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Framing Migration in Southern European Media: Perceptions of Spanish, Italian, and Greek Specialized Journalists

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ABSTRACT

Greece, Italy, and Spain are the Southern European borders and the main entrances for migrants and refugees to Europe, a movement that was particularly visible after the 2015 “refugee crisis of the Mediterranean.” In this context, immigration is used as a political tool, and the object of major media coverage. However, previous studies have shown that this coverage tends to be partial and prejudiced. This study, conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, uses the frame building theory to study the perceptions of journalists covering migration issues regarding ways to improve the representation of migrants in the media of these three countries. For that, in-depth interviews were conducted with 94 Greek, Italian, and Spanish journalists. The precarity of the profession, the focus on conflictive approaches, and discrimination based on national origin or religion are mentioned as the biggest challenges. Professionals covering this information demand more individualized and deeper coverage, giving the migrants’ condition greater visibility, and giving voice to the migrants themselves, as they are the protagonists of the stories. Greater attention to journalistic ethics and the defense of vulnerable groups is considered essential to achieve this.


KEYWORDS

COVID-19; journalism; Greece; Italy; media framing; migration; Spain

Introduction

Although migration, and particularly immigration, is not a new phenomenon in Southern European countries, 2015’s “refugee crisis of the Mediterranean,” together with the rise of nationalist, hate-filled anti-immigration discourses in many European and Western countries, led to an increase in the media interest in immigration and in its political consequences (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Colombo 2018). However, before this crisis, the representation of immigration in the media and its effects have been traditionally relevant matters of study in academia, especially in the areas of communication and social sciences. These studies have usually focused on the measurement of citizens’ attitudes toward immigrants (Schemer 2012; Arcila-Calderón, Blanco-Herrero, and Valdez-Apolo 2020) and, typically, on the application of framing or agenda theories to analyze the way immigration is represented (Van Gorp 2005; Zhang and Hellmueller 2017).

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However, few studies have focused on the perspective of the creators of the media content, that is, the journalists. Despite relevant efforts to analyze their profiles and working conditions—for example, the Worlds of Journalism Study or the Journalistic Role Performance projects—and other studies (Gemi, Ulasiuk, and Triandafyllidou 2013; Delmastro and Splendore 2020), journalists' perceptions of the representation of migration in the media are seldom investigated. That is why the present study aims to fill in this knowledge gap by interviewing journalists who usually cover migration information, in order to survey their perceptions about the frames built during the process, seeking to complement studies on the representation of immigrants in the media. Similarly, this study takes an international approach, interviewing journalists from Italy, Greece, and Spain, the three Southern European countries facing the largest number of arrivals of migrants, implementing a common methodological framework, and reaching a sample of more than 90 journalists from different media.

Contextualization of the Study

Attitudes and Frames About Migration in Society

The relevance of studying the representation of immigration in the media increases due to its effects on citizens' attitudes, especially because negative media frames of migration often leads to negative attitudes toward immigrants (Schemer 2012; Eberl et al. 2018). These attitudes, in connection with the studies on national identity (Esses et al. 2005) and about the "other" and the "exogroup" in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978), are often behind the rejection of immigrants, which can lead to hate speech (Arcila-Calderón, Blanco-Herrero, and Valdez-Apolo 2020), and could ultimately unleash hate crimes (Müller and Schwarz 2021). This also explains why the issue of hate speech and rejection has been a common issue among scholars in recent years, due to its growing presence in social media (Burnap and Williams 2015; Davidson et al. 2017) and participatory spaces in mainstream media outlets (Karyotakis, Antonopoulos, and Saridou 2019; Saridou et al. 2019), which commonly see the migrants and refugees as victims. Furthermore, racism and xenophobia are the motifs behind most of the growing number of hate crimes committed in Italy, Greece, and Spain, as in most countries (OSCE 2020).

Special Eurobarometer 469, a recent EU-wide survey on attitudes to immigrant integration, together with data from October 2017 (European Commission 2018), shows that Italian, Greek, and Spanish citizens are badly informed about immigration, and tend to overestimate the number and proportion of immigrants living in their countries. According to this survey, Spain has the highest average percentage of people claiming to feel comfortable interacting with immigrants, and the second-highest percentage of people claiming to have immigrants as friends or family; in Greece, these values are below the European average, while Italy's are about average. Spain is also among the countries where immigration is perceived most frequently as a success, and least frequently as a problem, whereas Italy and Greece are close to or below the European average. Similarly, according to the Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center with data from 2017, Spaniards say that immigrants make their country stronger, unlike Italians and Greeks, who take the most negative approaches to this issue. Finally, the Pew Research Center survey asked if they viewed immigrants as a

threat; in Spain, only a minority considered immigrants to be a burden or identified them with an increase in crime or terrorism, while in Italy, and particularly in Greece, the proportion of citizens think they are a threat is large, and growing significantly.

Framing Immigration by Media and Journalists

The way immigration is framed in the media is influenced by the current migration context in Southern European countries, which is strongly defined by the arrival of a growing number of asylum-seekers and migrants after the refugee crisis of 2015. Greece was the most affected country since the beginning, which, together with a weak economic situation, made the challenge more complex for this country (Kaitatzi-Whitlock and Kenterelidou 2017). After the agreement between the European Union and Turkey to control the migrant flow, the situation in Greece changed, and in 2018, Italy, the country experiencing the largest volume of arrivals until the closing of its harbors when the migratory flows moved to Spain, became the EU country with the most illegal entries after the Syrian refugee crisis (Seoane-Pérez 2017). Although incidents at the Greek–Turkish border in the first quarter of 2020 sparked media coverage of the migration issue, the attention soon decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as arrivals decreased significantly because of the closing of borders and movement restrictions. However, the fire in the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos Island in September, and the rapid increase in the number of arrivals to the Canary Islands in the last quarter of the year, brought the issue back to the forefront of media coverage.

Before that, the 2015 refugee crisis had caused an increasing amount of interest in migration by the media (Georgiou and Zaborowski 2017; Colombo 2018), which has profited some political parties and discourses (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak, 2018; Damstra et al. 2019). This, together with other socioeconomic events such as the 2008 economic crisis, has led to the growing political influence of anti-immigration and nationalist parties (Burscher, van Spanje, and de Vreese 2015; Dennison and Geddes 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte 2019).

In addition to these more current approaches, the media frame building of migrants and minorities has traditionally been a broadly researched aspect in academia, and numerous studies have observed that the representation of migrants in Western media is usually negative and prejudiced (Van Gorp 2005; Muñoz-Muriel, Igartua-Perosanz, and Otero 2006; Igartua-Perosanz et al. 2007; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Brändle, Eisele, and Trenz 2019; Stavinoha 2019; Fengler et al. 2020; Kalfeli, Frangonikolopoulos, and Gardikiotis 2020). These studies have used almost exclusively content analysis, but the perceptions of journalists, and even more, journalists who usually focus on migration, have been less common.

