

Article

Discourse, Immigration and the Spanish Press: Critical Analysis of the Discourse on the Ceuta and Melilla Border Incident

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Abstract: The Spanish press relayed the events that unfolded during the migratory incident that occurred in Ceuta and Melilla on 17 May 2021. Considering the media's key role in social and ideological construction, the purpose of this article is to analyze the informative treatment that the Spanish press gave to this incident, contributing to the study of the image that is shown about the migrant population in the media. For this, the present qualitative study performed a critical analysis, using the Atlas software. Ti 8, of the discourse featuring in the newspaper publications of El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia and ABC. The results demonstrated the following tendencies: a negative-tone discourse; the invisibility of migrant women; and a "we" vs. "them" narrative. In the light of this reality, we suggest that improvements be made, including a shift in the media's populist discourse and a greater focus on diasporas.

Keywords: migration; Ceuta; Melilla; discourse analysis; press; populism; hate discourse; stereotypes; anti-immigration



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1. Introduction

According to the Spanish Association for Media Research, television is the major source of news for 85% of the Spanish population, followed by the Internet (77.9%). The traditional written press, however, has gone on to attain 22.8%, having had to reinvent itself in recent years by transitioning to digital formats to expand its readership coverage and impact [1].

It is common knowledge that media plays a substantial role in shaping public opinion, because since the 20th century there are many theories that have been developed in relation to the influence that the media have on society. For example, the agenda-setting theory [2] states that the media direct attention to those facts that they consider necessary to have an opinion [3]. For its part, priming theory [4] starts from the same premise that the media determines which are the topics of interest, but also adds that they have a direct impact on the activation of cognitions and semantic feelings that it influences the way in which people evaluate information [5]. In this line, framing theory alludes to the approach or perspective from which information is narrated, taking into account the different elements that appear, how they covary and the emphasis placed in each of them [6–8]. This theory is relevant to analyze how the public perceives the events that have occurred and to analyze how the topics and stereotypes are shown to the audience [9].

Although each of the theories poses a different perspective, all of them highlight the influence that the media have on the perception of society. For this reason, authors such as Roy come to consider that people place great trust in the information provided in the media, without carefully evaluating the message transmitted [10]. This is one of the reasons why the media is the so-called "Fourth Estate", as it greatly influences a country's social and political affairs, configuring our perceptions of which issues are important, dangerous, good or bad. As Giardina and Márquez-Lepe explain, "The media are currently one of the main instruments of social reality production as well as transmitters of information" (All

original Spanish quotations contained in this article were translated into English by the author) [11] (p. 2).

Studies, such as those of De Vreese and Boomgaarden [12], have established that for the media to have an impact on the public, on their attitudes and on their perception of social events, the events must be treated in an equal fashion persistently over time, that is, there must be some continuity over time. It is thus important to examine the positive or negative messages that are given about a social fact in order to determine which orientation will be adopted by readers. Added to this is the way in which ourselves, as readers, discriminate the news, deciding what to read and from which sources. We usually choose sources that are in line with our own beliefs and thoughts, thus further strengthening the messages that reach us through the media, such as the press.

We agree with Herzog and Ruiz, according to whom discourses have effects—i.e., an impact on our practices, social relations, etc.—as well as causes—since discourses derive from relationships, practices, previous narratives, etc. In addition, “words are pronounced by human beings and institutions, by those who contribute to creating discourses. Their practices and the material infrastructure at their disposal influence the elaboration of the discourses. Discourses, therefore, are always related to texts, practices and contexts” [13] (p. 11).

Along these lines, the media play an active role in shaping the collective imagination and collective attitudes. These media, therefore, contribute to the collective imagination on immigration, a central topic of this work. They thus represent a medium that produces “forms of tolerance-intolerance, inclusion-exclusion, togetherness-otherness” [14] (p. 33), attitudes of acceptance, stereotypes and/or discourses of solidarity, respect, distrust, rejection or hatred. According to some studies carried out, the Western media mostly present a prejudiced and negative image of migrants [15–19]. Likewise, based on an investigation carried out in seven countries of the southern border of the European Union, it is observed how in a generalized way, in the media, discourses are proposed that lack conceptual information that expose what are the true causes and consequences of the migratory processes, giving greater importance to other types of less relevant content [20]. This reinforces the idea that migrants are a threat and a burden for the host society [21].

