders with respect to other issues and to protect particular interests.

In the last decade, the representation strategies and discursive practices enacted by a wide range of state and non-state actors have been presenting irregular migrants crossing borders as an ‘emergency’ to be managed in terms of a wider social, cultural and political ‘crisis’. These media representations of migration and asylum seeking as a ‘crisis’ have outstripped the reality of the situation⁷. The current crisis – usually framed as “a state of exception”⁸ that needs emergency legislation and intervention – has now been increased by the fears connected to the health crisis due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Often supporting the image of migrants coming to Europe as bearers of the disease, the pandemic has seen an intensification of controls in the European countries as well as around Europe’s borders, legitimising further borders externalisations⁹. As a consequence, the public anxiety about migration and asylum-seeking in Europe is increasingly shaped by the political rhetoric that depicts Europe as an endangered continent besieged by people fleeing conflict or seeking economic opportunity to ensure a better life. Institutional and political actors have stoked public fears and security concerns, endorsing a range of emergency narratives, aggressive policing and militarized border control, which in turn has generated a fertile breeding ground for xenophobic, populist reactions.

The answers to citizens’ fears were thus converted in physical and symbolic fences and walls to block immigration, undermining respect for human rights both in domestic and foreign policies. The outsourcing of the management of migrants to third countries – such as the EU-Turkey agreement signed in March 2016 and the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya signed in February 2017 – as well as the failure to sign the Global Compact on migration by various European countries are only some of the distorted outcomes and shortcomings of this system. The ‘securitization of migration’ has shaped the common understanding of what or who represents a (potential) threat¹⁰. Narratives of threats and security risks have been used to justify measures, policies and laws that were once considered to be extreme, unjustified and inhumane. We could call it a ‘cimmigration approach’ that not only frames migrants as symbolic threats but also extends to legal and illegal attempts to push migrants outside of the territories¹¹.

The media play a key role in this process. In the dominant Eurocentric discourses on migration numerous myths and misconceptions prevail, such as the claim that the biggest migration flow is the South-North migration (accompanied by terminology

⁶ M. Ambrosini, *L'invasione immaginaria. L'immigrazione oltre i luoghi comuni*, Roma: Laterza, 2020.

⁷ N. Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012; P. Musarò, “Mare Nostrum: The Visual Politics of a Military-Humanitarian Operation in the Mediterranean Sea”, *Media, Culture & Society*, 39, 1 (2017): 11-28.

⁸ G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

⁹ E. Giacomelli, P. Musarò, P. Parmiggiani, “The ‘Invisible Enemy’ and the Usual Suspects. How Covid-19 Reframed Migration in Italian Media Representations”, *Sociologia della Comunicazione*, 60 (2020): 119-136.

¹⁰ D. Bigo, “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease”, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27, 1 (2002): 63-92.

¹¹ D. Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012.

invoking ideas of out of control ‘floods’ or an invasion) whereas, as demonstrated by several studies, intra-regional migration is far more prevalent than inter-regional migration¹²; as well as the politically driven image of migrants as single, male, unskilled and dangerous is contested by the ‘feminization’ of the international migration framework¹³, with a steady increase in the numbers of migrant women entering the EU in the past two decades¹⁴ and a growing awareness of their economic contributions in Europe history: for long presented only as vulnerable subjects and economic burdens, female migrants are at last recognised as active builders of Europe with economic means, belongings, assets and social networks¹⁵. Even though unregulated movements across national borders constitute only a minor part of the mobility between states in the EU, it is one of the most spectacularized themes that is covered by the media. With the diversity of media platforms, the multiplication of formats for representation, and the complex feedback loops between reporting and public opinion we have witnessed the emergence of new voices but also the consolidation of old stereotypes. This over-mediatization of the phenomenon leads to a consistent discrepancy between the perception and the reality of the issue¹⁶, and this distance has fueled populist agenda and elevated the political status of migration issues. In this expanded media field it is therefore crucial to “deprovincialize” the media imaginary¹⁷ and critically examine the ways in which political attitudes towards migration are framed¹⁸.

Returning to the Eurocentric discourses we note that the inflows of refugees and asylum seekers have been often described catastrophically, representing their arrival as a major contemporary challenge and often as a threat¹⁹. The crisis narrative, with its securitised, depoliticising and technocratic approach, has helped populist, right-wing political parties push their anti immigration agendas²⁰. Although the “migrant crisis” is constructed in its historical and symbolic frame, its consequences are real. De-humanising migrants and asylum seekers, these narratives legitimise unequal power relations connected to the right to move and mask unjust and hegemonic treatments²¹. Within this general situation, new forms of poverty, exclusion, social desegregation and gender inequalities are emerging all around the world.

