

**Media and Migration:
Linguistic Dehumanization and Desensitization of a Humanitarian
Crisis**

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Introduction

The media presence in everyday life has allowed people to learn about worldwide events that could otherwise go unnoticed by those who are not directly affected.¹ Today, with the highly publicized wars and uprisings in Africa and the Middle East, refugees and migrants are given a lot of attention in the media as they migrate to European countries. Without these media sources, people in other countries may never know that these problems are occurring. Although the media raises awareness and can help mobilize change around the issues they cover, we must also be critical of how stories are presented and for which audiences. The content and language used in the media have an immense influence over the public's opinion or attitude towards the topics covered. With migration, the stories and language often victimize and promote fear of migrants and refugees.² As a result, this language can perpetuate misguided ideas about migrants, as well as migration itself, failing to show that the current situation is a humanitarian crisis. Through stories chosen and the language used in them, the media creates the perception of a migration crisis and promotes fear, pity, and dehumanization of migrants. In contrast, the individuals and organizations involved with migration have a more holistic idea of migration through their interactions with migrants and understand that migration today is a humanitarian crisis.

In order to see how Mediterranean and European migration trends are covered internationally, in this paper, I perform a content analysis of newspaper articles from the U.S.

¹Eda Gemi, Iryna Ulasiuk, and Anna Triandafyllidou, "Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices," *Journalism Practice* 7, no. 3 (2013): 267.

² Mahmoud Zidan, "The Image of Italy and Immigrants to Italy in the Media: A Destination or Place of Damnation?" in *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), 87.

newspaper *The New York Times*. After learning in a lecture from Professor Michela Ceccorulli (Dickinson Center in Bologna, Italy) that many notable migration events and policy creations occurred in October, I decided to look at all articles related to European migration in October 2013, 2014, and 2015 in order to see if migration and migrants are represented differently depending on events happening at that time.³

Throughout this paper, I refer to these people as migrants, which the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines as:

any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.⁴

I chose to primarily use the word migrant because, as shown above, it encompasses all people who are moving, regardless of their motivation. Many of the people discussed in the articles are refugees and are forced to migrate, but there are still many people who migrate for economic reasons or are not officially recognized as refugees. However, I would like to remind the reader that their description as migrants is only a small component of their multi-faceted identities: many are mothers, fathers, business owners, and well-educated individuals, but these identities are not expressed through the homogenizing term of "migrants."

Methodology

³ Michela Ceccorulli, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Bologna, Italy*, February 21, 2016.

⁴ "Key Migration Terms," *International Organization for Migration*, 2015, <http://www.iom.int/key-migration-term>.

For my content analysis of newspaper articles, I looked at the U.S. newspaper, *The New York Times*, to see how Mediterranean and European migration trends are covered and portrayed. After Professor Ceccorulli's comment of October being an important month for migration, I first decided to look at all articles published during October 2013 because at the beginning of this month, on October 3rd, there was a tragedy off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa that involved the deaths of hundreds of migrants.⁵ This event was particularly prevalent in international news including in the Italian *Corriere della Sera*, the British *Guardian*, and the American *New York Time* due to the large number of deaths as well as the tragic circumstances that caused it. From here, I wanted to see if migrants and migration are portrayed more positively or negatively depending on what type of story the media is reporting, so I decided to look at the month of October in the following years, 2014 and 2015, even though I was not previously aware of any major events regarding migration in these years, in order to see how media coverage of migration changes over time.

In order to find relevant articles in *The New York Times*' archive, I used the search terms "migration" and "Europe" and only analyzed articles that were strictly related to human

⁵In Maurizio Albahari's book, "*Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border*," he discusses one of many Mediterranean boat tragedies- this one occurring on October 3, 2013, just a few miles off of the coast of Lampedusa. This particular boat had departed from the coast of Libya and held over 500 migrants from North Africa. Early in the morning on the date of the tragedy, the boat's engine failed and water began seeping on board. After hours with no assistance, the driver of the boat decided to light a blanket on fire to signal for help. Many of the migrants were not aware of the intentions behind setting the blanket on fire and thought that their lives were in danger. Many of the migrants ran to the other side of the boat to avoid the fire, which caused the boat to capsize. Once several fishermen saw the migrants floating in the water and understood that a boat had capsized, a governmental team, which included the coast guard and military helicopters, arrived to rescue as many migrants as possible. Unfortunately, out of the over 500 migrants on board, only about 155 were saved. A large number of the resulting drownings were caused because migrants were trapped within the boat when it capsized and they were not able to escape.