Focusing on the case of Spain, Miguel Stuardo et al., conducted an analytical review of political and media discourses on immigrants between 2014 and 2019 in Spain. Their work clearly shows how the Spanish media tend to associate negative terms with migrant groups or immigration, favoring the generation of prejudices [14] (p. 42).

According to the United Nations, hate discourse has an impact on society because it incites violence and damages social cohesion, promoting intolerance, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and hatred against ethnic minorities, as well as other forms of discrimination [22].

Several studies have focused on the transmission of hate discourse through the press and the media. For example, Gualda and Martínez-Brawley found that the Spanish press routinely conveys negative messages about immigrants such as: “too many immigrants, excessive numbers (. . .), competitors in the labour market (. . .), cultural contamination and impossible intercultural dialogues (. . .), citizen insecurity and criminalisation” [23] (p. 367). In the same vein, Vázquez (1999) in López Talavera established four stereotypes that are promulgated by the media: “the first is that there are large numbers of immigrants; the second is that they have integration difficulties in Spanish society, and that some nationalities are more affected than others; the third stereotype is that immigrants increase crime rates; and the fourth is that they have a negative impact on Spain’s unemployment rates” [24] (p. 342). However, it should be noted that these stereotypes can vary over time, depending on many factors, including the social situation and conditions of native people [25–27]. In addition, at times when significant events occur, such as the event analyzed in this article, the discourse presented in the press is significantly more negative. This idea has been raised by various authors, including González et al., in a recent study on the influence of the Spanish press in shaping stereotypes against the Moroccan population [28]. It shows how this news has contributed to shaping public opinion. Along these lines,

authors such as Martínez point to the media as one of the ways through which prejudices towards different social groups are internalized [29].

In this line, it is important to highlight the studies of Igartua and Muñiz about how the Spanish press has addressed migration [15]. A total of 105 news items in 2001, and 819 in 2002 were analyzed. All were extracted from *El País*, *El Mundo*, *ABC* and *La Razón*. The authors found that the press linked immigration to crime and the unauthorized entry of immigrant boats, but also to some positive aspects, such as their economic contribution and the migratory experience as a vital experience. A further conclusion was that the way this news was presented depended on the newspaper's editorial line, i.e., according to whether it was conservative or progressive [30]. However, there are studies that consider that, in general, regardless of ideology, the media tend to portray migrants as non-citizens and, therefore, as a problem [31].

Moreover, two migratory issues seem to have been treated differently in Spain's national press: unaccompanied foreign minors (UFM) and migrant women.

In the case of unaccompanied foreign minors, studies such as those of Gómez-Quintero, Aguerri and Gimeno-Monterde have shown that the conservative press uses the "UFM" acronym more often to refer to foreign minors and that the conservative press tends to convey a negative image of migrants more regularly than progressive newspapers [32].

"The framing of foreign teenagers is determined by the inclusion or omission of the "UFM" acronym. Information that mentions foreign minors -without using the acronym- represents a semantic field that is characterised by a greater geographical contextualisation, by a more human, personal, and sometimes humanitarian and welfare perspective than news that uses the acronym. The second information category is characterised by an approach linked to threat, security, moral reprobation and political intervention. The word "UFM" describes a homogeneous collective with patterns of herd behaviour and few contextual and subjective nuances". [32] (p. 103)

For its part, the issue of migrant women in the press and media has been scarcely studied. One such study is that of Calvo, who examined the news relating to migrant women in *El País*, *El Mundo* and *ABC*. The author found that women were mostly portrayed as victims of mafia networks [33]. Pérez conducted other studies, highlighting how migrant women were invisible in the press compared to migrant men [34]. When women did appear, they were associated with veil issues, forced marriages, genital mutilation, prostitution, the figure of domestic carers or suspicious marriages to Spanish men.

We cannot overlook the influence exerted by the hate narratives disseminated by certain political parties, which use media, such as the press, to spread their anti-immigration positions. By disseminating this approach to migration as a social problem, the configuration of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards migrants is often encouraged [21,35–37]. A far-right current in Europe is currently promoting these discriminatory and xenophobic narratives, as in the case of Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Denmark or even France, followed by a flourishing at present of far-right parties in Spain. They are adopting explicit hate discourse towards migrants and consider them a threat to social cohesion.

This article presents the results of an analysis of the discourse on migration identified in the Spanish press. Specifically, four national newspapers were selected: *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *ABC*. The aim was to study how the press treated the Ceuta and Melilla border incident of 17 May 2021, and to determine the messages that were transmitted on migrants. The incident was regarded as an unprecedented event in Spain and Europe and it received extensive media coverage. The crisis caused major social alarm, accentuated by the media's treatment of the event. It was also reinforced by certain political circles that exploited the incident to promote hate discourse or to launch xenophobic messages that criminalized the migrant population.