¹² D. Ionesco, D. Mokhnacheva, F. Gemenne, *The Atlas of Environmental Migration*, London-New York: Routledge, 2017.

¹³ K.M. Donato, D. Gabaccia, *Gender and International Migration. From the Slavery Era to the Global Age*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2015; S. Shekhawat, E.C. Del Re, eds., *Women and Borders. Refugees, Migrants and Communities*, London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018; F. Anthias, G. Lazaridis, *Gender and Migration in Southern Europe*, Oxford: Berg, 2000.

¹⁴ See the data available in the website of the Migration Data Portal <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/about>) managed and developed by IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC).

¹⁵ On this see for example the work of the transdisciplinary network of European researchers (Cost Action CA19112) *Women on the Move*, www.womenonthemove.eu/.

¹⁶ For further information, visit: <http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Immigrazione-realtà-e-percezione-27-agosto-2018-1.pdf>. For updated data on the Italian situation, see ISMU Annual Report on Migration, now in its XXVII edition: Fondazione ISMU, *Ventisettesimo rapporto sulle migrazioni 2021*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2022, open access at: <https://series.francoangeli.it/index.php/oa/catalog/book/757>.

¹⁷ T. Miller, J. Arroyave, “Worlding Media Studies” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory*, edited by J. Di Leo and C. Moraru, London: Bloomsbury, 2021: 355-366.

¹⁸ L. Zanfrini, *The Challenge of Migration in a Janus-Faced Europe*, Cham (CH): Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

¹⁹ E. Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.

²⁰ R. Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, London: Sage, 2015.

²¹ S. Goodman, A. Sirriyeh, S. McMahon, “The Evolving (Re)Categorization of Refugees throughout the ‘Refugee/Migrant Crisis’”, *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 27, 2 (2017): 105-114.

The distorted representations of migration generated a “moral panic”²² which has been concretised in a series of direct and violent attacks towards “newcomers” and hate speech²³. More generally, across and beyond countries of the Global North, a generalized “atmosphere of hostility” has led to shrinking forms of social protection and increasing precariousness for all those classified as outsiders, with the passing of legislation that denies them access to work, housing, services, and education. This tendency has been only exacerbated by the global rise of nationalist and populist political forces, which has turned the scapegoating of migrants – not only those with a foreign passport, but anyone racialized as others – into a distinctive target of public discourse and action. Through various forms of cooperation in surveillance, risk analysis and deportations, amongst border control agencies both within and beyond the EU, this form of policing operates “before, at, and after the border”, punctuating the above-mentioned trajectory with the aim of turning the environments it traverses into spaces of hostility for people on the move. This and other similar strategies of border control have locked in a connecting logic the “natural” borderlands located at the fringes of the Global North to urban geographies in Europe, the United States, Australia, and beyond. As Pezzani highlights, rather than a singular occurrence, it is a multiplicity of hostile environments that have sprung up across “natural” and civic spaces alike²⁴.

On the other hand, since the rise of modern nation-states, borders have played an important role in ordering society because they have the power to define territories and delimit the geographies of nations. This is also visible at the level of the imaginary, by shaping national identities of people and their perceptions of the world²⁵. From this perspective, borders and the process of bordering are not only social phenomena, but they are also political, which makes the border a strategy to control both imaginary and real space. Borders can function not only as territorial markers, but also as mediators of social constructed processes²⁶. Borders are part of the practices that both produce norms of exclusion across bodies and also give voice to the would-be migrants sustaining projects of geo-political sovereignty.

This process of bordering contributes to normalizing the extraterritorial border by negatively stereotyping migration, or even by criminalizing it. Hence, the reporting of the European or Australian ways to tackle the “migration crisis”, that focus on their endeavour in terms of risks, death, prohibitions, acts of breaking the law, and failure of arrival – are not just an attempt to criminalize migration, but also part of how the media contribute to shaping the border “landscape”²⁷. For example, the portrayal of their identities in binary of either ‘desirable’ or ‘undesirable’ is linked to what Chouliaraki and Musarò term the “narrated” border, which, in turn, is part of the wider “mediatized

²² S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972.

²³ F. Faloppa, #ODIO. *Manuale di resistenza alla violenza delle parole*, Turin: Utet, 2020.

²⁴ L. Pezzani, “Hostile Environments”, *e-flux* 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/325761/hostile-environments>.