However, a deeper understanding of migration coverage that journalists offer is particularly relevant in a context in which the profession and the industry face a new paradigm, especially given the relevance that fake news and disinformation have reached due to the ecology of digital media (Bakir and McStay 2018). In fact, disinformation is considered one of the biggest threats to freedom of speech and journalism (Bennet and Livingston 2018), and given the potential connection between hate speech and fake news (Cantón Correa and Galindo Calvo 2019; Schäfer and Schadauer 2019), it is even more relevant to go deeper than just the content to understand the representation of immigration in media and how to improve it.

For that, this work dialogues with the theories of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972) and framing (Goffmann 1974), as they are the ones that have been mostly used in previous studies, providing support to all the efforts to understand the effects that media representations have on societies. These theories offer a foundation for our work, but the focus will be on frame building, as we will try to understand the construction of frames by those producing the content (Scheufele 1999; Brüggemann, 2014). This is, journalists have pre-existing ideas about a topic—in this case, migration—and those ideas influence the way they frame their messages, which in turn can have an effect of the audiences. This last phase has been more commonly studied in the previously works, but the first element, the process of how journalists build their agendas, has been less common (Colistra 2012).

With this, the intention of our study is to overcome the already well-documented representation of migration in the media, by studying what migration journalists think about it, and trying to understand the processes that lead to the specific way that migration is framed in the media. Thus, this study will answer the following research question:

RQ1: What is the perception of Italian, Greek, and Spanish migration journalists about the coverage and frame building process of migration in the media?

Given that the media can have a strong influence in how prejudiced society is towards immigrants, our study also keeps in mind the concept of prejudice (Allport 1954) as the most relevant frame to be discussed. In fact, the spread of prejudice against immigrants by the media has been a common observation: some works have detected a clear presence of hate speech in some media (Sindoni 2018), whereas others have seen a more subtle indirect effect of negative coverage (Eberl et al. 2018). This needs to be improved to obtain fairer and more in-depth migration journalism. In addition to analyzing the perceptions of specialized journalists, this article offers ways to improve this sort of journalism. Therefore, we will also answer the following research question:

RQ2: Which strategies emerge from news-making practices to improve the coverage of migration in the media?

Methodology

This article is part of a European project that proposes a set of five interconnected work packages for hate speech about migrants and refugees. One of these work packages focuses on learning the perspectives and opinions of journalists specializing in migration in Spain, Italy, and Greece. The fieldwork is based on 94 semi-structured and reconstruction in-depth interviews—33 in Spain, 31 in Italy, and 30 in Greece—to journalists specializing in the area of migration, refugees, and human mobility issues. To maintain anonymity, journalists will be referred to the code SP (Spain), IT (Italy), or GR (Greece), together with the number of journalists within the country (see Appendix 1 for more details).

In all interviews, a previously designed questionnaire was followed and applied in a semi-structured manner. The questionnaire was designed ad hoc for the project with the supervision of experts, and it was divided into five phases. The first four constitute the body of the in-depth interview: the journalist's career; changes in journalism and the effect of technologies on it; journalists' ideas about hate speech and their interaction with their audience, colleagues, and sources; and responsibility, deontology, and alternatives to combat hate speech against migrants and refugees. The fifth phase is based on a

reconstruction interview focusing on a publication of the interviewees themselves to establish how they carry out their pieces and information related to migration. The entire set of questions used in this study can be found in Appendix 2.

The COVID-19 health crisis forced the scheduled interviews to be conducted as videoconferences (via Skype, Zoom, and Google Meeting) during the months of May, June, and July 2020. All interviews were conducted in the first language of the journalists—Spanish, Italian, or Greek—although the joint analysis was conducted in English. Afterwards, the transcription was carried out in two stages: first, in an automated way, through the tool API Cloud to Speech by Google for R, and second, manually, to validate the first version and complete the missing elements. Once the transcriptions in the original languages were ready, a similar process—first automatic and then manual—was followed to translate all contents into English to unify the analysis. Then, the analysis combined a quantitative content analysis of the entire transcription, together with a qualitative study of the specific parts of the interviews that allowed us to answer the research questions, given that the questionnaire was designed with a further approach, and not all parts of the interviews were necessary for this goal, as they dealt with elements not addressed in this article. With this, it will be possible to focus on the interpretation of journalists about how media frames are built around migration.

In the content analysis phase, manual and automated techniques were applied to study the discourse of journalists around the representation of migrants and refugees in the media in Spain, Italy, and Greece. Initially, using the free software AntConc, a word count was carried out in all interviews (total number of word types = 20,967; total number of word tokens = 450,742). This was a starting point of the work analysis, because knowing the frequency of the words has an exploratory utility, as it allows the researcher to delve into the analysis of the linguistic corpus based on the percentage of repetition of the words that will later act as keywords.

The semantization of lexical units allowed us to generate data matrices and establish clusters (groups of words) from lexical associations. The analysis of these lexical associations between the words gave the possibility of grouping them by order of frequency, indicating their relationship and proximity with contiguous terms. This analytical procedure is based on the generation of an unsupervised artificial neural network, taken as a reference in tools such as the CatPac (Category Package) program, which “acts as a self-organized artificial neural network aimed at optimizing the reading of a text” (Woelfel, 1998: 11). The result of this quantitative procedure, based on the number of elements that make up the analysis units, offers precise, objective, and easily validated results (Tian and Stewart, 2005).

Ward’s grouping method (based on a ± 1 word repetition algorithm), recommended by Woelfel (1998) in the CatPac II User’s Guide, is the procedure we use to place keywords within groups of words or clusters based on the relationship and distance established between them, according to an established central point.

Results

Detection of Clusters and Thematic Subgroups

Using Ward’s method, we limited the unsupervised artificial neural network to 388 lexical units (keywords), with a total of 46,587 recurrences, after selecting only those terms that were mentioned at least 17 times throughout the 94 interviews. With the intention of

locating and identifying keywords (terms that make up the thematic keys of the text) within the structural heterogeneity of the in-depth interviews, we restricted the keywords by excluding articles, adverbs, general and modal verbs, and expressions or phrases that are used repeatedly without adding meaning to the content of the text. Subsequently, the 388 extracted keywords were grouped according to their semantization, leading to the creation of 14 clusters or groups of meaning (see [Table 1](#)). It should be highlighted that these clusters constitute a preliminary approach with all the content of the interviews, although, as we will see next, our study focuses only on some specific aspects.

After this exploratory semantic classification, our work focuses more specifically on the “Migrations” cluster (Cluster 4), given that this is a homogeneous lexical block capable of answering the research questions posed in this article. Using these data, a qualitative manual analysis was carried out, so that it could be adapted to the studied context, avoiding a standardized study that prevents deepening into particular aspects of the speech.

The “Migrations” cluster has 49 keywords that appear in the interviews a total of 4,305 times. To broaden the study, we added related keywords that in the previous phase had been allocated to other clusters (to which they were also related): seven keywords from the cluster “Context and society,” two from the “Conflict” cluster, two from the “Journalism” cluster, and the entire “COVID-19” cluster—with the goal of adding a deeper temporary context. Hence, the total number of analyzed keywords was 66, which recurred 5,426 times (see [Table 2](#)).

The last level of analysis focuses on the correlations and associations of lexical units (keywords) established through their semantic relationships. Through this semantization of the lexical units, created by grouping keywords into meaning groups, a total of 13 thematic groups were obtained.

