

DISCOURSES ON MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND MINORITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE 21ST CENTURY UNDER DEBATE

DISCURSOS SOBRE MIGRANTES, REFUGIADOS E MINORIAS NA ESFERA PÚBLICA: O SÉCULO XXI EM DEBATE

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This volume of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal is dedicated to various studies on different discursive-textual strategies found in political discourses, the press and social networks about migrants, refugees and minorities, that circulate in 21st century societies.

Since World War II, Europe has not seen a flow of refugees and migrants as high as that registered during the last decade. In the American continent, the flow of migrants has also been the target of special political and media attention. Mass exoduses have become more intense, constituting a new social problem for states and obliging citizens to take a position in this regard. In the public space (in particular in the media and social networks) there are discursive practices that materialise conflicts between those primarily concerned with national security, who appeal to people's insecurities and risk, and more humanitarian voices, who propose effective reception of the refugees, evoking ethical and civilizational values. But people's fears and their reactions to other people, who are different, and cultural confrontations (including linguistic, religious, identity, ethnic-racial confrontations etc), as well as the images that are constructed of *us* and the *other* gain particular relevance within the competing arguments.

As in so many other dimensions of our collective life, this question is strongly conditioned by the public discourses with which we are confronted. In the press, we can identify discourses by "anonymous" citizens, which intersect with those of opinion makers, and recognised agents in the public arena. None of these discourses is neutral, none is removed from its underlying circumstances, and the values and idiosyncrasies of its author. On the contrary, all such discourses necessarily convey a specific vision of the world and try to convince the reader to share it. It is true that within all these

discourses, from the most markedly argumentative to the most (apparently) informative, we encounter

a generalised causative or factual orientation: within which it is surprising to find a more or less subtle, but always operative role by the speaker as an assumed influencer, something that is almost always veiled – a role that ranges from instituting the reader as a witness and/or judge of their beliefs, attitudes or purposes, to trying to foster cognitive, emotional or behavioural changes in this reader. (Fonseca, 1992, p. 238).

However, in the cases in hand, because they are public discourses, that actively participate in the configuration of social life, such productions extend beyond a generalised causative or factual dimension, which shapes the entire discourse. They are strategically configured as vehicles for argumentation, persuasion and manipulation and acquire increased power because they are discourses that (re)configure realities with which the citizen does not have direct contact, but which are mediated by the media (in this case the pleonasm is intentional).

It is therefore important to analyse such discourses, deconstruct them, and provide citizens with instruments and skills that enable conscious and informed reading. This is not necessarily a matter of contradicting any specific discourse, derived from any specific political-ideological universe, in which the researcher adopts a social position of denunciation and confrontation. Such a task can and should be left to citizens, if they consider that the values conveyed by these discourses stand in conflict with their own. But the researcher can and should help reveal the mechanisms of construction of reality achieved by the discourse, as well as the exercise of influence and manipulation. Conscious and alert citizens have increased power to take an active part in the social *praxis*, in a critical and responsible manner.

To achieve such a task, the present studies adopt the theoretical foundations and analytical instruments appropriate for research into discourses. In other words, the studies place importance on the discursive materiality that is woven within the texts/discourses, that have been chosen as objects of analysis. The articles presented in this volume assume a discursive analytical orientation, in some cases with greater relevance than in others, in which they consider that communication operates through contextualized discourses, within a specific social field (Bourdieu, 1982), communicating with non-verbal and other previous or future, factual or potential discourses, as Bakhtine (1930/1981) defended many years ago.

In the first study published in this issue, Maria Aldina Marques and Rui Ramos analyse the linguistic materiality of texts from two leading Portuguese newspapers and one magazine, in order to identify the way that they addressed the migratory flow towards Europe. They situate the *corpus* of texts in a period of intense public visibility of this question (in September and October 2015) and conclude that the way that the question was addressed was strongly polarised in terms of *us versus them* and that the argument

was insistently based on ethical values, that are widely shared by recognised opinion leaders and spokespersons, but not always by “anonymous” participants in the media discussion.

The next paper, by Alexandra Guedes Pinto, analyses political manifestos (from various candidates in the 2016 Portuguese presidential elections), and seeks to identify and describe how these discourses argumentatively codify the issue of the refugees who arrive in Europe. Using a methodological approach similar to that of the previous study, she concludes that the objects of analysis have similarities in genealogical terms, but adopt a diversity of discursive strategies, associated with the different *ethè* of the candidates.