²⁵ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991; M. Agier, *Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

²⁶ N. Vaughan-Williams, *Europe’s Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

²⁷ P. Cuttitta, “Borderizing the Island. Setting and Narratives of the Lampedusa Border Play”, *Acme. An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 13, 2 (2014): 196-219; L. Chouliaraki, M. Georgiou, “Hospitality: The Communicative Architecture of Humanitarian Securitization at Europe’s Borders”, *Journal of Communication*, 67, 2 (2017): 159-180.

border"²⁸ – a regime of reception characterized by the fusion of caring compassion for and military protection from mobile populations. In other words, assuming mediatization as a process in which “the media exert a particularly dominant influence on other institutions”²⁹, we can describe the mediatized border as a techno-affective network of mediations around migrants and refugees, where emotions of fear and empathy co-exist through digital connectivities, ritualizing relationship with the other through discourses of difference and superiority. Therefore, it can be concluded that these processes exacerbate the discrepancy between people in need, and people in “power”.

On the other side, this discrepancy can be reduced by physical experiences of proximity: bodily closeness to the ‘other’ provokes and reshapes the identities and the idea itself of borders. Practices involving bodies, participatory projects constitute shared spaces of action within which subjects experience both mutual presence and new forms of presence in and of the space³⁰: they create a level playing field that allows symbolic appropriation of spaces through their reinvention and their refunctionalization in places. Performative practices transform barriers into landscapes, borders into bridges³¹.

Borders are also intimately involved in the relationship between mobility and (in) justice³². Mobility is experienced in dramatically different ways across the globe. States still control their borders and the movement of people across them, and so, despite the rhetoric of globalisation, “the bulk of the world’s population lives in closed worlds, trapped by the lottery of birth”³³. Thus, the freedom to move has become a stratifying factor of today’s world³⁴ and those groups whose spontaneous mobility is considered suspect may be subject to enforced immobility.

As Wihtol de Wenden argues, although the end of the Cold War invoked the generalisation of the right to leave a country, the right to move is one of the least respected in the world³⁵. A look at the passport index³⁶ is indicative of the vast disparities in mobility experienced across the globe. The low passport ranking of many “countries of origin” (rankings are based on the number of destinations their holders can access), and a highly restrictive visa system, which has exorbitant costs, means that regular channels for cross border migration are extremely limited. As recent research has shown, border controls have, in many cases, simply rerouted migrants towards alternative, often more dangerous routes³⁷. This is evident in the destiny of people living in many poor countries who face dangerous journeys to the Global North, across geographies that have become

²⁸ L. Chouliaraki, P. Musarò, “The Mediatized Border: Technologies and Affects of Migrant Reception in the Greek and Italian Borders”, *Feminist Media Studies*, 17, 4 (2017): 535-549.

²⁹ S. Hjarvard, “The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change”, *Nordicom Review*, 29, 2 (2008): 105-134.

³⁰ C. Falletti, G. Sofia, V. Jacono, eds., *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience*, London-Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2016.

³¹ G. Schininà, “Here We Are, Social Theatre and Some Open Questions about its Developments”, *The Drama Review*, 48, 3 (2004): 17-31.

³² B. Anderson, *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; R. Andersson, *Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014.

³³ P. Hirst, G. Thompson, *Globalization in Question*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999.

³⁴ Z. Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016; S. Mezzadra, B. Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

³⁵ C. Wihtol de Wenden, *Le droit d’émigrer*, Paris: CNRS, coll. “Débats”, 2013.

³⁶ <https://www.passportindex.org/>.

³⁷ S. Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; V. Squire, “Desert ‘Trash’. Posthumanism, Border Struggles and Humanitarian Politics”, *Political Geography*, 39 (2014): 11-21.

deathscapes as a result of unjust border controls. The restrictions on mobility have therefore not reduced movement but increased the likelihood of exploitation and large costs in securing passage via irregular means. In this sense, “mobility justice”³⁸ is one of the crucial political and ethical issues of our day. In Sheller’s view, power and inequality inform the governance and control of cross-border movement, creating an overarching mobility (in)justice in the world.

In this context, the negative representations of migrants depict them as unwelcome “invaders”³⁹, crystallize power imbalances, dehumanize migrants, and legitimize the imperialist gaze of those who have established the rules of the game of mobility⁴⁰. Even when media reports are not reliant on stigmatic tropes there is still a tendency to convey the idea of solidarity through the prism of the “ironic spectator”⁴¹, namely a form of solidarity more based on the body and eyes of who is helping rather than on the conditions that have led to power imbalances.

In order to go beyond this depoliticised politics, that is based on detached forms of compassionate care and technocratic control, it is essential to enhance an alternative vision of solidarity that is capable of recognizing the other as a human being and unveiling the harsh oppressive conditions of the global and local structures of injustice. The goal of stopping migration is not only an unrealistic prospect, but more fundamentally produces deleterious effects in the everyday lives of millions of vulnerable people on the move, worsens the conditions under which migration will take place in the near future, and harms the lives of migrants already established in Europe⁴².

