



# Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical  
Journalism  
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

## **Moving Stories**

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**FOREWORD**

# Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND





**For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.**

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

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**What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.**

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But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

**Jan Egeland** is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council





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## INTRODUCTION

# Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

**Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.**

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.





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**“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo**

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In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

## 1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

## 2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

## 3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

## 4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

## 5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

## Some Useful Links

### Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

### Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

### Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

## Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"









## BRAZIL

# Where politics takes precedence over the people who make it

» JAN ROCHA

**In Brazil, a country of migrants, President Dilma Rousseff is the daughter of a Bulgarian migrant. President Juscelino Kubitschek, who built Brasilia, the country's capital since 1960, was the son of a Czech migrant. The father of Milton Hatoum, one of Brazil's best-known writers, came from the Lebanon. The very first migrants were the Portuguese, who arrived in 1500, decimating the indigenous population with war and disease.**

Over the next 300 years the slave trade brought an estimated eight million Africans to work in the goldmines, sugar plantations and coffee farms. The next big wave of migration came from Europe in the 19th century, when shiploads of impoverished peasant families, mostly Italian and German, arrived to farm and work in the new industries.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Japanese immigrants escaping from poverty arrived to work on the coffee farms. Today Brazil has the world's largest concentration of ethnic Japanese living outside Japan.

After World War One and the collapse of the Ottoman empire Turks, Lebanese and Syrians arrived and in between the wars came Jewish refugees. After the establishment of Israel, it was the turn of the Palestinians. In the 1970s, thousands of new exiles arrived, fleeing right-wing dictatorships in neighbouring Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.

As Brazil entered a period of economic prosperity in the early 2000s migrants came from the USA and Europe, escaping the economic downturn in their own countries.

Over recent years the tightening of restrictions on Africans trying to reach Europe led many to look to Brazil instead. The 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which caused thousands of deaths and widespread devastation in one of the world's poorest countries, caused an upsurge in migration to Brazil.



Between 2000 and 2010 the number entering Brazil rose by almost 90 per cent, to reach more than a quarter of a million. The Haitians chose the country for various reasons: Brazil had built up a considerable presence in Haiti since 2004, when the Brazilian military took over the UN Stabilisation Mission. After the earthquake, many Brazilian NGOs provided aid.

For thousands of Haitians, Brazil became the new promised land, even though reaching it involved an arduous 6,000-kilometre-long journey. They came illegally, catching a plane from Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, to Quito, the Ecuadorean capital, and then paying *coyotes*, or people smugglers, between US\$3000 and \$8000 to take them across the Peruvian Amazon and in by the back door, a journey that can last up to three weeks.

Federal authorities calculate that almost 40,000 Haitians have arrived by this route in the past four years. In 2012 the government created a new type of document – the “Humanitarian Visa”, valid for five years, which enables migrants to work and reside legally. The government also intends to allow the consulate in Port-au-Prince to grant more visas, increasing from 600 to 2,000 a month, as part of a policy aimed at cracking down on the operations of the *coyotes*. Joint actions with Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia to fight the people smugglers have also been proposed.

While in recent years Haitians have made up the majority who arrive via the illegal Amazon route, more and more Africans, especially Senegalese, have also been taking the same difficult route in search of better economic opportunities. Part of the reason for this new flow is Brazil’s growing presence in a number of African countries through its oil and construction companies. It also funds a number of agricultural and educational projects in Africa.

Migration has not all been inward. In the 1970s, after the giant hydroelectric dam of Itaipu flooded their lands, thousands of small farmers trekked across the border into Paraguay, where land was cheap. In the 1990s, when hyperinflation took hold and the economy stagnated, many thousands of young Brazilians made their way to the USA and Europe in search of work.

Internal migration is also a major factor and has long been a common feature of life. Hundreds of thousands have left the impoverished northeast – especially during periodic severe droughts – to find work in São Paulo, the country’s biggest city and economic powerhouse. In the 1950s, the opening of car factories stimulated the exodus. Among the migrants was a small boy, Luis Inacio da Silva, travelling with his family in search of a better life: many years later he would become president – widely known as Lula.

### Migration: A media story in political form

For all of this movement of peoples that has shaped the country in all aspects of its cultural and social development the Brazilian media coverage of migration and migrants is sporadic – sometimes positive, sometimes negative.

In the mainstream media, the growing influx often only becomes a story when it can be directly related to party politics. The national media, overwhelmingly conservative and critical of the Workers Party (PT), which has been in power for 12 years, tends to publish stories about migrants which show the PT government and administrators in a bad light.

In May 2015, busloads of Haitians suddenly arrived in São Paulo, coming from Rio Branco, capital of the Amazon state of Acre, where they had entered Brazil. Both Acre and São Paulo are governed by the PT, and the conservative newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* reported the story in a political context, discussing it primarily in terms of arguments and policy differences between local officials.