The third study, by Moisés de Lemos Martins and Valéria Marcondes, focuses on another part of the world, but once again featuring characters who repeat narratives of suffering and exodus: using the theoretical and methodological reference of Social Semiotics, the study analyses a feature article published in 2019 by the Brazilian magazine *Veja*, about Venezuelan refugees in Brazil. The researchers also identify and describe strategies for the construction of dichotomies between *us* and *them*, and conclude that the article conveys an exclusive discourse of the *other*, reproducing an official hegemonic, reductionist, conservative and nationalist discourse.

In the next paper, Célia Belim emphasises the fact that, in modern Western societies, people live in a “persuasive sphere”, which means recognising the power of the word in social *praxis*. The author applies Aristotelian concepts of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* to analyse the rhetoric of public communication campaigns on refugees and migrants. She concludes that, for the success of communication exercises in this field, aspects of credibility of the speaker play a fundamental role – with a strong recourse to the affective dimension; including use of material and verifiable resources.

Like the other researchers who have contributed to this issue, Isabel Margarida Duarte focuses her analysis on journalistic articles (seven chronicles and reports, extracted from the daily newspaper *Público* and the magazine *Visão*) on refugees and migrants. She identifies and describes enunciative mechanisms that generate empathy and that, through empathization of the discourse, seek to foster an approximation between the author and the reader, which will favour the effectiveness of the argumentation. She states that a fundamental strategy of this process is the figuration of migrants/victims themselves as enunciators.

Dora Santos-Silva and Débora Guerreiro analyse the coverage by the Portuguese media of two forced migratory movements, one in 2015, the other in 2019. Based on analysis of news content, these researchers show how our representation of refugees derives from the media’s own narrative. Indeed, media outlets do not just tell us about reality; they also enter into the production process.

Isabel Reboledo Seara and Ana Lúcia Tinoco Cabral analyse a set of comments from Facebook users, to assess the strategies employed in the process of disqualifying migrant refugees in Portugal and Brazil. The study focuses on verbal violence in a digital environment with a specific addressee, in which the authors identify and describe the forms of materialisation of such violence.

In the next study, Fernando Resende and Fábio Ferreira Agra, also address the construction of journalistic narratives about refugees, analysing a *corpus* of articles from the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper (September to December 2015). In line with this issue's other contributors, they consider that refugees are configured as *others*, distinct from Europeans. They emphasise that the journalist is the creator of reality, through his discourse, which is far from being "neutral" and purely referential, and instead enters into the various power games that can be found throughout contemporary societies.

Addressing a partially different *corpus* – articles from Portuguese and German newspapers, published between 2011 and 2017 – Rita Himmel and Maria Manuel Baptista predominantly carry out a content analysis in order to identify, in the discursive construction of their object of analysis, the same dichotomy of *us/them* that the other researchers have recognised in the *corpus* of works that they chose to analyse. In this case, they emphasise the reflection on what defines *us*, *Europeans*, including our defining cultural values.

The set of thematic articles concludes with a study by Patricia Posch and Rosa Cabecinhas, which selects five episodes from the first season of the television news series *Portugal pelos Brasileiros* (Portugal by Brazilians), broadcast in Brazil by Rede Globo de Televisão, in early 2018. They adopt Social Semiotics as their theoretical-methodological framework and the objective is to identify the images constructed by the media discourse of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal. According to the authors, this image is segmented and partial, and homogenises the migratory phenomenon in an elitist manner.

As can be seen, the thematic articles have evident aspects in common, both in terms of the strategies employed from a theoretical and methodological perspective, as well as the conclusions that they draw from their analysis. However, they still present several differences in terms of focus and specific object of analysis – and, in some cases, regarding specific aspects related to the adopted theoretical framework. Although they have been developed autonomously, they intersect in the emergence of several common findings in the respective conclusions.

This volume of *Comunicação e Sociedade* also includes two texts that lie outside the central theme, in the *Varia* section.

The first, by Eduardo Barroso, Rui Estrada and Teresa Toldy, reflects on the power of the image and the use made of it in three historical periods of the 20th century: Nazism, Stalinism and the contemporary era. The authors defend that, rivalling the power of the word, the image assumes different statutes, in function of whether it is a photograph or a painting: while the first can be, and has been, manipulated, with various different objectives, the second cannot be deleted.

The second article in the *Varia* section is by Vincenzo Susca and reflects on the social dynamics associated with the performing arts (the cultural industry), their value as a "commodity" and respective consumption, in particular from the second half of the 20th century.

Finally, the volume features two *Book reviews: Images of immigrants and refugees in Western Europe. Media representations, public opinion, and refugees' experiences*, reviewed by Fábio Ribeiro, and *Empire*, reviewed by Vítor Sousa.

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