If we step out of the hegemony performed by the gaze of the Global North, frightened by anxieties and concerned exclusively with the impacts on the society of arrival, it becomes easier to recognize that migration is a constitutive feature in our world. It provides an optic for experiencing existence of the world and understanding being in the world. Migrants (often denied by discourses and policies on migration), and the communicative flows with which they interpret and re-interpret their migratory experience can also furnish a new perspective for viewing the dynamics of cultural and social change.

In this light, migration appears as a “total social fact”, as Sayad defines it⁴³. A phenomenon to be investigated beyond its economic or demographic function because, far from involving only the individuals who migrate, it acts on society as a whole, bringing with it atavistic fears, risks of exploitation and ethnic or religious fundamentalism, but also giving rise to new movements of revolt, facilitating the creation of new transnational social spaces and the spread of new practices of cultural hybridization⁴⁴.

Studying people on the move therefore means analyzing the societies involved in migration – the limits of the nation-state and the contradictions inherent in the definition of a national identity – calling into question the categories of thought with which the social and political world is constructed⁴⁵.

The act of migrating therefore has much to do with the migratory imaginary, shaped

³⁸ M. Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*, New York: Verso, 2018.

³⁹ M. Albahari, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World’s Deadliest Border*, Philadelphia: PENN, 2015.

⁴⁰ N. Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

⁴¹ L. Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

⁴² E. Balibar, *Europe, crise et fin?*, Paris: Le Bord de l’Eau, 2016.

⁴³ A. Sayad, *La double absence. Des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré*, Paris: Seuil, 1999.

⁴⁴ N. Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

⁴⁵ E. Piga Bruni, P. Musarò, eds., “Viaggio e sconfinamenti”, *Scritture migranti*, 14 (2020).

both by the gaze of a North agitated by fears and by the gaze of a South nourished by expectations. In order to understand the reality of migration, it is therefore fundamental to investigate the behavior of migrants together with the narratives that precede or follow it. Hence, we recognize that the role played by the media in the description of migration has consequences on the development of a migrant imaginary.

Thus, moving away from othering and alarmist, depoliticised representations of the others, many of the articles included in this special issue call for the need to challenge current narratives and discourses and to create and construct alternative ones.

Assuming narratives as sense-making tools that help individuals and collectives to frame and understand their experiences, some of the articles echo the lesson of Silverstone⁴⁶ about granting the duty to provide asylum or of ‘media hospitality’ to the other, who expresses him or herself, precisely, not only through the possibility of enunciation (in his or her power of speech), but also through the right to be listened to. Giving the other the possibility to present and self-represent him or herself implies symbolically recognising him or her as a person, as a subject who is a bearer of rights (and duties), as a potential actor of positive social change, as an agent of social development⁴⁷.

Media, arts and culture have many important roles to play: making us communicate with each other in an immediate way, artistic and cultural expressions allow us to understand our similarities as well as our differences. Recent discoveries in neuroscience are only the last step of a long chain of thought that psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and anthropology have developed to clarify the central role of the (basically theatrical) interaction between the self and the Other for the constitution of human being and the pivotal role of performance for a human being who is not a substance given, but an action that develops. The nature of being human is dramatic: “our sense of who we are, how we relate to the world, and how we learn is conducted through the medium of drama”⁴⁸. And – very apropos – Prentki observes: “wherever we look across these landscapes of division and otherness, we see tribes of mistrust who lack the dramatic capacity of empathy; that specifically dramatic quality of turning the imagination into scenarios for action, of asking the fundamental question of all dramatic process: ‘what if?’”⁴⁹.

Successful strategies of inclusion tend to pass first and foremost through bodies and mainly bodies in action, bodies that perform, whatever type of performance it may be, bodies that encounter and interact with each other, also using media. The practices of participatory audio-visual writing and production have proved to be among the most flexible tools for expressing the irreducibility of migrant subjectivity. Moreover, audiovisuals can preserve memories previously excluded by the dominant political logics⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ R. Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.

⁴⁷ M. Moralli, P. Musarò, R. Paltrinieri, P. Parmiggiani, eds., “Participation and Resistance through Arts and Culture, Studi Culturali”, 18, 2 (2021); P. Musarò, P. Parmiggiani, “Beyond Black and White: The Role of Media in Portraying and Policing Migration and Asylum in Italy”, *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, 27, 2 (2017): 241-260.

⁴⁸ T. Prentki, “Migrante Players”, in *Playing Inclusion. The Performing Arts in the Time of Migrations: Thinking, Creating and Acting Inclusion*, edited by R. Carpani and G. Innocenti Malini, *Comunicazioni sociali*, 1 (2019): 23-32 (24).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁰ Several institutions have encouraged the creation of digital archives that can be consulted online, where video testimonies, autobiographies, private images and life stories, useful for the recognition of minorities, are collected. Among the most important international cases, the American website myimmigrationstory.com; Australia Lebanese Historical Society of Victoria; the joint project of Globalnet21 and the Migration Museum Project in Great Britain; the Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration in France.