migration into Europe. There was substantial media coverage in 2013 and 2015, with 12 relevant articles in October 2013 and 29 articles in October 2015, but media coverage in 2014 was scarce compared to the other years with only 4 relevant articles. Once I compiled all of the samples, I created word clouds for 2013 and 2015 to visually illustrate language trends within the media during these time periods. To make these word clouds, I used all of the substantive text within the articles, excluding any photo captions or descriptions. Because of the lack of articles in 2014, it was not possible to make a word cloud for this year because there were not enough articles to show any trends in the language use. I initially analyzed the trends found in the word clouds and then, drawing from a number of academic sources which discuss media portrayals of migrants and migration and the news making process, I continued to analyze the content and language used within these *New York Times* articles. I use the language and content in these articles to support previous research findings as well as my own original ideas about language relating to migration in the media. Throughout my content analysis of the newspaper articles, I also make reference to interviews and experiences that the Mediterranean Migration Mosaic team had during our three weeks of ethnographic field research in Italy. These experiences show important individual perspectives from people who are involved with and experience the migration that is covered in the media.

Background of Migration to EU

Human migration is by no means a recent phenomenon. Moya and McKeown note that migration is one of the most basic and important aspects of human nature because it has allowed for the spread of the *Homo sapiens* species across continents and created much of the world that

we know today.⁶ In more recent history, humans have moved in much larger numbers, creating mass migration phenomena which have occurred within and across continents.⁷ One of the first major modern day migrations occurred between 1840 and the 1930's and included the redistribution of 73 million Europeans within Europe and across continents.⁸ Another major producer of migration occurred from 1940-1960 after European decolonization in Africa when many European settlers left the former African colonies and returned to Europe. For example, after Italian decolonization of Tunisia and Eritrea, there remained ties between the countries, which meant that many Tunisians and Eritreans saw Italy as a possible destination for migration, especially when following Italians who were returning to Italy after living in the colony.⁹ These migration trends and ties to other countries further encouraged migration to and from former colonies.¹⁰

Several European nations, particularly ones which had weaker economies, such as Italy and Spain, initially and primarily experienced emigration of their people who were searching for better employment and economic opportunities in more developed European countries or continents.¹¹ As these countries became more industrialized and their economies strengthened, not only did emigration of their nationals slow, but they also became appealing destinations for immigrants from other countries. As a result, mass inward migrations to countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece are relatively recent phenomena.

⁶ José Moya and Adam McKeown, "World Migration in the Long Twentieth Century," in *Essays on Global and Comparative History*, (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 2011): 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 15.

⁹ Asher Colombo and Giuseppe Sciortino, "Italian Immigration: The Origins, Nature and Evolution of Italy's Migratory Systems," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2004): 55-56.

¹⁰ Moya, "World Migration...", 11.

¹¹ Colombo, "Italian Immigration...", 54-55.

One of the major events that has prompted contemporary migration is the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring began in December 2010 when Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, set himself on fire outside of the local town hall in protest against the government and the authorities which had oppressed and neglected him.¹² His act of self-immolation inspired protests throughout Tunisia as well as Egypt and Libya as well as throughout the Middle East. Although some of these protests were successful in ending their oppressive governmental regimes, in Syria, these protests acted as a catalyst for the Syrian Civil War, which is ongoing today and has caused thousands of people to flee the country in search of safety. Moreover, in Libya, rebel forces successfully overthrew the Gaddafi regime in 2011, but since his overthrow, Libya has been plagued with civil war and unrest as different groups fight to gain control over the country.

During our fieldwork, we primarily talked with migrants from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. One of our visits was to Casa dei Diritti Don Gallo, an old bank office building in Padova, Italy in which over 100 migrant men are squatting. During our talks with the men living there, we learned that many of the men had migrated from Sub-Saharan countries to Libya before the uprisings because the economy in Libya was strong and they could send money back home to support their families. However, as Libya's government became more unstable, they were forced to leave Libya and migrate once again.¹³ Many of these people looked to Europe as their next destination, a place where they could find safety from the growing conflicts, as well as a stronger economy.

¹²George Joffé, "The Arab Spring in North Africa: Origins and Prospects," *Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 4 (2011): 518.

¹³Various Individuals, By Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Casa dei Diritti Don Gallo, Padova, Italy*, March 2, 2016.