Finally, the analysis of the lexical associations established between the keywords in each category and the linguistic context in which they are found—that is, the words preceding and following them—allowed the analysis of the discourses of the interviewees around migration representation in the media. Each of the 13 categories focused on a specific aspect of this issue, although these categories are not independent, and often the terminology is closely related. These categories are detailed in [Table 3](#) and will be used as a basis for conducting the qualitative analysis that follows. The presentation follows a thematic order. The first, Migration and Human Mobility, is the most general, while the following four—Minors, Borders, Regularization, and Routes—focus on specific aspects of great relevance in the reporting and framing of migration on the media. The next four categories, Ethnicity and Racism, Origin, Religion, and Minorities, deal with forms of hate and discrimination that migrants face and that are very influential when reporting and framing migration. The next two—Coverage and Risks of reporting—approach journalistic aspects of the coverage of migration in the media, which are also central aspects of this study, while the last two—Gender and COVID 19—have a more transversal condition, affecting every other category.

Analysis of Thematic Subgroups

Migration and Human Mobility

Some interviewees see the “migratory issue as something very big that is considered not to have a solution” (16-SP). Moreover, the frames used in the reporting of migration are influenced by some realities and ideas that affect it. First, some media tend to focus on

Table 1. Clusters and keywords of the study of the narrative, representation and image of migrants and refugees in the Spanish, Italian and Greek media

CLUSTERS	COMPOSITION	KEYWORDS (r*)
1. HATE SPEECH	18 keywords 3668 recurrences	speech/s (1364), hate (1303), voice/s (113), comment/s (428), language (75), lies (38), hoax(es) (32), fake (33), criticism (43), rhetoric (38), false (78), prejudice (21), fascist (38), ideological (21), stereotypes (23), verification (23), approaches (22), speaker (18)
2. COMMUNICATION	33 keywords 3703 recurrences	communication (321), narrate (314), data (198), word/s (196), message/s (191), content/s (137), opinion/s (482), video/s (108), photo/s, photography/s (152), image/s (126), inform/information (158), publication/s, publish/ed (238), code (81), text (43), protagonists (38), tool/s (136), argument/s (57), visibility (29), debate/s (174), photographer/s (52), statements (47), narrative/s (48), manifesto (25), reflection (25), episode/s (39), dialogue (18), propaganda (27), campaign (50), project/s (146), camera (27), feedback (20)
3. RIGHTS AND VALUES	31 keywords 2603 recurrences	truth (408), reality, real (417), responsibility/s, responsible (291), right/s (281), human/s (125), ethics, ethical code (127), freedom, free (108), quality (65), safe, security (102), access (77), fair (48), conscience (37), ideology (28), trust (26), objectivity-objective/s (138), autonomous (45), depth (52), sensitivity (25), solidarity (23), trustworthy (18), credibility (18), honest (17), dignity (18), protection (21), feeling (21), codes (29), diversity (21), protect (17)
4. MIGRATIONS	49 keywords 4305 recurrences	migrant/s, migration/s, migratory (835), refugee/s (334), immigrant/s, immigration (610), racism, racist/s, racial (358), crisis (143), minor/s (99), foreigner/s (140), border/s (155), fence (64), black/s (152), origin (78), Muslims (49), asylum (39), discrimination (45), patera/s (68), foster care (46), Islam (31), minority/s (43), dead, death (77), poor/poverty (76), victim/s (61), roles (30), phenomenon/s (123), il/legal (81), activist/s (52), ship/s (60), centers (46), exploitation (22), religion (22), God (20), nationality (24), route (27), flow/s (43), integration (26), color (33), white (49), regularization (22), race (18), invasion (18), movement/s (49), trafficking (20), Arab (17)
5. CONTEXT AND SOCIETY	47 keywords 6999 recurrences	people (1138), person (1470), partner/s (251), society/s (218), professional/s (186), population (131), context/s (145), experience (128), child/ren (187), country/s (434), local/s (186), world (357), woman/s (203), city (117), friend/s (131), international/s (148), citizen (114), system (84), family/s (106), national (108), community/s (105), collective (69), youth (110), north (58), man (75), neighborhood (55), sea (48), colleague/s (163), groups (85), workers (37), territory (39), boy/s (86), gypsies (45), culture (39), cultural (48), father (20), mother (39), citizenship (35), international (22), worldwide (17), global (21), neighbor/s (22), region (23), kid/s (43), port (17), east (20), western (19)
6. JOURNALISM	60 keywords 13013 recurrences	journalist/s (1279), journalism (524), journalistic (179), fact/s (869), medium, media (869), topic/s (1559), information (814), news (788), history/s (699), newspaper/s (734), source/s (547), article/s (424), press (240), report/s (321), writing/s (204), editorial/s (150), radio (138), television (116), newspaper (108), magazine/s (126), editor/s (141), audience (65), reader/s (144), section (70), program/s (109), piece/s (110), freelance (55), interview/s (153), team (81), boss/es (109), agenda (77), correspondent (47), land (47), owner/s (90), <i>Porcausa</i> (45), <i>Corriere</i> (32), <i>ABC</i> (32), channels (28), <i>Giornale</i> (28), <i>New York Times</i> (28), department (28), <i>Internazionale</i> (26), <i>BBC</i> (17), gender (48), director (74), Republic (18), newsletter (32), report/s (193), documentary (40), production (40), edition (44), coverage, covering (77), role (37), reporter (27), <i>EFE</i> (20), informative (70), weekly (23), template (20)
7. INTERNET	20 keywords 3306 recurrences	social (830), network/s (718), <i>Twitter</i> , tweet/s (316), account (269), <i>Facebook</i> (256), Internet (197), web (123), profile/s (164), online (68), <i>Instagram</i> (64), digital (55), social media (32), followers (32), platform/s (59), blog (25), <i>WhatsApp</i> (22), technology/s (39), <i>Google</i> (18), computer (19)