Embodied practices may constitute an opportunity for decolonial approaches. Performances function as “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity”⁵¹ that can constitute a safeguard against hegemonic cultural frameworks. Performance as “a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world”⁵² could enrich even the historiographical perspective: the opportunity not to ‘write it all down in text’ necessarily and not to reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description can open to counter-memories, repertoire of non-hegemonic practices that might escape the dominance of the written word and rational thought⁵³.

This critical perspective on the role of the media and wider understanding of the agency of migrants can be coupled with the recognition that the arts have been transformed by migration and mobility⁵⁴. In particular, the recent cultural and aesthetic transformations have offered another way of seeing identity, politics and society. The EU Member States and the EU itself have been summoned to meet these challenges. There has been growing appreciation of the ways in which media, the arts and performative practices are able to facilitate intercultural dialogue among migrant and host communities⁵⁵ – thereby empowering their participation in social life; promote an understanding of the affirmative role of cultural diversity (different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage) within European societies; and question the boundedness of identities and cultures. These critical processes lead us to address the possibilities of a transcultural dialogue – one that opens up the ideas of belonging and sets up new positions for speaking that are not confined to pre-existing ethnic and national identities.

Opportunities have finally emerged in cross-media productions to challenge both the assimilationist logic and the process of Othering, with the reclaiming of identities that have already internalised their ethno-cultural roots⁵⁶. On another side, performing arts design a space in which to explore who we are, individually and collectively, and how to negotiate and renegotiate the dialogical relationship of self to other, in a long lasting challenge to the opposition between ‘attending’ and ‘acting’⁵⁷.

Media, performing arts and culture can foster innovative practical actions, and also alternative imaginaries on social phenomenon and spaces of collective participation. Indeed, different “liberal” and “applied” arts (film, visual art, theatre and performance,

⁵¹ D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003: 2. A critical reading of some experiences of performing arts and migratory processes is in the special issue of *Comunicazioni sociali* edited by R. Carpani and G. Innocenti Malini *Playing Inclusion. The Performing Arts in the Time of Migrations*.

⁵² Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 15.

⁵³ L. Peja, “Post-ist” Challenges, *Female Migration and Performing Memories as a Historiographical Method*, paper presented at the IFTR Conference “Theatre Ecologies: Environment, Sustainability and Politics”, Galway, 12-16 July 2021.

⁵⁴ C. Ianniciello, ed., *Migrations, Arts and Postcoloniality in the Mediterranean*, New York: Routledge, 2018; A. Ring Petersen, *Migration into Art: Transcultural Identities and Art-Making in a Globalised World*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017.

⁵⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *How Culture and the Arts Can Promote Intercultural Dialogue in the Context of the Migratory and Refugee Crisis: Report with Case Studies, by the Working Group of EU Member States’ Experts on Intercultural Dialogue in the Context of the Migratory and Refugee Crisis under the Open Method of Coordination*, Publications Office, 2017, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/468525>.

⁵⁶ A. Cati, M. Grassilli, eds., *The Migrant as an Eye/I. Transculturality, Self-Representation., Audiovisual Practice, Cinergie*, 16 (2019).

⁵⁷ J. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, London-New York: Verso, 2009.

dance, photography, crafts, architecture, design, etc.) as well as emerging cross-media forms (interactive and social media, games, street art, circus and performative practices, etc.), have a pivotal role to play in this direction.

As the mentioned EU Report on culture and the arts in intercultural dialogue highlights, “apart from the *non-material* qualities of arts and culture, the sector is also a field of economic activity, of learning, as well as of direct societal interaction”⁵⁸. It is a doubly attractive sector as a first mover in the current situation in both aspects: the wish to engage in an intercultural dialogue about values, histories and expectations, as well as the wish to lead productive, self-empowered lives.

There are many examples of projects⁵⁹ that focus on the interplay between social and aesthetic processes rather than the production of artistic products. Their scope of ambition is framed by the perdurance of hospitable relations in micro-politics. On a wider scale we also witness the formation of new transnational institutions such as *L’Internationale* – a collaborative venture between seven European museums⁶⁰. In each of the individual artistic projects and across these new institutional art programs we note the effort from the cultural sector to address the ethical deficits and rekindle the inclusive dimensions in the European political agenda. The networking of the cultural commons is in some way attempting to do the foundational work of solidarity that the mainstream institutions are now reluctant to embrace.