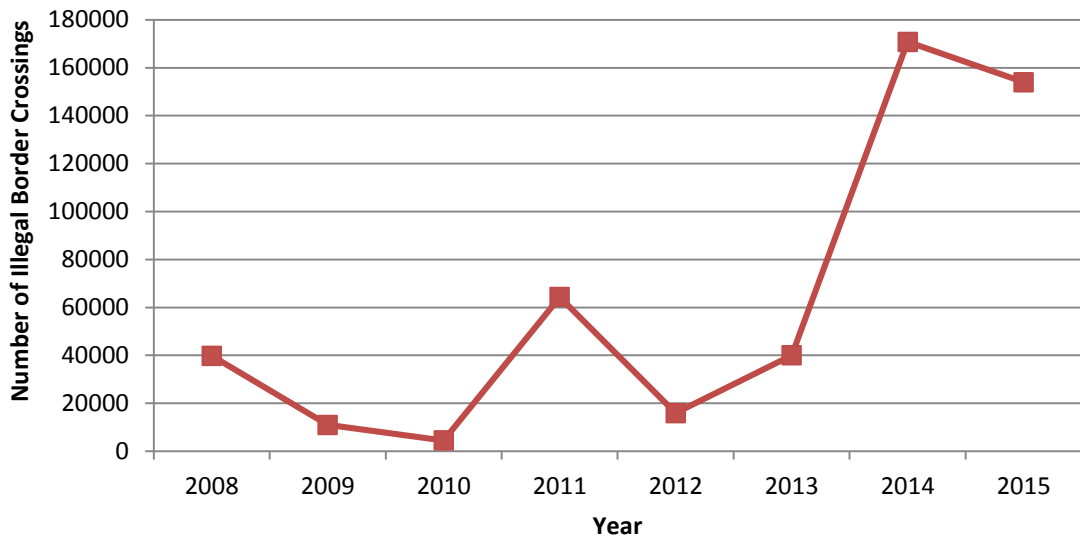
In order to reach Europe from Libya, the easiest option geographically is to go by boat across the Mediterranean Sea. In Figure 1, we can see the number of detected illegal crossings into Europe from 2008-2015. As thousands more people began taking this Central Mediterranean Route, especially after the uprisings in 2011, more boats began making this journey. Recently, as more Syrians flee persecution and war in their home country, the migration pattern has shifted and more people are taking the Balkan route.¹⁴ We can see the trends of migration through both of these routes in Figure 2. These data are important to keep in mind when looking at the articles from 2013 and 2015 because in 2013 the focus in the news articles is primarily on migration from Northern Africa to Italy through the Mediterranean route. As we can see from Figure 2, the numbers drastically increase in 2015 in the Balkan route, which reflect the trend in the newspapers which primarily discuss Syrian migration to Europe through the Balkan route. Unlike the migrations of the past which were primarily seen as a positive factor,¹⁵ these migrations from Northern Africa and the Middle East are seen as negative and migrations of the ‘poor and destitute.’¹⁶

¹⁴Pietro Bartolo, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Lampedusa, Italy*, March 10, 2016.

¹⁵Colombo, "Italian Immigration..." 50.

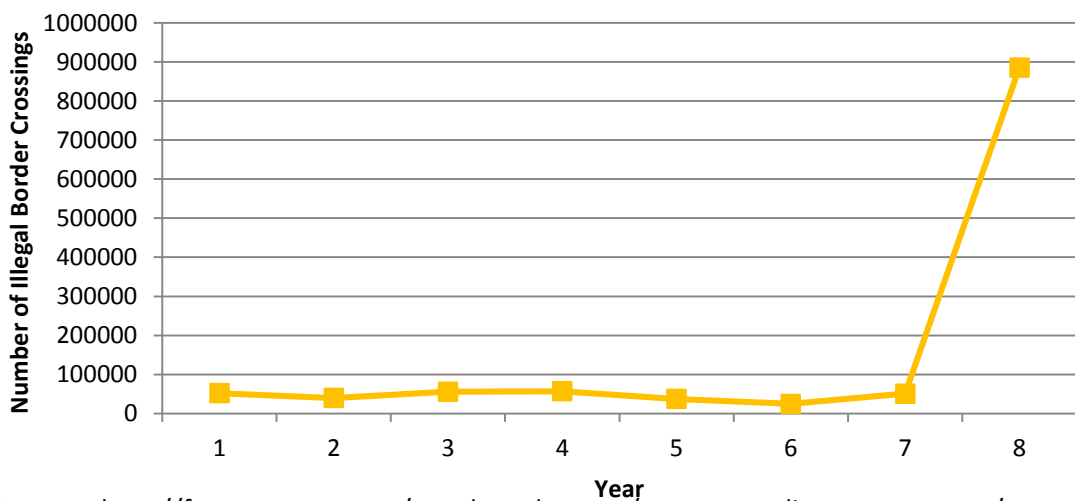
¹⁶Ibid, 49.