The border incident took place on 17 May 2021, as a result of a diplomatic crisis between Morocco and Spain. This crisis was caused by the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the leaders of both countries due, among other reasons, to the admission

to Spain of the representative of the Saharawi independence movement known as the Polisario Front in April. This fact triggered the relaxation of the control mechanisms by the Moroccan security forces located on the border in Ceuta (Spain), this being one of the territories where the kingdoms of Spain and Morocco adjoin. Some 8000 people were estimated to have entered Spain illegally, among which large numbers of minors (approximately 1500). In most cases, people from Morocco who arrived in the autonomous city of Ceuta (Spain) swam along the beaches of Benzú and El Trarajal (Morocco).

To date, this represents the highest number of people to have entered Spain illegally. In the light of this event, the media were filled with headlines in which the most recurring words were “invasion”, “illegal”, “insecurity”, “army” and “crisis”. Extreme right populist discourses seized the opportunity to spread anti-immigration and hate messages, ignoring the humanitarian crisis underlying the border incident.

The present work studied how the Spanish press treated this situation and in particular the news relating to the migrant population. The objectives were:

- To analyze the tone employed based on the emotions conveyed in the news: whether it was negative (with adverse connotations such as insults, hostile words, unfavorable adjectives, situations of misery, crime, etc.), positive (words with supportive connotations) or neutral (without any connotation).
- To establish the press’s symbolic representations of migrants, i.e., as victims, as a threat, as normalized people in society, etc.
- To detect what migrant population stereotypes were transmitted and whether any of them were related to culture or religion.
- To analyze whether a gender approach was adopted in the news and how migrant women were represented.

Such an analysis of Spanish press discourse is important as it enables to establish how the media treats the phenomenon of migration and the migrant population. Indeed, in its role of shaper of society’s collective imagination, the press is required to find ways of complying with bias-free, ethical and professional reporting standards. The press must verify the facts it reports and above all, avoid using stereotypes and unnecessary references to elements such as race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. Only in this way can the dissemination of hate discourse, misinformation and discrimination be prevented. Today, these latter processes are taking place across all countries in the European Union, and they are shaking the foundations of Europe’s democratic principles.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study followed a qualitative methodology based on a review of publications in a range of Spanish newspapers. Specifically, we used critical discourse analysis (CDA), taking into account our role as researchers and our critical positioning with respect to the object of study, maintaining a necessary equilibrium [38]. In addition, we understood “Discourse as a set of statements that allow defining its conditions of production” at a specific historical moment in time [13] (Herzog and Ruiz, 2019, p. 11, author’s translation). In our case, this moment is the border incident defined above between Morocco and Spain that occurred on 17 May 2021.

To carry out this work, we have developed an intentional non-probabilistic sampling of articles from the Spanish digital press, specifically from four digital newspapers: El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia and ABC. According to the data provided by the Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación with respect to the year 2021, the most widely read newspapers were: Marca, El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia and ABC. In the light of the objectives of this study, we did not believe it appropriate to study the results of “Marca” as it is a sports newspaper. Based on this, the newspapers analyzed in the study were: El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia and ABC. Although these newspapers have the largest readership, they each also have a different ideological orientation. According to Martínez, El País presents left-wing tendencies, ABC tends to the right and El Mundo has a more liberal approach. We also believed it was necessary to analyze La Vanguardia as it is

a Catalan newspaper [39]. This multifactorial approach was key to uncover the populist discourses present in the different newspapers according to their ideological tendency.

The fieldwork was developed by the authors of this article during the months of July to September 2021. The field work consisted of carrying out an analysis of the articles published on the subject in the aforementioned digital press. To do this, the search engines of each of the newspapers (El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia and ABC) were used and selection criteria were established to unify the search, ensuring greater scientific rigor. These criteria were:

- Search descriptors: “immigrant”, “migrant”, “immigration”, “migration”, “Morocco”, “Ceuta” and “Melilla”.
- Publication date: from 1 May 2021 to 1 September 2021.
- Topic: all the published news on the Ceuta and Melilla migratory crisis of 17 May 2021.

Worthy of note, although the initial search criteria were different, given the restrictions of the search engines of the newspapers analyzed, it was necessary to eliminate terms such as “UFM”, since the results that appeared did not meet the study’s objective and, therefore, would have distorted its findings.