Despite this high potential for opening up new perspectives the policies in the EU are caught in old traps: national cultural policies limit the scope of cultural productions by institutionalizing the process of Othering through rhetorical discourses and hegemonic representations; the vitality of emergent projects and practices are often vital but fragmented and contained within specific areas and territories; the skills and professional figures associated with these processes are poorly defined and have no particular training centres; and finally, the evaluation methods of the initiatives are variable and lack consistent protocols. The combination of all these factors provides an obstacle that blocks the extremely lively and promising potential in this sector. To this end we believe that new forms of scholarship that can integrate the theoretical foundations from cultural studies and new methods from critical discourse analysis can not only expose the imbrication between racist discourse and everyday perspectives, challenge the prevailing normative approaches, but also highlight the hybrid worlds that are now being forged by the discourses produced by migrants.

On this basis, this special issue of *Comunicazioni sociali* has assembled a diverse range of international scholars to discuss these issues using interdisciplinary methods and transdisciplinary perspectives. Many of the case studies in this special issue are in Greece and Italy. For most of the twentieth century it was the migration *from* these countries that was central to their national identity. In the twenty first century it is the migration *to* these countries that is challenging the hegemonic notions of cultural and

⁵⁸ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *How Culture and the Arts Can Promote Intercultural Dialogue in the Context of the Migratory and Refugee Crisis*, 15.

⁵⁹ One is the work of Vessel that is led by Viviana Checchia, Nicoletta Daldanise and Anna Santomau-ro <https://www.vesselartproject.org/en/istituto-per-l-immaginazione-del-mediterraneo>. Vessel is dedicated to translating the theoretical projects on the South by Franco Cassano (*Southern Thought and Other Essays*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (*Epistemologies of the South*, New York: Routledge, 2014) into lived experiences of collaborative artist networks and public constituencies.

⁶⁰ N. Papastergiadis, *Museums of the Commons*, London: Routledge, 2020.

national identity⁶¹. The contemporary narratives on migration cannot repeat the old top-down perspectives.

If the idea has clearly emerged that a different narrative of migration is needed, a “concurrent project to reframe the discourses on migration and diversity in contemporary societies”⁶², on the other hand, in his contribution to this special issue, Marco Binot- to argues that the effectiveness of these alternatives is closely related to the ability to apply *reframing strategies*. These strategies succeed in modifying elements of discourses, stories, symbols or examples of a narrative present in the debate and therefore can lead to the reformulation or resemantisation of the frame in which it is inserted, while most common *counter-framing strategies* simply react, and, making sense only in relation to something else, end up paradoxically strengthening the adversary and proposing the same mental schemes and examples. The paper offers a methodology to analyse the media discourse and a specific set of definitions and some tools useful for analysing the impact of arts, campaigns and media activist action.

Drawing on a conceptual framework informed by cultural studies and critical discourse analysis, Marina Morani’s article proposes the analysis of stories of Italians of immigrant background published on intercultural digital media platforms. These alternative media, which are largely not-for-profit enterprises, had the peak momentum of their establishment between 2008 and 2013, when public debates and campaign initiatives about the citizenship law reform gained visibility and support from a range of stakeholders committed to a progressive agenda of social change. They include collective blogs, web-zines and news portals where contributors of various immigrant backgrounds mix with practitioners of solely Italian descent. This study is based on a mapping of 34 intercultural digital media initiatives between 2000 and 2020 and focuses on the content category devoted to the narration of personal stories that broaden, challenge, and subvert the dominant regime of representation of immigration in Italy, where there have traditionally been very limited and limiting notions of ‘Italianness’.

Community media in Germany are instead the scope of the study proposed by Judith Purkarthofer, Nadia Bellardi, Esther Domke and Özge Zar. These independent, non-commercial media in Europe take the form of local radios, TVs and online multimedia projects. They provide digital media skills and ethical journalistic training to a variety of age, language and minority groups, including people with special needs. The term ‘community’ refers in fact to local, geographic communities, minority ethnic and language communities, as well as to communities of interest (for example, LGBTQI+ activists, artists, musicians). They are organised from and directed to the community, and aim to enable citizens to take control over their own representation, produce media content that is representative of a diverse society, and raise issues often overlooked by commercial and large-scale public-service media. The explorative, qualitative approach of the paper, focused on agency and strategies of migrant media producers in Germany, enables insights into discrimination at play in society at large but also in ‘alternative’ spaces and raises complex issues such as the fact that an established ‘space of inclusion’ could become a site of exclusion when that space lacks recognition from the outside.

In order to tune in and follow the way migrants in these locations see themselves and forge new narratives about the dynamics of their mobility and their transnational

⁶¹ Miller, Arroyave, “Worlding Media Studies”.

⁶² M. Schramm, S. Pultz Moslund, A. Ring Petersen, *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, New York: Routledge, 2019: 8.

forms of identity, we recognize that it is vital that scholars create new approaches and experiment with different combinations.