“The mayor Fernando Haddad accused the federal government and the PT administration of Acre of disrespecting the rules drawn up in 2014 for the transport and shelter of Haitians in the city,” reported *O Estado de São Paulo*. “Haddad’s criticism was a reaction to the sending of 500 immigrants at one go from Rio Branco to the capital.”

The Acre state Secretary for Justice and Human Rights, Nilson Mourão, said he did not know of any agreement and denied that Acre wanted to get rid

of the migrants. He said: “We are not disembarking Haitians in São Paulo as though they were rubbish (but) we are exhausted. For five years we have been involved in this struggle.” It was reported that 30 Haitians a day were crossing the frontier.

The newspaper used the situation not to criticise the precarious conditions of the migrants, arriving in São Paulo with nowhere to stay, but to attack the PT for not coping properly. In an editorial the same newspaper also attacked the special “humanitarian” visa given to Haitian migrants.

“If these human beings were to be treated like animals, it would have been better to stop them entering Brazil – as does every country whose government ... measures the consequences of a migratory flux,” said the editorial.

“Without this visa, they (Haitians) would have to be repatriated. But the PT federal government, with the aim of showing its ‘humanitarian’ side, has created an instrument to regularise the situation, stimulating the entry en masse of new illegal immigrants.”

The same humanitarian visa was criticised in a different manner by the blogger João Paulo Charleaux, writing in the online *Brazil Post*, an affiliate of the *Huffington Post*, on April 25, 2014. “What happened to the country of solidarity which we said we were?” said Charleaux.

“Suddenly the nobility of the gesture has gone and all that remains is a game of pass the buck between the federative entities which show themselves every day more lost in dealing with what has become a hot potato.

“While they are in Haiti the Haitians deserve enthusiastic speeches of support, campaign hospitals, engineering works and games by the Brazil soccer team but when they get to Brazil, they are received first in a dusty overcrowded camp, then soon sent down by bus to an uncertain destination, arriving in a megalopolis like São Paulo without even knowing where to go.”

In 2014 the Ebola outbreak in West Africa led to widespread and sensationalist coverage after a refugee named Suleymane Bah, who had recently arrived from one of the countries most affected, Guinea, sought help at a hospital, complaining of a high fever.

Bah was immediately treated as an Ebola suspect and flown to Rio in a specially equipped Brazilian Air Force plane to an isolation hospital, and subjected to examinations. For days the press

speculated on the possibility of an Ebola epidemic brought by African migrants. He was eventually diagnosed with flu symptoms.

What was described as the Brazilian media’s “incompetence and lack of ethics” in their coverage was severely criticised by researchers at the National Public Health School in Rio (ENSP). Research coordinator Sergio Rego said the incident showed the media’s lack of preparation for dealing with the situation. “National newspapers with large circulations published the name of the patient, and details of his documents. He is a refugee and should not have his data exposed. Instead of protecting the victims we run the risk, once more, of blaming them.

“The cynical posture of the media may encourage more racism, xenophobia and discrimination in the population, traditionally lacking in quality information. Also lacking in information are the journalists who refer to Guinea as the patient’s country, forgetting that there are three Guineas in Africa (Bissau, Equatorial and Conakry); or worse, when they opt for the adjective African, homogenising the population of a continent of over a billion inhabitants.”

The non-mainstream press has tended to take a more sympathetic line, publishing informative and positive stories, sometimes sending reporters to investigate local conditions.

On June 7, 2015, the regional paper *Zero Hora*, of Porto Alegre, capital of Rio Grande do Sul – one of the southern states which has received large numbers of migrants – published an 11-page report on the Haitian migrants, called “Hell in the Promised Land”, written by journalist Carlos Rollsing, with photographs by Mateus Bruxel.

After describing the inadequate conditions in the overcrowded shelters where the migrants spend their first days or weeks, the two accompanied a group of 18 men and women on the 79-hour-long, 4,000-kilometre bus journey from the hot and humid Amazon to São Paulo. Among other travel hazards – pot-holed roads, precarious wooden bridges over swollen rivers, mosquitoes and a five-hour breakdown – they endured the rants of a xenophobic passenger who foretold the massacre of black immigrants.

Arriving at the city’s enormous bus terminal and unable to speak Portuguese, the migrants, all Haitians, were cold and hungry, confused and lost. *Zero Hora* reported that they were suffering from “a lack of information, the terrible difficulty of communication and a certain fear of behaving in the wrong way”. But Brazil’s metropolis, “so much





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## Organisations investigating human-rights issues found it necessary to publish a manifesto warning about the media treatment of migrants from Africa, Haiti and South America.

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desired and idealised”, was where they hoped to find work.

“Thousands have managed to find work in the southeast and the south, overcome the difficulties and now support their families back home,” said the report. “For them, the sacrifice was worthwhile. But there are many who came with the hope of not becoming (mere) labourers, who see the experience with frustration.”