Figure 1. Illegal Border Crossings on the Central Mediterranean Route



Frontex: <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/central-mediterranean-route/>

Figure 2. Illegal Border Crossings on the Eastern Mediterranean Route



Frontex: <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route/>

Findings

To visually see how language and reporting trends changed in the articles from 2013 (Figure 3) and 2015 (Figure 4), the word clouds below show the most frequently used words throughout the entire sample from each year. The small parenthesis to the right of each word shows the number of times the word appeared in each sample.

Figure 3. October 2013 Word Cloud

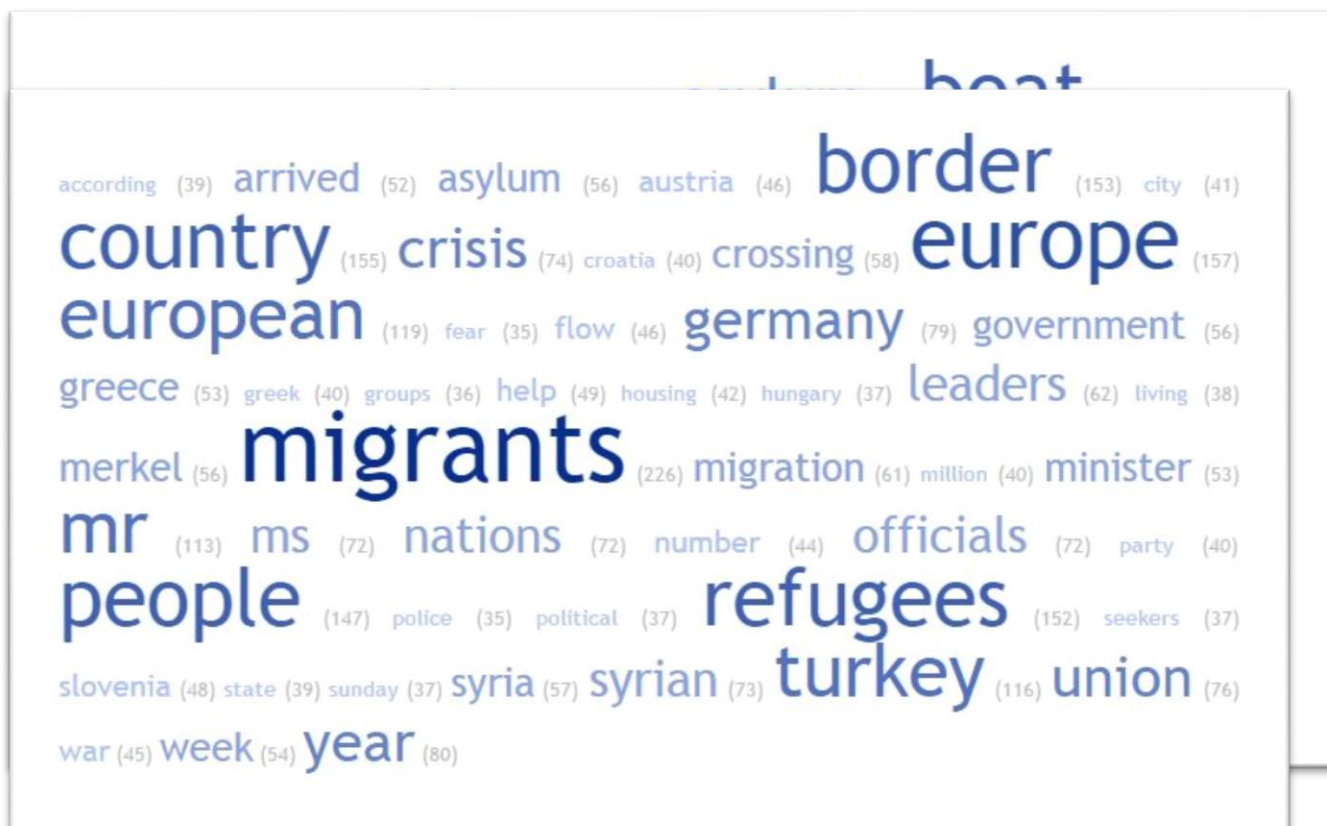


Figure 4. October 2015 Word Cloud

Excluding the words Europe and migration (as well as related words such as migrant and European) which were the search terms for these articles, in Figure 3, we see that the words that appear most frequently in the articles in 2013 were: boat, Mediterranean, Lampedusa, people, and Italy. In 2015, the top five most frequently used words were: country, border, refugees, people, and Turkey (Figure 4). The shift in subjects between these two periods is clear: in 2013 there is a narrower lens, which looks at the Mediterranean region, specifically Italy and Lampedusa after the tragedy that happened off the coast of Lampedusa at the beginning of the month. The articles in 2015 bring a more political aspect to the topic of migration as well as a broader and shifting geographical focus. In 2013, the only countries that were mentioned were Libya, where the boat of migrants left, and Italy, where the tragedy occurred. Because the articles in 2015 are more concerned with the policies around migration in Europe, many more countries appear in the word cloud including Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, and Syria.