Some articles published in this special issue have adopted collaborative research techniques. They have crossed the traditional boundaries that separate artistic practice and scholarly research as they sought to present new modes for articulating the voices of agents that have direct experience in asylum and migration and developed a more reflexive awareness of the role of the scholar in this field. One of the benefits of this approach is that it debunks the old myths that migrants are dupes and that they are condemned to silence or at least reduced to minor place in the margins of society. It has also sought to overcome the status of victimhood and the politics of pity.

What commonly lacks is in fact an intercultural approach. Even the communication of European organisations working with migrants and refugees in art-based educational projects often shows mechanisms of “post-humanitarianism”. This is the case of the examples studied by Alix Didier Sarrouy and Rita Grácio, where two similar music organisations in two different European countries (Sweden and Greece) use symphonic music as a tool for the education and inclusion of underage migrants and refugees. The multimodal critical discourse analysis of their web-based strategies reveals that their organisational communication does not dialogue with neither migrants and refugees nor with potential listeners/audiences, but only with potential donors in the host countries and internationally, using their multicultural contexts as an asset to persuade people to join the orchestra (as volunteers or as teachers) and to make donations. Children and young people, the target of the music education programs, instead, are presented only as the receptors of Western musical knowledge, without any reference to the musical agency they may have or to a sharing of each one’s original culture in an intercultural experience.

An interesting challenge to victimised representations of refugees is the multimedia project presented in the paper by Mariia Shaidrova, Marta Pagliuca Pelacani, Noemi Mena Montes. They focus on performative and collaborative research based on a participatory exhibition that took place in Palermo in 2021 with transdisciplinary methodologies aimed at producing engaging academic knowledge where the relations of power inherent in the positions of the authors as white women and academic researchers, as well as curators and contributing artists, become one of the explicit objects of the research inquiry. They use a participatory methodology based on the notion of *collage* as a tool to encourage dialogue between artists, researchers, and the communities they work with. Developed in collaboration with a few artists and a number of Nigerian women with a direct experience of human trafficking and migration, the project allowed a self-presentation of these women as attractive, independent and strong, challenging the stereotypical image of victims they can usually hardly escape: victims of sexual exploitation, of their outdated belief systems, of their migration journey.

In an effort to open up new dialogic and empathic modes of representation scholars have both questioned the validity of traditional stances that assert the imperiousness of critical distance and explored the techniques of collage and feedback that were advanced by the artistic avant-garde and pioneers in anthropology⁶³. More recent ethnographic advances that include action-observation and epistemic partnerships in knowledge for-

⁶³ J. Berger, *The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969; G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, London: Jason Aronson, 1972.

mation are also welcomed⁶⁴. These approaches will complement the new empirical uses of cultural indicators⁶⁵.

Similarly, we appreciate the adoption of visual tools, such as maps, which traditionally have been deployed to survey territories and regulate the movement of peoples, that can now be deployed to open new pathways of communication, reveal chains of affective connection, and make visible processes that otherwise escape detection. The tools that were used for surveillance and control can be appropriated to give credence to the poetics of belonging and a spur for the telling of migrant stories⁶⁶.

Aware that, apart from notable exceptions, theoretical critiques of traditional ontological conceptions of maps have often refrained from proposing illustrative examples of such analysis, Giacomo Toffano and Kevin Smith try to relate the theory to the discussion of three cases of cartographic production that trouble the traditional “ontological status” of maps. Investigating how refugee cartography evolves beyond the mere geolocation of migration flows, seizing maps’ possibilities to decipher and tell stories, their study explores fictional maps distributed in different media formats – performative art pieces, comic book tables, silkscreen prints – all conceiving fictional maps to engage with emotion and subjectivity in the narration of refugee stories. As contingent practices that come into being every time producers and readers engage with them, maps are perfectly suited to encourage a narrative process that can help to reveal intangible elements such as imaginaries, emotional, affective, and memorial trajectories. Therefore mapping emerges as a compelling practice that can give expressive life to questions such as (non-) belonging and the sense of home that are crucial issues in the scholarship of refugee studies.

While we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done in refining the applications of such concepts and tools, we are pleased to introduce some vital steps in this direction enriching a line already opened also by other issues of *Comunicazioni sociali*⁶⁷. For instance, the impact of the artistic practices in community settings is often easy to miss and just as easy to overstate. Many projects are ephemeral and focused on transient relations. Most artistic projects are confined to small gestures in specific spaces⁶⁸. It is difficult to find appropriate markers that demonstrate enduring shifts in understanding and habits. However, there is a growing commitment to both gathering data and developing new approaches for identifying strategies of resistance and recognising the collaborative efforts to reconfigure public meanings⁶⁹.