Based on the criteria described above and each journal’s search engine restrictions, the research sample consisted of a total of 274 articles, of which 87 (31.75%) were published in El País, 54 (19.71%) in El Mundo, 77 (28.10%) in the ABC and 56 (20.44%) in La Vanguardia.

A qualitative discourse analysis was then conducted on the selected publications using Atlas.ti 8.0 software. This Software is an adequate tool for those investigations that use the qualitative paradigm as a study method [40], facilitating the understanding of the phenomenon to be analyzed [41]. It has an important capacity to analyze a large amount of content and its diversity [42]. There are more and more investigations that use this tool in their methodological and analytical process, proof of this are the investigations carried out by Ince, Hoadley and Kirschner [43] or Núñez, Jara and Avila [44].

In the present analysis, a deductive coding method was used. Each of the researchers carried out an analysis of other previous studies that had been developed on the subject. Based on the findings obtained by each of them, they drew up a list and description of the codes that they considered most suitable. Subsequently, the proposed codes were shared and the most relevant ones were selected to meet the objective and theme of this study, specifically a total of 14 Codes were created. Some of the research that was taken as a reference was that developed by Apolo, Calderón and Amores and Jiménez-Amores [45,46]. Having carried out the coding independently, it has allowed a more diverse and broad approach, ensuring an adequate analysis of the data and greater scientific rigor.

Based on the premises set forth above, some of the codes and groups of codes used in the study are set out below:

- Tone, distinguishing between negative-tone (use of derogatory words and unfavorable connotations); positive-tone (use of words of recognition, value or favorable connotations) and neutral-tone (those that did not fit into the previous two descriptions).
- Portrayal, i.e., the migrant population’s symbolic representation. A distinction was made between the codes: normalization (described as normalized people), victimization (depicted as innocent victims), burden (regarded as having a negative impact on the country’s economic sustainability) and threat (perceived as a threat to the security of society).
- Qualifiers and stereotypes (the terms used to designate or name the migrant population).
- Culture and religion (elements used as identifiers and conditioners of migrants).
- Gender (use of a gender approach in narrative and language).
- Possessive pronouns (use of possessive pronouns in the discourse to distinguish between the migrant and autochthonous population).

To ensure that the coding carried out by the researchers was adequate and had the same criteria, each of the codes was described in the code book, determining: the meaning of the code, when it is applied and some examples that facilitate understanding and the

application of these. Likewise, for certain categories such as tone or qualifiers/stereotypes, a list of terms/lexicons was drawn up that would make it possible to identify and unify the content that appeared in these codes, thus ensuring greater scientific rigor. These lists of terms/lexicons were prepared based on: the previous knowledge and research developed by the researchers; other investigations carried out on the matter; to the documentary analysis carried out for this investigation.

Below is Table 1 with some of the terms that have been assigned for each code. It is necessary to point out two aspects. First, given the breadth of the list of terms/lexicons, only a sample appears in the table. And second, the existence of the term was not binding to the code. At all times, the researchers have contextualized and attended to the real meaning that the term had in the article in question.

Table 1. Examples of lexicons/terms considered in the coding.

Category	Code	Examples
Tone	Negative	Invasion, avalanche, settlements, brawls, insecurity, subjects, fear, amalgamation, disbursement, overflowing, etc.
	Positive	Cooperation, help, understanding, use of real numbers avoiding terms like “thousands” which is generic and voluminous . . . Islamists, without papers, invaders, poor, criminals, opportunists, hungry, dirty, use of the generic masculine, etc.
Qualifiers and Stereotypes	Qualifiers and stereotypes	

Elaborated by the authors.

It should be noted that in those cases in which there has been some type of doubt or discrepancy between the researchers, a pooling has been carried out. Through the definitions designed for each code and other investigations previously carried out, a decision has been made. However, the reliability rate between the raters in the codifications by the different authors has been 97%, using the percentage agreement.

After having systematized the data, the results were analyzed based on the codes set out above. Worthy of note, we took the newspaper together with its ideological approach into account when examining the codes.

3. Results

The discourse analysis conducted in the different media illustrated the narrative that had built up over several months in the different newspapers on the Ceuta and Melilla “Migratory Crisis” that began on 17 May 2021. Different news elements thus had to be studied.

3.1. Topic

Different topics could be identified in the publications dealing with the “Migration Crisis”. While some news items described the arrival of the migrant population objectively, explaining the unfolding of the event, others focused on the consequences of migration realities. In addition, a large number of publications raised the issue of repatriation and its difficulties (see Table 2).

