

## Foreword

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One of the frustrations related to research in the broad field of media and communication is the reluctance to critically engage with Palestine, not only for its cultural and political meaning or relevance to global politics, but for its significance as a normative transnational, rather than a nation-specific, imaginary and concept that can enhance our understanding of continuous subaltern and post-colonial struggles and how these struggles are communicated and talked about. This is surprising given the fact media and communication research has been concerned, for the most part, with social justice, equality and inequality and power and, more concretely with representations/mis-representations – which are the key concerns of scholars working on Palestine.

However, what is also surprising, as the editors of this special issue note in their introduction, is that Palestine has also received little attention in transnational studies concerned with the Middle East and North Africa, as an area or region. Perhaps this reflects the reluctance of publishers to bring into the public space discussions of Palestine as an occupied space, where occupation cannot only be understood as a political project of subjugation within specified borders, but as a political project that transcends these borders and thus implicates the national and transnational. The fact that the special issue, as it is, comprises only a few articles, despite the lengthy call for papers and the interest by authors, attests to the gap in scholarship bringing Palestine, provocatively proposed here as a 'space' of critical study, and communication, proposed as an interdisciplinary field of study, together, perhaps pointing to the difficulties of engaging with Palestine as a critical space of scholarship given the global climate of surveillance of academic output and threats of accusations of anti-Semitism.

Perhaps it is apt to be reminded that as scholars working on communication and the Middle East, broadly, and communication and Palestine, more narrowly, we have noted, like others have done, that the field of media and communication studies remains Eurocentric. As such, the field remains restricted by normative (European) understandings of what post-colonial and colonial subjects should be, rather than what these subjects can offer for enriching decolonial media and communications studies. This might not be surprising given the fact that media and communication studies, like all the social sciences, has been embedded in the historical experiences of Western industrial capitalism, liberal democracy and bounded nation-states.

In addition, it is also worth being reminded that as scholars mainly concerned with the Middle East and North Africa (often talked of problematically as a region), we have been concerned, like others, that area studies generally remains stuck in old paradigms that persist despite the challenges posed by waves of colonial, post-colonial and critical race studies to the field's normative aims and despite what we might call the transnational turn in different disciplines. As Arjun Appadurai pointed out some years ago (2000: 7), much traditional thinking about 'areas' has been driven by conceptions of geographical, civilisational and cultural coherence that rely on a list of traits, related to values, languages, material practices, ecological adaptations, marriage patterns, social relations and the like.

Long before Appadurai, Palestinian scholar Edward Said (1981) too offered a strong critique of 'area studies' which he pointed out remained focused on the framing of the Middle East, and Palestine, by the triumvirate of government, the media and the academy. This is a framing that has generally tended to regard 'areas' as relatively immobile aggregates of traits with enduring historical boundaries and unified structures composed of more or less enduring properties. These conceptions and framings have persisted to the present day despite expanding networks of communications and transnational digital platforms offering expanded spaces and areas for imagination, physical and mental mobility across borders and boundaries, as well as for rethinking transnational connections and transnationality as an inevitable, but not necessarily equal, condition of the contemporary world.

The key questions the editors of this special issue wanted to pose were: “What does a focus that brings together Palestine, as a space for critical inquiry of transnational frames and imaginations, and communication enable us to think about?” and “what does it offer us conceptually?” They also wanted to ask “in what ways can transnational de-colonial praxis – different actions and practices by diverse people in the everyday- speak back to systems of power?”; and “how can decolonial methodologies as frameworks and lived practices help us address how Palestine and communication are co-constitutive and have always been thus?” It would be difficult to think of Palestine without addressing how it has been framed, represented, mis-represented and discussed, and likewise it would be difficult to envisage critical transnational communication theories without addressing persisting inequalities and systems of representation.

The focus on the transnational offers us a spatial optic through which to think of Palestine in communication or, *Palestine as communication*. This focus does not ignore the two other spatial frames - the national and the regional – but invites interrogation of the connection between them.

#### References

- Arjun Appadurai (2000). Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination, *Public Culture* 12(1): 1–19
- Edward Said (1981). *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Vintage Books.