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

CLUSTERS	COMPOSITION	KEYWORDS (r*)
8. ECONOMIC FACTORS	8 keywords 429 recurrences	money (134), economy (35), companies (35), contract (32), advertising (31), economic/s (119), business (19), competition (24)
9. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	41 keywords 3323 recurrences	Italy, Italian/s (775), Spain, Spanish/s (462), Africa, African/s (305), Europe/s, European/s (308), Rome (135), Greece, Greek/s (106), Madrid (100), Ceuta (84), Libya (92), Morocco, Moroccan (128), Seville (57), Mediterranean (55), Melilla (54), United States (50), Andalusia (47), Senegal (38), York (37), Canary Islands (36), France, French (55), Mali (32), America (Latin) (55), Milan (30), Lampedusa (28), Naples (27), Germany (26), Bulgaria (23), Iraq (22), English (32), Niger (17), Sub-Saharan (17), Thessaloniki (17), Rome, Roman (18), Somali (18), Turkey (18), Barcelona (19)
10. INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC OFFICES	34 keywords 2757 recurrences	politics (329), public (355), politicians (321), right (143), extreme (110), government (98), organizations (97), party/s (148), Vox (96), NGO (118), Salvini (64), organization (68), agency (70), police (51), association/s (109), institutions (46), agencies (49), State (29), government/s (48), <i>guardia civil</i> (50), president (27), officers (41), left/s (53), minister (21), extreme right (20), organizations (19), Parliament (19), <i>Unidas (Podemos)</i> (22), mayor (17), (ministry) Interior (18), authorities (19), football (17), government (24), Trump (41)
11. POWER	8 keywords 581 recurrences	power (239), law/s (83), censorship (35), control (34), filter (24), relationship (107), rules (41), democracy (18)
12. INVESTIGATION AND EDUCATION	6 keywords 526 recurrences	research (190), education (77), training (75), analysis (62), school (64), university (58)
13. CONFLICT	26 keywords 1123 recurrences	problem/s (168), war (115), violence (101), discussion/s-discuss (176), conflict/s (82), fear (97), complaint/denounce (72), insult/s (57), risk (31), negative (29), dangerous (27), crime (19), emergency (18), incidents (18), damage (18), protests (19), battle (17), demonstration (17), crime/s (40), threats (18), rejection (20), enemy (23), trial (21), revolution (20)
14. COVID-19	6 keywords 251 recurrences	coronavirus (54), pandemic (54), COVID (50), virus (18), health (25), positive (50)

Source: Author's elaboration from AntConc, concordance and text analysis software.

*Recurrence: number of times the word appeared in the 94 interviews

“the danger of an invasion and the problems caused by immigration” (10-SP); second, “The simplification of the phenomenon is being exploited by radical political forces and by hate speech spreaders” (7-GR); and third, “The same words are being used for reporting about migration and human mobility, a phenomenon that has completely changed in the last ten years” (11-IT). Therefore, journalists consider that journalism should try “to change the narrative about migrants” (23-IT), which tends to be repeated and hackneyed, so it is necessary to enrich narratives and arguments, reducing the use of rhetoric and artificial language. For example, “Africa is only mentioned when talking about wars, epidemics, or catastrophes, and seldom are the daily life of people—music, painting, fashion, youth movements, or civil society—depicted” (6-IT); or in the same line: “The most general discourse regarding immigrant people is that they come to Spain for the social benefits, to steal, to profit from social welfare” (22-SP).

The interviewed journalists are also clearly aware of the relevance of language and the intention behind it when framing migration: “When I see the words ‘illegal immigrant’ or ‘expulsion of Afghans, Pakistanis,’ etc., I see clearly that behind the article there is an intention, and I do not take it seriously” (4-GR). They highlight the importance of concept accuracy and fidelity to the facts rather than narrative styles: “The author had no clear idea about who was an immigrant and who was a refugee. The reference was made only with the goal of repeating the same words” (5-GR). These linguistic aspects must be

Table 2. Subdivision of the “Migrations” cluster obtained from interviews with specialized journalists in the Spanish, Italian, and Greek media

CLUSTER	SUBGROUPS	Total R	KEYWORDS	R*
MIGRATIONS	Migration and human mobility	2484	migrant/s	563
			refugee/s	334
			immigrant/s	340
			immigration	270
			foreign/er/s	140
			il/legal	81
			migration	244
			migratory	114
			phenomenon/s	123
			crisis	143
			flow/s	43
			invasion	18
			movement/s	49
			traffic/trafficking	20
			crisis	143
			flow/s	43
			invasion	18
			movement/s	49
			traffic/trafficking	20
	colour	18		
	racist/s	33		
	minor/s	99		
	child/ren	187		
	young boys	110		
	boys	86		
	kid/s	43		
	Borders	219	border/s	155
			fence/s	64
	Origin	102	origin	78
	Religion	122	nationality	24
			Muslim/s	49
			Islam	31
	Regularization	254	God	20
			religion	22
			asylum	39
			reception	46
			regularization	22
			discrimination	45
	Routes	220	integration	26
			papers	30
			centre/s	46
			<i>patera/s</i>	68
boat/s			60	
route			27	
sea			48	
Minorities	53	port	17	
		minority/s	53	
Risks	396	dead/death	87	
		poor/poverty	86	
		victim/s	61	
		exploitation	22	
		risk	31	
		threats	18	
		violence	101	
		activist/s	52	
Coverage	109	coverage/covering	57	
		woman/women	203	
Gender COVID-19	203	coronavirus	54	
		pandemic	54	
		COVID	50	
		virus	18	
		health	25	
		positive	50	

Source: Author’s elaboration from AntConc.

*Recurrence: number of times the word appeared in the 94 interviews

Table 3. Thematic groups determined in the manual content analysis of the “Migrations” cluster

THEMATIC SUBGROUPS	EXPLANATION
MIGRATION AND HUMAN MOBILITY	A general category about the phenomenon as a whole and the terminology used to refer the people who migrate and how they are represented in the media.
MINORS	Related to minors and underaged people, paying special attention to their vulnerability.
BORDERS	The condition of Spain, Italy and Greece as Southern border of Europe and the issues surrounding borders: violence, police control, fences and walls, etc., very present in the representation of migration in the media.
REGULARIZATION	Focused on more administrative and institutional aspects, such as asylum and logistic and legal aspects of migration, mostly from the perspective of arrival countries.
ROUTES	Focused on the trip of the migrants, commonly, given the situation of the three studied countries, by boat.
ETHNICITY AND RACISM	Focused on the “race” and ethnic dimension of migration, strongly connected with racist issues and discourses.
ORIGIN	Focused on the country of origin of the migrants and how this can be used as a discriminatory element.
RELIGION	Mostly related with Islamophobic issues, and in general with the role that religions play in the migratory process.
MINORITIES	About the condition of migrants of minorities in their arrival country: strongly related to the Ethnicity and racism, Religion and Gender categories.
COVERAGE	A more journalistic category, about how migration is covered in the media and also the role of journalists.
RISKS OF REPORTING	Related with the risks of the trip –shipwrecks, for example, but also death or slavery– and in the arrival country –discrimination, poverty, etc.–
GENDER	Specifically about gender issues and the particularities and difficulties that affect migrant women and also female journalists.
COVID-19	Related with the current health crisis and its effects on migration its coverage by journalists.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on the manual content analysis of the keywords of the “Migrations” cluster obtained from AntConc.

supported by a “common code” (20-GR) and in the elimination of stereotypical and “criminalizing” (29-SP) terms that arise when people “connect migrants and criminals” (2-SP), and use sensationalist and inaccurate terms.

Indeed, the narrative used to refer to migrant people and to the migration phenomenon is an essential aspect that can have many consequences: “When, for example, you use the terms ‘invasion’ or ‘avalanche,’ that is terminology that might seem harmless, but it is not, because there are connotations of war, threat, or fear, sliding into daily language” (10-SP). This is of great relevance given the attention that the media coverage about migrants and refugees awakens in multiple parts of the society: “A case of a transfer of immigrants and refugees created a great discomfort in the local community” (11-GR), partly because “nationalist feelings are growing, together with the belief that the immigrant is a useless person who is maintained by the government” (30-SP).