Table 2. Article topics analyzed.

Topic	Headline
Arrival	“As much as fifty migrants enter Ceuta by swimming around the Tarajal breakwater border” (ABC, 18 May 2021) [47]
	“Thousands of immigrants, including large numbers of minors, swim into Ceuta” (El Mundo, 17 May 2021) [48]
	“5000 people swim to Ceuta as diplomatic tensions with Morocco escalate” (El País, 18 May 2021) [49]
	“Day 2 of migrant “invasion” as Ceuta is bewildered and scared” (La Vanguardia, 18 May 2021) [50]
Aftermath	“Ceuta, the first city to achieve COVID Zero, receives the equivalent of half a million immigrants in Madrid” (El Mundo, 19 May 2021) [51]
	“Over 100 immigrants who crossed into Ceuta test positive for coronavirus” (ABC, 4 June 2021) [52]
	“Ceuta doctors denounce a health crisis after the May avalanche” (ABC, 5 June 2021) [53]
Repatriation	“Moroccans who lost their jobs due to COVID are among those who jumped the fence” (La Vanguardia, 19 May 2021) [54]
	“Over 100 Moroccans leave Ceuta to return to their country every week” (El Mundo, 2 July 2021) [55]
	“The helplessness of hundreds of minors is aggravating the Ceuta migration crisis” (La Vanguardia, 20 May 2021) [56]
	“Ceuta back to normal after returning over 5600 people” (ABC, 20 May 2021) [57]
	“Spanish and European pressure allays the Ceuta crisis but hundreds of children are left in limbo” (El País, 19 May 2021) [58]

Elaborated by the authors based on the data retrieved from the referenced journals.

As shown in the table above, each headline encloses certain nuances that condition the readers’ perceptions of the same event.

Upon careful analysis, the ABC headline, for example, clearly describes the event as it happened. Although the narrative includes words designed to have a greater impact on readers, such as “as much as fifty” (of note, the original term in Spanish is “medio-centenar”, meaning a half-hundred), instead of “Fifty”, no subjective assessment of the fact is put forward. Conversely, in the case of La Vanguardia, the headline has a negative connotation that puts all readers on alert. Using terms, such as “invade”, “bewildered” or “scared”, conveys an idea of massiveness. The same applies to the headline published in El Mundo, which fails to further detail the “thousands of immigrants” who arrived. That same day, however, El País specified that 5000 people reached Ceuta.

3.2. Gender Issues

With respect to the gender perspective, most of the news items analyzed used the generic masculine to refer to the migrant population. The group was routinely referred to using the Spanish masculine generic for “minors”, “the North Africans”, “the undocumented”, “Moroccans”, “immigrants”, “Moroccan citizens”, “sub-Saharan Africans”.

Despite the predominance of the generic masculine, some news items used inclusive language in the narrative discourse, such as the news published in El Mundo, where the noun “people” is used to include both sexes; or they explicitly named both collectives, for example, “the Government Delegation is working on a solution that will allow children to return to their families” [55].

In addition to the use of language, other elements determined the inclusion of the gender perspective in the narrative. In most cases, the news did not address the specific experiences of migrant women due to the simple fact that they were women. Only one story that did take this group not account was identified, and it was in the El País newspaper [59]. The publication, entitled “The invisible women of the Ceuta migration crisis”, shows the migrant female minors who arrived in Ceuta during the Migration Crisis. Although this article highlights the low proportion of women who arrived, i.e., only 1%, it sheds light on their more acute vulnerability. It also describes the circumstances that forced them to migrate, the most common cases being LGBTI people who were not accepted in their community, labor exploitation, sexual exploitation or forced marriages.

To finish, not only were migrant women not included in the journalistic narrative under study, but they were not quantified either.

3.3. Tone of the News

3.3.1. Negative Tone, Portraying Burden and Threat

A negative tone was detected in the publications. Discrediting expressions were routinely applied to the migrant population. One example of this is the following excerpt:

“A large part of the ‘undocumented’ who do not plan to stay in Ceuta are organised into groups, living in settlements in the countryside or even in abandoned buildings. According to our sources, they also sometimes trigger fights, increasing citizen insecurity while dangerous situations are taking place in the port [. . .]”. [60]

First, one can observe the use of qualifiers such as the “undocumented” (the Spanish word is “sin papeles”, a recurring term used for immigrants in Spain and which literally means “with no papers”) to refer to the newly arrived migrant population. The use of this term and others such as “irregular migrants” or “illegal immigrants” serves to criminalize these people. These expressions indeed seek to create a situation of administrative irregularity which would contain a criminal act. Moreover, using this administrative situation is a way of identifying and stereotyping them to an even further extent.