Media Reporting Trends and Migration

As Gemi, Ulasiuk, and Triandafyllidou discuss in their article, “Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices,” one of the major motivations for writing news stories is to draw the biggest audience possible, but these articles often lack depth and in the case of migration articles, they give little or no voice to the migrants.¹⁷ Additionally, they note that to determine if an article is newsworthy, the story must involve an element of surprise or it must involve elites from the political realm.¹⁸ We see this news reporting trend through the sample of articles from 2013 and 2015: in 2013 the media articles cover the tragedy and death of migrants in the

¹⁷Gemi, “Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices,” 272.

¹⁸Ibid, 268.

Mediterranean Sea while in 2015 the articles focus on the political issues surrounding migration as well as some other tragedies that occurred in the Sea.

Gemi, Ulasiuk, and Triandafyllidou argue that just because the media is not reporting on migration at certain times does not mean that migration has stopped or that nothing eventful is occurring.¹⁹ Although there were not enough articles in 2014 to make a word cloud, the lack of attention is significant because it illustrates the tendency of the media to only report when there is a sensational or tragic event involving migrants. This inconsistent reporting can give the impression to viewers that migration is only occurring when the media reports on it and the lack of coverage during normal or non-sensational times gives the impression that migration is not occurring at all.

Because there is a tendency to report only on the sensational aspects of migrants and migration, journalists who do not have a background with migration do not always fully investigate the topic that they are reporting.²⁰ One particular instance that illustrates the lack of depth and knowledge in investigative journalism was the media coverage of the Besta School in Bologna, Italy. During our fieldwork in Italy, we visited the middle school because it enrolls a high number of migrant students. In our interview with Emilio Porcaro, the headmaster, and Giuliana Pancaldi, one of the teachers at the school, they discussed how the Besta School had become a target of the media because of the high number of immigrant students at the school.²¹ At the beginning of the school year in 2013, a group of migrant students enrolled in the Besta

¹⁹Ibid, 275.

²⁰Ibid, 266.

²¹Giuliana Pancaldi and Emilio Porcaro, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Bologna, Italy*, February 22, 2016, Interview.

School. In Italy migrant students are usually placed in classrooms with students of the same age, even if they do not speak any Italian. The teachers at the Besta School agreed that in order to support their acquisition of the Italian language, they should create a class for the migrant students where they learn the different subjects while also receiving linguistic support before they entered the classroom with the other students full time.

Two months after the start of this program, the Besta School was suddenly featured on local and national television and newspapers because they had created a class of only foreign students. For example, *La Repubblica* published an article “Bologna, una classe di soli bimbi stranieri. Scoppia il caso: ‘Così si rischia il ghetto’” [Bologna, a class of only foreign children. The case explodes: ‘It risks being a ghetto’]²² As shown in this article and during our interview with Porcaro, the Besta School was criticized for creating a “ghetto class.” As a result of this media attention, the government became concerned that this class was exclusive and unconstitutional, so an inspector from the ministry of education and integration came to the school to see if the program was unconstitutional like the media was saying. The inspector found that everything that the media was reporting was not true and that the program was not created on malicious or racist grounds, but rather to help the students so that they would be more comfortable and have an easier time adjusting to the Italian school system and language. The Besta School is now seen as a model for other schools wanting or needing to integrate immigrant children.

²² Ilaria Venturi, “Bologna, una classe di soli bimbi stranieri. Scoppia il caso: ‘Così si rischia il ghetto,’” *La Repubblica* (Rome, Italy), Nov. 4, 2013.

Migration: A Crisis?

A notable difference between 2013 and 2015 is the increased use in the word “crisis” in the sample of articles. In 2013 the word crisis is only mentioned 3 times, but in 2015 it is mentioned 74 times (Figure 5). Even though the sample sizes are different, this shows a clear change in opinion towards the migration patterns. Throughout the 2015 articles, the majority of times the word crisis is mentioned, it is in the context of “migration crisis,” “migrant crisis,” or “refugee crisis.” One would think that crisis would be at least slightly more prevalent in 2013 when most of the articles covered the tragedy in the Mediterranean and many migrants died; however, we see that it is used much more frequently in 2015, both in the commentary of text itself as well as quotations from various individuals they interviewed.