Matina Magkou, Katerina Protonariou, Eirini Iliopoulou propose an interesting reflection on the potentialities of collective and participatory artistic practices as spaces for community engagement and conviviality in the urban space. They analyze two cases of site-specific artistic practices taking place in two squares in the city of Athens, in a period of prolonged crisis. Central to this exploration is the notion of *site*, as a stage to understand artistic practices as facilitators of experiences in which borders between languages, communities and cultures are transcended, transgressed and transformed.

⁶⁴ G. Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

⁶⁵ A. Yue, S. Brook, R. Khan, “Developing a Local Cultural Indicators Framework”, *Culture and Local Governance*, 3, 1-2 (2011): 133-149.

⁶⁶ R. Dominguez, C. Fusco, “Performance Art in a Digital Age”, in *Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalization and Cultural Difference*, edited by N. Papastergiadis, London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003: 108-121.

⁶⁷ N. Carpentier, J. Sumiala, eds., *Arts-Based Research in Communication and Media Studies, Comunicazioni sociali*, 1 (2021)

⁶⁸ W. Bradley, C. Esche, eds., *Art and Social Change*, London: Tate Publications, 2007.

⁶⁹ G. Shollete, *Delirium and Resistance*, London: Pluto, 2017.

As grassroots initiatives contributing to transcultural dialogue and urban co-existence, these experiences call for a more systematic and comprehensive ‘culturally sensitive’ approach also on the side of institutions and policymakers that fully recognises culture as a driving force for peaceful co-existence.

The extent to which such practices have transformed public culture is obviously debatable, however, we believe that attention to the role of the arts as a catalyst in social change should not be missed.

One of the wider aims of this special edition is an examination of the process of artistic creation within the framework of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. The constitution of micro and macro-cosms in art is a big bang aesthetic moment, filled with horror and delight. It is our contention that the cosmos in art is also interlinked with the imagination of the *polity* in cosmopolitanism. Zooming into the aesthetics and zooming out onto the politics of cosmopolitanism is a dance with chaos and order. Through the examples gathered in this collection we believe that the aesthetic institution of world making is coeval with the social need for conviviality and widest possible forms of cosmic co-existence.

Where arts are considered as a space of performative citizenship and aesthetic practices as an imaginary constitution of cosmopolitanism, Audience Engagement can be framed as a way to pursue this type of ‘world-picture making process’ where cultural diversity is considered. Going beyond the idea of Audience Engagement as a mere marketing process, Giulia Allegrini e Roberta Paltrinieri discuss an ongoing Audience Development project funded by the Creative Europe program, aimed at developing a bond between cultural operators in the field of dance and performing arts and their local communities through a discussion on gender in the European dance system. The paper presents a number of insights emerging from the “exploring” phase of the project (the interviews, the working sessions in small groups, the participative observation during the co-design process) and, focusing on some analytical dimensions, questions Audience Development as a rhetoric discourse based on ‘neutral’ conceptualization and challenges the application of Audience Development as well as the role of cultural organizations and audience developers in overcoming hegemonic representations, highlighting the necessity to give space to multiple and divergent interpretations and go beyond the ‘patronizing’ approach that can often emerge in processes of participation and collaboration.

Hospitality and cosmopolitanism, security and salvation are at cross-roads. To step out of the stigmatic associations with cosmopolitanism we must not only cease the trade in caricatures, but also widen the conceptual frame beyond the normative paradigm⁷⁰. Even when cosmopolitanism has been deployed to explore the context of contemporary art, the emphasis has been on the polity and not the cosmos of art. The political function of aesthetic cosmopolitanism has been situated in both materialist and idealist frameworks. For instance, Smith’s mapping of contemporary art is reliant on the division between base and superstructure. Hence, the function of art as superstructure is to bring forth to the world an allegory of its own material existence in the base of contemporaneity⁷¹. However, this materialist theory of contemporary art is complicated by its own empirical observations. Smith’s detailed portraits of contemporary art show that the world picture is not just a reflection of the condition of contemporaneity, but

⁷⁰ L. Chouliarakis, *The Ironic Spectator*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

⁷¹ T. Smith, *Contemporary Arts: World Currents*, London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011.

also a manifestation of contested and hybrid world pictures. Multiplicity in the world of contemporary art debunks the Enlightenment version of universalism, and the diasporic consciousness of contemporary artist is not reducible to the alienation complex in modernity. This suggests the emergence of a more baffling and “larger cosmopolitanism”⁷². However, we also note that artists, whether they are engaged in collective projects that make direct interventions in the social terrain or speculating on the widest possible forms of belonging, they are in effect both upholding ancient ideals of hospitality and extending their vision of their connections across all the dimensions of the cosmos. Again, we note that it is difficult to register and calibrate such endeavours within the conventional scholarly terms, but we also believe that an expanded approach on migration and media will inevitably wander into such uncharted fields. It is to our peril to ignore such worldly excursions.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 253.