Secondly, terms such as “settlement” or “fights” are used to describe situations that could be narrated objectively without carrying such implicitly negative connotations. In this sense, other extracts were also identified:

“A total of 3474 subjects of the Alawite Kingdom have voluntarily returned and 124 have been sent back”. [61]

“They should all join the ships, we must take these people off the streets” said the representative of Ceuta’s central government. [55]

“Ceuta’s inhabitants have been plunged into a state of bewilderment and fear following the massive influx of immigrants on Tarajal beach”. [50]

“An unusual invasion has been followed by equally unusual normality. In less than 48 h, Ceuta streets went from a roaming and baffled hotchpotch to a near-normal situation. [57]

In these paragraphs, one can detect the use of deprecating terms towards migrants such as “nationals” or the use of words that generate social alarm such as “unusual invasion”, “massive influx” or “roaming hotchpotch”.

The use of this negative tone is related to the symbolic representation of the migrant population, which we called “portrayal”. The negative representations included burden and threat. The following examples illustrate the burden portrayal:

“For the time being, the minors who reached Ceuta during the ‘Open Days’ of the Moroccan border will remain in the existing centres. Expenditure for their upkeep will therefore continue: 1.8 million euros per month, according to the autonomous city’s government sources”. [62]

Although we do not question the accuracy of the data, the use of terms such as “expenditure” can be regarded critically. In the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE), the second meaning given to the word *desembolso* (expenditure) is “wastefulness, expense, cost”. The use of this narrative discourse thus highlights the economic “burden” that this Migration Crisis continues to impose on Spaniards.

Another example could be the following paragraph: “[. . .] refers to a territory that is seeing its economic, human and material resources being “overwhelmed” [63].

With respect to the threat portrayal, the following narratives were identified:

“[. . .] we have received a clear warning for the first time that the social situation is rapidly deteriorating in both cities” (referring to Ceuta and Melilla). [64]

“[. . .] taking a closer look, information is beginning to circulate in official and police circles pointing to the existence of troublemakers among immigrant groups, and it would seem that Ceuta may still be far from returning to peace”. [50]

Both extracts convey the idea of migration as a risk to the social order using terms such as “warning”, “deterioration” or “troublemakers”.

3.3.2. Positive and Neutral Tone, Normalization and Victimization Portrayals

Despite the prevalence of negative-tone news, certain narratives presented a neutral or positive tone. The following extract illustrates the first:

“At least 5000 immigrants entered Ceuta illegally throughout Monday with no documentation, as reported late in the day by Ceuta’s Government Delegation”. [50]

This extract visibly avoids using disqualifiers such as “the undocumented” or the use of terms that may generate social alarm such as “avalanche” or “invasion”. Likewise, the reporter chose to give an approximate figure, because the exact number was difficult to quantify. However, the specification “at least 5000 immigrants” is given and avoids generating greater social alarm as in the case of other news items that used expressions such as “thousands”.

With respect to positive-tone narratives, the following extract could be identified:

“This way of helping and prioritising the migrants most in need led him and his colleague Braulio to assist this mother and her strapped baby, whom they quickly rescued”. [65]

“He is still wearing his wet T-shirt because the blue sweater he uses against the cold does not let his clothes dry out. He is barely a few feet tall no matter how much he insists that he is eleven years old”. [56]

Both narratives could be qualified as victimizing as they center on the more human dimension of the Ceuta and Melilla event. These extracts reflect the protagonists as innocent victims of the incident, giving an emotional connotation to the news.

Positive-tone news was also identified in the normalizing portrayal, as illustrated in the following discourse:

“The Ceuta Government will “freeze” the transfers of unaccompanied minors to Morocco until a decision is taken by the judge who is investigating the case of a group of teenagers who were going to be expelled—allegedly illegally”. [66]

It narrates the fact objectively, trying to normalize as much as possible the situation in which they find themselves.

3.4. Use of Possessive Nouns, Culture and Religion

The discourse analysis revealed how possessive nouns and other terms were used in certain news items to mark the distinction between the migrant population and Spain’s population. In this way, they highlight how these people make use of services and areas that do not belong to them because they are not part of the nation.