Related to that, a constant element that is highlighted in the three countries is the connection between the media and the political agenda, something clearly seen “after the arrival of [Matteo] Salvini to the [Italian] government, when the arrival of immigrant boats became more present” (25-IT), or in “how when the migratory–asylum issue exploded in Greece the country was in a very particular financial situation that strengthened extreme voices [the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn] that even made it into the Parliament” (24-GR).

In contrast to this, the interviewed journalists try to depict “refugees and migrants as part of society” (14-GR), trying to associate them with “names and surnames” (30-SP) in an effort to represent them as individuals—something that is often seen as a “matter of responsibility” (31-SP). They demand migration journalism that is able to “highlight the positive aspects” (19-IT) and to show normalized elements of migration “related to the

education of migrants and refugees, their interaction with local communities, and personal human stories" (11-GR), because "the core is to talk about people, that is, to talk about migrants and refugees as human beings" (13-IT).

In this line, journalists complain that the media framing of migrating people still lacks personalization of the main characters, and as such, migrants and refugees "should have a voice, not once, but always" (24-IT). This way of building frames also tends to exploit adjectives instead of nouns, referring to these people simply as "refugees and (im)migrants" (21-IT), rather than focusing on the human condition of the person who migrates or seeks asylum. It uses terms like "foreign" (3-IT) or even untrue adjectives such as "clandestine," or denigrating terms such as "black," "illegal" (21-IT), or even "invaders" (16-IT). For this reason, some respondents point out that "specific guidelines have been established about how to deal with this topic and what language to use" (3-GR), although they demand that more efforts need to be addressed to prevent problems such as racism: "An effort is needed to add an Annex to the Code of Journalistic Ethics about racism, xenophobia, and fascism" (14-GR).

Minors

One of the most sensitive topics, according to journalists, is the issue of minors. One of the journalists in Greece remembered a situation in February 2017 "in which a school in the north of Greece was blocked by far-right-wingers to prevent young children of refugees from attending" (8-GR), which forced this journalist to involve herself, given that "it was racist, dangerous, and offensive to human existence." This is shared by another, who said that "a boy behind me was crying and I was trying to console him, but I was very angry because it is intolerable" (16-IT). These experiences create a level of empathy between journalists and young migrants that make it hard to maintain neutrality in the reporting, as journalists try to "give voice to those trying to help them getting their documents, or so that the voice of those that are migrating can be heard" (28-SP).

"As a protection measure of the rights of minors, there are several formal instruments, such as the Carta di Roma" (16-IT), and they must be respected by all Italian journalists and media as part of the "professional ethic package" (3-IT). Similar tools could be found in Spain and Greece; however, journalists complain that they "spend five months writing a piece about minors travelling alone, and then another media outlet does a similar story in half an hour and brings four commentators who have never talked to one of these boys" (32-SP). This incongruence is visible in general in migration journalism, but is particularly dangerous when talking about minors, given their particular vulnerability: "The didactic and educational value of our work is forced to make it possible to have tools to understand reality when talking about migrants, but especially when talking about small children" (5-IT).

The interviewed specialists focused especially on two groups of minors involved in the migration process. First, "the badly named MENAs [Spanish acronym for unaccompanied minors], which is a very dehumanizing term, given that they are people who left their country to find a future (11-SP); they are a 'star theme' (20-SP) in the Spanish migration scenario. Second, information regarding the integration level of second generations, because "the journalist must address immigration and second generations, as well as everything related to the identity of the people—the children of foreign origin, and their relationships with those born and bred in Italy" (29-IT).

Borders

Journalists point out how “in a world made of people moving and not by people staying inside their fences” (25-IT), “European media, with few exceptions, is not informing the public about what regularly happens in the Greek islands, Lésvos [i.e., Lesbos], and other critical points” (24-IT). Among these critical points, borders are particularly relevant, especially as we deal with three countries of the southern European border. Our sample of journalists finds that the media do not offer enough visibility to the work of journalists specializing in human mobility, something that is particularly visible in cases such as the refugee camps of Vucjak (28-IT) or Moria (31-IT), or the fences in Kastanies (21-GR), Melilla (18-SP), or Ceuta (1-SP). In these places, in which the majority of the interviewed professionals have experience, one finds stories like the one of “migrants who are about to cross the border and are brutally rejected by the police” (28-IT), “people who are used by governments such as Turkey’s as a political pressure tool, organizing attempts to cross their own border” (18-IT), “express deportations” (27-SP), or the “arrivals in small boats” (28-SP); they are all among the “hot topics” covered by media regarding migration.

This border reporting depends on the capabilities of the media: “I luckily belong to a big media company and I can do this; in the smaller media you cannot do this, or each journalists must take care of his/her own expenses” (31-SP). It also depends on the ideological line of the medium: “A picture by [Spanish photojournalist] Santi Palacios can be used in an unethical way by [conservative Spanish newspaper] *ABC*” (11-SP)]. Additionally, the stories of the border have a special impact on public opinion because “they always seem to be violent, as it is believed that a jump over a fence is violence” (29-SP), but also because they show “that international law is not respected by denying humanitarian aid to generally weak and distressed people” (23-GR). Once again, the use of language becomes essential when framing migration, avoiding expressions such as “assault” (6-SP) or graphical coverage that could depict humans as being nothing more than a mass (32-SP).

Although this part of the journalists’ discourse clearly shows how involved they are in their attempt to show “how Europe responds to the immigration issue” (31-IT), some argue that it is important not to become activists, as this could affect the independence of their job.

Regularization

A common complaint of the respondents is the fragility and insecurity of the asylum process, what makes them “write about the asylum petitions and the unacceptable conditions in camps such as Moria, or in other detention centers such as Athens” (5-GR). This situation is very sensitive, and journalists must inform the public about it “building a warm relation with the protagonists” (16-IT) and “assuming the public role of the journalist, based on verification, checking the conditions in those places, which sometimes are dreadful” (4-IT). Similarly, some journalists strongly criticize the detention centers—specifically the CETIs in Spain, centers for the temporary housing of immigrants, where immigrants wait for the resolution of their cases.

Other processes that the media reports are the regularization of work or residence permits, as well as the integration processes in hosting societies. These regularization processes have become one of the hottest issues in media discussions regarding migration, which has made the journalists of the sample focus on works that try to debunk the lies or

fake news that compromise integration, such as when “it is claimed that a refugee has raped somebody but it turns out to be false” (6-SP), and to clarify how these processes really work, such as explaining that the regularization is not a simple process and “sometimes takes up to three years, and some of the prerequisites cannot even be met by many Spanish nationals” (29-SP).

Routes

As already mentioned, the journalists are convinced that the protagonists of the stories, the people migrating, should have a voice in the media, which often leads the journalists to personally collect the testimonials in the places of origin, commonly African countries, or along the route, for example, “in places of the Balkan route, where migrants are trapped and rejected by Croatian police” (22-IT), or “along the Mediterranean route” (9-IT). This allows the journalist to “broaden the point of view of the topic, not only in Italian territory, but also trying to focus on the routes to the different European countries” (31-IT).