Figure 5. Migration as a Crisis in <i>New York Times</i> Articles			
Time of Publication	Total Number of Articles Referencing Migration	Number of Articles Referencing Migration as a Crisis	Percentage of Total Articles Referencing Migration as a Crisis
October 2013	12	3	25%
October 2014	4	1	25%
October 2015	29	20	69%

The articles in 2015 are much more politically oriented, discussing more about the issues that receiving countries in and around the EU are experiencing as a result of recent migrations. Because of this, it seems that migration is primarily viewed as a crisis in relation to the receiving

countries rather than a crisis in terms of the lives of the migrants. When hundreds of lives were lost, the term crisis, as in a humanitarian crisis, was not used, but in 2015 it is used frequently as the EU countries try to decide how to handle the migration crisis. This difference clearly shows how little migrants' lives are valued because the sheer number of deaths in 2013 are not considered a crisis, but the number of living migrants who make it to the receiving countries are seen as a crisis because the countries must find a way to accommodate them. This reveals the power and privilege of the countries that see migration as a crisis and, in a way, the receiving countries are painted as the victims through the use of the word crisis because they are the ones that have to find a solution to this burden that the migrants are blamed for creating. This shows that there is a disconnect between what the real crisis is, because according to the International Organization for Migration, in 2015 there were 3,770 migrants found dead or missing.²³ This magnitude of certain and presumed deaths in itself is a tragedy and crisis, but even for the migrants who *do* survive their journey this is still a humanitarian crisis: the conditions that migrants face during their journey are horrific and many of them endure terrible physical and emotional traumas during their journey to Europe.²⁴

This idea of migration as a crisis for the receiving country is perpetuated through language use in the media. As Zidan, as well as many authors point out, frequently in media coverage, migration is described with vivid natural disaster terminology, such as flows and 'floods of migrants.'²⁵ In his book "The Making of the Modern Refugee," Peter Gatrell also discusses the use of this disaster terminology, additionally noting the use of words such as

²³ International Organization for Migration, *Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond: Compilation of Available Data and Information*, (2015): 21.

²⁴ Pietro Bartolo, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Lampedusa, Italy*, March 10, 2016, Interview.

²⁵ Zidan, "The Image of Italy and Immigrants...", 93-95.

‘wave,’ ‘deluge,’ and ‘avalanche’ to describe migratory patterns in the media.²⁶ Additionally Gatrell notes that this language raises questions about the stability of the receiving nation and fear about dealing with the aftermath of such a large scale “disaster.”²⁷ Perhaps this language accurately represents how the receiving nations feel when there are large numbers of migrants arriving on their shores every week, such as in Greece and Italy, but this language perpetuates an image of uncontrolled devastation caused exclusively by migrants. Describing migration as if it is a natural disaster fails to show the wide variety of factors which cause someone to leave their home country and instead makes it appear like a random act; this language villainizes the migrants, and promotes the image of a destructive and unpredictable group arriving in different countries. Natural disasters have ambiguous sources and no one is to blame, so it seems that the current migration situation would be more appropriately labeled as a man-made disaster because humans start the wars which create the conditions that make migrants flee their countries. Economically, colonialism and the interventions of developed countries in lesser developed countries often resulted in exploitation of resources, such as oil, stripping the lesser developed countries of the resources that could strengthen their economy and, as a result, facilitating economic migration to the more developed, wealthier countries. Politically, migration is a man-made disaster because humans create the policies which make migration illegal and which cost people their lives during their journeys and prohibit them from entering countries to seek refuge or economic stability. Additionally, Zidan notes that migrants are often seen as a burden for the receiving country.²⁸ The *New York Times* articles in both 2013 and 2015 reference the arrival of migrants as a burden. For instance, in a 2013 article entitled “Europe Turns Its Eye to Migration

²⁶ Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 41.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 97.

Policies, Amid Another Sea Rescue,” James Kanter says that when leaders from the EU met in order to discuss policies surrounding migration they were “soon bogged down in long-running disagreements over sharing the burden.”²⁹ Once again, the blame for migration is placed on the migrants rather than conditions that make them migrants in the first place.

Throughout our time in Italy, one theme that was particularly prevalent was that many people described the current migration as a modern day Holocaust. It is interesting to note that the people calling it a Holocaust were the ones who were in direct contact with the migrants. At the end of our 3 weeks of field research, the Mediterranean Migration Mosaic team had the opportunity to interview Doctor Pietro Bartolo, one of now four doctors on the island of Lampedusa. Over the past 25 years, he has treated over 250,000 migrants as well as many of the 6,000 residents in Lampedusa. Because of his involvement with migration, Bartolo believes that the current situation is a modern day Holocaust and he was able to provide us with a humanitarian perspective on migration and migrants. Similarly, the deputy mayor of Sutura, which has adopted a program which settles refugee families in their village, also referred to today’s migration as a Holocaust. Interestingly, the people who called today’s migration a Holocaust are the people who see the migrants as individuals and humans rather than a force of numbers because of their day-to-day interactions with them.

