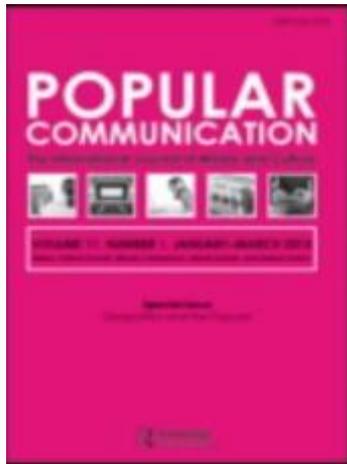


Connected migrants: encapsulation & cosmopolitanization

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(guest-edited by Koen Leurs & Sandra Ponzanesi, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, planned early 2018)

The number of international migrants is estimated at 244 million (UN, 2016), but their experiences and representations differ widely. For example, European TV viewers can witness Syrian asylum seekers arriving on the beaches of Mediterranean islands on the daily news. Newly arrived migrants are shown using smartphones to take selfies and announce their safe arrival on European soil to loved ones elsewhere. In response, as an example of what Wendy Chun describes as ‘high-tech Orientalism’ (2008, p. 73), prejudicial discourses about migrants have centred on smartphones; for example, anti-immigrant politicians frame refugees who own ‘luxury’ smartphones as less deserving of asylum. In sharp contrast, tech-savvy ‘knowledge workers’ are welcomed and instantaneous planetary connectivity is celebrated for bringing economic prosperity. Thus, the dichotomy of bodies that are naturalized as technology users and bodies that remain alienated from it betrays the geographic, racial and gendered discriminations that digital technologies, despite their claims of neutrality and flatness, continue to espouse across the global North and South.

Media and migration have commonly been studied from the perspective of underrepresentation and misrepresentations in news and popular culture (Madianou, 2014, p. 324). In contrast, this special issue acknowledges how – in the context of digital migrant connectivity – “the cosmopolitan Self” and the “encapsulated Self” are not mutually exclusive but can operate simultaneously (Christensen & Janson, 2015) and it grasps the social, cultural and political implications of these everyday practices among migrants. Research on migrant connectivity commonly singles out transnational and local practices. The notion of homophily, the assumption that ‘birds of a feather flock together’, is used to argue that transnational communication hinders integration and leads to disconnection, isolation and radicalization. However, while migrants (not just refugees but also global nomadic expatriates) commonly connect with family members and friends overseas, they often simultaneously develop bridging, cosmopolitan capital in connecting with their local host society. In line with *Popular Communication’s* current interest in ‘geopolitics and the popular’ (Burkhart & Christensen, 2013, p. 3), this special issue questions how connected migrants across the world are located in intersecting grids of power relations and how they may subvert those ‘grammars of everyday life’ (Burkhart & Christensen, 2013, p. 4).

The special issue’s focus on everyday cosmopolitanization and encapsulation develops the connected migrant as a distinctly located geopolitical figuration, continuously reshaped by the myriad relevant state and non-state actors in the field of migration, border control and management. Collectively, the articles seek to de-flatten popular meta-categories of ‘social media users’, ‘migrants’ and ‘digital diasporas’. The refugee, stereotypically perceived as an exemplary ‘have-not’, is afforded the celebration of technological access only as long as it remains ethnically distant, foreign, alien and exotic. The entry of this ‘ultimate outsider’ bearing the markings of digital technologies – indeed, sometimes enabled by these markings to escape her contexts and risk mobility – signals a crisis, and the technologies that were supposed to be their ‘saviours’ end up becoming technologies that mark them as inauthentic and undeserving.

Thematically, this special issue focusses on connected migrations in relation to (social) media representations of the migrant other; identity and digital self-representations; gender, sexuality and queerness; digital diasporas; critical race; cosmopolitanism and

encapsulation; human and communication rights; solidarity; literacies; political economy; radicalization and surveillance; the humanitarianism-securitization nexus; and the digital datafication of border management.

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