For example, expressions such as “Spanish soil” are used to refer to a territory that does not belong to migrants. This term has a warlike connotation that warns Spanish citizens of the danger that this population can cause to “their” territory.

Furthermore, expressions such as “their country” can also be found, which seek to accentuate the differences and to again highlight the role of invaders assigned to them when entering a territory that does not belong to them.

In this line, the use of terms such as “Moroccans”, “Sub-Saharanans” or “North Africans” are also employed to refer to this population in pejorative terms. In a way, these expressions help to create stereotypes and to generalize the collective based on its origin.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Migrations represent an ongoing phenomenon proper to our times. Since 2015, the size of the migrant population arriving in Europe, and especially in Spain, has been significant. While the media have played a major role over all these years in moments of crisis, such as the Ceuta and Melilla incident, they also crucially contribute to social construction.

As Bandura argues [67], the media are a source of informal learning and thus have a great capacity to influence the thoughts and attitudes of readers [68,69]. This influence is even greater in the case of the migration issue, since the majority of the population builds

awareness of these realities through the news published in the different media. Therefore, the narrative discourses found in the press, in this case, have a considerable impact on the population's perceptions and conceptions of migrations.

As Castells explains, the media are a pillar of society, influencing the creation of collective practices that contribute to building society [70]. Therefore, the information published in these media directly influences society's collective imagination of migrations, that is, it shapes people's perceptions of the world [71]. Based on this premise and the research carried out, several issues must be highlighted. First of all, upon examination, the results revealed how the discourse used in the analyzed press was, in most cases, subjective. Rather than fulfilling an information or referential function, based on events presented objectively, the narratives sought to be eye-catching or convincing, attempting to capture the readers' attention and somehow persuade them.

This way of presenting the discourse becomes latent in the different categories analyzed (tone, framework, qualifiers/stereotypes, etc.) in this research. To begin with, the results show the repeated use of warlike language, especially in those news stories that used a negative tone and a framework of charge and threat, for example, terms such as: "subjects", "avalanche", "invasion", "asylum", "settlement" or "brawl". These terms have been used to emphasize the risk posed by the arrival of these migrants.

This idea is in line with research that has been carried out recently, such is the case of the approach made by authors, such as Chakour and Portillo, who consider that a large number of the lexical resources in the published news on migration pertain to belligerent and military registers [72]. Likewise, authors such as Martínez affirm that the media have a great bias, since they show a specific way of seeing and analyzing the migratory reality [73]. This lack of neutrality in the news is creating and consolidates existing stereotypes about the migrant population and, therefore, accentuate the sense of threat in the social ideology.

This is in line with what was proposed by Rodrigo, who states that archetypes have emerged and are building society's representation of the migrant population, making other realities invisible. In the line of the psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (quoted by Feist J., Feist G. J.), this author understands the notion of archetype as the archaic images that are universally constructed based on the collective unconscious [74]. In the case of migration, these representations are usually different according to the type of migrant population referred to. A clear illustration is the differentiated use of terms such as "migrants" and "foreigners". In most of the news items analyzed in the present investigation, the first concept, migrant, was employed, since this term's social connotation is more negative than that of the second. The different statuses that people—who are not nationals—can have in society thus become patent [75]. The term "migrant" has not been the only archetype used, since others have appeared throughout the study, such as "sin papeles" or "MENAS".

Secondly, the use of these archetypes favors the creation of a homogeneous vision, turning the migrant population into a collective subject, overlooking the differences between individual realities and situations [76]. This homogeneity approach is evidenced in the analysis carried out when the aforementioned archetypes have been used in most of the publications: "migrants" or "undocumented" were used to refer to the whole population arriving in Ceuta and Melilla. Many of these news items did not even differentiate minors and adults, despite the high number of minors who were protagonists in this incident. Specifically, it is estimated that there were more than 1500 minors who came to Spain. However, in most of the news, all immigrants were considered equal.

A similar tendency was found regarding gender. The results revealed how migrant women were totally invisible in the vast majority of the news analyzed. The stories did not usually allude to the presence of women, considering them within the group of "migrants". The masculine gender was persistently used instead of inclusive language to designate this group.