The use of the word Holocaust in describing the current migration patterns suggests that these people see contemporary migration as a humanitarian crisis for which we are all responsible. In part, this responsibility comes from the colonial past which created ties between the colonizers and the colonized and still influences migration patterns today. Additionally, the

²⁹ Kanter, “Europe Turns Its Eye...,” Oct. 25, 2013.

migration policies that these countries create make certain migrations illegal and therefore force migrants to take risky routes in order to flee persecution and danger. We do not hear politicians and the media calling it a Holocaust, but rather using the word 'crisis.' Whereas the word Holocaust invokes a strong sense of humanitarian action that needs to be taken, calling the situation a crisis puts the burden on the state and the blame on migrants and neglects to see the migrants as individuals and more importantly, as humans.

Media Attempts to Humanize Migrants

Because of its tragic and heartbreaking connotations, one theme that appears throughout many of the articles is the use of migrant women and children to evoke pity and sympathy in readers.³⁰ In this sense, these articles humanize the issue of migration to the reader, especially with children since they are seen as innocent individuals. While using women and children provokes pity, the media also perpetuates the victimization of women and children. Not only are these women and children seen as a vulnerable group in any situation, but as migrants, they are especially vulnerable. The articles mention children more frequently than women, but when they do mention women, it is often in conjunction with children. Additionally, when they are present on the boats, the articles mention specifically if there were any pregnant women. This is seen as doubly tragic because there are now two lives involved and pregnant women being in such a vulnerable and dangerous situation also increases sympathy in the reader.

Sympathy is helpful for getting people to read about the situation, but it does not necessarily help the reader relate to the migrants or act on their behalf. The continual

³⁰ Tine Ustad Figenschou and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, "Faces of an Invisible Population: Human Interest Framing of Irregular Immigration News in the United States, France, and Norway," *American Behavioral Scientist* 59, no. 7 (2015): 787.

dehumanization of migrants in the media is in part due to the labels used; rather than calling them human, the media calls them migrants, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers. Most people reading these articles do not fall under any of these categories and therefore are less likely to identify or have a connection with the migrants and refugees. By using these terms, it is focusing on a marginalizing aspect of their identity and creates a divide between an “us” and a “them.”³¹ Doctor Pietro Bartolo gave a wonderful explanation for his reasons for avoiding these labels:

...these people-I call them people because I have difficulty calling them migrants...Let's think about the word clandestine...Who are the clandestines? Why are they clandestine? What have they done and what crime have they committed? Who does the land belong to? [points to group members] It's yours, mine, it is all of ours, so we are all clandestines. I am a clandestine. I am a migrant.³²

In 2013, “people” was one of the most frequently used words in the articles; however, upon further inspection of its context in the articles, it is clear that the migrants are only recognized as people when they are dead. While the migrants are recognized as humans, they are preceded by a number: “700 people died” or “25 people died.” So the migrants are recognized as people, but used in this way, it is the numbers that are shocking, not the fact that a person died. In these cases, the media is quantifying how tragic the situation is, and therefore quantifying how sad the reader should feel.

On a similar note, there are multiple instances in the articles when the word “people” appears in these articles, but it is preceded by the word “desperate.” As Zidan points out, this paints the migrants as frenzied and unstable people, a group with which the readers may have a

³¹ Gemi, "Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices...", 272.

³² Pietro Bartolo, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Lampedusa, Italy*, March 10, 2016, Interview.

hard time connecting.³³ In an article entitled “Desperation Fuels Trips of Migrants to Spain,” the author says that “many asylum seekers have become so desperate that they are trying to reach Europe on flimsy rubber dinghies.”³⁴ Because of their desperation, migrants seem to be willing to do anything, including risking their lives. The images of these “flimsy rubber dinghies”³⁵ and “rickety trawlers”³⁶ that are seen in the media further perpetuate the idea of migrants’ recklessness and irrationality.³⁷ What these descriptions fail to show is that many of these migrants are fleeing persecution and certain death in their home countries and have no other option than to take these potentially life threatening chances. Furthermore, the laws that criminalize migration and the countries’ policies which prevent migrants from entering the EU force the migrants to take these risky options so that they can hopefully enter undetected.

Migrants as an Object of Fear

The articles in 2015 are much more concerned with the political aspect of migration and the movement of people into certain countries, but the word *people* is still in the top five most frequently used words; however, the majority of times that *people* is used in these articles again has a number attached to it. Rather than primarily looking at the number of migrants’ deaths, the 2015 articles look at the number of migrants entering certain countries and the EU, usually in the thousands. For example, a 2015 article by Niki Kitsantonis entitled “Greece Saves 240 as Boat with Migrants Capsizes” says at one point “...with more than half a million people arriving in

³³ Zidan, “The Image of Italy and Immigrants...,” 91.