Although this line is the most recommended by the interviewed professionals, they consider that the generalist media do not explore the difficulties of the travel. In fact, the strongest media visibility of the whole trip is the boats and rafts arriving on the Southern European and Mediterranean coasts. This frame, focused on the end of the trip, is not seen as adequate, because “it has been given too much space to the arrival of boats, and we have forgotten the people in the boats” (24-IT). This is reinforced by the fact that it simplifies migration: “The migration topic is connected to the small boats in the Strait [of Gibraltar], when most immigrants arrive by plane” (7-SP).

This informative consumption has made the audience think that the goal of the people illegally migrating from Africa and Asia is to arrive in the south of Europe, when the travel and the migratory process is far more complex: “Italy is a transit country toward other countries; it is the European access in the Mediterranean, but immigrants do not tend to stay” (22-IT); moreover, border cities such as Ceuta are a “starting or a middle point in the migratory route” (27-SP).

Ethnicity and Racism

Narrative consensus and the elimination of obsolete terms, such as “race,” given that “races do not exist biologically” (33-SP), directly affects all content related to the ethnicity of people in movement. This connects with a particular moment in which “racism, hate, and so on, are very present in society, and also because social media are anonymous platforms in which people can talk claptrap” (13-SP). In this context, content from platforms, websites, and media are constantly oversizing the figure of “external enemies”: “You need enemies, simplifications: Moors, blacks, prostitutes, homosexuals ...” (10-SP); “They are trying to use particular ethnic or racial aspects to make enemies out of people” (29-SP). In sum, somebody “that can be blamed” (24-IT) is needed, given that “what is by definition “different” leads to racism” (27-GR). For this reason, journalists feel the need to “try to debunk them if they are fallacies, or try to see what is behind the story” (10-SP); this is a professional activity that seems obvious at a time when “Spanish society, European society, northern society, has always a racist drive, mostly a classist and excluding towards the pauper” (28-SP). This reality is depicted in the media framing, “which is racist by trying not to be racist, because it rests on completely colonialist ideas; it is a kind of paternalism and, therefore, racism, because you are not treating others as equals” (15-SP).

There exists an open debate regarding “politically correct language”: “The term “racialized,” according to its definition, refers to somebody who is discriminated against because of his/her race and therefore, the term is correctly used; however, “racialized people” have told me that the term bothers them, so I will stop using it” (33-SP). It raises the need to rethink some commonly accepted concepts: “I believe that the term “integrate” is racist in itself” (15-SP). But there seems to exist a higher level of agreement around the fact that some media are inclined towards sensationalism and a “free pass”: “The cover of *Liberio* after the Paris attacks was “Islamic Bastards”” (31-IT) The simplification and normalization of news that minimizes violence or racist attacks, such as the “institutional racism” (16-IT) promoted by the Lega-Movimento 5 Stelle government in Italy (21-IT). This trend is fed by a rhetoric that is not only produced by individuals or marginal groups, but also by politicians, religious leaders, or journalists (14-GR). In this way, the old classic racism, adapted to a new era, is easier to spread (28-SP).

Origin

Despite the clear need to avoid the spread of any prejudice, when speaking about migrants or refugees, media tend to “depict aspects related to the color of the skin, but mostly with the national origin, highlighting that a person is a foreigner” (12-IT). Journalists point out that, although it should be avoided because journalistic ethics forbids it (4-IT), the public discourse still pays a great deal of attention to the origin of people: “A politician had said that people of Romani origin—gypsies—are the scum of humanity” (29-IT), or “A journalist, one of the best ones in her area, until yesterday used ‘Maghrebi’ every time she wanted to refer to a boy of that origin who stole a watch” (32-SP).

Even though the majority of the questioned voices defend not including the origin in a report “unless the nationality is a relevant element for the context” (22-IT), there is still some discussion in the newsroom about this aspect: “We try not to indicate the nationality when a violent theft has taken place so that people do not focus on that, but I discuss it with one of my colleagues, as she is not as aware of the topic and thinks the nationality is important” (27-SP). Their decision not to include the origin is related to their intention not to promote stereotypes: “There are some stereotypes, like clichés, which are repeated over and over, mostly coming from ignorance and the lack of knowledge about the origin of the other” (24-SP). This also makes journalists work in hotspots such as Lampedusa or other parts of Africa, trying to “broaden the perspective about the origin” (31-IT) of people in mobility.

Religion

In addition to origin, the religion of migrants and asylum seekers is usually associated with a clear profile built by media narratives, especially Islam, “a religion associated with several negative connotations, threatening, dangerous, and connected to terrorism and a retrograde culture that despises women” (12-IT). However, this shows a general lack of knowledge and is a simplification, and some journalists with greater expertise in the topic show that “it is hard to depict Muslims as a collective—they are different from country to country, between Shi’i and Sunni, between Islamic schools ...’. This ignorance can be reflected in some rejection feelings: “A woman was afraid because of people who speak a language she did not understand and were of a different religion, and that scared her because nobody had ever told her who these people are, what they do, and why they

are here ... ” (12-SP). This is why journalists claim they feel responsible for explaining what is behind the migration movements, including who the migrants are and what their religion is, without simplifications or stereotypes.

In the same vein, the interviewees said that “when a journalist uses the headline ‘Islamic Bastards’ in a national newspaper, he/she is not a journalist and must assume responsibility” (16-IT), and that is because the “professional code of ethics demands the journalist to treat all citizens equally, without discriminating for reasons such as religion, but also to avoid vulgar expressions, given the educative role of the journalist” (7-GR). In general, the use of language is also seen as relevant when discussing the religion issue: “It is curious how [in Spain], Moors are the poor Muslims and Arabs are the rich Muslims” (10-SP).

In general terms, the former ignorance and abuse of simplifications leads to two issues related to religion: an Islamophobic feeling, “that becomes news as soon as a conflict breaks out” (17-SP), and the idea of “a war between religions—a completely false topic that is used to justify many things” (22-IT).

Minorities

Problems connected to migration and international relations are usually connected to the presence of “ethnic and religious minorities” (27-IT), as they often “produce extreme points of view” (7-GR), especially those who “have attributes that are, let’s say, incompatible with what is ‘acceptable’ to the average Italian male: Muslims, Blacks, people from Bangladesh, women, homosexuals, or combinations of all those” (17-IT). This situation forces journalists to “approach all these topics with journalistic terms and criteria” (7-GR), especially in societies that are “very influenced by the ideological aspect of immigrants and minorities” (31-SP).

Nonetheless, although this social conflict is recurrent in the media, it is not treated in a deep and comprehensible way, and the minorities’ identity is commonly unknown: “The presence of Arabs that are not Muslims is hardly known” (17-SP) or “The biggest risk of extremism hides behind the clichés that come from the lack of knowledge, because in Iraqi Kurdistan, moderate Muslims had to flee together with Catholics and other religious minorities” (22-IT). Generally, the respondents believe that the media do not give enough voice to minorities’ reality, commonly because part of public opinion tends to “simplify racist violence because that person is part of a minority” (31-IT). This situation sometimes makes them get involved, as in the case discussed by a Greek journalist, who claims to have “criticized the attitude of colleagues who falsely exaggerated the facts about a group of Albanians attacked for racist reasons despite being present at the attack” (13-GR). In this vein, most professionals in the three countries think they must work in this way in their own media, given that “we are living in a society prone to cynicism and simple discourses that lead to social conflict, the underestimation of minorities, and an unbreathable political atmosphere” (10-IT).

