

Crosscurrents Special Section - Introduction

Lusophone Media and Communication Studies: Imperial Nostalgia or Transcontinental Communicative Space?

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This Crosscurrents Special Section maps and critically examines media and communication studies in Portuguese speaking countries worldwide (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and S. Tome and Principe, East-Timor). Despite the existence of several vibrant communities of communication scholars within these communities, the communications and media systems and discourses in some of these countries are largely ignored in mainstream academic publications. The lack of international (and also intra-regional) recognition of these scholars and their work on Lusophone media is due to linguistic barriers, inter-continental fragmentation of the geo-cultural Lusophone space and, last but certainly not least, academic scepticism about Lusophony as a post-colonial construct that has not yet been emotionally (at least) decolonized.

We fully recognize that Lusophone countries are highly heterogeneous in terms of size, economic development, regional alliances, social practices, and media systems. This extraordinary heterogeneity has had an impact on the constitution of scholarly communities and participation in existing academic networks. However we contend that it does make sense to talk of a transcontinental Lusophone communicative space and we have put together four papers that substantiate this claim.

Helena Sousa addresses the community-building process in this space. She scrutinises the political consensus that was established in Portugal from the mid-1980s up today regarding the importance of the Lusophone community and examines academic scepticism about this post-colonial construct. In the article she shows that energetic bottom up inter-continental Lusophone dynamics seem quite indifferent to political logics and interests and to on-going Lusophone centred post-colonial academic debates.

In 'Communication studies cartography in the Lusophone world' Moisés de Lemos Martins departs from language as a struggle for a particular symbolic ordering of the world. He examines the Portuguese speaking community of media and communication researchers arguing that on the one hand this community needs to find ways to deepen inter-knowledge, dialogue and cooperation and on the other hand, that it

needs to consolidate the Lusophone community as a wide cultural region so it can be rescued from the marginal role it plays in the scientific field.

Based on extensive field work in African Lusophone countries, Susana Salgado examines the 'Prospects for Democracy and Media in Lusophone African Countries'. She considers the influence of the Internet and new media in the transition to democracy in Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Prince and asks whether there are new possibilities for popular activism to emerge from evolving communication environments and media systems. This contribution provides a unique empirical insight into the role and possibilities of scientific research itself in fragile democracies.

The last article by Luís António Santos looks at the power relations, tensions and paradoxes between Portugal and Angola. Departing from the communication field, this paper 'Portugal and Angola: The politics of a troubled media relationship' shows the need for inter-disciplinary dialogue when approaching the complexities of symbolic power and financial power. The links between present-day media control and economic strength need to be addressed in an historical perspective. Probably more than with any other Lusophone country, this relationship brings back memories of conflict and this has an effect both in the Portuguese and Angolan media and in the overall Lusophone communication academic community.