



**Mediatização, classificação e exclusão:
Fronteiras e centros de detenção para migrantes na Suécia.**

**Mediatization, classification, and exclusion:
Borders and detention centres for migrants in Sweden.**

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What do the terms mediatization, classification and exclusion have in common? What is the thread that runs from one to the other? In what way are they not only united but almost encompassed by each other? This is what this paper intends to reflect on, setting the analysis in a very specific context: migration and in particular in the borders and detention centres in Sweden. The former see an exponential growth in the technologies used to register, recognize, and store the data of those who arrive. It is already here that the first classification into desirable and undesirable migrants takes place. Detention centres, on the other hand, are facilities where migrants are detained pending repatriation, thus excluded from the possibility of remaining in the country. However, Swedish detention centres appear particularly interesting because the mediatization that characterizes every environment, aspect, and phase of migration, is here as if blocked: outside the centres, individuals are demanded to be digitized, inside the opposite. The contradiction of this mediatization moving not only at different speeds but also in different directions will be discussed.

This discussion will be made through the analysis of these three elements: mediatization, classification and exclusion.

Palavras-chave: mediatization, migration, surveillance, classification, exclusion

The entire human history has been marked by the presence of media (Edwards et al., 2011). Some scholars have introduced the concept of Homo Technologicus (Longo,



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2005), claiming that the evolution of technology and media has now become that of man, and that it is complicated to invoke a clear difference between the two. This is probably an extreme view, which could be branded as technological determinism, but which nevertheless can show how the history of technologies completely intersects that of man (and vice versa) and there is a profound sharing of the pivotal moments that characterise them.

Mediatization, therefore, pervades every aspect of everyday life (Couldry and Hepp, 2017); this has naturally changed the contours of society, not only its forms but also, by shifting boundaries, by inserting new ones. This does not mean, in this paper, that mediatization is understood as a phenomenon imposed from above and accepted a-critically by the rest of society. Nor as something not wanted by society itself.

As stated by Deuze (2011), one no longer lives a life with the media but a life in the media, completely immersed in a mediatized space and time. This has, on the one hand, brought improvements in many aspects and often facilitated living conditions. One thinks of distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, made possible precisely by a mediatization that had already begun to overwhelm the education system in many countries. However, this same example can be used to illustrate the other side of the coin and all the problems it has entailed, for example discussing issues such as inequality and unequal access to media infrastructure or control. The pronouncedly ambiguous nature of mediatization thus needs to be analysed within what can be defined as a dialectical relationship: sought after, desired, nurtured and nourished by society itself, but strongly dependent on an unequal distribution of power, capable of configuring new interactions (Braga, 2012) In this sense, a critical evaluation of the transformation to which mediatization has led becomes necessary (Kopecka-Piech and Bolin, 2023), including the processes, meanings, and purposes with which it is used.

In order to do so, this paper focuses on a very specific phenomenon, namely irregular migration, which well represents all the ambiguities of the phenomenon, which has



undoubtedly improved the transnational relations of migrants, but has also increased the possibility of control and data mining, even non-consensual by the authorities.

Migration, both as an experience and its narration, has always been a mediated event (Leurs, Smets 2020; Leurs 2023). On the one hand, migration is narrated and represented through the media; on the other hand, the everyday media practices of migrants make possible that ubiquity characteristic of all mobile lives (Elliott, Urry 2010). From letters to telephones and satellite TV, to the Internet and e-mail, pre-paid sim cards and social media today: the evolution of the media system has brought important changes to the migration phenomenon, fostering transnationalism, and facilitating the maintenance of relationships with those left behind in the countries of origin, or even travel and contact during journeys. In addition to this, there has also been a total digitalisation of the infrastructures that revolve around migration and reception: for example, asylum applications, rather than access to economic support or services such as health care, are now completely digital. This has therefore also required migrants to become, in a sense, mediated and digital individuals.

Alongside this, however, there has also been a mediatization of borders through the adoption of technologies related to surveillance and biometric recognition systems, identification through computer systems that cross biological and behavioural characteristics with data acquired through databases and algorithms, are constantly used (Chouliaraki and Georgiou, 2020; Madianou, 2019). Digitization has led to the 'datafication of human mobility', making everything about migration measurable and quantifiable. Apps, platforms, new technologies enable unprecedented data collection and the ability to track and monitor movements and interests. The technological infrastructure for data collection and analysis, used by governments to redistribute migrants, has made migration not only quantifiable but also calculable, predictable (Gamez, 2020). Borders are therefore no longer seen as geographical entities, but as political and technological, mediated entities.



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After all, as stated by Levi-Strauss (1962), the human beings are classifier animals. This classificatory logic, which is in their nature, is today implemented by the various technologies, AI, platforms, datafication that in their place, divide, classify, in this case migrants into desirable and undesirable at the borders of a country (Leurs and Seufferling, 2021; Latonero and Kift 2018). This paper will therefore start from the analysis of these new technologies in order to understand the meanings that pervasive mediatization has on migration and on the logics of classification, reception, and exclusion. In particular the Eurodac case and the VISA system for the European level and the use of ankle bracelets and smartwatches adopted by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE).

However, as already mentioned, the third element of this paper is exclusion, which here takes on two different meanings. The first meaning represented is exclusion from a country. Migrants at the border are registered, controlled, and classified. If they are considered undesirable, they are excluded from a reception system but potentially detained for repatriation. The second meaning concerns more explicitly the mediatization from which migrants can be excluded. Here we will analyse the Swedish detention centres, which are highly mediatized spaces, equipped with various surveillance technologies and where everything happens digitally. Here there are cards with personal information to move around the interior spaces, surveillance cameras capable of collecting and classifying the behaviour of individuals in detention through algorithms. This method is particularly used on individuals on whom a final imprisonment decision has not yet been made. Thus, case evaluation also takes place here thanks to the technologies present that collect the information, store it in databases and compare it with other biometric data obtained in the steps prior to detention.

However, migrants are, at least partially, excluded from this process of mediatization, which increasingly impacts any space intended to control migration. Migrants detained in Swedish detention centres are not allowed to bring their smartphones, which must be



handed in before entering the facility; here they will be given a phone without internet and camera. They can, however, access the internet via computer, which must be booked in advance and for no more than an hour. Furthermore, while the entire system is completely digitised, decisions and official communications arrive to migrants in the form of letters. A return to paper, which only applies to them.

So while we witness a fast and pervasive mediatization of spaces, we can also see a kind of counter-mediatization of the individuals inhabiting those same spaces. In this sense I say that it is a mediatization that follows different speeds and directions, depending on the power exercised through it and its purposes. To also better explore the meanings this brings to the daily lives of detained migrants, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth and face-to-face interviews. This aspect is also particularly useful to analyse the ambiguities of mediatization in migration management as outside the centres, migrants are asked for total mediatization which is then denied inside.

A critical evaluation of this aspect leads to a deeper analysis of the interrelation that exists between mediatization, classification, and exclusion. It will then be shown that these three elements are not only linked, but are dependent on each other. Each a consequence of the preceding but to be imagined as in a circular rather than a chain process. This nature is not only characteristic of migratory contexts, but undoubtedly these, and in particular borders and detention centres, can tangibly illustrate its meanings.

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