Coverage

The generalist journalistic discourse tends to be impoverished because, as already mentioned, “It is based on simplistic stories of what happens, always locked in our little country instead of looking more abroad” (10-SP), and because “less money is invested in journalism” (25-IT) which is “a model that is not sustainable, neither now nor before the [coronavirus] crisis” (7-SP).

Additionally, journalism practice has been characterized since the beginning by its dynamic and hard to plan condition: “Journalism seems to never end—it lasts 24 h, seven days a week” (2-GR). This cyclic and continuous process seems to be accentuated when talking about migration journalism, which makes many journalists see how “the line that separates personal and professional life blurs” (6-SP), especially due to the need to know the circumstances, the people, the origins, so that a proper deep and human coverage can be achieved: “I travel a lot to explain the context of why people keep emigrating. Sometimes these proposals become coverage in the field, others lead to pieces in the newsroom” (28-SP).

The difficult work–life balance of these journalists, together with “the growing precarity in the profession” (8-SP) also determine the coverage that can be conducted: “I think the profession has been degrading, especially regarding the coverage of reality” (10-SP). This is particularly problematic for freelancers, a very common type of employment for journalists covering migration information.

The effects of ICTs in the current communication model directly affect migration coverage. Many of the interviewed journalists stated that working in a digital environment means changes: “Before it was all about being the first one, having the best last-minute coverage; now we are moving into a different paradigm, seeking some long-read and high-quality pieces to attract readers” (25-SP). It is also noted that “technology has evolved a lot, and you can cover the story from almost anywhere with a telephone and a minimal connection” (28-SP), something relevant to coverage in the field, in places without the best facilities. Here it must be added there is parallel work that journalists conduct on social media to increase their visibility and the diffusion of the news: “When I see something interesting, I try to share it on Twitter, or if I do an interesting trip or coverage, I try to post it on Instagram” (30-SP).

This interactivity characterizing current journalism and social media opens a wide range of opportunities for journalists covering migration—as well as for the migrants themselves—, but it is not free of risks: “Social media allow any person to share an opinion, sadly, a majority of people who comment are racists” (9-IT). This explains why many journalists defend, first, an “integral coverage of problems, choosing their words and researching carefully to point out the causes rather than the symptoms of the problem of refugees” (10-GR), and second, the “supervision of online coverage of migration issues under the European Code of Ethics” (11-GR).

In this context, the journalists’ social media activity and their general feeling of anger at the contradictions and deficiencies of migration journalism have forced some journalists to adopt a more activist role: “Personally, I am an activist dressed as a journalist” (27-SP). Nonetheless, there is no consensus about this, given that “becoming an activist is abandoning the principles of journalism” (5-SP) and “the journalist and the activist are two roles that must be kept separate” (9-IT).

Their answers show that new technologies and the current migratory phenomenon “have transformed the way of showing information, leading to some inconsistencies and a fragile line between activism and journalism” (12-SP).

Risks of Reporting

The complexity, specificity, and dynamism of migration movements have some risks for journalists, not only when informing from conflict war zones, but also in the reporting

activity, which is the reason professionals need to “measure the words they use to avoid stereotypes and prejudice” (25-IT) and to “avoid creating problems and social tension” (21-IT). For this, it is important to listen to “institutions, organisms, and international organizations’ (19-IT). That is, journalists, especially those defending a more active role, need to “avoid paternalistic attitudes and the influence of their ideologies correcting elements that might put the people you like in a bad place” (10-SP), especially when this could lead to “a victimization discourse” (14-SP).

However, the risks for the journalists themselves are also clearly found as a potential consequence of their activity: “The situation was so tense that it reached the point of personal threats and blackmail” (6-GR); “Many colleagues have been attacked” (21-GR); “Threatening letters arrived in the newsroom and there are many insults in social media” (13-IT). Against these examples of hate, journalists advise “calmly trying to explain things following the logic” of the attackers (6-SP), and trying to find support in “solidarity between colleagues” (19-IT).

Gender

Paying attention to gender issues when covering migration in the media has been growing. Although most people entering Europe irregularly are male, migrant women are especially vulnerable, which [“Violence against migrant women by different types of criminals” (16-IT) or “Mafias in which women are exposed to terrible vulnerabilities” (12-SP)] makes journalists focus on them and give them more visibility in the media: “During the crisis in the north of Mali in 2013, we focused on the perspective of female refugees” (10-IT). This vulnerability demands that the visibility of women be achieved using special protocols: “Yesterday I received a code of ethics about how to interview women who have been victims of trafficking” (6-SP).

Despite some “positive discrimination processes” (32-SP), discrimination is not limited to vulnerable women, but also to female journalists covering migration and human mobility. There exist “voices who think that women should stay home” (12-GR) or be kept to some beauty standards “as in the case of Botteri, a RAI journalist accused of not focusing on her attire” (14-IT). This can be partly explained by a very masculine media ecosystem: “In Italy, beside a few exceptions, all newspapers directors are men” (24-IT). In this environment, female journalists also face stronger criticism: “As soon as you try, as a woman, to deal with some issues, easy insults start” (15-IT).

COVID-19

The current health crisis has strongly affected human mobility, not only by the health risks migrants face, but also due to the “closing of borders, with NGOs prohibited from conducting sea rescues” (13-IT). Because of this, “arrivals have plummeted” (27-SP).¹ For migrants living in the host countries, this has also had consequences, especially in Italy, where “the government has approved a regularization of these workers” (16-IT).

The omnipresent pandemic has filled most media, touching all aspects of life and society, including migratory events: “The other day, people in Thessaloniki were demonstrating together against immigrants, vaccines, and 5G” (21-GR). This has also provoked some media to connect immigration with the spread of the virus, with headlines that journalists find outrageous, such as “COVID—Immigrants Bring It” (30-IT), “After Misery, They Bring Sickneses” (31-IT) or “Africans with Coronavirus in Sicily” (29-IT).

This has also affected journalists' work and routine, not being able to go to their offices or to travel to cover migration movements and seeing their work situation endangered: "Many of my colleagues must work for the same media companies, but without a contract, and they can be fired without notice, as has happened with the coronavirus situation" (18-SP). This has made new technologies gain even more presence: "Communicating via Skype or email has become the norm with the coronavirus" (23-IT).

In general, the pandemic "has changed media discourses and created new paradigms" (7-SP) and "set different game rules" (6-SP). This includes clear difficulties, but also some opportunities: "Thanks to new technology, I am seeing some amazing work on COVID in Brazil by formerly unknown photographers" (19-SP); "I just filed a report about the impact of COVID-19 on intra-African migration, which is rarely covered" (6-SP).