This finding supports that of Rovetto, who pointed to women's scarce presence in the publications of different media. Even authors such as Gualda and Martínez-Brawley come to consider that the discourse shown in the press is mainly based on men [24]. In

addition to being rarely mentioned, the study also found a lack of information or evidence accounting for the greater difficulties migrant women have to face due to the simple fact of being women [77]. Adopting an intersectional approach is clearly important in any area, but especially in the case of migration. In order to properly analyze social reality, it is necessary to consider the range of influential factors. However, the way female migrations are represented has so far failed to address the phenomenon's complexity [78]. When women are alluded to, they are portrayed as victims, underestimating their role as active agents [79]. If we look at the results of this research, we see how only 1 of the 274 articles that make up the sample focuses exclusively on showing the vulnerability of migrant women. In the rest, news goes unnoticed, being on many occasions considered in that generic masculine that makes the migratory reality of the women who participated in this incident so invisible.

In third place, in response to this prejudiced and stigmatizing discourse, it has been observed in the investigation how most of the news has focused on narrating the events that occurred in an exaggerated way ("invasion", "avalanche", etc.) without paying attention to other important aspects in this migratory incident, such as the real causes and motives that drive the population in North Africa to migrate. Although it is true that in many of the news the diplomatic conflict between Morocco and Spain is narrated as the main cause of this incident, this aspect would not justify why these people really decide to migrate, it only justifies why they were able to migrate at that precise moment (relaxation of border controls). As González et al. state, the press does not usually analyze what the true causes and problems are that drive these people to migrate [28].

In this way, not only is the information presented in a biased way, contributing to the creation of stereotypes and prejudices, but it can also lead to a depersonalization of the protagonists themselves. An aspect that is further accentuated with the use of certain linguistic strategies [80]. We observe this issue in the present investigation on different occasions, for example, when they use impersonal, disqualifying tenses to refer to migrants, when they speak of the protagonists as if they were inanimate beings whose actions are motivated and developed from the guidelines set by the government ("a total of 3474 subjects of the Alawite Kingdom"), among others.

In fourth place, considering how these migrations were portrayed, in addition to a widespread conception of migration as an invasion and threat to Spanish society, in this case [39,81], migrants were represented as an even greater danger in the context of COVID-19. As the results of the analysis showed, various news stories sounded the alarm by referring to high numbers of infections caused by the arrival of the migrant population in Ceuta and Melilla. Faced with this reality, Castillo (suggests that society perceives them as a greater risk because they believe that migrants remain outside the control system that has been established during the pandemic and this fact accentuates their "infected" and "contagious" image [82].

All the above reinforces the approach of Van Dijk [83,84] who considers that the media portrays migrants as different, spiteful and threatening. This approach to migration has been considered on many occasions as a populist discourse, though current populism clearly cannot be situated on a right-left ideological spectrum nor can a specific social base be attributed to it [85]. Indeed, populism is today present across various ideological currents. Although there are authors such as Cheregui [86] or Ward, Szabo and Stuart [28] who consider that the most progressive line tends to have a more favorable approach towards immigration compared to the more conservative.

In fifth place, it should be made clear that, as advanced by Dr. Campani, the migration and refugee crisis stems from political and economic processes that are unfolding globally [87]. Therefore, migration discourse in the media will present certain peculiarities according to the different ideological frameworks. Despite this, in the research carried out, no truly significant changes were observed that would confirm this approach, although certain differences were appreciated in the present study, there was a general tendency to depict the migratory Ceuta and Melilla incident as a crisis, as a threat to society as

a whole. This has been reflected in social networks, since during that time hate speech increased by 28.5% [88], which demonstrates the great relationship that exists between what is disseminated in the media, between them the press, and the perception of society.

Based on the above, we believe that changes should be made to the narrative discourses present in the Spanish press with respect to the migrant population. The tones adopted and the information should not alarm Spanish society. Rather, the discourse should be aimed at proposing a new approach in which diasporas are addressed.

As limitations of the present study, we must highlight the difficulties encountered in locating the news given the conditions of the press search engines. These search engines did not allow the use of Boolean operators or the application of search filters, such as “time” to exclusively identify the publications that have been made during the analyzed period. All this has significantly complicated the field work. Despite this, it has been possible to overcome this difficulty as it was an isolated event in time (May–April 2021) and devoting more time to field work.

Regarding future lines of research, it would be interesting to extend the study’s time frame in order to draw more solid conclusions. This, in turn, would make it possible to perform comparisons with other relevant migratory events in recent years, such as the Aquarius Ship rescue or the arrival of migrants in the Canary Islands. On the other hand, it would be interesting to analyze other media (television, radio, etc.) and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to identify the differences and similarities in how the Ceuta and Melilla events were treated. In addition, the fact of analyzing social networks would allow studying the impact that the media have had on the population as a whole.

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