When not using migration for political ends – mainly to criticise the PT party – the national press has occasionally published stories that convey some idea of the wide range of experiences, positive and negative, experienced by migrants. A 22-year-old Haitian, DJ Cayes, who had been in Brazil for three years, told the *O Estado de São Paulo*: “Here I am earning money. I can earn R\$300 (approximately US\$100) a night at clubs, playing techno music. The trip was worth it.”

A more recent arrival, 31-year-old beautician Muta Zhephiran, told the same newspaper of her ambitions. “In Haiti they talk a lot about Brazil. They say there are good opportunities here. It was my dream

to come.” She arrived in São Paulo hungry and tired after the four-day journey from Acre, and was sleeping at the church-run Peace Mission, where two large rooms have been set aside for the new arrivals.

Alexandre Martins, a specialist in media analysis, says: “A superficial analysis of the online coverage of immigration presents positive aspects when it shows some of the difficulties migrants face when they arrive.” “What is noticeable is that these news items obtain low audience ratings, indicating that they are not a theme of interest to the Brazilian reader.”

Even in cities which have seen a substantial influx, interest is low. Martins says there is “no obvious prejudice in the coverage” but feels that the lack of interest could be due to the weakness of the stories presented, which “fail to arouse the interest of the reader enough to make him reflect on such a sensitive social question”.

However, a group of organisations investigating human-rights issues found it necessary to publish a manifesto warning about the media treatment of migrants from Africa, Haiti and South America arriving in Brazil. They said that in many cases,

the media had “assumed a tone of criminalisation and alarmism”.

To help combat such coverage, in May 2015 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) organised a meeting with migrants and refugees to which the press was invited. Several spoke about their experience in Brazil.

Syrian refugee Miguel Majd said he had been surprised, when questioned by immigration police on entering Brazil, not to be asked about his religion. “Nobody asked me, are you a Christian or a Muslim?” Another immigrant said that while there was discrimination, many people were welcoming, though he was surprised at the level of ignorance or interest about where migrants had come from. And another said, “They (Brazilians) thought we were running away from our country because we were murderers.”

## Inequality, racism and partisan media

Brazil’s migrant background and traditional support for the United Nations means its official policy towards migrants and refugees is positive. Although overwhelmingly a Christian country, all religions are tolerated, and religious persecution is minimal. But it is also considered to be one of the world’s most unequal countries with yawning gaps between the rich elite and the poor, which affects both Brazilians and migrants.

In a country where almost everybody can claim a migrant ancestor, Brazilians have a tradition of accepting foreigners. Yet racism – the legacy of 300 years of slavery – persists, even in what is, formally, a racial democracy. Afro-Brazilians have less education, earn lower salaries and die earlier than white Brazilians. They are over-represented in the prison system and under-represented in government.

This means black migrants are subject to discrimination, not because they are migrants, but because they are black. When the press uses the emotive words “avalanche” and “invasion” to describe the growing numbers arriving, in almost all cases they are referring to black migrants, not white ones. Ignorance about the rest of the world, including geography and politics, means that few Brazilians know where migrants come from, or why refugees have left their countries. Migrants often express a wish for Portuguese lessons, not generally on offer except at some charities such as Caritas.

But many problems encountered by migrants are the same faced by Brazilians: inefficient bureaucracies slow down the recognition of overseas documents, like university diplomas; public services are often understaffed and inadequately equipped.

Brazil has become an increasingly popular destination for both migrants and refugees from all over the world, as traditional destinations become more difficult to access. Until recently, unemployment was low, but since 2014 the economy has gone into recession: this could lead to greater resentment as competition for jobs becomes ever more intense.

Some migrants, however, have found niches where their particular skills give them an advantage, like the Senegalese employed by firms exporting meat to Middle Eastern countries, because, as Muslims, they know the necessary halal techniques. Or the Haitians employed in a club in São Paulo frequented by Jewish immigrants from Europe, because they speak French.

Media coverage is volatile but could become more openly hostile if unemployment increases and the government cuts more jobs in public services. The recent growth of intolerance in Brazilian politics – as evidenced by strident calls for President Rousseff to be impeached or forced to resign – could spread to migrants, if one of the political parties saw attacking them as a vote-catcher.

Such a situation could be exacerbated by a partisan media, often subservient to powerful political interests. The alternative and regional press generally strive to be positive and informative on migrant issues, running stories similar to that reported in *Zero Hora*. But it is the mainstream media, especially radio and TV, that most influence public opinion.

This highly influential sector could be doing a lot more to inform their viewers, listeners and readers about the context of the recent migration. They could provide background information about the countries they come from, why they come, their motives in migrating or fleeing their home countries.

The media could also remind Brazilians that most of their ancestors were migrants and how they helped to make Brazil what it is today. The role of black migrants, historically brought as slaves, is especially important: their labour not only built the economy but created the art and culture that is the essence of modern Brazil.



## Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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