Discussion

As the Journalistic Role Performance Project—led by Claudia Mellado and her colleagues—proves, professional roles can be misleading, and it is important to analyze news content complementarily, and many scholars have analyzed migration representation in the media under agenda or framing theories. However, in such a complex and conflictual issue, it is essential to explore the points of view expressed by journalists specializing in the field of migration, especially to understand the problems behind media representation and how to improve them. That is why this article, conducted in a multidisciplinary and European context, employs frame building to analyze how journalists perceive the framing of migration in the media, a rarely used approach to migration journalism. After using quantitative and qualitative methods, combining computerized and manual analyses, the testimonials of these professionals bring us closer to better understanding the representation of migration in the media.

In answering RQ1, the study clearly shows that the type of migration with the highest presence in Spanish, Italian, and Greek media is based on migrants who arrive in Southern Europe through the irregular routes of Africa and Asia. Migration journalism is often associated with negative issues—for example, human trafficking, violence, or marginalization—because the focus is on the arrival process: loaded boats, shipwrecks, border crossing issues, the closing of harbors, etc. This study has also observed that migration coverage tends to be limited, and it does not grasp the whole complexity of the phenomenon, something that should be improved for the audiences to really understand the multiple dimensions of migration.

These observations fit those of the existing studies about media representation of migration, which using content analysis had identified a negative and prejudiced representation of immigration in the media (Van Gorp 2005; Muñoz-Muriel, Igartua-Perosanz, and Otero 2006; Igartua-Perosanz et al. 2007; Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017; Brändle, Eisele, and Trenz 2019; Stavinoha 2019; Fengler et al. 2020; Kalfeli, Frangonikolopoulos, and Gardikiotis 2020). These previous works usually followed the theories of framing (Goffmann 1974) and agenda (McCombs and Shaw 1972), which assume that the selection of topics or the treatment given to them influence the audience.

Using that basis, this paper went back in the process, understanding the elements that determine the frames used by journalists. Among the reasons for this superficial and insufficient coverage, the journalists mention political agendas, but also note the precarity of journalism (Figueras-Maz et al. 2012; Spyridou et al. 2013; Blanco-Herrero, Olle-Alonso,

and Arcila-Calderón 2020). Frequently, the reason behind the insufficient and inadequate portrayal of migration is ignorance or lack of knowledge about the topic. At the same time, this coverage is influenced by racist behaviors and discourses, or from rejection to minorities, especially due to origin or religion, not because journalists explicitly reject immigration, but because these behaviors are generalized in society. Other elements that should be considered when analyzing the framing of migrants and refugees in the Southern European media include more transversal aspect, such as gender issues—including violence against female migrants and the denigration of female journalists—the influence of new technologies, or the changes brought by COVID-19, which has affected the way the coverage is produced, the issues that are covered, as well as the daily lives of both migrants and journalists.

All these elements are of great relevance because, as Vliegthart and Van Zoonen (2011), frames are a result of social context and production routines, in which the journalist has limited control. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also argued that journalists' influence in determining the coverage of an issue is shared with other elements—the routines of the media companies, organizational factors, social institutions and cultural/ideological considerations—. That is why, even though journalists covering migration issues tend to be formed in the topic and they know how to properly portray it, this coverage is generally negative and prejudiced; as Valera points out (2016), other social actors involved in the topics also influence media content, and not only journalists.

Regarding RQ2, one of the strongest agreements is found in the relevance of the proper use of language, avoiding terms such as “invasion” or “avalanche,” not only because they are inaccurate, but also because of the effect they have on societies. Conducting journalism in the field and giving voice to migrants, as they are the protagonists of the stories, is strongly recommended. Moreover, a more individualized, human, and deeper coverage is required, not only showing masses of people arriving in a new land, but digging into the causes and human stories behind them. These recommendations are reflected in the profession's codes of ethics, which promote full coverage with a humanitarian focus, and decries discriminatory or harmful discourses against minorities. In general, among the main goals of the respondents is the development of a model based on research into migrants' stories and on new narratives, to show a more contextualized and deeper view of this phenomenon to audiences.

Among other consequences, an improvement in the media coverage of migration would help reducing prejudice towards immigrants, and with it, other forms of rejection or hatred. For that, a more humane and empathic coverage of migration is needed. Some of the key recommendations from the journalists to achieve this are:

- Understand who the person is: “Am I dealing with a victim of a bombing or of abuse, with a person who is forced to migrate?” (31-IT);
- Try to “avoid a emotional presentation of figures, of how many people died, how many are infected ...” (7-SP);
- “Be empathic when telling stories of racism” (30-IT) and when covering other complex topics that have vulnerable victims;
- Cover the stories by “listening to testimonials from the victims in the first person” (1-IT) and by “listening to every segment involved, but having migrants as my main source to give them the greatest prominence” (19-IT);

- “Put a face to the deaths in the Mediterranean and in the Sahara, even if these are not as interesting because they did not occur here” (8-SP);
- “Position ourselves [as journalists] against violence” (24-IT);
- “Try not to confront marginalized collectives with migrant people” (29-SP);
- “Use a multidisciplinary approach, one that involves other journalists” (30-IT); and
- Eradicate the “association between violence and Islam” (12-IT) and the idea of “immigration as a security threat” (20-IT).

Finally, one last aspect that clearly determines the frames used by the journalists is the discussion observed among those interviewees defending a more activist type of journalism, whereas others support a more independent and dispassionate approach. Nonetheless, most journalists show their awareness and involvement in the topic, defending the most vulnerable people, not only migrants and refugees, but underaged migrants and women in particular. At the same time, they criticize the inhumane and complex regularization processes, and the simplistic and hateful political and media discourses against migration. It is not so much the journalists’ personal beliefs that influence the way they cover migration issues, as they almost unanimously share a human and positive perspective about migration and a negative one about its current depiction in the media. What affects their coverage the most is their perception of whether they see journalism as requiring detached reporting, or activism and advocacy.

Conclusion and Limitations

This article fills in a gap of knowledge about the perceptions of Spanish, Italian, and Greek journalists regarding the way migration is currently framed in the media. This representation tends to be superficial and simplistic, often discriminatory, and mostly focused on conflict and violence. The interviewed professionals demand a more humane and empathic approach, in which migrants’ voices are heard and the causes of (and processes in) migratory movements are reported. Paying attention to language, and avoiding dehumanizing or inflammatory terms, is considered essential, as is defending those in vulnerable situations.

This study has some limitations. As interviews were carried out in three languages, and all responses were translated into English so that a unified analysis could be conducted, it is possible that the journalists’ answers might have suffered slight modifications; however, the word counts should not have significant changes, while in the qualitative section, only sentences in which there was no doubt about the meaning were reported. Additionally, given that this work belongs to a broader project, the selection of journalists and the design of the questionnaire had to align with the goals of the project, which might affect the recurrence of some words and the cluster design in the first stage of the study, although it does not affect the answers to the posed research questions, as they focus on only one of these clusters.

Bearing these limitations in mind, these results fill an empirical gap that helps us understand the framing of migrants and refugees in Southern European media from the perspective of the journalists. Future studies might compare the three countries’ national differences and approaches, with more focus on hate speech, new technologies, and economic factors, which also influence the reporting of migration and which have only been touched upon here.

Note

1. In the last months of 2020, after the fieldwork of the study was concluded, arrivals have resumed, especially in the Canary Islands.

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