³⁴ Raphael Minder and Jim Yardley, “Desperation Fuels Trips of Migrants to Spain,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 4, 2013.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ James Kanter and Gaia Pianigiani, “European Union Official Calls for More Surveillance of Migrant Routes,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 8, 2013.

³⁷ Zidan, “The Image of Italy and Immigrants...,” 91.

Greece so far this year, the authorities have acknowledged being overwhelmed...³⁸ In another 2015 article entitled “Stranded in Cold Rain, a Logjam of Migrants in the Balkans,” Barbara Surk writes that “Slovenia insisted that it was unable to receive and properly care for more than 2,500 people...”³⁹ This language perpetuates the image of an invasion into a country and that a country only has a certain capacity and cannot take them or is willing to only take a certain number of people. Once again, rather than the emphasis lying in the use of the word people, it is again in the numbers attached to the word, as a way to overwhelm the reader and dramatize the issue of migration. In their article “Migrant arrivals and deaths in the Mediterranean: what do the data really tell us?” Laczko, Singleton, Brian, and Rango argue that the migration data in the media tells the readers the number of migrants that are arriving and where they are coming from, but the data fails to show what the migrants can offer to society.⁴⁰ Only showing the numbers can give the idea that migrants are entering the country and creating a threat to the country’s economic stability and public health.⁴¹

During our interview with Doctor Bartolo, he mentioned that the media suggested that migrants were bringing contagious diseases with them to Europe, such as Ebola and monkey’s diseases.⁴² He said that this is absolutely not true, that what illnesses they do have are due to the journey they take, such as dehydration and malnutrition. Although I did not choose to include this article in the sample because the majority of the content did not directly relate to European

³⁸Niki Kitsantonis, “Greece Saves 240 as Boat with Migrants Capsizes,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 28, 2015.

³⁹ Barbara Surk, “Stranded in Cold Rain, A Logjam of Migrants in the Balkans,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 19, 2015.

⁴⁰ Frank Laczko, Ann Singleton, Tara Brian, and Marzia Rango, “Migrant arrivals and deaths in the Mediterranean: what do the data really tell us?” *Forced Migration Review*, no. 51 (2016): 30.

⁴¹ Gemi, “Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices...,” 271.

⁴² Pietro Bartolo, Mediterranean Migration Mosaic Team, *Lampedusa, Italy*, March 10, 2016. Interview.

migration, a 2014 article by James Kanter entitled “Britain Pledges Millions to Fight Ebola and Chides Others to Spend More,” discusses the World Health Organization’s decision to forgo making travel bans in the countries that are most affected by Ebola saying that “...travel bans could do more harm than good by increasing the economic damage inflicted by the epidemic and raising the risk of uncontrolled migration from the worst-hit countries...[which] would also increase the risk of spreading the disease beyond West Africa.”⁴³ The implications of this article are that travel bans would necessitate economic migration of Western Africans to Europe which would spread Ebola to the epidemic free North. It is important to note that the article only makes reference to Northern African migrants bringing the disease to Europe rather than Europeans who had traveled to the area and returned to Europe. Doctor Bartolo added an interesting perspective to the claims that migrants are bringing contagious diseases with them to Europe, saying that:

“...none of the important diseases arrive because if you think about how many thousands of kilometers and how much suffering...these people are superhumans, because we, we would not be able to make it 10 kilometers in their conditions, so clearly they are people that have an extraordinary strength and they must be perfectly healthy to be able to arrive here.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

Because it is so easily accessed and prevalent in everyday life, media can greatly influence the public’s perception of migrants and migration. In many of the articles that I analyzed in this paper, language, whether knowingly or unknowingly, was used in a way that created a negative image of migrants either showing them as a threat or as a victim. As with any

⁴³Andrew Higgins and James Kanter, “Britain Pledges Millions to Fight Ebola and Chides Others to Spend More,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 23, 2014.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

situation there are negative aspects, but it is important in the future to make sure that the positive aspects of migration and migrants are equally represented in the media to give a more holistic view of migration and a more accurate representation of migrants.⁴⁵ With more in-depth and informed reporting, media could portray migrants and migration in a more positive light. Even though the media today does not usually incorporate migrant voices, media and news sources could easily become a platform for migrants to provide a more multi-faceted representation of migrants and perhaps open the public's eyes to the humanitarian crisis that is ongoing today.

⁴⁵ Gemi, "Migrants and Media Newsmaking Practices...", 271.

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